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IN THIS ISSUE: a) Eric Voegelin's unpublished typescript "Clericalism" (c. 1946), introduced and transcribed by David Beam.

Introduction to Eric Voegelin's "Clericalism"

by David Beam

Briefly, let me try to situate Voegelin's unpublished article "Clericalism" in the context of his thought as it developed over the twenty year period from 1937-57. This twenty year period is significant because it's during this period that we can see three major themes in Voegelin's thought begin to emerge and take shape:

(1) What began in the mid 1930s with his reading of the Papal encyclicals and neo-Thomism, developed into a much deeper Augustinian outlook by the time he wrote the first three volumes of Order and History in the early 1950s. Voegelin was never a Thomistic philosopher, but like Augustine, he was both eschatologically-oriented and anti-apocalyptic. It is therefore not without significance that he chose a quote from Augustine's De Vera Religione as the motto for Order and History (1956-57): "In the study of creature one should not exercise a vain and perishing curiosity, but ascend toward what is immortal and everlasting."

(2) What began in 1940 with an attempt to correct the treatment (or lack of it!) of the Church and the Middle Ages in the standard histories of political ideas, ended with his abandonment of the history of political ideas and his turn to consciousness. The result of this turn to consciousness was Order and History, "a philosophical inquiry concerning the principal types of order of human existence in society and history as well as the corresponding symbolic forms," i.e. myth, revelation, and philosophy.

(3) From his first discovery of the problem of gnosticism in his reading of von Balthasar's Apokalypse der deutschen Seele (1937) to his delivery of the Walgreen Lectures and their subsequent publication as The New Science of Politics (1952), Voegelin came to identify gnosticism

as the principal disordering force in history. However, he later qualified the decisive role that gnosticism had played when he began to differentiate the deformations of differentiations. As he said at the Thomas More Institute, in Montreal, on March 12, 1976:

I paid perhaps undue attention to gnosticism in the first book I published in English, The New Science of Politics. That was the time when the historic explosion of knowledge started which we are living today. I happened to run into the problem of gnosticism in my reading of von Balthasar. But in the meanwhile we have found that the apocalyptic is of equal importance, and the Neo-Platonic tradition, and hermeticism, and magic, and so on. If you read Frances Yates' book on Giordano Bruno, you will find that the gnostic mysticism of Ficino is a constant ever since the end of the fifteenth century, going on to the ideologies of the nineteenth century. So there are five or six such items -- not only gnosticism -- with which we have to deal. If all new types have to be brought in, the simple doctrine is no longer very useful. [Conversation with Eric Voegelin IV: "Myth as Environment," 149.]

The unpublished essay "Clericalism" fits into Voegelin's encounter with the papal encyclicals and their background in Thomistic philosophy. In his Autobiographical Reflections, Voegelin recounted how:

After 1933 Austrian resistance to National Socialism led to the civil war situation of 1934 and to the establishment of the so-called authoritarian state. Since the conception of the authoritarian constitution was closely related to the ideas of the Quadragesimo Anno, as well as of earlier papal encyclicals on social questions, I had to go into these materials; and I could not get very deeply into them without acquiring some understanding of their background in Thomistic philosophy. In the years 1933-36, my interests in neo-Thomism began to develop. I read the works of A.D. Sertillanges, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and then got even more fascinated by the not so Thomistic but rather Augustinian Jesuits like Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac. To this study, extending over many years, I owe my knowledge of medieval philosophy and its problems (25).

Although he doesn't mention the Augustinian Jesuit, Erich Przywara, in his Autobiographical Reflections, it is "the religious-scientific assumptions in general" of Przywara's Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie (Handbuch de Philosophie. Edited by A. Baumler and M. Schroter. Abteilung II. Natur-Geist-Gott). Munich and Berlin: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1927. [English translation: Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion. Translated by A.C. Bousquet. London: Oxford University Press, 1937.] that Voegelin followed in writing Political Religions in 1938. For the importance of Przywara in relation to Max Scheler, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Aurel Kolnai and Christian von Ehrenfels, Cf. Francesca Murphy, The Sound of the Analogia Entis, New Blackfriars 74 (November-December 1993): 508-521; 557-565.

