

## Voegelin and Bonhoeffer: History, Transcendence, and the Holocaust

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If the salvation of society depends, in the long run, on the moral and spiritual health of individuals, the subject of contemplation becomes a vastly important one, since contemplation is one of the indications of spiritual maturity. . . . You cannot have social order without saints, mystics, and prophets.

Thomas Merton, "Mysticism in the Nuclear Age" 1 [1]

Since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence.

Albert Camus, *The Plague* 2 [2]

There are very few events that challenge our perception of reality; yet the catastrophe of Nazi Germany is among them. Throughout the twentieth century and still to this day, the atrocities wrought by this regime often serve as the quintessential archetype of the portentous possibilities of human governance; these atrocities lead naturally to a reflection on appropriate political action in response to such political breakdown. What type of action is fitting when we

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1 [1] In *A Thomas Merton Reader*, edited by Thomas P. McDonnell (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 375.

2 [2] (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1991), 128.

experience injustice in political reality? How should we respond to political disorder? Under the threat of the Nazi regime, many philosophers and theologians responded in various ways. Two of them are of particular interest--Eric Voegelin and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>3</sup> [3] Both of these men experienced first-hand the atrocities of the regime and were even made targets of the Gestapo; yet in turn they responded to National Socialism in strikingly different ways. Voegelin engaged in *intrapersonal* action, what is usually described as contemplation,<sup>4</sup> [4] seeking to order his own existence so as to stand as a representative, or an example, to the Germanic people. In contrast, Bonhoeffer suffered with them in communal solidarity, thus engaging in *interpersonal* action, which is generally viewed at least in tension, if not outright antimony, with contemplation. This difference is not circumstantial; it rather reflects their contrasting conceptions of human existence. These conceptions are rooted in a larger framework of history,

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3 [3] Unfortunately, it does not appear that Voegelin and Bonhoeffer had any personal interaction or correspondence between them. As a matter of fact, the only mention that either one of them has of the other appears to be a couple of sparse comments by Voegelin. The first was during a lecture at Munich University in 1964 where he praises Bonhoeffer's response to Nazi Germany in light of what Voegelin calls the "Ecclesiastical Abyss," or the institutional corruption and failure during this period. He writes, "Personalities who really understood what Hitler meant and were ready to resist were extremely rare: among the military, perhaps General Beck; on the Protestant side, younger people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Berlin; on the Catholic side, the young Jesuit father Alfred Delp." The other reference to Bonhoeffer was in a lecture at Emory University in 1967 where Voegelin mentions Bonhoeffer's well-known phrase--"man come of age." Cf. Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 31, edited by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 1999), 174; "The Drama of Humanity," in *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers 1939-1985*, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 33, edited by William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 175.

4 [4] Though there is disagreement as to whether contemplation is a form of action or not, this essay will assume that contemplation is indeed a type of action. For two classic defenses of contemplation as action see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a12-1179a33 and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II 180.

where the meaning of human existence is governed by some axis, some interpretive center, that serves as the fulfillment and the norm of history.<sup>5</sup> [5] For both Voegelin and Bonhoeffer, this axis is found in the symbol--Christ,<sup>6</sup> [6] but before discussing Christ as the axis of history, it is important first to examine their divergent personal responses to this political catastrophe.

### Responding to National Socialism

Though born in Germany, Voegelin moved with his family to Vienna, Austria in 1910, and apart from a few travels outside of Austria including two influential years in the United States, lived there until 1938. It was his experience of political turmoil in Western Europe that motivated his work. As Voegelin would later say, "The motivations of my work, which culminates in a philosophy of history, are simple. They arise from the political situation,<sup>7</sup> a situation marked by the devastation of this political mass movement.<sup>7</sup> [7] His earliest works demonstrate a concern about the growing political threat of Hitler's Nazi regime.<sup>8</sup> [8] In these

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<sup>5</sup> [5] These analytic categories--fulfillment and norm--were taken from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco, Ca.: Ignatius Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> [6] Though running the risk of certain religious overtones by using the term "Christ" to describe their understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, it nevertheless portrays better their conception of his importance for political action than the use of Jesus, which seems to place emphasis on the historical person for whom neither Voegelin nor Bonhoeffer were as concerned about. They were more interested in Jesus as a normative symbol for human existence.

<sup>7</sup> [7] Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1989), 93.

<sup>8</sup> [8] Eric Voegelin, *Race and State*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 2, edited by Klaus Vondung (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1997); *The History of the Race Idea from Ray to Carus*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 3, edited by Klaus Vondung (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1998). The only exception to this

early works, one can see Voegelin becoming increasingly conscious of what would be deemed in his mature thought as the core of the modern political crisis, namely a disorder of reality, caused by an eclipse of transcendence. Voegelin initially focused on the dehumanizing effects of the Nazi "race idea,"<sup>9</sup> arguing that the ideology stripped man of both his spiritual and historical essence. But perhaps the most important work, at least for our purposes, is the only book completed after the Nazi occupation of Austria and prior to his flight to the United States. In *The Political Religions*, he argues that underlying the catastrophe of Nazi Germany was a distortion of reality that was religious in nature.<sup>9</sup> [9] It became clear to Voegelin that the devastation wrought by this "satanical force"<sup>10</sup> could not be explained fully by institutional or societal reasons but rather required a robust moral and philosophical analysis. Voegelin writes, "[O]ne should be able to proceed on the assumption that there is evil in the world and, moreover, that evil is not only a deficient mode of being, a negative element, but also a real substance and force that is effective in the world."<sup>10</sup> [10] It is in this work that Voegelin explicitly recognizes that at the core of this disorder is what he calls the "decapitation of God."<sup>11</sup> [11] Though it is an early work and Voegelin would later offer minor criticisms of it, the rejection of

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Nazi concern was his first publication--*On the Form of the American Mind*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 1, edited by Jürgen Gebhardt and Barry Cooper (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1995).

9 [9] In *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, edited by Manfred Henningsen (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

10 [10] Ibid., 24.

11 [11] Ibid., 64.

National Socialism as an ideology built on a false understanding of reality would remain constant throughout his career.

