POLITICS AND THE TRANSCENDENT

Eric Voegelin's Philosophical and Theological Analysis of the Old Testament in the Context of the Ancient Near East

Israel and Revelation, Vol. I of *Order and History*. By Eric Voegelin. (Louisiana State University Press, 1956; 3rd printing 1969). Pp. xxv, 533. $10.00.

The task of government is to actualize the order within which men may live together in peace and justice. In our revolutionary period; when conservatives to the right defend established political structures by appealing to law and order and idealists to the left advocate the overthrow of political forms which are seen to impede human fulfilment, this political task evokes with new urgency the question of the source and basis of world order. The question becomes insistent at a time when technological society has developed massive centers of power, which frighten the imagination with apocalytic visions of cosmic catastrophe. Yet today, as we well know, the search for a meaningful interpretation of reality must be carried out in a post-Christian age, when the Christian symbols which once endowed Western Civilization with eternal meaning have lost their power. Charles West expresses the mood at the time when he writes: "The structures of order, on which man has depended throughout the millennia to give his existence eternal meaning and direction, no longer control the reality in which we live. To put it in simple terms, God as the symbol of the unchanging transcendent being, the measure and the goal of all that happens in the transient realm, the ultimate reality in which all our partial realities participate, is no longer there. . His place is taken by man and man's activity."[1] Many social analysts would swear that this is the truth-"honest to God!" If, however, it is difficult to believe in God in the modern world, it is equally difficult to believe in man-whether man the planner whose reason opens up new vistas of technological development, or man the revolutionary who shoulders the responsibility for his self-emancipation and the creation of the new order of the future.

[1]Charles West, "Theological Guidelines for the Future," *Theology Today,* Vol. XXII (1970), p. 277.

Indeed, "disenchanted intellectuals," for whom the spell of the Enlightenment has been broken, wonder whether man can create a social order without a recovery of transcendence.[2] Where does man encounter the Reality which from the outside, so to speak, lays claim upon his existence, providing a motive for political responsibility, a source of meaning in the midst of social change, and a ground of ultimate hope?

In his impressive study of "Order and History," Eric Voegelin boldly undertakes a renewal of the perennial philosophical investigation into the metaphysical source of order. Philosophical inquiry, he says, is a way of diagnosing "modes of existence in untruth" and, as in the case of Plato, is "the means of establishing islands of order in the disorder of the age." He states at the outset that his work "should be read, not as an attempt to explore the curiosities of a dead past, but as an inquiry into the structure of the order in which we live presently" (Vol. I, p. xiv). This structure is not something which man may create by taking charge of his historical destiny, through technological planning or social revolution; rather, it has its source in divine being. Accordingly, Voegelin's first volume, *Israel and Revelation*, sets forth a philosophy of history which is informed by a philosophical reflection upon the mystery of being and an analysis of the symbolization which expresses man's participation in being. In its courageous synthesis of Old Testament revelation with classical philosophy, in its viewing of the whole human struggle for meaningful order *sub specie aeternitatis*, in its grappling with the problematic interrelation of the divine and the human order, this study displays a scope and penetration which have rarely been achieved since Augustine's monumental work on *The City of God*.

One of the great heresies of our time, if one may be permitted to speak in this manner, is the separation of theology and politics, which is all too evident in the pietistic individualism found in many churches and synagogues. "We fail to recognize the indivisibility of the world," wrote Thomas Mann in "Joseph the Provider," "when we think of religion and politics as fundamentally separate fields, which neither have nor should have anything to do

[2] See the illuminating essay by William C. Havard, "The Disenchantment of the Intellectuals," in *Politische Ordnung and menschliche Existent*, Festgabe **fur** Eric **Voegelin (Munchen: Verlag** C. H. **Beck,** 1962) pp. 271-286.

with each other; to the extent even that one would be: devalued and exposed as false if any trace of the other were to be found in it. For the truth is that they change but the garment, as Ishtar and Tammuz wear the veil by turns, and it is the whole that speaks when one speaks the language of the other."[3] The great merit of Voegelin's work is that he seeks to recover "the whole" by penetrating to the dynamic of human existence-existence which, as he says, is not a given, static fact but "a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death." It is from the experience of "man's participation in *a movement* with a direction to be found or missed" that the question of meaning arises; and this question which concerns "the humanity of man," Voegelin maintains, leads the inquiring mind to search for the divine ground of being.[4]

The field of Old Testament studies, like other scholarly disciplines, is currently the victim of specialization. Hence, it is refreshing to read the work of a philosophical "layman in the field who has taken it upon himself to master the original sources and the secondary literature up to the time of his writing. ' If the Old Testament for many people is a "valley of dry bones," to use Ezekiel's figure, then Voegelin has made these bones live ! Indeed, this is one of the few books on the Old Testament which has so engrossed my interest that I have eagerly wondered what would be on the next page. In reviewing a work of such compact richness it is tempting for an Old Testament scholar to turn aside to some of Voegelin's specific contributions to a field which, as he observes, has too often been lacking in philosophical clarity. It would be profitable, for instance, to discuss his forceful challenge to literary critics who have inherited the presuppositions of Wellhausen, the implications of his philosophy of symbolization for current hermeneutical discussions of biblical language, or his exegesis of particular passages which is always provocative, if not always convincing. In this review, however, I shall concentrate on the

[3] Thomas Mann, ***Joseph and His Brothers,*** trans. by H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 908f. I am grateful to my daughter, Carol Warthin, for directing my attention to this passage.

[4] Eric **Voegelin,** "The Gospel and Culture," in ***Jesus and Man's Hope,*** edited by Donald G. Miller and Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971), p. 63.

main outline and thrust of his book, *Israel and Revelation.* Since this work first appeared some years ago (1956), it is appropriate, first of all, to recollect its central content, giving some attention to subsequent changes in the study of the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East. Then I shall examine from several angles the tension between the divine order (Kingdom of God) and Israel's existence as a people in political history. And at the end I shall raise the question as to whether Voegelin's ontology, which suggests a "mortgage" of mundane existence upon transcendent being; is adequate for dealing with Israel's witness to the faithfulness and freedom of God in his historical dealings with his people. Since Voegelin limits himself in this volume to the Old Testament and alludes only occasionally to the New, I shall confine myself to observations which belong within the context of Old Testament theology and shall not venture too far into the larger question of the relationship between the Testaments.