So here, I will claim that it was his exposure to the the papal encyclicals and neo-Thomism, during the 1930s, that decisively shaped Voegelin's own approach to the history of political ideas. In 1944, the American Political Science Review published Voegelin's "Political Theory and the Pattern of General History" which was a summary of his work to date on the history of political ideas. In this essay, Voegelin dealt with the deficiencies of the existing histories of political ideas, such as Sabine, 1937, and indicated what he believed needed to be corrected, namely, that the Middle Ages and the Church were usually passed over in such histories. It was also Voegelin's great insight to see the decisive role that the early Christological controversies in the Church played in shaping political ideas in the West.

For Voegelin, Christianity is to be taken seriously, but not literally, for, as he rightly characterized it, "literalism is the materialism of the spirit." What it means to take Christianity seriously, but not literally really came home to me, several years ago, while I was reading David Cayley's Conversations with Ivan Illich. Let me quote at some length from what Illich says to Cayley because I believe that it has a direct bearing on our understanding of Voegelin's relationship to Christianity.

Illich: Powerful and unprecedented ideas, brought through Christianity and through the Gospel into Western history, have been perverted into normative notions of a cruelty, of a horrificing darkness, which no other culture has ever known. The Latin adagium, corruptio optimi pessima -- there's nothing worse than the corruption of the best -- became a theme in my reading and reflection. Most of my concern with the Middle Ages is precisely to observe the process of flipping by which a notion which goes beyond what I find in any other culture in bringing out the glory of being you and me is then institutionalized by the Church and becomes something more destructive and worse than anything I can find anywhere else. . . . Yes, my work is an attempt to accept with great sadness the fact that Western culture . . . [t]hrough the attempt to insure, to guarantee, to regulate Revelation, the best becomes the worst. . . . I live also with a sense of profound ambiguity. I can't do without tradition, but I have to recognize its institutionalization is the root of an evil deeper than any evil I could have known with my unaided eyes and mind. This is what I call the West. By studying and accepting the West as the perversion of Revelation, I become increasingly tentative, but also more curious and totally engaged in searching for its origin, which is the voice of him who speaks. [my emphasis D.B.] It's as simple as that . . . childish, if you want, childlike, I hope.

Cayley: You're saying, I think, that the perversion and the preservation of Revelation are bound together in the history of the West.

Illich: Absolutely. That is what the human condition is after

the crucifixion. You can't take the crucifixion away if you want to understand where we have arrived at. [_Conversations with Ivan Illich_, 213-214; 242-243.]

Was Voegelin a normative Christian? (For a discussion of this question which is beyond the scope of this Introduction, I refer the reader to Gerhart Niemeyer's essay "Christian Faith and Religion in Eric Voegelin's Work," in Within and Above Ourselves: Essays in Political Analysis, Wilmington, De: ISI, 1996, 126-142.) Although Voegelin was critical of all attempts to categorize him "ideologically" (Cf. Autobiographical Reflections p. 46), he did often refer to himself as a "mystic philosopher" and according to Gerhart Niemeyer, he sometimes also referred to himself as a "pre-Reformation," or "Pre-Nicene" Christian. In doing so, Voegelin wanted to signify that he felt an attachment for something that existed before the fourteenth century split between fideism and mysticism.

All these qualifications aside, let me now turn to the essay "Clericalism" itself. Here Voegelin rightly observes that:

Christianity is not a system of social ethics, but a religion. It is a faith concerned with the destiny of the soul; and this faith as such has no direct bearing on the formation of the social environment; it can have a bearing only indirectly insofar as the conduct required of the Christian is not compatible with the exigencies of every social order. Hence the Church cannot develop a positive social program; it can only deal with concrete social questions as they arise, and try, by counsel, to guide the conduct of individuals in such a manner that it will become Christian conduct.

If Voegelin is very clear about the impossibility of a Christian political programme, he is also equally clear about the dangers "of the politico-religious movements which [would] achieve the reunion of Church and State" and which would attempt to fill the space vacated by the Church.