It was also during this period that Voegelin came to see that political science itself was in disarray. During graduate school, he was introduced to a host of methodologies (e.g. Weber's value-free method, positivism and neo-Kantianism), yet even this superabundance of approaches to political knowledge was for him of little value in solving restoring political order because they too had restricted reality.<sup>12</sup> [12] Voegelin writes, "The default of the school philosophies was caused by a restriction of the horizon similar to the restrictions of consciousness that I could observe in the political mass movements, namely an eclipse of transcendence."<sup>13</sup> [13] This "restriction of the horizon" was the result of the rise of positivism in the social sciences that restricted the field of proper study to the world of phenomena.<sup>14</sup> [14]

It was the very recognition of an eclipse of transcendence in both politics and political science that not only influenced the perception of his vocation but his personal response to National Socialism as well. Voegelin writes, "I had observed the restriction [of the horizon], and recognized it as such, with the criteria coming from a consciousness with a larger horizon, which in this case happened to be my own."<sup>15</sup> [15] In other words, Voegelin realized that in order to

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<sup>12</sup> [12] Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," in *Published Essays 1966-1995, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 304.

<sup>13</sup> [13] Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 305.

<sup>14</sup> [14] Cf. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 1987), 1-13.

<sup>15</sup> [15] Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 305.

restore order to the political (and political science) a "new science" of politics would have to be pursued that could account for this "larger horizon" (i.e. transcendence), and such a project could only be achieved through philosophic contemplation of this larger horizon inaccessible to positivist social science.

However, it became clear to Voegelin that he could not engage in this philosophic contemplation in Austria . As might be expected, his critical analysis of the philosophical, or perhaps better said the mythical, foundations of National Socialism were not taken well by the authorities, and as Nazi Germany gained control in Austria , Voegelin was targeted as a threat. In April of 1938, pressure was being put on him to resign from his teaching post as an adjunct professor of law at the University of Vienna , and only one month later, he was fired from that position. Shortly after his release, the Gestapo came to his residence to confiscate his passport and probably to arrest him. He recounts the event this way:

Just when we had nearly finished our preparations and my passport was with the police in order to get the exit visa, the Gestapo appeared at my apartment to confiscate the passport. Fortunately I was not at home . . . . We [my wife and I] were able, through friends, to get the passport, including the exit visa, from the police before the Gestapo got it--that all in one day. On the same day, in the evening, with two bags, I caught a train to Zurich , trembling on the way that the Gestapo after all would find out about me and arrest me at the border.<sup>16</sup> [16]

Voegelin took a train to Switzerland and shortly thereafter traveled to the United States . It would seem natural for him to come to the United States where he had visited over a decade earlier because he had found an intellectual and spiritual vigor there that was lacking in Western

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<sup>16</sup> [16] Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 43.

Europe , a vigor that would easily facilitate the philosopher's search for order.<sup>17</sup> [17] Upon arriving in the United States , Voegelin moved to a few cities before ending up as an associate professor of political science at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge , Louisiana , where the only threats to philosophic contemplation were perhaps the pesky mosquitoes and the humidity.

Bonhoeffer, unlike Voegelin, was both born and raised in Germany and experienced the atrocities of Nazi Germany in a more intimate fashion, even to the extent of his own execution by Nazi military. The reason for his death can be traced ultimately to his deep *pathos* for the Germanic people, particularly the German church. Bonhoeffer's concern is seen most clearly in his writing during his second and final trip to the United States only one year after Voegelin's flight from Austria . Bonhoeffer left Germany again in the first place because of concern for the church. He was cognizant of the increasing isolation of the Confessing Church in Germany as other churches and ecclesiastical leaders were defecting to Nazi oversight and so desired to gain support from other Christian churches in the West. Moreover, Bonhoeffer was concerned about the real possibility of being called to mandatory German military service and the effect it would have on the German Confessing Church , if he refused to serve.<sup>18</sup> [18]

Though academic and pastoral work had been secured indefinitely, Bonhoeffer never planned on remaining in the United States . He arrived in New York on June 12, 1939 with the

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<sup>17</sup> [17] Ibid., 28-33.

<sup>18</sup> [18] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Chichester , 25 March 1939 , ♦ in *The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1935-1939*, edited by Edwin H. Robertson (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), 204-06.

intention of staying one year but left for Germany on July 7, 1939 , not even one month after his arrival. Though Bonhoeffer was in the United States , he never really left Germany ; his thoughts were always directed toward Europe . One of the more comical, but illustrative, accounts of this desire is that of a discussion with an acquaintance in New York :

We sat for an hour and chattered, not in a silly way, true, but about things which left me completely cold--whether it is possible to get a good musical education in

New York , about the education of children, etc., etc., and I thought how usefully I could be spending these hours in Germany . I would gladly have taken the next ship home. This inactivity, or rather activity in unimportant things, is quite intolerable when one thinks of the brethren and of how precious time is.❖19 [19]

But the most famous, and the most telling, disclosure of Bonhoeffer's sentiments was expressed to Reinhold Niebuhr: "I have made a mistake in coming to America . I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany . I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.❖20 [20]

As soon as he returned to Germany, he continued on with his pastoral work as if he had never left, even continuing to run the Finkenwalde seminary which had now become illegal, but he also became personally involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler, even though this was in conflict with Bonhoeffer's earlier pacifism. His suspected involvement in this attempt resulted in

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19 [19] Bonhoeffer, "The American Diary, 15 June 1939 ,❖ in *The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1935-1939*, edited by Edwin H. Robertson (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), 228-29.

20 [20] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Niebuhr, July 1939,❖ in *The Way of Freedom* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966), 246.



his arrest on April 5, 1943 ; he would never be free again. Roughly one and a half years later, the Gestapo found conclusive evidence of his involvement in the assassination plot, which ultimately led to his execution on April 9, 1945 at the Flossenbürg concentration camp just days before the camp was liberated by Allied forces.

Such action can only be understood in light of Bonhoeffer's notion of communal *pathos*. From his earliest work until his last reflections, Bonhoeffer believed that the church was to engage continually in "vicarious representative action,"<sup>21</sup> [21] that is to say, suffering with and for others, as the body of Christ. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer writes, "we naturally ask if there is any place on earth for the community which they [i.e. the suffering church] describe. Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the poorest, meekest, and most sorely tired of all men is to be found--on the cross of Golgotha."<sup>22</sup> [22] In vivid language, Bonhoeffer asserts that the church has only one place on earth and that is on the crucifix. Thus, it was to this suffering that Bonhoeffer felt called, to suffer with his people.

Yet in spite of this suffering, he embraced this age. However, by embrace, I am by no means asserting that Bonhoeffer justified the atrocities of the Nazi regime or the regime itself. Bonhoeffer's own life demonstrates the contrary. The term "embrace" is meant to express his belief that this age, including the suffering present in Germany, revealed the true nature of God as the suffering One. He writes:

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21 [21] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, edited by Joachim von Soosten (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1998).

