

# VOEGELIN AND CHRISTIANITY

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Aaron Hoffman gave a paper at the EVS 2000 society entitled "History and Faith: Eric Voegelin and Historical Jesus Research," in which he ably reviewed our topic in general and the more interesting secondary literature as well. Now I too have read the secondary literature and, as a matter of fact, it lies about me on the floor in stacks and heaps as I sit here at the computer. There must be some reason why Ellis Sandoz thought this topic was worth discussing again so soon and perhaps that will become clear in Boston!

The topic "Eric Voegelin and Christianity" suggests to me three separate, but perhaps somewhat overlapping, areas of inquiry: The first would be EV's personal relationship to Christianity. The second would be EV's criticism of the churches. The third would be the worth of his thought to contemporary theology. I want to say a little about each of these areas.

## Voegelin's Own Christianity

When dealing with Voegelin's thought, the thought of a man who has alone mastered materials beyond the range of any scholar who might be active today, and more concretely, when I consider my own inability to independently verify the accuracy of his source materials, then I must decide whether on the whole to trust him or not. How much we trust a man about important matters depends on our assessment of his spiritual foundation. The question of a man's spiritual state is centrally important to the question of trust when we touch on what Voegelin liked to call the quaternary structure of reality: God, man, society and the world. Those of us who have finally learned to number our days perhaps have little appetite for procrastination or evasion in these matters.

Some points then that stand out when looking at EV's elusive Christianity: Voegelin's assertion to Gerhart Niemeyer that he was a "pre-Nicaean" Christian is well known. Recently Manfred Henningsen wrote to me after Dante Germino's death that in the days when he was a

graduate student, he tried to pin down Voegelin on his Christianity (Germino being a Catholic). Voegelin said to him, "I believe in papal infallibility and I'm glad I'm a Protestant!" (He said this in the privacy of his office!) And then in my own experience, some 40 or so years ago, I clearly recall EV standing on the lecture stage of a Notre Dame auditorium and addressing the eighty or so of us undergraduates, "It is fortunate that you have a Christian background, otherwise we would be wasting our time."

Then there is the story told by Niemeyer: "[After my 1976 critique of *THE ECUMENIC AGE* {*ORDER AND HISTORY*, VOL IV, CW VOL 17)] an American professor and friend of Voegelin's attacked me, in Voegelin's presence. Voegelin rejected his sharp words, saying: 'Let it be; this is a personal problem.' Could Voegelin have meant that his personal problem was an inability to embrace the Christian faith with a personal surrender?" (Review of Politics, Winter, 1995, Vol 57, No 1, p.101) Lastly we find in the Epilogue which has been added to the second edition of Ellis Sandoz' *THE VOEGELINIAN REVOLUTION* (Transaction-Rutgers, 2000), the fascinating exchange between EV and his wife Lissy, just days before he died, in which he declares, "At last I understand Christianity!" And she replies: "Yes, Eric, but you're going to take it with you!"

This kind of anecdotal material is pretty well known by longtime Voegelin students and one is inclined to agree with Niemeyer's conclusion that "Those who still, at this point, are impatiently waiting for a judgment on Voegelin's personal confession of faith should be sent to the four o'clock session of tattling and gossiping, where they will undoubtedly hear something that for a time will satisfy their idle curiosity." (Ibid., RP, p.104)

There seem to be two strains to the criticism of Voegelin's Christianity. One is that he lacked belief in the minimal dogma required of a Christian: Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection (and additionally for a Catholic, the Petrine Office and Magisterium, the *depositum fidei*, the Communion of Saints, the Mystical Body, etc.). There was the famous exchange between EV and Frederick Wilhelmsen at the University of Dallas (a Catholic school) which has left a lingering distaste there for EV. Wilhelmsen asked EV in a public setting if Christ had risen and EV replied, "No!" (In this case I suspect EV felt he was being baited by a roughneck, but

nevertheless it was said.) One must note also EV's famous long letter to Schatz on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1953, in which he displays an astonishingly superior understanding of the logic and utility of the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and perhaps most interestingly, those concerning Mary—all of which is prefaced by a denial of any interest in Christianity other than to fill the fifteen hundred year gap left by the modern lobotomization of history!