As soon as the public representation of the spirit is removed by law, or even if it is only seriously weakened in fact, new spiritual forces pour into the vacuum and give sacramental sanction to the Western national societies.

When Voegelin wrote this piece [i.e., "Clericalism"], the world was still living in the afterglow of the Allied victory and the Cold War still lay ahead. He ends the essay on a note of hope, rather than optimism, for the future.

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[Editor's note: The original manuscript (Box 62, Folder 18 in the Voegelin Archives, the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California) consists of an eleven page typescript with Voegelin's own handwritten corrections. There is also a letter from Frederic A. Ogg, Managing Editor of the American Political Science Review, to Eric Voegelin

dated April 4, 1947. Professor Ogg wrote: "The enclosed manuscript came into my hands some time ago from Professor Colegrove. He did not particularly recommend its publication, and I do not see any way clear to use it within any reasonable time. Believing that you can use it elsewhere, I have decided that I shall not hold it longer." Based on what little evidence we have, "Clericalism" was probably written sometime in 1946.]

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Clericalism

by

Eric Voegelin

We are supposed today to talk about three worlds of ideas which are in conflict with each other on the contemporary scene, that is about Clericalism, Nationalism and Communism; and we are supposed to talk about them with special regard to this conflict. Obviously, this topic includes the whole intellectual and political structure of Western Civilization; and it does include not only the present phase of disintegration of the old Western order which is marked by this conflict but a good deal of its history as well. We have to focus the topic through vast eliminations. In talking about Clericalism, we shall concentrate on its most important manifestation, that is on Catholic Clericalism -- though incidentally a Protestant problem may be touched; we shall, furthermore, concentrate on the European aspects of the question -- though, again, incidentally an American problem may be touched; and, finally, we must eliminate the vast field of variants and details, in particular Clericalism in the pejorative sense of episcopal directives in politics, and concentrate on the fundamental causes of the conflict. These fundamental causes we may characterize as (1) the failure of the Church to master certain intellectual and social problems of the modern world in proper time; and (2) the success of the Church in preserving certain parts of the Western spiritual and intellectual heritage which have been not too well preserved by the secular political movements. Both causes determine the present situation of conflict. If the Church (not as a divine but as a social institution) had not failed, it would not find itself today in a position which to some will appear as a last-ditch defense; if the Church had not succeeded, it could not be the rallying point and shelter -- which it is -- for the many who have taken a good look into the abyss of evil in the secular movements.

Both failure and success are not of yesterday; a long history has sedimented in the present situation. We have to reflect for a moment on this history in order to understand the weight of the various factors in the present conflict. A specifically clerical position in politics presupposes the existence of opposing secular forces. The emergence of secular forces, as well as the corresponding formation of

a clerical position is a long-drawn process; and historians may disagree in fixing the point at which the position is definitely formed. Some will find that the first great conflict of this nature occurred around 1300, in the clash between the Church and the French national monarchy. Others may consider this episode as too ephemeral, and will rather accept the appearance of the new legal form of the concordat as the formal, institutional recognition of the dissociation of Western Civilization into clerical and secular political forces. Others again will accept as decisive the year 1648 when, on the occasion of the Treaties of Westphalia, the Papacy was removed definitely as a publicly representative power from the international scene. These would be the principal dates and events which mark the formation of an autonomous sphere of secular politics, in opposition to which the Church is pressed into the clerical position.

The second great line of events which has determined this position originates in the schisms of the Church. The appearance of Protestant rival Churches and sects has brought a further diminution of public status, not for the Catholic Church only but also for the Protestant foundations. Whether it be a national establishment as in England, or the public recognition of a plurality of religious societies as in Central Europe, or the complete separation of Church and State as in the American and French Republics -- the net result is, in any case, the relativization of the ecclesiastic position, not only with regard to the autonomous sphere of secular politics, but also with regard to the schismatic religious establishments.