22 [22] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 113-14.

Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help. To that extent we may say that the development towards the world's coming of age . . . which has done away with a false conception of God, opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness.<sup>23</sup> [23]

Though this concept was unarticulated in his early career and is one of his most mature reflections, it provides one of the penetrating explanations of his response. For Bonhoeffer, our current experience of the world as a world *etsi deus non daretur* (as if God were not there) was providentially given: "God lets himself be pushed out of this world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us."<sup>24</sup> [24] Thus, in contrast to Voegelin who viewed the loss of the divine as a disordered reality, needing philosophical reordering, Bonhoeffer understood the same phenomenon as a time of heightened insight into the nature of God, fostering a time of increased responsibility, namely living out this knowledge by suffering for others.

By examining the accounts of their own experiences, one quickly understands that both figures viewed their own life and vocation with humble significance. Both had lived through the rise of Hitler; both had experienced first-hand the atrocities of Nazi Germany, and both had witnessed the failure of Germanic institutions. They viewed their life as an important response to this catastrophe, yet those responses were notably different. But before continuing, an

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<sup>23</sup> [23] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, 16 July 1944," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 361.

<sup>24</sup> [24] Ibid., 360.

important caveat must be given. This examination of their responses in no way expresses a judgment on their moral character. The comparison of Voegelin's flight to the United States, in light of Bonhoeffer's return, is not to confer upon Voegelin cowardice, nor is Bonhoeffer's return to such a hostile environment to be taken as a martyrdom complex. To the contrary, the purpose of this comparison and the analysis that ensues is first to gain insight into their responses, and second to argue that those responses were made as reasoned ones following logically from their respective conceptions of the person of Christ as the axis of history.

### Christ as Center: Voegelin and Bonhoeffer on the Axis of History

Where is meaning to be found in history--in the past, the future, or the present? Is our age an age of decline or progress? What is the fulfillment and norm of history? What axis, if any, provides the answers to these questions? Our perception of political reality is often expressed as the answers to these questions. As seen in the discussion above, Voegelin rejected the spirit of the modern age, incarnated most potently in Nazi Germany, as one of political disorder and left Austria after Nazi occupation in order to initiate a restoration of order through philosophic contemplation, whereas Bonhoeffer in contrast embraced the modern age as an age of maturity but returned to Germany to engage in radical, subversive political action. As will be demonstrated below, these responses were governed by their divergent understandings of Christ as the axis of history.

Voegelin

History in Voegelin's sense is summed up in the phrase "Christ writ large."<sup>25</sup> [25] This phrase means first of all that Christ fulfills history, and that he fulfills history as an expression of the most differentiated understanding of reality, entailing the clearest and most penetrating understanding of our existence. Of course, this assertion must be placed within Voegelin's larger philosophy of history. He begins the culmination of his work, the five volume series *Order and History*, with a pregnant statement: "the order of history emerges from the history of order."<sup>26</sup> [26] In other words, for Voegelin, one's interpretation of history, or the way it is ordered, must be formed, not from ideological abstraction, but from a chronological account of man's ordering of himself, the various expressions and incarnations of man's understanding of reality and his place in it. Through Voegelin's investigation of historical sources and his own experience of this same reality, he discerned a pattern in history where "the truth about the order of being emerges in the order of history."<sup>27</sup> [27] Thus, for Voegelin, man's understanding of reality has been clarified throughout time, and Voegelin calls this process the movement from compact to

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25 [25] Voegelin, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol,"<sup>25</sup> in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo. : University of Missouri Press, 2004), 201.

26 [26] Voegelin, *Order and History: Israel and Revelation*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 14, edited by Maurice P. Hogan (Columbia, Mo. : University of Missouri Press, 2001), 19.

27 [27] Voegelin, *Order and History: The World of the Polis*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 15, edited by Athanasios Moulakis (Columbia, Mo. : University of Missouri Press, 2000), 73.

increased differentiation.<sup>28</sup> [28] However, this process is not a linear progressive one culminating in the modern age. To the contrary, the experience of the disordered reality incarnated in the modern political mass movements, such as Nazi Germany, was to Voegelin a distortion of the order of being and by consequence a degeneration from earlier differentiated accounts.

This process of differentiation can be summarized as follows. For Voegelin, reality consists of a "primordial community of being."<sup>29</sup> [29] This fundamental reality (God and man, world and society) was expressed in ancient civilizations as a unified whole--the cosmos. This compact experience of reality emphasized the experience itself over and against further reflection or differentiation. For example, elements of nature (e.g. water) were simply understood as divinities. There was no desire to differentiate, or to separate, those natural elements from the divine. These compact experiences, expressed in mythical form, emphasized consubstantiality as opposed to separateness. Yet the compact expression of reality began to falter because it failed to express adequately man's experience, especially the distinction between the gods and man. More differentiated accounts of reality emerged in history that broke from these mythical accounts. Moses encountered the transcendent God in the burning bush and thus moved beyond the Egyptian immanent deities; Xenophanes rejected the mythic conception of the gods given by the Greek poets and instead argued for a philosophic conception of the transcendent God. Thus, an order of being emerged, as evidenced by this distinction between

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<sup>28</sup> [28] Though it must be acknowledged that Voegelin altered his understanding of history throughout his career, this process of differentiation (i.e. the process of man's increased understanding) remained.

<sup>29</sup> [29] Voegelin, *Order and History: Israel and Revelation*, 39.

transcendence (the divine) and immanence (the non-divine), that articulated reality on a level of clarity that went beyond the compact experience.<sup>30</sup> [30]

Christ brought about an understanding of reality unmatched in its clarity. Though Voegelin believes that Greek philosophy is the most articulate form of expressing reality, Christ provided one significant distinction in our understanding of reality that went beyond even the Greek conception of reality. He writes, "The impossibility of *philia* between God and man may be considered typical for the whole range of anthropological truth [expressed by Greek philosophy] . . . . The experience of mutuality in the relation with God, of the *amicitia* in the Thomistic sense, of the grace which imposes a supernatural form on the nature of man, is the specific difference of Christian truth."<sup>31</sup> [31] This insight into divine friendship is made visible through the experience of Christ and is expressed by Voegelin's phrase, "in immediacy to God."<sup>32</sup> [32] Unlike more compact understandings where a mediator exists between God and the individual, in Christ, each individual, not Israel or Pharaoh, stands in immediacy to God. But again this insight is placed within the larger process of the order of being emerging in time and thus for Voegelin fulfills history. He expresses this process of differentiation in terms of fulfillment similar to the *praeparatio evangelica* of the church fathers, when he writes:

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<sup>30</sup> [30] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 160.