I

The presuppositions of Voegelin's analysis are set forth in an introductory section entitled "The Symbolization of Order" (pp. 1-12). This discussion, which merits careful pondering, provides the ontology or philosophy of being which informs his treatment of Israel's reception of revelation in the context of the civilizations of the Ancient Near East. The history of mankind, Voegelin maintains, is to be understood as a drama of being in which man plays his part as an actor-not a spectator. Man participates in being, for being is "consubstantial" with him. The meaning of the drama in which man is involved is veiled in mystery. The divine mystery, however, is partially illumined when the compact symbols of man's participation in being are differentiated; that is, when some aspect of the total experience of reality is, so to speak, lifted out or sharpened up in human consciousness. Voegelin emphasizes that the sharpened consciousness of one aspect of reality does not invalidate the other elements of the compact experience, but rather provides the vantage point for a clearer awareness of man's existential participation in the divine order of being. When this happened in Israel, there appeared "a new type of man on the world-political scene" (p. 222), a man who stood forth as an individual and who lived and acted politically vis-a-vis God, the

transcendent author and source of the divine order in creation and history. The main outlines of the emergence of this new historical consciousness are as follows:

1. In the Ancient Near East man existed within a "cosmological civilization," that is, one whose symbolization expressed "the mythical participation of society in the divine being that orders the cosmos." In Mesopotamia the empire in its spatial organization was regarded as the archetype of the order of the cosmos, on the principle of the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. At the *omphalos* (navel) or sacral center, where heaven and earth meet and divine being flows into society, the social order was periodically regenerated. During the New Year celebration the king, as the analogue of the deity, took part in the annual victory over the powers of chaos. Egyptian culture, too, was grounded in the consubstantiality of the divine order with the pharaonic order, the Pharaoh being the mediator through whom the divine Maat (order, justice, truth) emanated into society. Pharaonic order was "a continuous renewal and reenactment of cosmic order from eternity." Through the Pharaoh, in whom the presence of God was manifest, the humblest subject participated in the majesty of cosmic order. The Egyptian style of attunement of society with divine being created a static and stable civilization which survived without essential change for more than 2000 years.

2. In these civilizations there were tendencies toward a breakthrough into "the radical transcendence of divine being" over against mudane society. This was especially the case in Egypt, as evidenced in the Memphite theology and the reform of Akhenaton. But these tendencies toward the differentiation of compact experience and symbolization never achieved the transcendence which could become the ordering force of a religious personality who, in turn, could become the center of a new kind of community.

3. It was in Israel that "the search for the true order of being was carried one step forward." Under the XIXth Dynasty, which struggled in vain to break the limits of imperial symbolization, Moses led an "exodus from cosmological civilization" in the thirteenth century B.C. The Exodus, Voegelin rightly observes, was not a mere event of pragmatic history but was, according to the witness of the Old Testament, an event of divine liberation. This redemptive event Voegelin interprets as "an irruption of the spirit" which "transfigured the pragmatic event into a divine drama of the

soul and the acts of the drama into symbols of divine. liberation" (p. 113). Israel was liberated from the Sheol (realm of the dead) of Egypt for a new life in historical form. The "divine choice" of Israel resulted in a differentiation of the formerly compact experience through a heightened awareness of the gulf between immanent existence and "the transcendent truth of being." The "leap of being" toward more perfect attunement with transcendent reality, however, was primarily an event in the soul of Moses, though one that was anticipated in the case of Abraham. The "inrush of divine reality" created a new order of the soul and, through the agency of Moses, a new type of society living in immediacy under the Kingdom of God. History was "the inner form" of Israel's existence under God, in contrast to other civilizations of the time that existed in the form of cosmological myth. Voegelin states that without Israel there would be no history, but only the recurring rhythms of cosmological civilization.

4. From the very first, however, this life of the spirit was difficult to maintain, owing to "the pressures of mundane existence." Tradition portrays the history of Israel in the prestate period as an undulating movement of recessions from and returns to the covenantal order of existence given in the Mosaic revelation. The "great derailment" came when, under the duress of political necessity, the people demanded a monarchy like the nations round about. This fateful development brought about a reversal of the Exodus and a reentry into the Sheol of cosmological civilization. ; From this point on the perpetual task of history was to regain the order of God which had been eroded or eclipsed by the influences of mundane existence.

5. Israel's history would have been an indefinite undulatory movement of defections from and returns to the order of the covenant had it not been for the prophets. These "new carriers of meaning" rejected the institution of the monarchy and awakened the universalistic potentialities of Yahweh's revelation to Moses that lay dormant in the tradition. To them, the existence or nonexistence of the kingdom was irrelevant to "life in righteousness before the Lord." Their mission was to recall Israel to the covenant mode of existence which was "transparent for the order of transcendent reality." The prophets were, as Voegelin puts it, spokesmen of "the new Israel in search for an effective organization" (p. 231).

6. Since, however, the prophetic call to return to the true order of being fell on deaf ears, the omphalos shifted from the chosen people to the prophet himself (e.g. Jeremiah) who, at odds with society, entered into the suffering of God and by faith participated in the divine constitution of history. The climax of Old Testament prophecy was Second Isaiah's portrayal of the Suffering Servant, said to be the prophet himself, and subsequent individuals of this type. The keynote of Second Isaiah's message, according to Voegelin, is "Israel's exodus from itself" in order to penetrate all mankind with God's revelation. Thus the Servant represents a new community, one which no longer has to reside in Canaan but, with a universal outreach, includes each individual whose personal soul is "the sensorium of transcendence.

7. The end result was a differentiation of *theologia supra-naturalis* from *theologia civiles*, both of which were united compactly in primitive societies. The history of mankind, Voegelin says, was punctuated by "other irruptions of transcendent reality, such as the illumination of a Buddha or the opsis of Plato;" but the inbreaking of divine reality found its "optimum clarity" in the Bible where history is "structured" by crucial events such as the Exodus or the Incarnation.[6] From this standpoint of faith, the whole history of mankind is viewed as a drama in which every society, in its allotted time and space, struggles for attunement with divine being and, in some measure, approaches "the maximal clarity of divine revelation."

Before turning attention to Voegelin's exposition of the Old Testament, it is worth noting that his analysis of the civilizations of the Ancient Near East was undertaken at a time when there was a relatively high degree of scholarly consensus, reflected in the works of Frankfort, Jacobsen, Eliade and others. Voegelin states that his work was both invited and facilitated by "the convergent interpretations" of various scholarly disciplines such as archaeology, the history of religions, and theology (p. xii). At the beginning of the 70's, however, scholarship in all fields is in flux and this makes a comprehensive interpretation more difficult than in an

[6] Voegelin's view of the encounter with the Incarnation as a "structuring event" in human history is presented succinctly in his essay on "History and Gnosis," *The Old Testament and Christian Faith,* ed. by Bernhard W. Anderson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 64-89, especially pp. 82ff.

earlier period. A. Leo Oppenheim, in his study of Mesopotamian civilization, takes a very dim view of the "apparently well rounded and pleasingly complete presentations of Mesopotamian religion" which are available in English, German, and French. Owing to the variety of religions embedded in the millennial history of Mesopotamian civilization, the accidental preservation of texts, and other complexities, it is not possible, he maintains, to present a structural evaluation of Mesopotamian religion. He argues that if this is true of Mesopotamia, from which we have an abundance of texts preserved imperishably on clay, it is no less the case with regard to ancient Egypt, where practically all documentary evidence on papyrus and leather has vanished, leaving the Egyptologist in the position of having to rely for the most part on evidence from the mortuary cult which happened to have been inscribed on stone.[6] Whether this judgment, "predominantly negative in tone and outlook," is proper, will have to be debated by experts in the Ancient Near East. I do not see, however, that an increasing awareness of the complexity of ancient civilizations necessarily invalidates Voegelin's analysis. After all, the historian is always in the position of having to deal with possibilities and probabilities, since the evidence will never be completely in and in any case is selective. As a philosopher, however, Voegelin has a particular hermeneutic: a philosophy of being which applies to man in any society. His analysis merits attention if it illumines the historical materials that are available.