In the era of constitutionalism and democracy, this relativization leads to the necessity for the Church to make its influence in politics felt in those forms which today we consider specifically clerical: that is through its influence on, or support of, groupings of Catholic laymen who participate, in due constitutional form, in the political life of their country. We cannot go into variants and details; it will be sufficient to mention such groupings as the former German Zentrum's party, the Austrian Christian-Socialists, the post-War parties of a Catholic complexion in contemporary France and Italy, and so forth.

We have characterized the Clerical position in its external aspect, that is with regard to the institutional form in which the substantial struggle itself is carried on. This conflict of ideas, however, has an extremely complicated structure. Above all we have to realize, what today so frequently is forgotten, that Christianity is not a system of social ethics, but a religion. It is a faith concerned with the destiny of the soul; and this faith as such has no direct bearing on the formation of the social environment; it can have a bearing only indirectly insofar as the conduct required of the Christian is not compatible with the exigencies of every social order. Hence the Church cannot develop a positive social program; it can only deal with concrete social questions as they arise, and try, by counsel, to guide the conduct of individuals in such a manner that it will become Christian conduct. This casuistry extends from comparatively simple questions like the payment of

taxes to such grave questions as murder under governmental orders in war; it extends to a recognition of trade-unions because they express human initiative in self-government, and to the rejection of Fascist corporations because they violate this initiative. Obviously, there is ample room for conflict with the powers that be; but precisely because these conflicts must arise casuistically, on concrete occasions, they can hardly be the source of the great conflict in which Christianity and the Church find themselves today with the general course of Western secular civilization. Let us glance now at the great sources of conflict.

The first of these causes is by now largely, though not quite, a matter of history. It is the adjustment of the economic basis of the Church to the rational organization of the national state to the economy. The economic basis of the Church in landed property had to lead to conflicts with the state organization when a considerable part of the national area was withdrawn from state jurisdiction and taxation. Ever since the medieval clash with the realm of England over this question, the retrenchment and confiscation of church lands has remained a richly flowing source of conflict with the secular state -- down to its last major case in the Spanish Civil War. This long story of too little and too late by way of concessions, the first great failure of the Church which has led to a tension with secular government that never again could be dissolved harmoniously.

The second great cause of conflict was the failure of the Church to adjust itself in proper time to the rise and advancement of critical science in the sixteenth century and after. Again, the lack of adjustment is a matter of the past. The Church has accepted science, even in the delicate field of higher criticism of the Bible. The Encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu, of 1943, on Biblical studies, summarizes and sanctions the long course of adjustment; the most careful scrutiny of this Encyclical will hardly discover a sentence that could be understood as a curb on the freedom of science. But while the adjustment is complete, it comes too late -- or so it seems to the ordinary eye; the de-Christianization of broad sectors Western society, which was caused by the maladjustment of the Church, can hardly be reversed -- at least not in our time.

The third cause of the conflict comes closer to the present. It is the failure of the Church to grasp intellectually the problems of industrialized society and of the position of the worker in it. We have to be brief; and we shall refer, therefore, only to the Encyclical Rerum Novarum, of 1891, as symptomatic of the situation. The Encyclical is in many respects a laudable document, particularly in its analysis of the ideology of class-war, but it fails in the crucial point, that is in the discussion of private property. It restates the position of the Church with regard to the justness and necessity of private property for the building of an integral human existence, and insofar it is on safe ground. The ground becomes less safe, however, when the Encyclical

proceeds to berate Marxism flatly for demanding the abolition of private property, without entering into the distinction between property of objects of consumption and long range personal use on the one side, and property in the instruments of large-scale industrial production on the other side. Even if we take a charitable view and consider that in the 1880's the discussion of these questions in the Marxist literature was more inspired than precise, and that the Curia could hardly be blamed for understanding Marxism not better than its more vociferous advocates of the time, we might at least expect of the Papal counsellors that they would offer a more palatable substitute of their own for the condemned solution. But what do we find instead? A concentration of the argument on the property in land. The idea of a Communist society is against natural law because it deprives the individual of the possibility to own his piece of land as the basis of his personal existence. Under a Communist society the industrial worker would not be able to invest his savings in land. Well, our attitudes towards the merits of a Communist society may differ, but, I think, we can all agree that it is not the primary sorrow of the industrial worker in our society to invest his savings in landed property and that a few other factors determine the drive towards a nationalization of industries and planned economy. The later Encyclicals, in particular the Quadragesimo Anno of 1931, have become more cautious in their formulations, but the position is not yet surrendered in principle. The Church is still today seriously handicapped in dealing with the burning problems of industrial society by what we may call its rural hangover.