<sup>31</sup> [31] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 78. Cf. also Voegelin, *The History of Political Ideas: Renaissance and Reformation*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 22, edited by David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 249-50.

<sup>32</sup> [32] Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas: Renaissance and Reformation*, 132-33.

One can discern a strong existential movement, driving toward an understanding of the hidden divinity, the *agnōstos theos*, behind the intracosmic gods, for instance, in the Egyptian Amon Hymns . . . at about the same time when Moses broke with the Pharaonic mediation of divine order to society . . . yet it took thirteen centuries of history, and the shattering events of successive imperial conquests, to make people receptive for the truth of the gospel.<sup>33</sup> [33]

Thus, Christ serves as the axis of history in the sense that he advances the process of differentiation, that is to say illuminates our existence in the most discriminating manner.

A word of caution must be given however. Though Voegelin does view Christ as the fulfillment of history in the sense discussed above, this does not preclude a further differentiation of reality. In Voegelin's thought, "fulfillment" then is not to be taken as the end of the process of differentiation itself. Yet it is accurate to conclude that for Voegelin the differentiation that Christ brought to human understanding is the fullest differentiation and thus the fulfillment of the process *at this point in history* and should thus be incorporated into our understanding of the political. He writes, "I would take it as a principle of philosophizing that the philosopher must include in his interpretation the maximally differentiated experiences . . . . Now with Christianity as decisive differentiation has occurred."<sup>34</sup> [34]

Though Christ fulfills history in Voegelin's philosophy, he also symbolizes the norm of history. For Voegelin, Christ is an example for all mankind, serving as our representative, witnessed most clearly in his suffering and death. It should be noted that the term representation

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<sup>33</sup> [33] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 160.

<sup>34</sup> [34] Voegelin, "On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953)," in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness, and Politics*, edited by Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 450.

refers to Voegelin's theory of representation, by which he means here that the insights gained by Christ serve as the ordering truth for all men and society, with Jesus of Nazareth fulfilling a function similar to Aristotle's *spoudaios*.<sup>35</sup> [35] Christ's representation happens through his response to the paradox of human existence, namely the "double meaning of life and death."<sup>36</sup> [36] The Greek tragedian Euripides expressed it as follows: "Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead to live."<sup>37</sup> Christ himself expressed this paradox: "[W]hoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Within the paradox however is the knowledge of the search that brings *eudaimōnia*. This quest for happiness, or the "Saving Tale" as Voegelin calls it, is an act of submission to the divine pull toward life, which ultimately leads to death of self, and an act of resistance against the pull toward death (licentiousness), which in turn gives birth to life. Yet perhaps the most provocative aspect of this tale is the suffering indicative of the struggle. This process of dying in order to live is most clearly expressed in the passion narrative of Christ. Voegelin writes that the passion, which was voluntary, "is representative because it authenticates the truth of reality," that is choosing death in order to live.<sup>37</sup> [37] Thus, Voegelin believes that Christ in this physical act represented the existential truth normative for all men and served as the norm of history in so far as his death,

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<sup>35</sup> [35] For Voegelin's discussion of the theory of representation see *New Science of Politics*, 27-51.

<sup>36</sup> [36] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 145.

<sup>37</sup> [37] *Ibid.*, 152.



though not necessarily to be followed literally, is to be imitated existentially if happiness is to be achieved.<sup>38</sup> [38]

Bonhoeffer

For Bonhoeffer, Christ serves as the axis of history, the "centre of history,"<sup>39</sup> and this in part entails viewing Christ as the fulfillment of history.<sup>39</sup> [39] Though Bonhoeffer does not have as nuanced a conception of history as Voegelin, the understanding of Christ as fulfillment is there nonetheless. The most articulated account of this understanding appears in a series of lectures given at the University of Berlin in 1933, though the only record of these lectures are from reconstructed notes taken by Eberhard Bethge and other classmates. The particular section in the lecture that deals with Christ as the fulfillment of history is a rather limited account, and as a result it is difficult to grasp completely what Bonhoeffer was driving at. Regardless of this difficulty, there are a few points that are clear. The argument takes place within a larger discussion concerning the *where* of Christ, that is to say his place spatially and temporally. For

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<sup>38</sup> [38] It should be noted that Christ is not the only representative sufferer. Voegelin places Socrates right alongside Christ. He writes, "[B]ehind the tale there stands the authority of the representative death suffered by Socrates for its truth. The *Apology* concludes with the ironic parting word to the judges: 'But now the time has come to go. I go to die, and you to live. But who goes to the better lot is unknown to anyone but God.' This equivalence drawn between Socrates and Christ does not negate the fact that Voegelin posits Christ as the fullest differentiation of human existence. Though Voegelin argues Socrates offers a representative death for man, it is not to the degree of that offered by Christ. In other words, Socrates offers a more compact representation. Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 146.

<sup>39</sup> [39] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, edited by Edwin H. Robertson (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1960), 63.

Bonhoeffer, Christ is essentially at the center of all reality.<sup>40 [40]</sup> In terms of human existence, Christ stands at the center between "me and myself, between the old existence [law] and the new [gospel].<sup>41 [41]</sup> In other words, man stands between law and fulfillment, but because he cannot fulfill the law, he is in need of Christ who fulfills the law and thus replaces man as center. Similar to his discussion of human existence, Bonhoeffer writes that "history lives between promise and fulfillment,<sup>42</sup> and just as man is helpless to fulfill the law, so too history cannot fulfill its promise. He mentions the futility of various messianic figures, who have claimed to usher this time of fulfillment, similar to the futility of men who attempt to fulfill the law on their own. Yet for Bonhoeffer, there is one place where the fulfillment of history was given-- Israel .

Bonhoeffer makes an important distinction between the center of history as a "hidden<sup>43</sup> center in contradistinction to those "visible<sup>44</sup> messiahs that proved corrupt, and it is this very hiddenness that at the same time both destroys and fulfills this promise of history. It is destroyed in the sense that a visible messiah does not appear, yet it is fulfilled in that the Messiah has indeed come though in secret. When contrasting the "hidden<sup>45</sup> and the "visible,<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer appears to be discussing the true nature of the messianic promise as one of suffering as opposed to power: "The meaning of history is swallowed up by an event which takes place in the depth and secrecy of a man who is crucified. The meaning of history becomes evident only in the

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40 [40] Ibid., 62.