In 1983 in Boston, a little more than a year before his death, EV answered questions at a seminar directed by Frederick Lawrence. At one point EV placed dogma in a context that makes him appear stronger than orthodox, if one may say that:

And then you might go on to speak concretely, taking as an example the definition of Chalcedon. You can say, Yes, I believe it because I know the truth intention in it. Or you can say, My God! You have a dogma of that importance formulated with that second-rate type of philosophy that was in use in the fifth century, as compared to what we know about the matters. It is deplorable, but there is nothing we can do about it, since the dogma was formulated in the fifth century. They use such terms as the nature of man and the nature of God, which I wouldn't use today. Thus, they solve a problem which is an entirely ridiculous problem in theology on the basis of the *depositum fidei*. (THE BEGINNING AND BEYOND, Scholar Press, 1984 p. 101)

The other criticism is that EV lacked the moral personality, if I may say that, of a Christian believer. This morning on the internet there was published an interview with a Green Bay Packers football player, a young adult professional athlete, who came to Christianity last year. It portrays a kind of fervor that is especially esteemed in parts of Christianity:

Or some people will say, You over-use Jesus too much. Stick to football. Stick to team issues. Stay away from politics and religion. I'm like saying, it's not a religion. He's my boss. He's my Lord and Savior. That's who I answer to. I can't over-use Jesus. The truth is the truth. If I told people anything else, I'd be lying to them. And I'd take that glory away from Jesus and put it on myself, but I can't do that because I have to answer to Jesus Christ. (Kabeer Gbaja-Biamilla to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reporter 8 August 2002).

EV's moral personality was perhaps better described instead by Ellis Sandoz:

'A dry soul is wisest and best,' wrote Heraclitus and Voegelin agreed. . . . The spirit of his *Quod Deus Dicitur?* [his Last Testament] is in this same vein of affective austerity and invocation of the authority of the dry souls for their insight. (VR, *ibid.*, Epilogue)

But not always a dry soul, for in 1960 I witnessed EV in a state of red-faced anger at the brutal treatment of blacks in Mississippi by sheriff's deputies and dogs. Any suggestion that EV was insensitive to the need for justice in this world, is in my judgment, unfounded. (as was for instance implied by Aaron Mackler in his review essay found in *VOEGELIN'S ISRAEL AND REVELATION*, Marquette U., 2000 AD). On the contrary I would argue that EV's whole life was spent in a courageous struggle to establish justice in society by opening first his own soul and then those of his students to the operations of Grace (or *mutatis mutandis*, the cool and detached Greek vocabulary he preferred) and that he did so in the face of forces bent on his destruction by murder or ostracism. Of course I would suggest that behind a hint that EV didn't care enough about people there is a kind of defective paradigm that rejects the contemplative life as being one that is incapable of reaching the fullness of human stature!

It is difficult to argue against Niemeyer's conclusion: "None of the quoted passages from Voegelin's works amounts to a confession of Christian faith on the part of Eric Voegelin. Yet, if one remembers that these are scholarly texts (even the letters) one must be profoundly astonished at the inner freedom with which Voegelin can speak of God and Christian dogmas." (Review of *Politics*, *ibid.*, p 96) The phrase "inner freedom" worked like a splash of ice water in my face! Of course! Only a personality in erotic tension, or if you like, in the tension of the life of pneumatic existence, could describe with such loving detail the beauties (and flaws) of his beloved.

All the while one must keep in mind, as Aaron Hoffman put it: "Voegelin in his work is most concerned with the balance in the order of history and the structure of reality. His hedgehog-like attention to this issue overshadows his writings about everything from ancient Israel to the German universities. It is no wonder then that the figure of Jesus and early Christianity are subordinate to his concerns of restraining egophanic tendencies and the spread of gnosticism. The figure of Jesus is very

important in Voegelin's writing, but Voegelin was not trying to write the definitive work on the history of early Christianity." (Hoffman, "History and Faith," *ibid.*)

Lastly one might want to consider whether EV should be considered a mystic philosopher. EV deals from time to time with mystical experiences as though he were talking about things familiar and true rather than as someone assessing a strange phenomenon from the outside. But if we limit the name "mystic" to those who have had an immediate experience of God, I don't know whether EV should be included.