These failures of the past are responsible for most of the strange political associations in which the Church finds itself today. History does not wait for those who do not catch on; to the failures of the Church correspond the secular movements which try to solve the problems of the moment as best they can, without guidance from the Church and even in opposition to it. The failure of adjustment to the administrative and economic necessities of the national state has compelled the differentiation of a secular, autonomous public order in which the Church is ultimately reduced to the rank of a private organization. The

dangerous consequence of this development is the abolition of public representation for the authority of the spirit. The development is dangerous because the life of the spirit is an essential part of human existence, and a public order in which this essential part of human existence, and a public order in which this essential part is not represented, is unbearably defective. As soon as the public representation of the spirit is removed in law, or even if it is only seriously weakened in fact, new spiritual forces pour into the vacuum and give sacramental sanction to the existence of the community. With the progress of de-Christianization in the Western national societies, we can observe, indeed, the parallel rise of new religions which are compatible with the secular order and thus can become representative in public. The socially most comprehensive, and today still the strongest of these new religions, is nationalism. The eighteenth is the critical century in which the nations begin to assume the form of schismatic religious bodies. The first to understand this new development and to

grasp its full significance was Auguste Comte. He raised the demand for a new pouvoir spirituel, that would succeed the moribund Christian spiritual power as the companion of the temporal power in an industrial society; he even went beyond the demand, and became himself the fondateur de la religion universelle with its somewhat grotesque rites and paraphernalia. Comte's intellectual counter-church has remained an abortive attempt; but he had diagnosed the situation correctly. With the increasing de-Christianization of our time, we witness the rise of the politico-religious movements which achieve the reunion of Church and State in such foundations as National Socialist Germany and Communist Russia.

The Church -- now speaking again of the Catholic Church -- has understood the problem quite as well as Comte. As a consequence, the Church finds itself in a desperate position. The failures are a matter of the past; the adjustments are made, or on the point of being made. And now that the Church can turn actively towards the solution of contemporary problems, it finds the place of a spiritual guide preempted by the counter-religions which have grown in the course of the last two centuries. The destruction of Christianity and of Western Civilization through the new counter-churches looms as a problem much larger than any social or economic policy. Today the Church might be willing even to assist in the construction of a socialist order -- the attitude towards the French Popular-Republican Movement seems to indicate this possibility. But the field of socialism is largely preempted by the anti-Christian religious movements, and a cooperation between the Church and these movements is impossible. The Church cannot cooperate with a political movement, however acceptable its social policy might be, if the price is the destruction of the souls. The social order is a means to an end; it is not an end in itself; the salvation of the soul takes precedence over all problems of the world. The position of the Church in contemporary politics must remain unintelligible as long as we pretend that the differences between the great movements are differences of political opinion which can be deliberated and compromised, as long as we insist on disregarding the religious character of the contemporary conflicts. Faced by the necessity of a decision, the Church will have to throw its support not to a social policy of its preference but to the political group which, at the moment, seems to be less bent on the destruction of Christianity than the other. Since the groups in whom the forces of Christian tradition are more alive than in others, are frequently those who by the standards of worldly politics are the more backward, the Church will find itself frequently in what may justly be called the reactionary camp. This situation is inescapable; and however regrettable it may be, no regret and no indignation can change it.