41 [41] Ibid., 61.

humiliated Christ.❖42 [42] To put it somewhat differently, the center of reality cannot be produced or fabricated through human effort but rather is the gift of God.

Though this understanding of the "hidden❖ nature, that is to say the weakness, of the center of history is part of his earliest work, the concept persists through his later writings, evidenced by Bonhoeffer's discussion of the "world come of age.❖43 [43] Again, Bonhoeffer embraced this age because he believed that it revealed the true nature of God--weak and powerless. Throughout history, religion attempted to explain God as *deus ex machina*; man looked to the "working hypothesis called God❖ to explain the mysteries of life found in nature and society.44 [44] However, in the modern age, these mysteries have increasingly become answered by science, pushing God further and further from the center to the periphery of existence. Bonhoeffer is critical, not of the rise of science and its explanatory power, but of a religion that holds fast to this concept of God as *deus ex machina* and complacently allows God to be pushed to the periphery of existence. All that is left for religion in our modern age is the "ultimate questions,❖ that is questions concerning death and guilt.45 [45] Though Bonhoeffer is even suspicious that man will not be able to answer these questions without God in time, the more important concern is that Christians have allowed God to be relegated to the periphery of

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42 [42] Ibid., 64.

43 [43] Cf. also Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, edited by Clifford J. Green ( Minneapolis , Mn.: Fortress Press, 2005).

44 [44] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, 8 June 1944 ,❖ in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 325.

45 [45] Ibid., 326.

existence by maintaining this false hypothesis of the all-powerful God. In response, Bonhoeffer advocated a "religionless Christianity" that rejected this understanding of God and demanded that Christ be placed at the center of our existence, not as a powerful divinity but as one that has allowed himself to be pushed out of this world and onto the cross that man may come to know him. And by participating in this divine suffering, God is placed at the center of reality. And so in this age, for Bonhoeffer, we must realize that just as Christ was forsaken by God on the cross "[t]he God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15.34)."46 [46]

Not only is Christ the fulfillment of history but the norm of history as well. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer connects moral action with history. No doubt grounded in his Lutheran suspicion of human nature, Bonhoeffer restricts the ethical good, that is to say true moral action, to those actions that are free actions having their "origin, essence, and goal . . . in God's own actions," instead of some deontological ethic or subjectivism.47 [47] For Bonhoeffer, man cannot engage in the good, only God can do this, and if man is to act good, then he must participate in God's own action, where God is acting through a human vessel. How is man to know where God is acting? The answer is Christ: "Good is historical action that receives its laws of historical action from the center of history, from the event of God's becoming human."48 [48] Yet again Bonhoeffer does not view the center of history as some ethical principle but rather as a person,

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46 [46] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, 16 July 1944," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 360.

47 [47] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 226.

48 [48] *Ibid.*, 228.

who was "willing to become guilty."<sup>49</sup> [49] It is this willingness to suffer and become guilty, what Bonhoeffer calls "vicarious representative action,"<sup>50</sup> that is the historical action of God, and thus human action must participate in this action of God as the norm of history, if it is to be morally good. He writes, "All human responsibility is rooted in the real vicarious representative action of Jesus Christ on behalf of all human beings. Responsible action is vicarious representative action."<sup>50</sup> [50]

To be sure, Voegelin and Bonhoeffer agree (with certain qualifications) on Christ being the axis of history in the sense of fulfillment and norm, and this understanding seems in the spirit of Christ's own declaration: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."<sup>49</sup> Yet at this point a crucial difference begins to emerge regarding their respective understandings of what constitutes a proper response to political catastrophe, and this difference is their divergent understandings of normative action. For Voegelin, Christ is our representative because, by expressing his immediacy to God, he allows man to understand how to order one's individual existence through dying to self, whereas for Bonhoeffer, participation in Christ's suffering for others is the norm. In other words, though there is agreement on *where* Christ is, namely at the center of history, they differ on the very understanding of *who* Christ is, and it is this difference that accounts for their dissimilar understandings of and responses to Nazi Germany.

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49 [49] Ibid., 229n.44.

50 [50] Ibid., 232.

## Voegelin and Bonhoeffer on Christ

On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am; ♦ he received responses as varied as John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. He then put the same question to his disciples, to which Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. ♦ Peter recognized through revelation that Christ was unique, even to be distinguished from the great prophets of Israel 's past. Both Voegelin and Bonhoeffer recognize Christ's uniqueness as well. This uniqueness is implicit in their mutual belief that Christ is both the fulfillment and the norm of history as his function as the axis of history is only possible because of his uniqueness as a person. Our discussion turns then to the *who* of Christ. For both Voegelin and Bonhoeffer, Christ actualizes human existence, a point already alluded to in the discussion on Christ as the norm of history. Yet it is their contrasting conceptions of human existence, exemplified by Christ, that illuminates the difference in their understanding of and personal response to Nazi Germany.

### Voegelin

Voegelin defines life as existence in the "in-between ♦ (*metaxy*).<sup>51</sup> [51] Of course, the question that follows is in-between what? In this spatial metaphor, life is experienced as a

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<sup>51</sup> [51] Voegelin develops this symbolization of human existence from his interpretation of Plato's use of *metaxy* in the *Symposium* and *Philebus*.

struggle between the tension of two transcendent poles, one above and one below. These transcendent poles are "something beyond one's own consciousness yet experienced by consciousness itself. In other words, these poles are external to our own person yet somehow are experienced in our internal consciousness. Voegelin expresses this tension as follows:

Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic *metaxy*, and if

anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness; between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence; between *amor Dei* and *amor sui*, *l'âme ouverte* and *l'âme close*; between the virtues of openness towards the ground of being such as faith, love, and hope, and the vices of infolding closure such as hybris and revolt; between the moods of joy and despair; and between alienation in its double meaning of alienation from the world and alienation from God.<sup>52</sup> [52]

The reason that this tension exists in human consciousness is that each transcendent pole is pulling one's consciousness in the opposite direction. In the discussion concerning Christ as the norm of history, this pull (*helkein*) and counter-pull (*anthekein*) was alluded to in Voegelin's "Saving Tale," defined as following the divine pull (*helkein*) toward life and resisting the counter-pull toward death. Voegelin uses Plato's Myth of the Puppet Player to illustrate this tension.<sup>53</sup> [53] In the myth, the puppet player pulls the puppet by various chords, one of which is the golden chord, the chord of reason, the other lesser chords are the chords of the passions.

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<sup>52</sup> [52] Voegelin, "Equivalences in Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 119-20.

<sup>53</sup> [53] Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, translated by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 645bff. Cf. also Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 151-53.

