

APSA 2011 Eric Voegelin Society Panel 5:
Order and Disorder in International Politics: From *Pacem in Terris* to the Regensburg Address

Joseph de Maistre's Insufficient Response to the Crisis (Spoken Remarks version)

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In 2003, a minute before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, John Paul II finds himself lobbied by all parties to the coming war, including: **Tariq Aziz**, a Chaldean Catholic, who warns that Muslims will only think it a new crusade; **Tony Blair**, who is postponing his conversion until after his retirement; and **Michael Novak**, who argues just war theory in Bush's behalf. The countries represented are not Catholic by legal establishment or cultural tradition. A prelate goes before TV cameras with Aziz, who looks sad, worried, victimized. The Vatican calls for more negotiation and adherence to the arms control "regime." When the invasion begins, Cardinal Tucci declares it "a defeat for reason and for the Gospel... beyond all legality and all international legitimacy."

Reason and the Gospel. In 1963 *Pacem in Terris* made an appeal to Catholics and non-Catholic "men of good will," on the basis of natural law and right reason as well as the Gospel. But who hears such appeals, in an age when, as Voegelin says, "the spiritual substance of Western society has run to the vanishing point, and the vacuum does not show any signs of refilling from new sources"? And *who is the pope* ... to the men now inhabiting this vacuum? Who is he to

Voegelin? Only the spokesman of an *old* source of spiritual substance? I say in my paper that *Pacem in Terris* assumes there is some "spiritual substance" left to serve as a premise for seeking a just international order. Then, in 2006, the Regensburg speech acknowledges this shrinking of spiritual substance "to the vanishing point" as the loss of belief and of a specific culture that can embody truth, historically given, which is to say, providentially given—a loss occurring, in part, when the snake of reason devours its own tail. Providence... Providence is divine *love*.

Two documents, written in different forms for different occasions, but still evidence of changing attitude over forty-three years. *Pacem in Terris* speaks to an ideologized world in terms of this world's own category of "rights"... To what purpose? To reform that world by blessing it, or only to offer a futile witness? In Voegelinian language, is it an "insufficient response to the crisis"? With Regensburg, though it does address Islam (obtusely, the secular press says), the main concern is to restore the Church's own view of Christianity, before the Church has no witness left to offer. It speaks of providence and a revelation *not* confined to canonical scriptures, and the relationship of truth and culture in history. It pulls the Church back to Europe as the home base of both Christianity and Western civilization. It warns that Christianity and Western civ. are of one piece, that anything good in Western civ. originates in Christianity, to which Western civ.

must return for its very life. And, in this pulling back to the center, to origins, the intended Christianity is not a de-historicized "primitive" Christianity of *early* Protestantism or a de-mythologized, despiritualized, re-historicized Christianity of *late* Protestantism, it is a patristic Christianity unfolded and articulated through a Platonic and Aristotelian and Neoplatonic grounding. And so Hellenic philosophy is another point of origin and return. No Europe without Christianity, no Christianity without the Greeks, no Europe without the Greeks. Without Europe, no home base for Catholicism (in history or geography), and no place (in history or geography) from which to witness to a secularized and rationally debased Western world, or from which to witness to a non-Western world.

My summary of Regensburg here suggests in structure, and somewhat in substance, a quotation Voegelin cites in his History of Political Ideas: "No public morality or national character without religion, no European religion without Christianity, no Christianity without Catholicism, no Catholicism without the pope, no pope without the supremacy that is due to him." This quotation from Count Joseph de Maistre is used to summarize the thesis of his famous book *Du Pape* of 1819. The expanded title of an English translation of 1850 is, "The Pope, considered in his relations with the Church, temporal sovereignties, separated churches, and the cause of civilization." So I take us beyond the forty-year time-frame of the two documents, to the time-frame of the founding of the modern