We have drawn the gloomy picture of failure, ending in a desperate situation. Let us now look, in conclusion, at the success of the Church

which opens a hope for the future. The period from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present, that is the modern age which now draws to its bloody close, has to be characterized in retrospect as an age of spiritual obscurantism, of moral confusion and of intellectual disorder. The great Christian-humanist substance of Western Civilization was gradually dissolved. The transcendental orientation of man through the bios theoretikos in the Aristotelian sense, were abandoned; the Christian image of man was replaced in succession by the images of rational man, of utilitarian-pragmatic man, of economic man, of libidinous man and of racially determined man. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, when the darkness of Enlightenment descended on the Western World, the work of destruction was carried on by the intramundane religious movements, -- in approximately chronological order -- of Utilitarianism, of Progressivism, of Positivism, of Scientism, of Liberalism, of gnostic Romanticism, of Marxism, of Evolutionism and of National Socialism. In this progress of destruction the Church has stood firm; it has not made a single concession to the spirit of the age, not the slightest concession. Not only has it stood firm; in the mid-nineteenth century it has administered to exuberant progressive civilization the slap in the face, the Syllabus Errorum; and in our time it has put forth the magnificent summaries of the position of the Church with regard to contemporary politics, the Encyclicals against National Socialism and Communism of March 1937. Now that the disaster has run the course which was sensed with apprehension by more imaginative minds, like those of Pascal, or of Hobbes, or of Vico, even before the Age of Enlightenment proper had begun, this firmness of the Church has become its great asset.

From the general disaster, the Church emerges today as the one major social institution which has kept alive the flame of the spirit, which has preserved intact the order of the soul, and which at the same time, has continued to cultivate the critical instruments of the philosophizing intellect.

By virtue of this success, the Church may regain, at least, in part, a position which it has all but lost. For the spirit of Christ and the humanist tradition do not live in the Church alone. From the anarchy of the age, we see emerging all over the Western World individuals and groups in whom the same spirit and the same tradition are alive. The survival of the great tradition has a broader basis than the Church, and it has a considerable vitality and quality. Here is the substance which, at least potentially, might solidify into the nucleus for a Western regeneration. In this situation the Church may find the hope of meeting civilizational forces with whom it does not have to lie in mortal com-

bat; while those outside the Church may find in the spectacle of the success and survival the hope that sometime the spirit will be released from the prison of its solitude and again live in community.

It is worthwhile to survey the field of the representative of the great tradition, within the Church and outside the Church, because the result, as you will see, is somewhat surprising. We find in these ranks two great Jesuits like Przywara and de Lubac; Catholic thinkers like Maritain, Guardini, and Scheler; and a Greek-Orthodox like Berdyaev; a representative of Protestant orthodoxy like Karl Barth, and of the Protestant idealist tradition like Karl Jaspers; here we find the English Christian-humanist historians Tawney and Toynbee, and the Dutch historian Huizinga; a Spaniard like Unamuno; and the American thinker whose spiritualism is tilting in its mood of fatigue towards a Lucretian materialism, but who in his stronger moments betrays an experience of the *_noche oscura_* of San Juan de la Cruz, George Santayana; we may include Bergson by virtue of his last work, *_Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion_*; and finally, we should mention one of the most interesting figures on the contemporary scene, a man who even now can look back on a magnificent achievement as a historian of ideas, and who is still young enough to develop into one of the leading figures of this generation, the Swiss Jesuit Hans-Urs von Balthasar.

The list might be prolonged, but even so it will convey to you what I meant by the surprise. If we look over this list of distinguished thinkers and historians, of interpreters of politics and the spirit of the age, we find that not only are they representatives of the great Western tradition, but that this list practically exhausts what can be considered a notable achievement in the last twenty-five years. If we would try to form a counter-list of utilitarians, progressives, liberals, nationalists, positivists, and so on, I am afraid the list would be short and the achievement would lag far behind. This comparative show of strength and atrophy is perhaps a symptom that the orgy of destruction has passed its climax, by far not, of course, that it is over. There is no reason for glowing enthusiasm, and those who interpret such ephemeral phenomena as the current rush of the bewildered towards the Church as a sort of prosperity around the corner, are heading for a disappointment. The centuries of formidable effort that have gone into the work of destruction will have to be balanced by centuries of equal effort in rebuilding. But at least there is a spark of hope that future generations will arrive *_au bout de la nuit_*; and the smallness of this hope will not drive into despair those who live in the faith that is the substance of things hoped for, and the proof of things unseen.

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