The Old Testament field is perhaps in an even greater state of flux.[7] In recent years some scholars have challenged the view, which has virtually dominated the field for a good number of years, that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was known as the God of history and that history was the chief mode of his revelation.[8]

[6] A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 171ff.

[7] See my article, "Current Trends in the Old Testament Field," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin,* Vol. LXIII (1970), pp. 24-29.

[8] On the American scene this view was forcefully presented by G. Ernest Wright in his widely influential monograph *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952; 7th impression 1964). The view was sharply criticized, without the offer of a positive alternative, by James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). The first and third chapters of Barr's book elaborate his inaugural address at Princeton Theological Seminary, "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and Modern Theology," *Interpretation,* Vol. XVII (1963), pp. 193-205.

A Scandinavian scholar, Bertil Albrektson, has extended this criticism beyond the Old Testament. By means of quotations from Mesopotamian sources, he attempts to show that the testimonies to divine activity in history were not peculiar to the Old Testament.[9] This, however, is a very deceptive argument, especially since Albrektson admits at the conclusion that "the idea of divine acts in history," in Israel on the one hand and in Mesopotamia on the other, "may well have occupied a rather different place in the different patterns of beliefs" (p. 115). The issue is not whether texts from both Babylonia and Israel witness to God's historical activity. That has really never been disputed. Rather the question is the semantic field, or as Voegelin puts it, the pattern of symbolization within which the respective statements are made. One looks in vain in the culture surrounding Israel for a cult which, by stressing the story of God's actions with his people, provided the impulse for historiography.

Voegelin is right, I believe, in saying that Israel's knowledge of God brought about a historical consciousness which was a novelty in a cultural environment dominated by a mythical view of reality. History was, indeed, "the inner form" of Israel's existence before Yahweh. Unlike some modern theologians-Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant-Voegelin does not speak of *Heilsgeschichte or* a history of salvation which is distinguished from profane history, but rather of human history illumined by crucial events, such as the Exodus, which witness to the transcendent. This, however, poses a problem to which we must give attention. The fundamental dilemma of Israel's existence, according to Voegelin's interpretation, is "the relationship between the life of the spirit and the life of the world" (p. 183). The "spiritual meaning of the Exodus," he maintains, was never fully freed from the concrete Exodus, and the transcendent Kingdom of God was never completely disengaged from "the sensuous, concrete symbols of Canaan." The Old Testament, to be sure, witnesses in various ways to the struggle of the spirit to escape confinement in a particular form of social organization and to separate the Kingdom of God from the collective life and institutions of a people. But the attempt was never com-

[9] Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1967).

pletely successful. Just as new wine could not be contained in old wineskins, so the leap of being for a life of the spirit in worldly existence could not be expressed adequately in Israel's historical symbols. Or, to use Voegelin's figure, the Old Testament carries a "mortgage" of the mundane upon the transcendent. The mortgage was reduced, especially by the prophets; but it was not liquidated until the time when Christianity, announcing that the Logos had become flesh, united Israel's prophetic witness with the Greek philosophical "love of being through love of divine Being" which is the end of all existence.

II

With this summary of Voegelin's volume in mind, our task is to consider what bearing "revelation" has upon man's existence in history, which is inescapably political. It is not accidental that Voegelin devotes the first volume of his projected *opus magnum* to ancient Israel. Theologians have often observed that if the Bible speaks anywhere to man's existence in the political forms of society, it does so primarily through that part of the biblical canon which Christians term the Old Testament. The new Testament, heavily under the influence of apocalyptic ways of thinking, made a virtue of "patient endurance" until the end, which was believed to be imminent. Therefore, except for a few passages like Romans 13 and I Timothy 2, it does not address itself to the problems of ongoing political life. On the other hand, the Old Testament, in which apocalyptic expectations stand on the periphery (e.g. the book of Daniel), struggles with the question of what the revelation of God means for this world in which we live and move and have our being. We are reminded of the down-to-earth quality of the Old Testament by the fact that its two major motifs-the covenant (treaty) between two parties and the Kingdom of God-are drawn from political experience. According to the Old Testament, God's revelation touches man's existence in a society whose symbols provide the form of man's self-understanding and his knowledge of God. As Voegelin observes, even the course of pragmatic history can be transfigured, in the vision of faith, into "sacred history," whose "single events become paradigms of God's way with man in this world" (p. 121).

The Dutch theologian, Arnold van Ruler, has emphasized that Christianity would be impoverished, particularly in those areas

having to do with political organization and social responsibility, if the Old Testament with its "overplus" were not part of the Christian canon.[10] Voegelin would agree, I believe, that the New Testament presupposes this overplus; but he does not fall into van Ruler's error of supposing that the state is a theocratic order, a creation of God. On the contrary, Voegelin maintains that, owing to the gulf between the transcendent and the mundane, the divine order can never be incarnate in a particular form of government or in any ethnic community. No "chosen people," he insists, can be "the omphalos of history."

This is a valid warning against the notion, which has proved to be pernicious in recent history, of a chosen race (e.g. the white) or *a Herrenvolk* which arrogates to itself a position of superiority. It is important to bear in mind, however, that "Israel" was constituted as a "people" (Hebrew: *`am)* long before the rise of the state under David. As the Jewish scholar, E. A. Speiser, has pointed out, Israelite tradition speaks of "the people of Yahweh" but not "the nation of Yahweh."[11] The sacral term, Israel, which once referred to a tribal confederacy loosely bound together in covenant relationship with God, has suffered the fate of corruption into the name of a state, as happened when Jeroboam I appropriated the term for the northern kingdom, or again in recent history when it was adopted to designate a secular state of the Middle East. The plain fact is that "state" or "nation" does not describe the unique calling and self-understanding of the "people of Yahweh" whose life-story is recorded in the Old Testament. The late Martin Noth began his *History of Israel* with the sober observation that Israel, despite its similarities with contemporary peoples, appeared on the historical scene as "a stranger in the world of its own time, a stranger wearing the garments and behaving in the manner of its age, yet separate from the world it lived in."[12] Voegelin himself asserts that "there was apparently no factor in original Yahwism

[10] Arnold van Ruler, *Die christliche Kirche and das Alte Testament,* Beitrage zur evangelischen Theologie 23 (Munchen, 1955).

[11] E. A. Speiser, "People and Nation of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol.* LXXIX (1960), p. 157-63.