The golden chord is the pull toward life, the divine pull in the "Saving Tale"; the lesser chords of the passions represent the counter-pull (*antheikein*) toward death.

Though this metaxical existence should not be reduced to the pull of life and death (see the quote above), this pair of symbols is the most revealing in terms of human existence in general and of Christ in particular. It should now be clear that life and death at least in this context are not referring to mere natural, earthly existence, but rather to the movement "from imperfection of death in this life to the perfection of life in death, a movement similar to Aristotle's process of immortalizing (*athanatizein*).<sup>54</sup> [54] For Voegelin, this movement takes place in the *metaxy*, that is in-between the two transcendent poles of (immortal) life and (mortal) death. Voegelin writes, "The In-Between--the *metaxy*--is not an empty space between the poles of the tension but the realm of the spiritual; it is the reality of man's converse with the gods."<sup>55</sup> [55] In other words, it is this space where communion with the divine occurs, and such communion can only occur because of our rational faculty (*nous*), which was identified by Aristotle as either "itself divine or the most divine thing in us."<sup>56</sup> [56] In this process of immortalizing, man becomes more than mortal, he engages in the action of immortalizing through *nous*, being pulled by the divine.<sup>57</sup> [57]

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<sup>54</sup> [54] Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience," in *Published Essays 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 279.

<sup>55</sup> [55] Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> [56] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), 1177a15-16.

<sup>57</sup> [57] This understanding of human existence emphasizes a form of individuality that is in tension with the notion of community. The individual for Voegelin stands in immediacy to



However, a couple of caveats are in order. First, man will not necessarily engage in this process. He can refuse to follow the divine pull toward life and instead give completely into a life of licentiousness. And second, even if someone engages in this process, this experience of communion with the divine can never eclipse the metaxical structure of existence. That is to say, even if a man rises above his mortality to experience immortality, he cannot stay there because first he has other needs (e.g. sustenance) and second the counter-pull toward death will return enticing him toward mortality.

Now that we have discussed human existence in Voegelin's philosophy, it will be easy to discern his understanding of Christ. According to Voegelin, Christ existed in the state of "pleromatic *metaxy*, ♦ that is to say that Christ lived in the in-between to its fullest (*pleroma*).<sup>58</sup>

[58] The use of *pleroma* as an adjective to describe Christ's existence comes from Voegelin's interpretation of a passage in Colossians: "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity [*theotēs*] dwells bodily. ♦ Voegelin writes, "In its whole fullness (*pan to plērōma*), divine

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God. The implication of this relationship to the transcendence is in part that the individual can order his own life without the necessity of community. Though communities are needed by most to help them in their search, some men are capable without such assistance. As a matter of fact, the very notion that a community is necessary is indicative of a more compact understanding of reality in which the individual can only experience the divine through the mediation of a community. To be sure, the individual is born and raised in a larger community that shapes his understanding of reality. However, because of his immediacy to God, the individual can in a sense transcend the community to arrive at truth: "[T]he Christian idea of the person in immediacy to God would prove the permanent irritant against institutions. The idea of the Christian person would function doubly as an agent of revolt against the institutionalization of the relations between the soul and God and as an agent of regeneration of the institutions. ♦ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas: Renaissance and Reformation*, 132-33.

58 [58] Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme, ♦ in *Published Essays 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 369.

reality is present only in Christ, who by virtue of this fullness, ♦ is the image (*eikōn*) of the unseen God' . . . . All other men have no more than an ordinary share of this fullness. ♦ 59 [59]

On this reading, it might appear that the transcendent divine broke into the immanent world in the person of Christ. But before such conclusion can be drawn, it is important to recall that this understanding of *pleroma* is descriptive of the nature of Christ's existence, that is existence in the *metaxy*. To return to the Colossians passage, Voegelin makes much of the author's creation of the Greek neologism (*theotēs*) to express at once the utter uniqueness of the divine presence but also to guard against immanentizing the transcendent divine. In other words, Voegelin argues that the author created this word, which Voegelin interprets as an impersonal deity, to guard against any confusion that the transcendent has become immanent in the person of Christ, thus destroying the metaxical structure of existence. Though it must have appeared that the divine presence virtually consumed Christ's existence, he nevertheless lived a metaxical existence--in between mortal man and the immortal god, like all men. Christ was a concrete individual who possessed a bodily existence subject to mortality, yet he also had the rational faculty, which allowed him to engage in the process of immortalizing and thus to commune with this transcendent divine. To be sure, Christ experienced this divine to its fullest, but for Voegelin, even in this fullness, the metaxical structure remained intact.

Christ then existed on one hand in utter uniqueness yet on the other hand was the same as all men. Peter's profession mentioned at the beginning of this section demonstrates this very tension. Concerning this profession, Voegelin writes that Peter's profession was his "response to the full presence in Jesus of the same Unknown God by whose presence he is inchoatively

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59 [59] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture, ♦ 158.

moved in his own existence.❖60 [60] On Voegelin's reading, Peter recognized Christ as the fulfillment and norm of his own existence. Christ was no mere mortal (nor is any man for that matter) but neither was he the transcendent divine.

Bonhoeffer

For Bonhoeffer, existence is both *being* as being-there (*Dasein*) and *act* as being-for-you (*Dir-Sein*).61 [61] Bonhoeffer defines being in terms of the social structure "I-You.❖62 [62] Man--an individual's self-consciousness--arises through an encounter with the other, something that is recognized as external to his own consciousness. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer at first defines this other in terms of the divine: "*For Christian philosophy, the human person originates only in relation to the divine; the divine person transcends the human person.*"❖63 [63] Thus, the individual arises through the encounter with the transcendent divine. Yet Bonhoeffer quickly alters the definition of the other from the divine to another human being. He

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60 [60] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture,❖ 167.

61 [61] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (Minneapolis, Mn.: Fortress Press, 1996).