papacy (for *who is the pope?*), with the modern nation state's aggression against Church *and* papacy: even before the Risorgimento, the Kulturkampf, and the French laic laws, an aggression beginning with Napoleon's incarceration of two popes, when Maistre starts writing this book, a book which over the decades creates the ultramontane constituency ready to receive the dogmatic declaration of papal infallibility. Then the First Vatican Council of 1870, into which copies of Maistre's book are bootlegged, though it never gets official approval. And finally the arrangement with Mussolini in 1929 which restores to the pope a tiny papal state. Honorable mention is due to Benedict XV, who resisted another aggression, that of the robust Kantian genius Woodrow Wilson. Benedict is said to have favored "*a*" league of nations while resisting "*the*" League of Nations with its universalist intention. Maistre wanted an international system with the pope *in charge*, a king *above* the kings, recreating the medieval two-power system, where kings (in place of the Emperor) have political sovereignty, while the pope has the sovereignty of spiritual authority. And today the pope is a king *after* the kings, the last king with any real power in Europe, the power of influence, however much of it he can gather by all available means, including the construction of a mass media image for himself. The existence of the Vatican city state is more a miracle of endurance than a symbol of contraction, since the papacy itself should have died

several times by now, according to the respective schedules of various progressivist ideologies.

Notwithstanding all that, the average secular Westerner, not knowing a lick of history, must wonder *who is the pope* that Aziz, Blair, and Bush's surrogate Novak should court him, and that he should have this sovereign mini-state with a complete diplomatic service? Isn't he just a Western version of the Dalai Lama, just a general advocate for peace and humanitarianism, just another "religious leader" under pluralism? There are still a few ways to view the pope in some historical context. If you are a Marxist, then he's a relic of feudalism. If you are a strict Reformation Protestant, your official doctrine may hold him to be the Anti-Christ. If a Muslim, your imam may tell you he's the millennial center of the crusaderist conspiracy. But even for élites with a little liberal progressivist history who take benign if patronizing views of his peace message—*who is the pope* who addresses these big encyclicals to a post-Christian Western world, and who indeed is he *in his own Church*? But I would ask, when war looms, why does the pope defer to the Kantian-Wilsonian "international system," as if by default? Is this not another reason to ignore the pope's peace message, at least for some?

I bring up Joseph de Maistre in part because he has more to do with the modern papacy's foundations than many may want to concede—Maistre who is completely obscure to Anglophones and irrelevant to a political theory syllabus

premised on the development of Anglo-American democracy as universal humanity's ethical fulfillment. Maistre who says "people get the government they deserve,"¹ and who, in response to Rousseau's saying that man is born free but is everywhere in chains,² says "We are all attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a supple chain that restrains us without enslaving us."³ Maistre receives a curious mention in the *History of Political Ideas* in connection with Auguste Comte, and his beliefs parallel Voegelin's remarkably. That paper is the paper I *wanted* to write.

In the Eighties I wrote an essay for Roger Scruton's Salisbury Review that explained Maistre's political philosophy in terms of Voegelin and Solzhenitsyn. In the past I've only spoken here on literary topics: Proust, Musil, and Valéry, regarding the theory of consciousness and modes of spiritual deformation. Maistre too is a literary topic: he is a great writer and he comes up in Baudelaire, Stendhal, Tolstoy, and Camus. Literature is essential for getting at Voegelin's intention: his biography is his philosophy, and his reading is a great part of his biography. Today I'm considering Maistre as someone who could have fit into Voegelin's array of personal heroes like Bodin, Vico, and Schelling, the Cassandra-like isolated

¹ "Toute nation a le gouvernement qu'elle mérite."

² "L'homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers."

³ "Nous sommes tous attachés au trône de l'Etre Suprême par une chaîne souple, qui nous retient sans nous asservir."

witnesses to the mystical life of reason, gifted with prescience about the disasters befalling their civilization. *Could have* fit into that array, but didn't. *Not* an academic philosopher, but still philosophical, a *philosophos*, who read philosophy for understanding, as well as to train himself to puncture the *philosophes*. A man with two desks: the public one, where he writes his polemics and apologetics, and another where he meditates. He read Vico. He studied Plato steadily and, when young, was a masonic theosophist in a line from Jakob Boehme. His theology is a logos theology with an expansive view of revelation: it's a Maistrean theme that someday the sciences will vindicate all the myths and traditions of ancient civilizations—everything the *philosophes* consider rubbish. Now as a practical statesman as well as a polemicist, you might call him the French Burke: a legislator, chief magistrate, and diplomat, who knew affairs of state and knew his Montesquieu, though not a *conservateur*. Burke makes it into the Straussian syllabus, while Maistre *and* Voegelin's array of witnesses do not.