[12] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel,* trans, by Stanley Godman from the 2nd German edition and revised by P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 2f. See also my introductory essay to Noth's traditio-historical study, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions,* trans. by Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1971).

that would have imposed a particular political form on the faithful" (p. 219). One could agree to this statement readily if it were to mean that Israel's existence as a people was adaptable to various political forms. Voegelin, however, seems to press the point to the conclusion that Israel's attempt to adapt to any political organization was from the outset doomed to failure. The failure of the Israelite experiment was not just a failure in pragmatic history-the fate of a small nation overwhelmed by the imperial might of Assyria and Babylonia. Rather, owing to the transcendent character of the divine order, Israel's history in the world, that is, in the realm of political struggle and political organization, was intrinsically a history of failure.

This evaluation of Israel's existence as a people should not be confused with that of Rudolf Bultmann who, from existentialist premises, regards Israel's history as *a Geschichte des Scheiterns-an* abortive history. The miscarriage occurred, according to Bultmann, because the Covenant, the People of God, and the Kingdom of God were deeply enmeshed in worldly existence; and therefore the sacred history, as Israel understood it, moved toward the inner-worldly goal of the covenant people living in its God-given land under a Davidic messiah. The Old Testament, he says, is not a revelation for the Christian and its history is not "our history." Only from the standpoint of faith in Jesus Christ can this abortive history be understood, in a curiously negative sense, as ."promise." For it demonstrates the impossibility of the realization of God's Kingdom in worldly history and points beyond failure to God's gracious action in Jesus Christ, which transposes man into an eschatological existence and makes him a "new creature" (II Cor. 5:17). The meaning of history cannot be understood by surveying the whole course of human history; rather, its meaning is given in the present when man, critically reflecting upon the heritage of the past and with a view toward the open future, realizes his true historicity *(Geschichtlichkeit)* in decision and responsibility.[13]

[13] See Rudolf Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," in *Essays* ***Philosophical and Theological,*** trans. by James C. G. Greig (1955), pp. 182-208 and *re*-printed in Claus Westermann, *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics,* ed. by J. L. Mays (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), pp. 50-75. The view is also expressed in Bultmann's essay on "Das Verstandnis der Geschichte im Griechentum and im Christentum," ***Politische Ordnung*** *and* ***menschliche Existenz,*** Festtrahe fur Eric Voegelin, pp. 59-70.

Voegelin has directed a penetrating criticism against this existentialist view which, in the manner of Gnosticism, "annihilates the world and history" by seizing a fragmentary truth out of the whole and eliminating or omitting other aspects of man's experience and symbolization of reality. The experience of "eschatological existence," he says, is not in itself wrong; for "we have indeed experiences of alienation; of being strangers in a world that is not ours; of a true measure of existence that is not taken from existence in this world; of a true reality, not of this world, whence this measure comes to us..."[Y4] But the differentiation of one element of the whole truth, he insists, does not justify dismissing other aspects of the more compact experience. The leap of being was not "a leap out of existence into world-transcendent reality."

Nevertheless, Voegelin maintains that God's revelation to mankind did not reach its optimum clarity in the Old Testament because it was too closely bound up with Israel, the people who lived in a concrete society on the land of Canaan. The Mosaic leap of being had to be disengaged from the collective symbolism of Israel's self-understanding so that the individual personality might emerge as the locus of "the new order of the soul." For in the last analysis it is the psyche which is "the field of right order." The personal attunement with the order of divine being is said to have been realized in a measure by the prophets, who struggled to emancipate the psyche from the collectivism of the chosen people. Perhaps, Voegelin suggests, the prophets were handicapped by the lack of a positive philosophical vocabulary such as was found in Greece. In any case, prophetic personalism was unable to break through to philosophy and to the idea of an immortal soul, perfected through grace beyond death (pp. 232-42). Furthermore, "the prophets apparently were not only unable to see, but not even interested in finding, a way from the formation of the soul to institutions and customs they could consider compatible with the knowledge and fear of God" (p. 446).

It is not my purpose to challenge the philosophical position from which this judgment is made. Here the question is whether Voegelin's analysis does justice to the materials of the Old Testament.

[Y4] See "History and Gnosis," op. cit., where Voegelin responds to Bultmann's essay "The Significance of the Old Testament for Christian Faith" and other writings. Quotation from p. 83.

Admittedly, the Old Testament as a whole does not break through into universalism, at least the kind of universalism which excludes the people whom Yahweh has called and formed for his special service in the world. There is one major exception to this, and Voegelin could have made much more of it. I refer to the wisdom literature, represented by such writings as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, or the Wisdom of Ben Sirach. It is well known that literature of this type, in contrast to the historical and prophetic literature of the Old Testament, makes little use of the historical experiences and symbols of Israel: promises to the patriarchs, Exodus, Sinai covenant, entrance into Canaan, Davidic covenant, and so on. Israel's sages turned their attention away from the unique events and the great historical sequences to what remains constant as a pledge of God's faithfulness. For them "the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom" in that it leads to a confidence in the ordering will of Yahweh manifest in creation, society, and individual life.[15] It is doubtful, however, whether tendencies toward "the idea of the psyche" can be traced in the parts of the. Old Testament that come under Voegelin's scrutiny:. the Pentateuch, the historiographical works, and the prophetic literature. From the very first the Mosaic "leap of being," to use Voegelin's expression, demanded *a people* in historical form. Voegelin acknowledges this; but it should be emphasized that peoplehood was not accidental but essential to the revelation, as evident from the recurring covenant formula (e.g. Jer. 31:33) : "I will be their God and they shall be my people." To be sure, the relationship between God and people, according to the prophetic understanding, did .not guarantee success in the world. Indeed, the prophets perceived two Israels: the empirical Israel which stood under the severe judgment of God, and the new Israel that would arise out of the purging fires of suffering and with whom Yahweh would continue his work in history. Voegelin fails to emphasize that Jeremiah's prophecy concerning "the new covenant" (Jer. 31:31-33) portrays a covenant with "the whole house of Israel." Although the prophet condemns externalization and speaks of the inwardness of the covenant, whose law is written on the heart, he does not propose a new individu-

[15] See Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), especially pp. 364-505 where the peculiar Israelitic character of wisdom is discussed.

alism, nor does he suggest that the former collectivism was a deformation of the Mosaic covenant. Furthermore, Second Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40-55), which Voegelin regards as the climax of the Old Testament, begins with Yahweh's message of consolation to "my people," although the prophet understands the election of Israel in the spacious perspective of the divine purpose for creation and the whole mankind.

III

Once we start from the premise that Yahweh constituted a people, a historical community within which the individual has his being,. the question arises as to what bearing the knowledge of God has upon man's life in society where he must act politically and assume social responsibility. Yahweh's controversy with Israel, as found in the covenant lawsuit *(rib)* of Micah 6: 1-8; indicates that the historical symbols of Israelite tradition (i.e. the "righteous acts" of Yahweh summarized in vss. 4-5) provide the standard for action in society:

> He has showed you, 0 man, what is good;
> and what does Yahweh require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?