62 [62] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 34-57. For a similar approach to human existence see Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

63 [63] Ibid., 49. This understanding of man is also expressed in a later lecture at the University of Berlin : "[M]an comes to know his foundation not through himself, but through God.❖ Bonhoeffer, "Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology,❖ in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1928-1936*, edited by Edwin H. Robertston (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965), 61.

anticipates that the reader might object to this shift, and so justifies it on the basis of the "inseparable and essentially interrelated nature of God, community, and the individual. But beyond this explanation, Bonhoeffer provides a more illuminating reason, namely that the other experienced in the encounter always takes the You-form and thus is always transcendent, whether the You is the divine or another human being. Thus, just like the encounter with the divine, an encounter with another human being creates the self-conscious I in relation to the You, thus creating the "I-You social relation. The two forms are dependent on one another. The I-form comes to consciousness through the encounter of You; and You depends on recognition of I. In the "I-You encounter, a barrier (*Schranke*) arises, namely the other itself. The I can never become the You, nor can the You become the I. This is made evident from understanding the You-form itself. In one sense, the You could be defined as the "other I. However, for Bonhoeffer, the You should not be viewed in terms of sameness; the other is different and unique. He writes, "The other can be experienced by the I only as You, but never directly as I, that is, in the sense of the I that has become I only through the claim of a You. The You-form is fundamentally different from the I-form in the sphere of ethical reality. 64 [64] Because of this barrier, because the other is always encountered independent of the I-form, the other human being is transcendent.

Through the encounter itself an ethical responsibility necessarily arises. The maintenance of these distinct forms are critical for proper human existence: "I can never become a real barrier to myself, *but it is just as impossible for me to leap over the barrier to the other.* My I as You-form can only be experienced by the other I, and my I as an I-form can only be experienced by

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64 [64] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 51.

myself; thus *in the experience of a You, the I-form of the other is never an unmediated given.*◆65 [65] The ethical demand of the other, namely being-for-you (*Dir-Sein*), is created by the divine itself. Bonhoeffer writes, "*God or the Holy Spirit joins the concrete You; only through God's active working does the other become a You to me from whom my I arises. In other words, every human You is an image of the divine You.*"◆66 [66] Not only does this statement confirm the ethical barrier of the other, it also reaffirms the inseparability and interrelatedness of God and man in the You-form. Both the divine and another human being are only known by an individual as a transcendent You.

Of course, the ethical responsibility in the form of *Dir-Sein* is reminiscent of the discussion of Christ as norm through his "vicarious representative action"◆ (Stellvertretung), that is his willingness to become guilty (and suffer) for others. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer writes, "Vicarious representative action and therefore responsibility is possible only in completely devoting one's own life to another person. Only those who are selfless live responsibly, which means that only selfless people truly *live*."◆67 [67] And such a devotion to the other extends even to the point of physical death itself, where Bonhoeffer believes man truly lives. As a matter of fact, he writes, "Only because human beings are free for death can they give up their bodily lives for the sake of a higher good. Without the freedom to sacrifice one's life in death there

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65 [65] Ibid., 52.

66 [66] Ibid., 54. For a similar approach to an encounter with transcendence in another human being see Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1999); *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2001),

67 [67] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259.

would be no freedom for God, and there would be no *human* life.❖68 [68] Here again the contrast between Voegelin and Bonhoeffer arises in their understanding of the paradox of life and death. For Voegelin, this paradox is understood as an individual struggle for personal order, but for Bonhoeffer it is understood in terms of the other.69 [69]

Now having discussed Bonhoeffer's understanding of human existence, we turn to his conception of the person of Christ, the fulfillment and norm of that existence. The clearest articulation of this conception is found in his 1933 Christology lectures given at the University of Berlin . In those lectures, Bonhoeffer presents a Christ that existed, but more importantly exists, "*pro me*."❖ In other words, Christ not only exists in terms of *Dasein*, but also *Dir-Sein*.

Bonhoeffer writes:

Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me. His being Christ is his being *pro me*. This being *pro me* is in turn not meant to be understood as an effect which emanates from him, or as an accident; it is meant to be understood as his essence, as the being of the person himself. This personal nucleus itself is *pro me*. That Christ is *pro me* is not an historical or an ontical statement, but an ontological one. That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relationship to me.70 [70]

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68 [68] Ibid., 197.

69 [69] This understanding of human existence emphasizes a form of communality that is in tension with the notion of the individual. For Bonhoeffer, the individual only rises in relation to the other. In the "I-You"❖ structure, both forms are to be sure utterly "unique and thus fundamentally separate and distinct from one another."❖ Yet without the encounter with the other, there is no individual to speak of. The individual I arises only in the encounter with a transcendent You. Bonhoeffer writes, "[T]he person ever and again arises and passes away in time. The person does not exist timelessly; a person is not static, but dynamic. The person exists always and only in ethical responsibility; the person is re-created again and again in the perpetual flux of life."❖ Thus, it is only in the context of community that human existence is fulfilled, or even exists for that matter. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 48.

70 [70] Bonhoeffer, *Christ as Center*, 47.

In similar fashion to the "I-You" structure of *Dasein*, Christ is never conceived in isolation of being in itself but only in relation to the other. Moreover, Christ's existence is not simply defined as being-there (*Dasein*) but also as being there *pro me*.

Yet the question naturally arises how can Christ be present? For unlike Voegelin who does not seem to understand Christ as present *today*, except as an existential norm, Bonhoeffer does believe that Christ is present at this moment. Bonhoeffer answers that Christ's presence is in the form of likeness, particularly in the *sanctorum communio*, the church, and this presence takes the form of Word, sacrament, and the community itself.<sup>71</sup> [71] However, as evidenced in the previous quote, this likeness is not merely an emanation, or an accident, of his being but is truly his essence. In terms of the Word, the unity of being and act remains. In contrast to a static concept of Word as idea, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the sociality of Christ as Word by defining it as "address." An address requires community. At minimum, three elements are required--the speaker, the address itself, and the hearer, and it is in this process, in the speaking of the Word itself, that Christ is present. But Christ's presence as the Word is not simply *Dasein*, but also *Dir-Sein*. The address is a personal one directed to each hearer, calling him or her not only to exist (*Dasein*) but to exist for the other (*Dir-Sein*). Christ as sacrament also expresses this same unity of being and act. Similar to Christ's presence in the Word, he is also present in the form of bread and wine, and this presence again is not for itself but for others. Bonhoeffer writes, "So bread and wine are a new creation. They are real nourishment for new being. As elements of the

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71 [71] Ibid., 49-61.

restored creation they are of course nothing for themselves, but for men. This being-for-men is what makes them a new creation.❖72 [72]

Finally, Christ is present as the church. Bonhoeffer is not stating here that Christ is present *in* the church, though to be sure Christ is present in the community as both Word and sacrament; rather Bonhoeffer is arguing a different point, namely that Christ is the community itself, the body of Christ. Though in this section, Bonhoeffer does not explicitly state that the church is *Dir-Sein*, it is certainly implied. But, later in the lecture, Bonhoeffer does provide an example of the church as *Dir-Sein*. He draws a connection between Christ as the center of history and the church (as Christ) as the center of the state.<sup>73</sup> [73] Just as Christ stands as the "hidden❖ center of history fulfilling history's purpose in secret, the church is the "hidden❖ center of the state. This community should not become visible by becoming the observable center of the state (e.g. state church) but rather should serve as the hidden center calling the state to its purpose, namely law and order.<sup>74</sup> [74]

### *Conclusion*

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72 [72] Ibid., 59.

