

Mysticism and Politics in Voegelin's Philosophy

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1. By Voegelin's account, the philosopher's vocation is to love the Good, to serve the truth of Being in its highest dimensions and live in attunement with it, and to resist untruth. The worldwide contemporary assault on truth Voegelin saw as an unprecedented revolt against the divine ground of being. Since he philosophized on the basis of the political situation, the core of his resistance lay in the affirmation of the truth of being. When asked toward the end of our interviews in what became *Autobiographical Reflections* the "So What?" question of "why philosophize?" his answer was "to regain Reality." By this he especially meant highest reality as glimpsed through experience most notably articulated in the differentiated noetic and pneumatic modes lying at the core of meditative process. As he stressed from time to time, reality remains what it is and what it will be. Not God but man is perplexed, ever wandering in mazes lost proclaiming the death of God and hopefully acting on the perplexity like Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor bidding Christ never come again--doubtless to God's own amusement, the only One permitted to laugh, a thought akin to Solzhenitsyn's sly observation when the Buddha smiled.

2. Resistance and remediation therefore frame a high-stakes *political* game. It forces the philosopher to seek recourse with the deepest sources of spiritual sustenance implicating ontology and anthropology, the ineffable Reality made effable through human experience in the representative work of the great contemplatives. Reductionist materialism of the positivist, National Socialist, or communist kinds, such as biologism and economism, appear as armed ideological movements claiming exclusive truth and usurping reality for themselves. Against this array of power and distortion the recourse of the resisting individual person, as with Ezekiel's Watchman, can only go to the eminent Reality transcending time and history, the Divine Presence within which the human drama plays out in politics and history.

3. Thus the appeals to the great mystics. Among them: To Thomas à Kempis at the beginning of *The History of the Race Idea*, for instance; to the anonymous meditative called the Frankfurter as author of the *German Theology* at the end of *Political Religions*; and to Anselm of Canterbury in the *Proslogion* at the end. Therein lies the culmination of Voegelin's quest to find a satisfactory pattern of philosophizing by determining the limits of *sapientia experimentalis* or felt presence of God emerging in fragmentary fashion as knowledge in noetic exegesis in the open search in meditation of the divine-human reality for its truth. The mentioned way stations in Voegelin's pilgrimage seeking illumination of the It-Reality are thus dated at 1933, 1938, and 1984. But these events are merely indicative of a continuity in the reflective life to be traced from the earliest writings and sustained with great consistency down to the deathbed meditation, "Quod

deus dicitur?" The continuity rests on the insight that the key problem of philosophy is the relation to transcendence, i.e., that philosophy originates in mysticism (CW29, p. 645).

4. Faced in 1933 with the experience that the knowledge of man had come to grief in a world infested with evil, Voegelin at the outset almost in the spirit of the exorcist defiantly invokes the anthropology of *The Imitation of Christ* against the bestial reduction of human being to cranial indexes and pseudo-scientific racial phenomenal traits. It is man as the image of God he offers in blistering response in the preamble of his own methodical analysis, the ***primal image*** immemorially preserved in human consciousness and experience now mutilated and debauched by a pretentious flawed biology arrogantly and ignorantly elevating the mythic Aryan super race. Voegelin write, and quotes Kempis:

The Christian image raises man out of nature; though it presents him as a creature among other creatures, as a finite being among others, it nevertheless juxtaposes him to the rest of nature; he stands between God and the subhuman world. This intermediate status is not determined by a unique formative law that would constitute man as a self-contained existence but by his participation in both the higher and the lower world. By virtue of his soul, man is united with the divine *pneuma*; by virtue of his body, his *sarx*, he partakes of transitoriness.... Man must live according to the example of Christ and follow Him: ... "All is vanity but to love God, and to serve him alone. Thus the supreme wisdom is to seek the kingdom of heaven by despising the things of this world." (CW3, p. 4.)

5. Five years later in the conclusion of *Political Religions*, having studied and savored Nazi truth more completely and being fired as a professor from the University of Vienna, Voegelin reminds readers of the anonymous 14th century mystic called the Fankfurter in counterpoint to the prevailing apocalypse of the newly ascendant Superman destined to perfect the world who thereby is defined as satanic:

If the human creature attributes something good to itself...as if he were that or had that, as it belonged to him or came from him, then he goes astray. What else did Satan do? What else was his fall and abandonment than his assumption that he were something too, and his wish to be someone and to have his own. This assumption and his "I" and "my", his "me" and "mine" were his abandonment and fall. And it is that way still.

To which Voegelin emphatically adds: "It is not indifferent how the sphere of human-political organization is integrated in the order of being. The inner-worldly religiosity experienced by the

collective body-- be it humanity, the people, the class, the race, or the state--as the *realissimum* is abandonment of God.... According to the *German Theology* the belief that man is the source of good and of improvement in the world, as it is held by the Enlightenment, and the belief that the collective body is a mysterious, divine substance...is anti-Christian renunciation....[T]he inner-world-religiosity and its symbolism [of whatever kind] conceals the most essential parts of reality. It blocks the path to the reality of God and distorts the circumstances of the levels of being subordinate to God." (CW5, p. 71).

6. It is still the anthropology of the mystics that persists in the *Hitler* lectures in 1964 (CW31, pp. 86-87) and in the related lecture on the *German University*, where it is stressed that the human being is theomorphic and that his whose true destiny is to enjoy the restoration of the *imago Dei* mutilated in Adam as the consummation of his spiritual and intellectual quest. (CW12, p. 7).

7. Finally, from the related literature comes the approving elaboration of the form of true philosophizing arduously won by Anselm of Canterbury as faith in search of understanding, and no less arduously pursued in Voegelin's work, until it finally plays out in the unfinished essay called *In Search of Order*. The structural limits of the quest as noetic conceptual analysis is reached in Anselm's prayer in *Proslogion* XV: "'O Lord, you are not only that than which a greater cannot be conceived but you are also greater than what can be conceived.'" The contemplative's desiring heart, drawn toward the divine light in faith, now understands that the Light surpasses human reason. Experientially, Voegelin tells us, "the divine reality lets the light of its perfection fall into the soul; the illumination of the soul arouses the awareness of man's existence as a state of imperfection; and this awareness provokes the human movement in response to the divine appeal. The illumination, as St. Augustine names this experience, has for Anselm indeed the character of an appeal, and even of a counsel and a promise." (CW12, p. 383).