It is important to begin by recognizing that divine revelation induces a "tension," as Voegelin says, between the "spiritual order" and the temporal. This tension is inescapable if, as Micah's prophetic exhortation suggests, the standard by which human actions are judged is derived from the experience of the "transcendent," not from the realm of pragmatic politics. Voegelin deals effectively with the tension that existed in Israelite tradition between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of David. Old Testament traditions show that the rise of David as king brought innovations which evoked the sharp criticism of representatives of : the old theocratic confederacy known as Israel. The controversy over kingship was precipitated in part by the pragmatic adoption of a centralized form of government capable of coping with the new realities of political power-initially the threat of the Philistines to establish an empire in Palestine. Samuel reminded the elders of Israel that if they were to have a king "like the nations," the royal power would divest

them of the liberties they had enjoyed during the days of the tribal confederacy (I Sam. 8:10-18). In a deeper sense, however, the struggle over kingship was a theological one which went to the very heart of Israel's faith. In the ancient world, as Voegelin observes, kingship was understood in the context of a mythical view of reality. The king was regarded as the mediator of the cosmic order evidenced in the rising and setting of the sun, the rhythmic regularity of the seasons, and the stability of heaven and earth. Historical changes, according to this view, occurred within a cosmic setting which gave ultimate meaning to man's historical existence and delivered him from the recurrent threat of chaos. Under David, Israel emerged from the restricted sphere of the tribal confederacy and "entered the cosmos," thereby gaining a broadened view of Yahweh's sovereignty over creation and history. No longer was Israel's self-understanding expressed primarily in the pastoral imagery of a semi-nomadic people; rather, the key image came to be the City (Zion), at the center of which was a complex of buildings whose architecture reflected the mythical views of the environment: Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.[16] It was this urban theology which provided the metaphor for Augustine's work, *The City of God.*

The adoption of the symbols of cosmological civilization, however, was qualified by a particular kind of covenant theology sponsored by the Jerusalem court. According to the royal covenant of Zion, which is associated with the court prophet Nathan (II Sam. 7), Yahweh made a *berith `olam,* or covenant in perpetuity, with David, promising to uphold his dynasty regardless of the strengths or weaknesses of particular kings. Unlike the Mosaic covenant, the "everlasting covenant" was fundamentally unconditional: Yahweh bound himself with promises of grace to David and, through David, with the people. This "theology of social stability," as it has been called, dealt effectively with the problem of the transfer of power to a new royal administration. By minimizing the risks of social disorder that attended the death of a

[16] In his traditio-historical study entitled *Kdnig and Tempel im Glaubenszeugnis des Alten Testaments,* Stuttgarter biblische Monographien 3 (1967), Nick Poulssen demonstrates that the building plans of David and the building activity of Solomon are to be understood against the cultural background of the Ancient Near East, where king and temple were intimately associated in mythical symbolization.

king, it undoubtedly contributed to the unbroken duration of the Davidic dynasty for some four hundred years.

Moreover, the royal theologians, by drawing freely upon the cosmic symbolism of the Ancient Near East, brought the faith in Yahweh as Creator-a faith which previously had been somewhat peripheral to Israel's traditions-into the very center of theological interest.[Y4] These theologians, who stressed the "everlasting covenant" with David, were vitally interested in the creation symbolism of ancient civilizations which also were concerned for social order and stability. In Jerusalem the everlasting throne of Yahweh, who is enthroned over the insurgent powers of chaos (Pss. 29; 93), was regarded as the heavenly complement of the order and stability of the Davidic throne. The decrees by which Yahweh established cosmic order (Ps. 93:5) were considered to be analogous to the mandate by which he installed his king on Zion (Ps. 2:7).

Voegelin rightly emphasizes that Israel's covenant symbols did not require the rejection of everything else known as true in cosmological civilizations. Indeed, Israelite tradition was immeasurably enriched and deepened when mythical elements, liberated from their context of cosmological symbolization, were appropriated to express divine transcendence.[18] This point deserves due emphasis, for man's existence is defined not only by his place in the continuum of history, but by his relation to the constancy of the cosmic order, as wisdom literature testifies. Yet, while the two kinds of symbolization were not mutually exclusive, it needs to be said also that the mythical language was transformed when brought into the Israelite context of interpretation. A case in point is the divine kingship of the Ancient Near East. Although Israelite poets could adopt Egyptian court style in speaking of the Davidic king and could even address the king, in one instance,

[17]See my *Creation versus Chaos* (New York: Association Press, 1967), chapter 2, "Creation and Covenant." This thesis was further developed in my Haskell Lecture (Oberlin, 1970) on "The King and the Cosmos."

[18]The appropriation of mythical elements began even before the time of the Davidic monarchy, according to Frank M. Cross, Jr. in "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," *Biblical Motifs,* ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 11-30. "Even in the cult of the [tribal] league," he writes, "themes of mythological origin can be detected, standing in tension with themes of historical memory or enhancing redemptive events by assimilating them to cosmic events" (p. 18). See further my essay, "**Myth and the Biblical Tradition,**" *Theology Today,* Vol XXVII, No. 1, pp. 44-62.

as "God" (Ps. 45:6), this extravagant court language should not be pressed too far. Did the Davidic king, as Voegelin maintains, really become the mediator of the divine order in the sense of the Pharaoh (p. 272) ? Evidence for this is lacking, despite the contentions of some Scandinavian scholars. An interesting aspect of the problem is the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26 (cf. Ps. 8:5). In ancient Egypt the Pharaoh was regarded as the image of God, that is, the real manifestation of the presence of God. The intention was not to say that the king was made in the form of God, but that God was present in him and acted through him.'° In Israel the king was regarded as the *elected* Son of God; but the expression "image of God" was never applied to him. Rather, this Near Eastern motif was "democratized" and applied to man. Man is the image of God, the one in whom God manifests his presence on earth and through whom God's rule is to be made manifest. As God's vicegerent, man is to rule benevolently over his environment and other forms of life, and thus is to bring the natural world into the drama of God's history with his people.[20] If Psalm 8 comes from the period of the monarchy, as is probable, the democratization of kingship theology took place early in the history of the Jerusalem cult.

It must not be supposed that the covenant was a homogenous form in the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, there are several covenant theologies. Standing in rivalry with the Davidic covenant discussed above was the Mosaic covenant, which formally was similar to the suzerainty covenants or treaties made by Hittite kings with vassal states.[21] The Hittite covenant form includes the self-identification of the covenant maker, a recitation of his benevo-

[19] See H. Wildberger, "Des Abbild Gottes," ***Theologische Zeitschrift*** 21 (1965), pp. *245-259,* 481-501. The view that "man" of Gen. *1:26* and Ps. *8:5 is Urmensch* and *UrkOnig (e.g.,* Aage Ben.tzen, *Messias, Moses redivivus, Menschensohn,* pp. *6,* 12) has not been demonstrated exegetically.