73 [73] Ibid., 63-66.

74 [74] For an example of this function of the church see Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question,❖ in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1928-1936*, edited by Edwin H. Robertson (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965), 221-229.



In experiencing the atrocities of Nazi Germany, both Voegelin and Bonhoeffer observed a loss of transcendence, even if they understood transcendence differently, and they sought to restore this transcendence to politics through a political action grounded in a conception of history with Christ as its center. Voegelin recognized the abandonment of transcendence *in the beyond*--that is to say, transcendence experienced vertically, particularly through one's own individual consciousness. Through the symbol of the F hrer, Hitler deemed himself the divinized man, embodying the will of the German people.<sup>75</sup> [75] As the representative of this will, German political action was limited to an expression of loyalty to the F hrer. The people were thus restricted in their access to the transcendence *in the beyond* and by this were limited in their ability to access a higher truth above the F hrer, which could ground a philosophic critique. In order to restore this transcendence, Voegelin looked to Christ, who on his reading experienced the fullness of the divine, and in *imitatio Christi*, Voegelin engaged in contemplative action--that is to say, *periagoge*, the turning from immanent *doxa* to transcendent truth, which then made it possible to critique and reorder Germanic political society. He writes, "The restoration [of order] requires a turning-around (*periagoge*) of  the whole soul' . . . from ignorance to the truth of God, from opinion about uncertainly wavering things to knowledge of being." <sup>76</sup> [76]

Bonhoeffer recognized the loss of transcendence *in the midst*--that is to say, transcendence experienced horizontally. This recognition came through Germany's forced

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<sup>75</sup> [75] Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 302-03.

<sup>76</sup> [76] Voegelin, *Order and History: Plato and Aristotle*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 16, edited by Dante Germino (Columbia, Mo. : University of Missouri, 2000), 122.

sterilization and attempted extermination of the Jews and gypsies.<sup>77</sup> [77] The Nazi regime had violated the structure of human existence by destroying the ethical barrier of the "I-You" structure. Instead of maintaining the dignity and "otherness" of human beings, the regime had imposed the I onto the You. In order to restore this transcendence, Bonhoeffer looked to Christ who for him lived only for the other, thus witnessing to the inviolability and the dignity of the other through communal *pathos*. In contrast to Voegelin's *periagoge*, Bonhoeffer engaged in interpersonal action--that is to say, *metanoia*, turning from self-centeredness, by giving himself completely to others through vicarious representative action, fulfilling the ethical responsibility of the "I-You" structure. He writes, "It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is *metanoia*: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ."<sup>78</sup> [78] Political action here is the process of turning toward others by suffering with them, which creates an existential solidarity, a communal *pathos*, serving as a redeeming witness to the disordered state.

There is no doubt that these two types of political action are in tension with one another, and at this point, a philosophical evaluation of these two distinct responses to National Socialism would seem to be a natural conclusion, and one perhaps worth pursuing on another occasion. But the temptation to pick a side as it were between intrapersonal and interpersonal action is not the purpose of this essay. Instead of attempting to argue for the superiority of one type of action

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<sup>77</sup> [77] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 189-213.

<sup>78</sup> [78] Bonhoeffer, "Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, 18 July 1944," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 361.

over and against the other, both are needed for a proper theory of political action. In other words, the very tension between intrapersonal and interpersonal must be maintained, and in as much as this tension is dissolved disorder arises in the theory itself.

Besides the tension between their responses to National Socialism, Voegelin and Bonhoeffer are also worth comparing because of the tension in their own lives, a tension that was almost lost because they so emphasized one type of action over and against the other.<sup>79</sup> [79] Voegelin's stress on intrapersonal action made it difficult for him to engage in interpersonal action, a weakness that Voegelin himself recognized. In his memoriam to close friend Alfred Schütz, Voegelin offered praise for Schütz's ability to achieve, what Voegelin calls, "tangible results" in the area of social action, results Voegelin realized he could not achieve because of his contemplative approach to political disorder.<sup>80</sup> [80] Bonhoeffer's emphasis on interpersonal action made contemplation seem virtually unnecessary. To be sure, Bonhoeffer encouraged the contemplative life at the Finkenwalde seminary, but as the devastation of Nazi Germany increased, such intrapersonal action in a sense meaningless. In *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he writes, "Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable--that is not authentic transcendence--but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others.'<sup>81</sup> [81] It would seem then that any dissatisfaction with either

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<sup>79</sup> [79] Cf. also n. 52 and 64.

<sup>80</sup> [80] Voegelin, "In Memoriam to Alfred Schütz," in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 42-43.

<sup>81</sup> [81] 381.

Voegelin or Bonhoeffer as a model for political action resides in their inability to maintain better the tension between intrapersonal and interpersonal action in their own lives.

But more importantly, the failure to maintain the tension between intrapersonal and interpersonal action is to fall into a similar disorder that both Voegelin and Bonhoeffer observed in National Socialism, namely a loss of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human existence. If a man engages in contemplative action without any tangible interpersonal efforts, then he has failed to recognize the dignity of his fellowman, the transcendence *in the midst*, and the moral responsibility that such a communal existence entails. Even in Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher who has ascended to truth must descend back into the cave. This ordering of one's own existence is after all not merely for self but for everyman, as Voegelin tells us. On the other hand, if a man engages purely in interpersonal action without contemplation, then he has failed to recognize divine transcendence, the transcendence *in the beyond*, which provides access to a transcendent truth that illuminates the meaning of one's own existence. After all, the dignity of the other person, and even the desire to act on their behalf, comes from the recognition of divine transcendence, a point Bonhoeffer himself acknowledged.<sup>82</sup> [82] Moreover, the political actor loses the ability to transcend the disordered community and provide a philosophic critique towards the restoration of order; it seems that the actor can only suffer in solidarity. Thus, a theory of political action must maintain the tension between intrapersonal and interpersonal action so as to express both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human existence. To do otherwise is to restrict reality itself. To be sure, certain actors are drawn to one type of action

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82 [82] Cf. n. 63.

over the other, and even emphasizing one type of action in their lives is not necessarily problematic as long as the emphasis is not so severe that the tension itself is dissolved.

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