ERIC VOEGELIN
AND THE PROBLEM OF
CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ORDER

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CHAPTER TWO

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of the Christian Community

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Voegelin and the "Jesus of History"

The closest that Eric Voegelin ever came to exploring the "historical Jesus" was in the *History of Political Ideas.* At the outset, however, Voegelin notes a problem that is particular to understanding the Jesus of history: The Gospels, the first-person accounts of the life of Jesus, are not "history" at all. Voegelin observes, "The Gospels, and particularly the Gospel according to Saint Mark, which created the type, are admittedly not historical reports but belong to a class of literature that is generally called hagiographic—though it might be more cautious to rank the Gospels as a genus by itself. It does not seem particularly fruitful to treat a source of this type as if it were a work by Polybius or Tacitus." In other words, to treat the Gospels as if they represent a historical rendering of the events they recount is an exercise in missing the point. As Voegelin maintains on the question of interpreting the Gospels: "I cannot see much sense in treating the Gospel text as if it were a stenographic report of events and sayings and to draw from the obvious contradictions concerning the point the conclusion that only one version can be the correct one" (*CW*, 19:152–53).

Indeed, the notion that the Gospels ought to be treated as accurate historical renderings of events is a relatively new phenomenon that has more to do with an ideological position than with a recognition of their purpose. Furthermore, there is something to be said for Voegelin's con-

tention that they ought to be treated as a genre unto themselves.[1] Eusebius recounts Peter's ministry and describes how the first Gospel came to be written: "So brightly shone the light of true religion on the minds of Peter's hearers that, not satisfied with a single hearing or with the oral teaching of the divine message, they resorted to appeals to every kind to induce Mark . . . as he was a follower of Peter, to leave them in writing a summary of the instruction they had received by word of mouth, nor did they let him go until they had persuaded him, and thus became responsible for the writing of what is known as the Gospel according to Mark."[2] If Eusebius's account is correct, then the Gospels were intended to serve two purposes: first, to provide a "summary of instruction" for the faithful; and second, to provide theological tools for use in spreading the Christian message of "the good news."

Even if the Gospels are not first-person accounts of events witnessed, it would be a mistake to assume that one cannot gain insight into the personality of Jesus and his sense of mission through the Gospel accounts of his life, death, and life after death. The premise of "form criticism" was precisely this: that the Gospels could offer no insight into the life of Jesus because they were a continuation of an oral tradition intended to literally proclaim the good news and to establish the doctrinal authority of the early church, not to describe the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In the introduction to his *Jesus and the Word,* Rudolf Bultmann, an early proponent of form criticism, argued, "We can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either."[3] The Gospels existed solely to promulgate the doctrines of the early Church communities.

1. See, for example, Shuler, "The Genre of the Gospels and the Two Gospel Hypothesis"; Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew;* and Talbot, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels.*

2. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastica Historica* 2.15.2. See also 3.24.15. On the history of the Gospels generally, see Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels,* and Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus.*

3. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word,* 8. On critical historical approaches to the Gospels, see Vorster, "Through the Eyes of a Historian"; Theissen and Merz, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus"; Dahl, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus"; and Stanton, "What Is a Gospel?" Voegelin himself had occasion to enter into a debate regarding the importance of the Old Testament to an understanding of Christianity. Bultmann held the position

The form school has an internal problem, which is found in the form of the Gospels themselves. If the intent was solely to establish the doctrinal authority of the community of the faithful, how can one account for the particular form of the medium chosen? Geza Vermes notes:

> If the evangelists were primarily preoccupied with teaching Christian doctrine, how are we to explain their choice of *biography* as the medium? They cannot have been influenced by tradition; no Jewish convention exists that the sayings of the sages should be transmitted in this way. . . .
>
> Again, if the raison d'être of the Gospels was to provide for the doctrinal needs of the churches, how are we to understand the insertion into them of sayings of Jesus, and attitudes of mind, which actually conflict with the essential teachings of primitive Christianity? The evangelists note that Jesus made disparaging comments about Gentiles. They observe that he was apparently unwilling to allow his followers to announce him as the awaited Messiah. Neither of these matters can have greatly suited the first promulgators of the Gospels, whose main task was to convince non-Jews of the truth that "Jesus is the Christ."
>
> It is consequently difficult to avoid concluding that if the evangelists chose to tell the story of Jesus's life, it was because, whatever else they may have intended, they also wished to recount history, however unprofessionally.[4]

Thus, the form of the Gospels themselves gives evidence of a primitive historiography that the form school claimed was lacking.