[20] See Karlfried Froehlich, "The Ecology of Creation," *Theology Today,* Vol. XXVII (1970), *pp. 263-76.*

[21] See the basic work by George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East,* first printed in *The Biblical Archaeologist,* Vol. XVII, *2* and *3* (May and Sept., 1954) and now available as a monograph; also Klaus Baltzar *Das Bundesformular* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960). *A* clear discussion of the major covenant theologies is foutnd in Delbert Hillers, *Covenants The History of a* ***Biblical*** *Idea* **(Baltimore Johns Hopkins** Press, 1969).

lent deeds on behalf of the vassal, a stipulation of laws binding on the vassal in gratitude for benefits received, and an appeal for obedience under the sanction of blessings and curses. The pattern of the Mosaic covenant is so similar to this that many scholars believe Israel understood its relationship to Yahweh in terms of this political form, at least from the time of the tribal confederacy which presumably was instituted at Shechem under Joshua (Josh. 24). . If this is true, Sinai (i.e. covenant and law) was not "a rival center of meaning" alongside of the Exodus,. as Voegelin asserts (pp. 137f.). Rather, Exodus and Sinai belonged inseparably to one form of symbolization.

The important thing to observe in this connection is that the Mosaic covenant, in contrast to the Davidic, was essentially conditional in character : "If you will hear my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all the peoples" (Ex. 19:5). While the Davidic covenant sought to insure social stability in the midst of historical change and the constant threat of chaos, the Mosaic covenant called man to decision, placed an awesome responsibility upon him, and set before him a future that, under the judgment of God, was contingent upon his behavior. There is good reason to believe that after the revolt of the northern tribes from the Davidic empire, this type of covenant theology was revived in the circles of North Israel, as represented by Hosea. and Deuteronomy. Unlike the South (Judah), the North did not develop a theology of social stability. No dynasty-not even that of the great king Omri-was able to maintain itself, and the kingdom finally came to an end in a wretched state of social disorder (Hosea 7:1 ff.)

Prophets who stood in the northern Mosaic covenant tradition held out the prospect of the dissolution of the covenant and the end of the people, owing to Israel's betrayal of the covenant obligations. In the face of persistent disloyalty, manifest in Israel's history and in contemporary social life, the covenant formula "my people" would be inverted to "not my people," for as Hosea announced, Yahweh's verdict was "you are not my people and I 'am not your God" (Hos. 1 : 8) . On the other hand, Isaiah of Jerusalem, a southerner who was profoundly indebted to royal theology, declared that the impending historical judgment of Yahweh would bring about a purification of Zion, but the City would stand and a

descendant of David would rise to govern a remnant of the people. These two major covenant theologies existed in tension with one another, as Voegelin observes. They converged, however, in the prophecy of Second Isaiah, who drew deeply upon the symbolism of the Exodus tradition (though ignoring the Sinai covenant) and announced that Yahweh had transferred the promises of the Davidic covenant to the *people* (Isa. 55:3).[22] In the message of this prophet, the "everlasting covenant," based unconditionally upon divine grace and forgiveness and not upon the contingencies of human history, opened a new future for Israel and, through the Suffering Servant, for all mankind.

IV

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the reaction of the prophets to Israel's involvement in politics was much more complex and varied than appears from Voegelin's analysis. It cannot be demonstrated, in my judgment, that the kingdom was the great aberration from the Mosaic revelation or a "fall from being." The situation in the Old Testament is much more ambivalent. This is particularly clear in the historical traditions, some of which approve the kingdom as a providential development, while others frown upon it as Yahweh's grudging concession to Israel's improper demand. The prophets, too, are not unanimous on the subject. Hosea, to be sure, has a predominatly negative attitude, for he traces the corruption of Israel's society to Gibea, presumably a reference to the home city of Saul, the first king of Israel (Hos. 9 : 9) ; and he states flatly that Yahweh gave Israel kings in his anger (Hos. 13 :11) . But this anti-monarchic stand did not prevent the prophecy from being received in the south (after the fall of Samaria, 721 B.C.), where it was understood to anticipate a return to "Yahweh their God and David their king" after a period of corrective punishment (Hos. 3:5). Of course, southern prophets were bitter in their attack upon the reigning kings but, in varying degrees,

[22] This matter is pursued further in my "Exodus Typology in **Second Isaiah,**" *Israel's* ***Prophetic Heritage*** (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), ed. by B. W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson, pp. 177-195.

their faith in "the messianic royal ideal" prompted them to believe that the Davidic dynasty would not be broken.[23]

The fact is that the prophets do not always say the same thing in regard to the shifting scene of politics. Nathan, as we have seen, provided an oracle concerning Yahweh's covenant with David and his dynasty. Elijah returned from the traditional mount of the Mosaic covenant to sponsor political revolutions in Syria and North Israel (I Kings 19:15-18). Isaiah of Jerusalem spoke of the inviolability of Zion, while his contemporary, Micah, insisted that Jerusalem would become a heap of ruins. Isaiah declared that the Assyrian dictator was the rod of Yahweh's judgment against Israel (Isa. 10: 5-19), and Second Isaiah, who stood in the same Isaianic circle of tradition, announced that Cyrus of Persia was Yahweh's instrument (literally, "messiah") for liberating Israel from political bondage in Babylonia (Isa. 44:24-45: 13). In short, "nothing is taken for granted," as Miskotte remarks, and thus there is ample room in Isralite tradition for what we would call "experimental thinking" in the realm of politics.'

At one point Voegelin's discussion prompts the question as to whether the word of Yahweh, spoken by the prophet, may exert a power for social reform. In the context of a comparison of Isaiah and Jeremiah, he remarks: "The order of society in history is reconstituted in fact through the men who challenge the disorder of the surrounding society with the order they experience as living in themselves. The word of the prophet is not spoken to the wind, it is not futile or impotent, if it does not reform the society which he loves because it has given him birth" (p. 483). There was a profound difference, he maintains, between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah envisioned reform through *metastasis-a* term which Voegelin uses to refer to a "change in the constitution of being." In doing so, he "tried the impossible : to make the leap of being a leap out of existence into a divinely transfigured world beyond the laws of mundane existence" (p. 452). Later, in a virtual *tour de force,*

[23] See Ivan Engnell, *A Rigid Scrutiny: Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), pp. 160-62. Engnell goes so far as to say that the prophets "ultimately reflect a positive understanding of the king" (p. 62).

[24] Kornelis H. Miskotte, ***When the Gods are Silent*** (New York: **Harper** and Row, 1967), pp. 274, 278.

Jeremiah returned the prophetic word to "the untransfigured present," the world in which we live. This achievement, however, made an impact not in the reform of society, but in the formation of a new community: the "remnant" of Israel which is a "continuation of order in history, when its realization in the pragmatic order of a people is in crisis." "In Jeremiah," writes Voegelin, "the human personality had broken the compactness of collective existence and recognized itself as the authoritative source of order in society" (p. 485). Despite metastatic visions of prophets like Isaiah, the Israel that was organized as a kingdom "went the way of all organizations, their governments, and kings in history." What is left, however, is a residue of individuals, like Jeremiah, who attune their existence in the present to "the order of being."