My paper isn't about vindicating Maistre, but I warn you that you cannot know him from the usual secondary sources (though better studies, such as Dr. Armenteros's, have come out lately). To begin with, he's hard to read if you're not in his target audience: Catholics and loyalists of the *ancien régime*, wavering and needing to be given the courage of their convictions. He's not trying to shock liberal readers, he's trying to shock conservative readers. Liberal progressives

construct a Maistre of their own from misread proof texts and assumed motives to custom fit their genealogy of retrograde thinkers culminating in Nazism. They are helped by *illegitimi* such as Charles Maurras and Carl Schmitt, who seek honorable ancestors to force into their own family tree of gnostic rightism. Then a hysterical decadent romantic-modern existentialist school turns Maistre to an authoritarian Marquis de Sade who puts the pope, the executioner, and the inquisitor all on the same level, for the irrationalist tripod of all legitimate order. It's Dostoevskyan, it's Nietzschean, it's Monty Python. But isn't that who Joseph Ratzinger is to many liberals, though he's against executioners? But I would say, looking at Regensburg's *logos* theology, its providentialist historicism, its embrace of Greek philosophy, and critical attitude towards modern philosophy, isn't he the Maistrean pope and even the Voegelinian pope in intention, to sum up in a provocative way the shift from the post-Kantian wasteland of *Pacem in Terris* to Regensburg?

Voegelin's no Catholic. He works plenty of digs into the *History of Political Ideas*: as when he says that what civilization needs is a New Thomas, not a neo-Thomist. He holds up the "two powers" scheme as the pinnacle of Western order, but his compliments to the Church are backhanded; often he favors one side to stigmatize the other in historic conflicts; and the reformation was "strongly provoked." When discussing Ockham he lumps the infallibilist centralization of

the Catholic Church with the rise of the sovereign nation state as a case of voluntarism-nominalism-fideism. Voegelin likes conciliarism and dislikes Dionysian sacramental hierarchy.

Critics often put Maistre in this voluntarist-nominalist pigeonhole because of his doctrine on sovereignty, which is a practical doctrine on power as well as a stick with which to beat rationalist constitutionalism. *Du Pape* is controversial because it yokes the pope's monarchical sovereignty to infallibility. But it's a ploy. I distinguish between the outer, political form of the papacy and its inner spiritual content, as between a negative doctrine and positive doctrine. On the positive side is a divine guarantee of right decisions; on the negative, a structure for producing decisions of any sort at all. We expect infallibility to be argued as providential inspiration: the pope as oracle of the Holy Ghost. Inasmuch as apostolic order is a concept of message, sacramental power, and judicial authority radiating from the person of Christ, it is both a *vertical* succession in hierarchy and a *horizontal* succession over time—partaking both of spiritual content, the positive, and the material structure, the negative. On the negative, Maistre makes the papacy's material structure the analogue of an earthly monarchy, apex of a structure of executive command, but notice that this material structure is just as much the result of divine providence as the spiritual content—in the way it functions as much as in the way it has unfolded through time. What this negative negates is some

expectation of a purely supernatural functioning in the natural order of the Church on earth, requiring a permanently open ecumenical council attended by all the baptized, with unanimous results. Maistre is also negating a purely secular concept of popular sovereignty, which begins from an orthodox articulation of the priesthood of all believers, and deviates into Protestantism, and, passing through Enlightenment political theory, comes back to bite the Church. Negating this negative doctrine, secular popular sovereignty, explains Maistre's strategy.

And only through the mouth of an apostolic king could the church ever speak with one voice to worldly kings, in judgment over them—and there we have the theory of two powers. But is this nominalist? The pope's sovereignty over doctrine is not unconditional—no more than a king's sovereignty over law. Truth is truth, justice is justice, whatever power tries to do with them; they are built into the cosmos, reflections of the divine essence, intelligible through participation in *logos*. Maistre declares, in a paraphrase of Hebrews 11:3: "This world is a system of invisible things visibly manifested."⁴ You call that nominalist? Well, do you?