Glen Hughes ponders the question and suggests that while for EV mysticism is necessarily at the core of the Christian tradition, in his own work it appropriately remains in the background. (*MYSTERY AND MYTH IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ERIC VOEGELIN*, 1993, p 59). He refers us to Eugene Webb in his *ERIC VOEGELIN: PHILOSOPHER OF HISTORY*, (1981, p 44, n. 43) who quotes a line from Gregor Sebba's Essay "Prelude and Variations on the Theme of Eric Voegelin" which originally appeared in *Southern Review*, n.s., 13 (1977 )p. 665: "To me Eric Voegelin has always been an exemplary representative of rationality in the Greek sense, but when I argued that against a statement calling him a mystic philosopher he wrote back: 'This will shock you, but I *am* a mystic philosopher.'" (By the way, I can't find this *IN ERIC VOEGELIN'S THOUGHT: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL*, 1982, where the Sebba essay is reprinted on pages 3 to 65.)

It is otherwise hard to understand EV's attitude of absolute certainty on the great questions, an attitude which seems to depend less on accumulated learning than on a penetrating vision. There is a truly remarkable exchange between EV and graduate students in Montreal in 1976:

E.V. [Students always ask the question:] Where do you get this Divine revelation? Where is the Divine presence?

You are sitting here and asking questions. Why? Because you have that divine *kinesis* in you that moves you to be interested.:

Q. Can't I just call it interest?

E.V. You can call it interest, but it is the revelatory presence, of course, that pushes you or pulls you. It's there. We are talking.

(*CONVERSATIONS WITH ERIC VOEGELIN*, IV(1976) , Montreal, 1980. p. 140.)

### Voegelin's Criticism of the Churches

Voegelin's criticism of the Churches naturally falls into two areas: personalities and institutions, the former being primarily Protestant and the latter being primarily Catholic. Since the Protestant foundations are dependent to some extent on the personalities of their founders, it is not surprising that when it was revealed that EV had unsheathed his scalpel in *THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL IDEAS*, he lost a few friends! (See *The Great Confusion I: Luther and Calvin (RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION*, HPI Vol. IV, CW 22, Part 5, Ch 1),

But of course EV didn't actually do this; rather his literary executors and trustees did it! If we recall, the manuscript for the projected *History of Political Ideas* ran to somewhere between 10 and 12 volumes. EV mined the early volumes for the first three volumes of ORDER AND HISTORY and permitted John Hallowell to extract late materials to make up the volume entitled *FROM ENLIGHTENMENT TO REVOLUTION* published in 1975 by Duke U. Press (subsequently reappearing in HPI). EV also published essays based on the manuscript, such as *The Origins of Scientism* (1948) (reprinted in *PUBLISHED ESSAYS, 1940-1952*, CW Vol 10. p. 168).

As far as the materials that were not published in his lifetime, among which must be included those on Luther and Calvin, EV on occasion expressed reservations: that he would have had to rework the materials in the manuscript to bring them up to a current state of scholarship; that the restoration of science following upon the slough that constituted positivism had led to the proliferation of good scholarship, that the explosion of such good scholarship had made it impossible for one man to keep abreast of all current developments, and lastly, and I suspect most importantly, that he no longer cared to spend his remaining time on these pre-philosophical matters.

Nevertheless we are faced with a collection of almost ruthless critiques of Martin Luther and John Calvin, primarily, and with additional hard blows against the Puritans, John Milton, John "Dutch Lunch" Locke, and the "spiritual thinning of the English" in general. The reaction has been swift and barbed, as in Joshua Mitchell's 2000 EVS paper titled "Voegelin and the Scandal of Luther: Philosophy, Faith and the Modern Age," in which EV is portrayed as a producer of anti-Reformation writings consistent with his anti-democratic and aristocratic elitism.