In his understanding of the prophets, Voegelin thus seeks to correct the delusion that man can achieve the promised land or the perfect social order in history through evolution or revolution. "The will to transform reality into something which by essence it is not," he states, "is the rebellion against the nature of things as ordained by God" (p. 453). His deep concern about this matter is voiced in the preface, where he says that "the prophetic conception of a change in the constitution of being lies at the root of our contemporary beliefs in the perfection of society, either through progress or through a communist revolution" (p. xiii). He goes on to say: "Metastatic faith is one. of the great sources of disorder, if not the principal one, in the contemporary world; and it is a matter of life and death for all of us to understand the phenomenon and to find remedies against it before it destroys us.." Time and again he reminds us that the problem of history cannot be solved by "Canaans or Utopias.

It . may be true, as some . have observed, that modem perfectionist views, especially the Marxist, are secularized versions of the prophetic understanding of history. I cannot agree, however, that the prophetic *view itself is* the root of our contemporary troubles. To be sure, Isaiah opposed to his corrupt society, which was completely lacking in health, the vision of a new society in which an idealized Davidic king would inaugurate a reign of unprecedented peace and justice (Isa. 9:1-7) ; but the portrayal concludes with the emphatic statement that this would be accomplished through "the zeal of Yahweh of hosts," that is, through wonderful divine intervention. To both Isaiah and Micah is attributed the well-

known vision of the New Jerusalem to which the nations will stream in an ecumenical pilgrimage, finding there the omphalos of universal peace (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-4) ; but this oracle is for "the latter days" and points toward the eschatological horizon of history. Such visions of the future serve as testimonies that Israel's history is under the purposive direction of God even though, according to these same prophets, the present stands under his catastrophic. judgment. It is worth noting that the editor of the book of Isaiah has placed the vision of the age of peace, when men will beat their.' swords into plowshares and learn of war no more, in the immediate context of vivid portrayals of the Day of Yahweh-the Day which will be against every symbol of civilizational achievement and human presumption and when men will flee into caves of the cliffs before the terrible manifestation of the divine majesty. Clearly there is no basis anywhere in prophecy for the modern illusion that man can build the Kingdom of God on earth, either through technological planning or revolutionary zeal. This notion is completely alien to the prophetic understanding of God and man.

Having said this, however, we come back to the fundamental problem of man's existence in society. Although the prophets forbid us to equate the rule of men with the rule of God or to identify any social or political cause with the will of God, they are unanimous in their demand for "the humble walk with God" in society. The prophetic message was not directed to individuals (though kings constitute a notable exception) but, rather, to the entire people or to social units within the people, such as a particular city with its inhabitants, a social class, or a priestly or prophetic group. They spoke to those who have power-political, economic, or social-and were in a position to act. The justice which they demanded was not an abstract moral standard but the exercise of power in setting things right, in restoring oppressed individuals or groups to their proper place, in giving men the freedom to be human in God's covenant society. Since justice is a requirement which has to be faced from case to case, they offer no overall plan for social reform. Rather, they attacked the abuses of privilege or power, such as the land-grabbing from the poor by those who have economic power, the callous indifference of rulers to the welfare of the people, the capitulation of religious leaders to na-

tional interests, or the failure of the law courts to administer justice impartially. They spoke in the name of the God who once displayed his power in giving justice to slaves in Egypt, victims of the mightiest empire of the day. While they were not dreamers or idealists, they proclaimed the actuality of God in the world-the God who was actively engaged in the human struggle to create the peace *(shalom)* which is a wholeness and healthiness manifest in the midst of time as a pledge and foretaste of his ultimate intention for mankind.

This is the dimension that I miss in Voegelin's exposition of the Old Testament. The category of "being" is inadequate for the Old Testament if, in the last analysis, it means the attunement of the individual soul to the transcendent order of being. According to Israel's witnesses, there is no true being unless it is a being-in-relationship and there can be no attunement with God unless it is manifest in the social sphere of man's life. This is the reason, I believe, that the Old Testament never approaches anything like the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul and why at its frontier, where it begins to touch the New Testament style of expression, it adopts the apocalyptic view of the resurrection of the body (self) at the consummation of the whole historical and cosmic drama (Dan. 12:2-3). In contrast to other cultures, Israel did not develop a mortuary cult and displayed surprisingly little interest in a transcendent solution to the problems of human existence beyond the grave. In the Old Testament, life and death are understood dynamically. Death is regarded as a power which extends its empire into the land of the living, manifesting its aggression in any limitation, bodily or social, which reduces man's historical being in relationship with God and his fellow men. And life, on the other hand, is measured by the wholeness and fulness of man's being in the context of historical relationships, within which he can join the worshiping community in praising God for his goodness and faithfulness. The laments of the Book of Psalms, which sound the depths of our experience of alienation in society today, are cries of distress to God for deliverance here and now from faceless "enemies" (often described in mythical imagery) which reduce "the vitality of the individual" to the verge of the non-being of death. And the thanksgivings of the Psalms are praises to the God who, as the Vindicator of justice, manifests

his righteousness by restoring the suppliant to some measure of the fulness of human life.[26]

A sound exposition of the Old Testament must deal with Israel's varied witness to the dynamic character of human existence and the participation of God in the human drama. There is much in the Old Testament which indicates that God, in his own way, acts to change the world as it is. In the vision of Jeremiah, Yahweh's word is the power that tears down the structures that oppose his purpose in order that he may build and plant anew (Jer. 1:9-10). His epiphany can be described as a seismic event, which shakes the earth to its foundations and, as in Jeremiah's vision, even threatens to return the earth to the chaos which responded to his creative word at creation (Jer. 4:23-26). The prophets announce that men will come to know through historical suffering and catastrophe, whether it be the end of a nation or the death of a civilization, that God's will cannot be mocked and that it is only his grace that gives men a future.

V

We have raised the question as to whether an ontology which presupposes a gulf between the transcendent and the mundane can deal adequately with the witness of the Old Testament. Let me now come to what I think is the heart of the problem, namely, the "mortgage." Israel's historical symbolization, Voegelin maintains, was "a perpetual mortgage of the world-immanent, concrete event on the transcendent truth that on the occasion was revealed" (p. 164). Moses experienced a breakthrough into transcendence that went beyond the dim apprehensions of divine reality in Egypt or Mesopotamia, but the transcendent reality was couched in the sensuous, collective symbols of the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan. The question was whether, in the course of Israelite tradition, "the mortgage of the historical circumstances of revelation" could be gradually reduced so that the universalistic and transcen-

"On the dynamic conception of life and death, see Aubrey Johnson, *The Vitality of* ***the Individual in the Thought*** *of* ***Ancient*** *Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949). On the psalms of lament and thanksgiving, see Christoph Barth, ***Die Errettung vom*** *rode* ***in den individuellen Klage- and Dankliedern*** *des* ***Alten*** *Testaments* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947).

dental implications of divine revelation could be acknowledged by men in the present (p. 369) .