My paper title comes from my original plan to explain the place Voegelin gives Maistre in the *History of Political Ideas*. Voegelin's main task is to account

⁴ Hebrews 11:3, Textus Receptus: Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὰ βλεπόμενα γεγονέναι. (Vulgate: Fide intelligimus aptata esse saecula verbo Dei: ut ex invisibilibus visibilia fierent.) (KJV: Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.) Soirées de St Pétersbourg, 10th dialogue: CE MONDE EST UN SYSTÈME DE CHOSES INVISIBLES MANIFESTÉES VISIBLEMENT (Vol ii P 167)

for the schizoid progressivism of Comte, which embraces Maistre's theory of two powers—and that's the side of Comte that Voegelin identifies with. So Voegelin sets up a parallel between *Du Pape* and Comte's megalomaniac ten volumes which are designed to reshape the world. Voegelin says we must assume that Maistre "seriously believed he could change the course of Western history by a clear analysis of the problem of the crisis and by suggesting the only organizational solution that seemed to make sense." But, Voegelin says, Maistre could only believe this feasible if the scale of the crisis wasn't clear to him. This characterization of Maistre would apply to certain restorationists, but viewing the full context of his thought, I can't see his intention as that simple or simple-minded. Voegelin juggles his themes complexly, and this paper is not the place to criticize the *History of Political Ideas*, especially the paper as reconfigured for this panel. But what did Maistre really intend and really accomplish?

In brief, Maistre believed that Europe had passed through an evil so extreme that something had to happen. Man is religious; his soul does not simply go away when he commits evil. Either Catholicism will come back, he says, or there will be a new religion. Like the political religions? But Catholicism did come back: think of the converts of the Romantic movement. Things never are the way they used to be, but isn't it success if you write a book and, to the eye that seeks the workings of providence, it appears that providence uses this book to accomplish a

goal, even while providence continues generously paying out the golden chain of freedom to man's capriciousness in a secular age? In its way, the Vatican City is Maistre's monument.

Now look at another cycle of history, from *Pacem in Terris* to Regensburg. Under the civil service papacy of Paul VI, you have, for example, Latin America treated as ideal ground for constructing a Marxist paradise with a cross on top (and place that in parallel with the Bush administration's Wilsonian secular democracy project for the Middle East—and, by the way, imagine what Maistre would say about both of these...). But then John Paul II arises—with good timing, shall we say?—and a little of the golden chain is withdrawn from Latin America, while the iron chain of the iron curtain is cut. Then comes Benedict XVI to reassess the doctrinal situation in theodictic terms and to begin "the reform of the reform."

I've used Maistre to get at our present arc of history, and to get at the intention of Voegelin. And what did Voegelin really think of the part that the modern Catholic Church played in this arc, and what its resistance to the spirit of the age has been worth? I have no opinions of his on Roncalli, Montini, Wojtyla, and Ratzinger. But in the time of Pacelli, in an APSA paper of 1946 entitled "Clericism," he praises the Church for standing firm against the "intra-mundane religious movements" that issue from "the darkness of enlightenment," for Pius IX's *Syllabus*, which he calls the "slap in the face" to progressivism, and for Pius

XI's edicts against Nazism and Communism. (I wish he had mentioned the 1926 condemnation of the Action Française.)

And I assume Voegelin means what he says in this passage:

"Now that the disaster has run the course
which was sensed 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.**" ⁵

. . . As if to say. "I don't get everything you guys are doing, but whatever you do, don't stop. It seems to be working, especially the Gilsonian Neo-Thomism thing."

The firmness seemed to go slack for a few decades. The Church on earth consists of sinful humans, so it shares in the passing illusions of sinful humans who are all on that golden chain. To a political scientist, the Church has the merit of having disavowed Marxism before the Soviet Union did. And just because the life of a Christian is a pilgrimage and our true home is elsewhere—just because we are Augustinians and not Pelagians, we do not concede the worldly order to the bad

⁵ In Selected Correspondence 1924-1949, Collected Works v. 29 pp708-9.

men, and allow them to destroy the innocent and the stupid. And we are left facing this ongoing problem of the shrinking of spiritual substance to the vanishing point.

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