Likewise there is William Stevenson's "An Agnostic View of Voegelin's Gnostic Calvin." Both essays, I suggest, were composed using unanalyzed terminology—the pre scientific doxic vocabulary that EV always tried to avoid. Both essays, I further suggest, violated a prime canon of Voegelin's own scholarship, which is that one must evaluate the historic development of materials from the time of their origin, through to the present, and on their own ground; and one may not arbitrarily select a date before which everything may be conveniently ignored and after which history really begins. Nor may one leap over and past awkward periods of time (As does a standard text in philosophy, recently shown to me by a friend, in which philosophy peters out with the Stoics and resumes sixteen hundred years later with Descartes!)

I do not mean to argue that EV gave the correct measure of Luther and Calvin. I am not equipped to evaluate his judgment here; I can say however, that on many occasions I have gone to the original materials Voegelin writes about and have never gotten a sense of a forced interpretation or, in fact, any distortion whatsoever. But it must be said that text A may mean something different in the light of text B and text C so one needs to look at them all to be sure! On the other hand, EV was describing pneumopathologic behavior, by his standards—the standards he rather uniformly applied to historical figures. So it is necessary to distinguish between the rejection of EV's diagnostic techniques and misdiagnosis in a particular case. I do not think these critics have weighed the issue of whether EV's diagnostic technique is valid. In any event, Thomas Heilke, in his "Calvin, Gnosis and Anti-Philosophy—Voegelin's Interpretation of the Reformation," (EVS 2000) presented EV's views in great detail, without critically evaluating them in relation to the source materials themselves or the accumulated scholarship on these personalities.

With respect to personalities in the Catholic Church, EV never attacks its foundational figures and no one seems to mind too much when he criticizes popes and theologians, from the Jesuit Francisco de Vitoria ("Who is this man Vitoria? Is he a smooth rascal who writes his lectures tongue-in-cheek? Is he a professional lawyer who defends a racket for a fee? Or is he an egregious example of the human capacity for self-deception?" CW Vol 23 (HPI-V), Chapter 4) to Pius XII ("[the Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi* which first appeared ] in 1943, makes the most severe contraction of the membership of the church that it had ever received, insofar as here the community of the *corpus mysticum* is limited very strictly to members of the Catholic Church who have received the sacrament. Whoever does not have this sacramental character is not a member of the church, and since 'church' is now identified with *corpus mysticum*, he is, so to say, not a member of the *corpus mysticum*. . . . However, a theologian like [Karl] Rahner, certainly in the framework of the formulated Christian doctrinal pronouncements, as, for example, in this encyclical, has to behave himself. He must now erect all sorts of interesting constructions to make these doctrinal pronouncements compatible with his intended thesis, that Christ is the head of all men." [*HITLER AND THE GERMANS*, CW VOL 31, CH 5, Descent into the Ecclesiastic Abyss-The Catholic Church, pp 210-212]). (Parenthetically I will mention that I did read the long Rahner piece found in his *THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS*, VOL II, [Man and the Church ,1963, 1990, p.1] and, as has always been the case for me, cannot quarrel with EV's interpretation of the text.)

EV's specific criticism of the Catholic Church under Nazi domination is scathing: After he lists ten guidelines to be used by the clergy in reforming their souls, he finishes with "Instructions for use of these guidelines: Lower clergy, copy it out daily ten times; bishops and theologians, daily a hundred times; theologians who have received a Cross of Merit from the Federal Republic, daily two hundred times, until they have got it" (Ibid., CW 31. ◆4 "Guidelines" for German Clerics and Theologians, pp 199-201.)

Voegelin often strikes hard and then restores most of what goes flying. It is a technique for getting at the root of things. As Jacques Maritain has written:

"Before sewing one must cut. A philosopher who is in search of the nature of things is obliged to begin with sharp distinctions. These distinctions may seem brutal. They simply deal with certain

essences taken in themselves: and how could we bring out otherwise the intelligibility of things from the confused flux of existence? To isolate an essence does not imply any disregard for the complexity and continuity of the real. It is indispensable in order to analyze this complexity and continuity in a correct manner and finally to become aware of their very richness and meaning." (*CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND POETRY*, 1953, p. 44.)