Voegelin maintains that the mortgage was made permanent by the book of Deuteronomy which codified the Torah, thereby mummifying the historical revelation and bequeathing to the future the legalism based on a "canonical" book. The great prophets, however, sought to liquidate the mortgage. The prophetic struggle, he says, went through three stages. First, Amos and Hosea expected the political restoration of Israel under the conditions of pragmatic history. Second, Isaiah's awareness of the gulf between present society and the divine order prompted a metastatic faith in the rule of a future king under completedly changed mundane conditions. And finally, Jeremiah turned the futuristic faith back to the present, and the prophet *himself,* as one who enacted the fate of his people, became the omphalos of God's order in history. Thus the messianic hope moved toward separating the eternal from the temporal, the spiritual from the political, the universal from Israelite collectivism. The end of the mortgage, which occurred with Christianity, was anticipated by Second Isaiah's message of Israel's exodus from itself to communicate God's revelation to all mankind.

Difficulties inevitably arise when the poetic and concrete idiom of the Old Testament is translated into philosophical categories such as transcendence and immanence. It is appropriate to use the word "transcendence," to express the truth of the second commandment of the Mosaic decalog: the God whom Israel worships cannot be domesticated within man's world. He is not the captive of man's theology or philosophy, the prisoner of man's political schemes, or the guarantor of man's values and priorities. When men build a Golden Calf, attempting thereby to bring the divine into cultural or historical visibility, this "god" must die. Yet there is another side of the matter which is just as important in the Mosaic tradition, namely, the announcement that God has chosen to involve himself in the historicality of human existence, speaking his Word in human words and making his sovereign action known in the interpersonal relations of society. This theology of "divine condecension," as it has been called, is evident in the episode of the thornbush (Ex. 3) . Moses was confronted by the God who "had seen the affliction of his people," who had "heard their cry of distress," who "knew their sufferings," and who had resolved

to bring them out of Egyptian slavery into a new land where they could find their freedom in his service. The story goes on to say that, even though the slaves preferred the fleshpots of Egypt to the possibility of freedom in a new land, Yahweh refused to leave them in a no-exit situation where the future was closed. It is not surprising that recent "theologies of hope," especially those produced by the black community, have made much of this Old Testament witness.

Although the prophets were profoundly aware of the "gulf" between God and man, the burden of their message was the inescapable actuality of God in their historical sphere. For the prophet Hosea, Yahweh was "the Holy One in your midst" (Hos. 11:9); and even Amos could subscribe to the belief in Immanuel ("God with us") with the proper reservations (Am. 5:14-15). The prophets, to be sure, contended mightily against the popular perversion of this theme which in their day, as in our own, prompted the nationalistic or cultural presumption that "God is in our side." While they were not against the cult on principle, they directed their scathing attacks against "religion" which is culture-bound and the servant of the vested interests of society. Yet they spoke of "transcendence" in such a way as to claim every aspect of society under the sovereignty of the God whose word was the powerful force with which men must reckon (cf. Isa. 55:10-11). For them the gulf between man and God was measured not just by the transience of man and his achievements but by the lack of "knowledge of God," that is, the wilful refusal to acknowledge the presence of God who demands and promises. In their view, the fault lay in man's will, in his misplaced devotion. And this fault, they declared, could be overcome not by a change of man's nature but by a redirection of the will which, as Jeremiah insisted, would manifest itself in Israel's social existence.

Voegelin touches on this aspect of God's revelation when, in an illuminating discussion of the tetragrammaton (YHWH = Yahweh), he speaks of the Name of God as "the frontier of God's presence with man" (pp. 411, 413). The context of the disclosure of God's Name (Ex. 3:13-15) indicates that this "frontier" is the future which lies under the sign to Moses, "I will be with you." God's Being, as it is turned toward man, is manifest as a being-with, a going-with. The God who goes with his people into the future, however, cannot be reduced to human size or visibility, but remains

free to have mercy on whom he will have mercy (Ex. 33:18-20; cf. Rom. 9:15). His is free to act as he will and to manifest himself in any way he chooses. He retains the initiative and, consistent with his character and faithful to his purpose, alters his course of action from time to time in view of the changing responses of man in history. The Name of God, by which the people call upon him in worship and by whose authority prophets speak, is indeed the frontier of God's presence in the world. Those who face this frontier are called to act in the world: to assume responsibility for changing the relations of power so that justice may prevail, and to rule over their God-given natural environment in a way that will sanctify human life and glorify the Creator. Life in the spirit versus life in the world is not an alternative for prophets, narrators, and psalmists who stand before the mystery and majesty of the God who has chosen to implicate himself in man's history.

For those who stand in this community of faith, there is no certainty about what the will of God is for a particular social situation or area of political responsibility. Nothing is given except a tradition in which men have wrestled with the problem of God's will in concrete situations. Moreover, men are not given the security of being able to perceive clearly a straight-line continuity of the divine purpose in the long, and perhaps imminently tragic, story of the rise and fall of human civilizations. History is filled with too many gaps, good and evil are too deeply entangled in human achievements, and the interrelation of human freedom and divine providence are too interwoven in the course of events for any neat historical schematization, ancient or modern, to suffice. In small sectors of human experience, it may be possible to trace the hidden working of God's purpose which overrules the self-assertive actions of man and creates a new possibility, beyond human intention. A paradigm, perhaps, is the Joseph story which reaches its climax in Joseph's words to his brothers. Looking back over the chain of events which led to their reconciliation with him in Egypt, Joseph says: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:29). It does not lie within man's province to grasp the whole meaning of the drama in which he must play his part. Yet while much remains uncertain and unknown, men are not left in the dark about God's call to act, and to act politically, in the present so as to realize in some degree the *shalom,* the human welfare and fulfillment, which God wills

for his people. Faith is not a mystical experience of the presence of God; it is faith in action at the frontier of God's presence in the world.

I share Voegelin's appreciation of Paul's theology of history expressed in his epistle to the church at Rome, chapters 9-11.[26] In this great passage Paul is overwhelmed by the "mystery" (Rom. 11:25) of history whose meaning, partially revealed, is finally lost to human comprehension. What awes him, however, is not a vision of the "structure of history" but the wonderful constancy of God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel and the amazing freedom of his grace. At the end of his anguished struggle with the problem of the church existing vis-a-vis the community of Israel, both sharing the same scriptural heritage and both belonging to God's elect people, he finally breaks out into a doxology to the God whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33-36). There is, to use Paul's expression, an "Israel of God," composed of those upon whom God shows his mercy, and which bears witness to the faithfulness of God which underlies the whole creation and the whole human drama. Those who are drawn into this community of strangers and pilgrims are called to actualize in the present the peace and justice which, in some measure and in some sectors of society, signify the purpose of God which he intended in the beginning and which he will fulfill in the end. Such people who respond with active faith to God's involvement in mundane existence represent, in the words of Voegelin, "the new type of man on the world-political scene."

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[26] See "History and Gnosis," op. cit., pp. 75-77, 85.