I suspect a number of people, ranging from Hannah Arendt and Frederick Wilhelmsen down through Joshua Mitchell and William Stevenson, have not fully understood this *modus operandi*, which I believe is also Voegelin's. And most of his critics, or perhaps all of them, have failed to master his philosophy of consciousness.

### Voegelin's Thought and Contemporary Theology

If we can first agree that EV believed that theology and philosophy are rightly considered the same subject, then when I say "theology" I will mean that part of philosophy dealing particularly with man and God taken together that which those in the theology profession call "theology." It seems to me that Voegelin has performed several valuable services of which modern theology ought to be made aware: he has brought into clear focus the problems associated with dogma or doctrinization; second, he has given us a fresh view of some of the Jesus and Gospel issues; third, has developed his philosophy of consciousness which is useful to make Christianity seem more congruent with our experiences.

With respect to dogma and the churches, EV often said that dogma or doctrinization led to the forgetting of the underlying experiences and led to the war between the dogmatic adherents, the "dogmatomachy," and eventually to the immanentist's refutation of dogma once the underlying truth had been forgotten by all parties. I would add from personal experience that fideism is still sufficiently common today that discussion may be virtually impossible with those who refuse to step away from doctrine lest thought lead to diminution of faith.

As EV said in response to questions in 1970:

"Dogma separated from questioning is the style of ideologizing statements. If you look at those completely ridiculous attacks by Voltaire and Diderot on Christianity, you see that they always criticize statements; they are never aware that behind a statement there is a question to be answered by it...

"That style of degenerative doctrinism in Christianity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is continued today." (*CONVERSATIONS WITH ERIC VOEGELIN*, III, Montreal, 1980. p 102)

Of course EV would say that dogma is necessary. It protects the truth against the fool, the *nabala*, the man who in his heart says, "There is no God." It allows the truth, the *depositum fidei*, to be transmitted by the religious institution from generation to generation. By simply becoming aware of this problem in its current and historical manifestations, the theologian can avoid endless traps and dead ends. EV didn't discover this problem, but by making it thematic, he encourages us to remain constantly aware of it.

The fresh views of Jesus and the Gospel that EV has provided us are found principally in *THE ECUMENIC AGE* (CW Vol17, O&H IV) and in such essays as "The Gospel and Culture" (CW Vol 12). I do not want to repeat here the extensive and edifying exposition of these later writings by such distinguished men as William M. Thompson, who has himself internalized Voegelin's thought and made it his own in such works as *CHRISTOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY* (1991, New York) as well as explaining EV's philosophy of consciousness in numerous essays:

"This brings us to the conclusion of our analysis of Voegelin's analysis of the Christ-event. I will now bring this essay to a close by indicating what I find

particularly suggestive for those of us engaged in christology. Perhaps what I should begin with is the probable difficulty the theologian will experience in reading our author, a difficulty which contains a promise. Voegelin is engaged in a kind of therapeutic

philosophical-theological task. He views his Order and History as a way of helping us to become conscious of our deformation of our inherited symbolisms and simultaneously of reawakening ourselves "to the truth of reality as it reveals itself in history" (OH, IV, 58).

◆ He wants to reawaken our consciousness to the theophanic experiences giving rise to the classic and Judaeo-Christian symbolisms. As Altizer put it, ◆ What establishes his as a radical project is that these symbolisms achieve a new form if not a new meaning in his reconstruction. Voegelin, like Ricoeur, is radical and reactionary at once and altogether, thus baffling all who attempt to employ him either for political or theological ends. ◆ To read him requires nothing less than learning to understand history in a new way.

◆ His experiential analyses of theophanic consciousness simply force us to overcome many well accepted dogmas and dichotomies: that history is linear and necessarily progressive; that the insights of Hellas result from merely human effort while those of Israel-Christianity stem from revelation; that the true advances have only occurred in the West, with no parallels in the Orient; that every advance is a further overcoming of possible deformation; that reason and faith stand in opposition to one another, etc. In this light we can perhaps appreciate the novelty of his language: theophanic experience, Metaxy, history becoming luminous for its truth, noetic and pneumatic differentiations, etc. This novel language is therapeutic: it enables us to transcend our inherited understanding of our symbolisms and to engage in the effort to reenact in consciousness the founding experiences of our great tradition. The simultaneous clarity and obscurity of this language is quite purposeful, for that is what real history is: a Mystery (the obscurity) which through experiences of differentiation becomes luminous for its truth (the clarity). Need I indicate that all of this has great relevance for christology?."

( *VOEGELIN AND THE THEOLOGIAN*, ◆ Voegelin on Jesus Christ, ◆ 1983, Lewiston, NY. pp 204-205.)

In his book *CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRANSCENDENCE* ◆ *THE THEOLOGY OF ERIC VOEGELIN*, Notre Dame, 1994, Michael Morrissey has offered us a densely written yet eloquent exposition of EV ◆s innovations and renovations in theology. (Please bear with my extensive quotations. His observations are important and irreducible!)

1. First there is Voegelin ◆s revitalization of the Anselmian view to give it full breadth beyond time and place:

◆ Consequently, Voegelin believes that the proper method of this inquiry must be something like the *fides quaerens intellectum* and the correlative *credo ut intelligam* that was first formulated by St. Anselm in the eleventh century. The only significant difference is that Voegelin's inquiry, following the exigencies of the contemporary world, expands beyond the Christian horizon of Anselm's *fides* in order to include the manifold of pre-Christian and non-Christian theophanic events.◆(Ibid., p.151)

◆ . . . Nevertheless, Voegelin argues, the formulation of the inquiry bestowed on us by Anselm remains durable and sound. It only needs to be generalized so as to include all the manifestations of divine presence in history. In short, the firm tie to the Christian creed that *quaerens intellectum* has traditionally borne must today be broken. In this time-honored theological phrase, Voegelin argues, is contained the potential for a profound analysis of historical reality beyond the confines of its inception. "Faith seeking understanding" can be structurally applied not only to the creedal faith of Christians but also to the questing symbolizations of a Taoist speculation, a Platonic dialogue, an Egyptian Amon hymn, or a prehistoric petroglyph. Furthermore, Voegelin claims, if one is to take seriously Jesus' statement that "Before Abraham was, I am," then a philosopher must make intelligible the ubiquitous presence of Christ in these symbolizations just as much as in a Gospel.

◆ Of course this kind of expansion of a Christian symbol will undoubtedly meet much resistance, so Voegelin has to devise its generalized formulation carefully. To do so he returns to the source: Anselm's *Proslogion*. The intent of Anselm's meditation in the *Proslogion*, he states, has been seriously clouded under centuries of interpretation which found in it the so-called ontological proof for the existence of God. The identification of Anselm's argument with this anachronistic phrase effectively assured that *the fides* behind the quest would become lost. Voegelin argues that the centuries of distortion spawned by the critics of Anselm who associated his text with the so-called ontological proof (i.e., Gaunilo, Thomas, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel) mutilated Anselm's true insight. Only in our century, he believes, has the experiential content of Anselm's *fides* been recovered by studies such as Karl Bath's *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* in 1931, and Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, the Gifford Lectures of the same year.(Ibid., p. 152)

2. For Voegelin it is essential to avoid the objectifying intention of consciousness in addressing the non-intentionality of the spirit:

◆ What makes [Bernard] Lonergan's transcendental method inadequate for Voegelin is that in using the language of "intention" it becomes too easily associated with the kind of deficient intentionality that is pervasive in contemporary thought on consciousness, such as Husserl's phenomenology, which for critical reasons Voegelin seeks to avoid. The intention of consciousness present in the perception of external objects invariably becomes the model for understanding the intention toward divine reality. Consciousness understood in this way tends to objectify whatever is the so-called object of consciousness even if the object is no object at all, but instead transcendent mystery. The objectifying intention of consciousness, thus, is always in tension with the consciousness of nonobjective reality. Because the transcendental method takes its stand on the intentional operations of consciousness, it cannot do full justice to the nonintentional opening toward divine reality. ◆ (Ibid., p. 213)

3. Then Voegelin refuses the ◆ ontological ◆ vs. ◆ symbolic ◆ distinction:

◆ . . . Voegelin's theory of consciousness allows him to avoid the deforming confusion wrought by Christian thinkers who draw a distinction between "ontological statements" (which purportedly describe the real truth of things) and "symbolic statements" (which are allegedly "only" evocative and rhetorical). But Voegelin would have none of this. Instead he would say that the truth of Christianity is eminently symbolic and not "ontological," a conclusion made not to destroy Christianity but to free it from a literalist deformation, for in the end one cannot separate "revealed truth" from symbol and myth. Transcendence can only be articulated in an analogical language replete with inevitable ambiguity. Such is the nature of human knowing in the realm of transcendence. Within the orbit of faith one cannot move from *mythos* to *logos* pure and simple, for reason itself can not provide the ground for affirming transcendent reality. For example, to say "Jesus is the Son of God" is a symbolic, analogical statement whose truth is apprehended in faith; it is not an ontological statement of rational discourse (which often is based in an extrinsic objectivism that, as Lonergan puts it, is so objective as to get along without minds). This view of knowledge and language follows Thomas' *analogia entis*, a principle of theologizing which Voegelin adopts. Ultimately one cannot escape the form of symbol and myth in theology; certitude is simply not available. Faith must tell its

story in the penultimate language of inescapably ambiguous symbols seeking ever-greater adequacy. (Ibid., p.232)

4. The restoration of myth to the core of Christianity has been a central part of Voegelin's work:

As early as the 1940s Voegelin argued that this loss of spiritual substance was due in large measure to the destruction of the myth. When the symbols of Christianity met their rational, historical critique at the beginning of modernity, the integrity of Christian truth was doomed. At the heart of the matter was the fact that the symbolic language of Christianity, stemming from its Hebrew and Hellenistic origins, was mythical. The myth was the specific vehicle "for expressing the truth of transcendent reality, its incarnation and its operation in man." In the early Christian centuries this language was not a myth in the modern pejorative sense. It was the precise way to designate religious reality. It only became a "myth" after Christianity was penetrated by the rationalism and the historicizing sciences of the last three centuries. It was the stunning critique of these intellectual movements that debunked the "first naivete" (to use Paul Ricoeur's term) of popular symbols and dogmas and left the teaching authority of the Church with less and less credence. Voegelin's whole endeavor to reconstruct a Christian philosophy of history is rooted in the very urgent need to recover through a "second naivete" the original meaning of the ancient symbolisms, and thus to restore their authoritative status in a way that prevents their institutionalized perversion. This entails a reappraisal and recovery of the myth. The myth is the permanent guarantee for maintaining consciousness as luminosity. The loss of the myth has meant the loss of the consciousness of the It-reality. For Voegelin, the symbolic form of the myth can alone regenerate the transcending movement of the self toward mystery and the eternal, as well as restrain the immanentizing forces of modern gnosticism. (Ibid., p. 230)

5. One of Voegelin's major achievements has been to reunite the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith:

[Christology today] attempts to wed critically the Christ of faith with the Jesus of history, as the Gospels themselves clearly attempted to do. I believe this fundamental problem can only be

assuaged by remembering Voegelin's theory of consciousness, *metaxy*, tensions, pushes and pulls. It is Voegelin's foundational principle that revelation occurs not in the external world of things but in the in-between of divine and human *metalepsis*. The critical focus has to remain on the metaleptic consciousness of divine presence that can be discerned in the original experiences and symbols of theophanic events. Voegelin's first hermeneutical principle being that symbols must not be torn from their engendering experiences. Their meaning is moored to their source of emergence: the persons who experienced, interpreted, and understood the transcendent reality they objectified through their symbolic imagination. This is why, instead of focusing on the historical Jesus, Voegelin concerns himself with the *kerygmata* of a Paul, a John, or a Matthew as providing the privileged, indeed the only, access to Christ. The only "historical Jesus" we can know is the one known by the New Testament authors. The event of the *theotes* coming into revelatory luminosity in Jesus and his disciples is the significant reality behind the symbolic language that expresses the event. There would be no Christ without those who pronounced the Christ and recognized the Christ in Jesus. This event of recognition and the symbolic articulation of it cannot be separated. (Ibid., p. 233)

Morrissey has recently applied this analysis to six contemporary theologians who write without an understanding of *metalepsis*. The devastating (and sometimes humorous) results may be read in Eric Voegelin and the New Testament: Developments, Problems and Challenges, in *POLITICS, ORDER AND HISTORY*, Sheffield, 2001, pp. 462-500.

6. In further comparing Bernard Lonergan with Voegelin, Morrissey notes a problem with Voegelin's expressed understanding that has bothered many:

There is a dimension in Lonergan's thought, however, that is markedly absent in Voegelin's. It comes to light due perhaps to the fact the Lonergan is indeed a confessional Christian theologian. Although Voegelin is nonpareil in his analysis of personal and social order and his resistance to disorder, he has not fully grasped the Christian mystery of "the law of the cross" that answers the problem of sin and evil in human existence. The order of self-transcending love that redeems us from the struggles of finitude is only hinted at in Voegelin's "Wisdom" essay, nowhere else. The tale that is a saving tale is true of both Plato's philosopher's tale as well as the Gospel, but the Christian belief that in the cross God's solution to the problem of Lonergan is much stronger on

articulating this dimension of human experience."

I would interject here that whatever inadequacies one finds in Voegelin's exposition do not cause the edifice to come crashing down. Nor are they a trap for the unwary. One notes them and moves on past them.

## CONCLUSION

One can only speculate how Voegelin's theological explorations will be received over time. The Dante Germino wrote in 1985: "To me, Eric Voegelin saw himself in *The New Science of Politics* and in the letter to Schmitz as a New Thomas Aquinas." ("Voegelin, Christianity, and political theory: the new science of politics reconsidered," *Revista Internazionale de filosofia del dritto*, 1985, Vol 62,). I felt Germino also saw Voegelin that way at that time.

And Ellis Sandoz has written:

"As [William] James subsequently said, 'Souls have worn out both themselves and their welcome, that is the plain truth.' Soul, psyche and consciousness are equivalent terms in philosophy. And James added this afterthought: 'But if the belief in the soul ever does come to life after the many funeral-discourses which Human and Kantian criticism have preached over it, I am sure it will be only when some one has found in the term a pragmatic significance that has hitherto eluded observation. When that champion speaks, as he well may speak some day, it will be time to consider souls more seriously.'

"That 'champion' has appeared in Voegelin, for while he accepts virtually all of James's analysis (including the nonexistence of consciousness-soul), yet the latter comes to life nonetheless in his theory of consciousness, which rests on the analysis of experience showing consciousness-soul as a dimension of nonexistent reality." (THE VOEGELINIAN REVOLUTION, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, pp 176-177)

I rather like Morrissey's conclusion that Voegelin, without so naming it has given us a new Christian philosophy of history:

". . . . Voegelin's work has been from the start an indisputable attempt to construct a new

Christian philosophy of history apposite the contemporary world, a philosophy which theologians ought to begin to take seriously. What makes his work so challenging to Christian theology is not only its broad scope, intellectual rigor, and outright persuasiveness, but also its independence from any Church authority. The authoritative weight it carries is principally due to the experiences it claims to be founded in. Like philosophy itself, its authority is intrinsically rooted in the truth it alone is beholden to. This posture of an independent philosopher who is free from external constraints, political and ecclesial, goes back at least as far as Socrates, the progenitor of the philosophical life whose love of truth and wisdom sealed his fate, thus giving to philosophy every after a sense of sacrificial risk when it is practiced among its 'cultured despisers,'" (Ibid., p. 228)

I hope these ruminations are useful, at least in so far as they try to touch on the high points of a broad topic, "Voegelin and Christianity." It seems to me that while the area of Voegelin's personal belief will always remain an area for speculation and his criticism of the churches will likely be an impediment for some, what we call in a kind of shorthand, "philosophy of consciousness," now has and will continue to have an inestimable value for thinking about the life of the spirit. ###fjw