One of the more interesting intellectual diversions of modern times, the search for the historical Jesus, has a long history. As Charlotte Allen notes in *The Human Christ,* "During the first centuries of Christianity, the disputes among pagans, Jews, and Christians over the identity of Jesus had a curiously modern flavor. Many of the objections that Jews and pagans raised about the believability of the Gospels were exactly the same

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that the Old Testament was theologically irrelevant. Unfortunately, Voegelin saw a "vein of gnosticism running through 'Faith and Understanding,'" the Bultmann essay. Voegelin's contribution to the debate is available in *CW,* 11:156–77.

  4. Vermes, "The Gospel of Jesus the Jew," 4–5.

as those voiced by many searchers for the historical Jesus today."[5] The distinctly "modern" debate, however, has its roots in Enlightenment rationalism that reached its apex in the publication in 1906 of Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus.*[6] As Allen argues,

> Christianity's oldest and most puzzling paradox is that of the crucified man who was celebrated in song as being "in the form of God."
> . . . Throughout nearly 2,000 years of Christian history, his dual identity has been a source of mystery, meditation, theological investigation, and troubling inquiry. In our own theoretically post-Christian age (at least in the industrialized West), Jesus is still the *ur*-icon of civilization, the enigmatic figure who continues to fascinate our imagination. Because we live in an age when science and scholarly research is supposed to supply answers to all our questions, for the most part we are unwilling to accept such a paradox. The search for the "historical" Jesus—the human being who walked the roads of Galilee 2,000 years ago—has thus become the hallmark of modernity, an obsession that has gripped the minds of intellectuals for nearly three centuries.[7]

This may be a key to answering Gerhart Niemeyer's and Frederic Wilhelmsen's questions regarding the lack of a "historical Jesus" in Voegelin's later works. Indeed, between the composition of the *History of Political Ideas* and his subsequent work on *Order and History,* Voegelin seemed to become hostile to the notion that there could be a meaningful discussion regarding the historicity of Jesus. As Voegelin writes in *The Ecumenic Age,* "the debate about the 'historicity of Christ' is not concerned with a problem in reality; it rather is a symptom of the modern state of deculturation" (*CW,* 17:332). By *deculturation,* Voegelin was referring to the loss of openness to the experience of transcendence that lay at the

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5. Allen, *The Human Christ,* 50.

6. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.* On the Enlightenment origins of the modern historical Jesus debate, see Dahl, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," 82–83; Thiessen and Merz, "Quest for the Historical Jesus," 2–3; Kee, *Jesus in History,* 9–14; and Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History,* 12–19. Of course there is now a "postmodern historical quest of Jesus" that began in 1985 with the first meeting of the Jesus Seminar.

7. Allen, *The Human Christ,* 4.

heart of his conception of Aristotelian *noesis,* as he describes it in *Anamnesis,* and that is also found at the core of Paul's experience of the risen Christ— which is, at the same time, the core of Voegelin's exegesis of Paul in "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected" in *The Ecumenic Age.*[8]

In describing *The Voegelinian Revolution,* Ellis Sandoz argues that among the reasons for Voegelin's "relative obscurity" is his "revolutionary originality." Voegelin, according to Sandoz, "is (in varying degrees) at odds with all schools of thought. He does not fit any of the convenient intellectual pigeonholes." Furthermore, Sandoz notes that Voegelin "is a genuinely independent thinker. His work is strikingly free of polemics, yet it clearly entails a rejection of all the dearest idols of the Cave of modern intellectuals here and abroad."[9] And the "search for the historic Jesus" has proven itself to be remarkable in its capacity to insinuate itself into the ideological and intellectual pigeonholes of the day. As Allen observes:

> Jesus scholarship has been shaped by nearly every intellectual fashion of the past three centuries: English deism, Enlightenment rationalism, philosophical Idealism, Romanticism, Darwinism, existentialism, Marxism, and feminism. The liberal Protestant outlook of the 19th Century, the "social gospel" of the early 20th century, the "God is Dead" movement of the 1960s, and the liberation theology of the 1970s and 1980s have all cast long shadows on the search for Jesus. In 1909, the Modernist Catholic theologian George Tyrell complained that the liberal German Bible scholars of his day had reconstructed a historical Jesus who was no more than "the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, at the bottom of a deep well." In other words, the liberal searchers had found a liberal Jesus. The same can be said of Jesus-searchers of every era: the deists found a deist, the Romantics a Romantic, the existentialists an existentialist, and the liberationists a Jesus of the class struggle. Supposedly equipped with the latest critical and historical tools, the "scientific" quest for the historical Jesus has nearly always devolved into theology, ideology, and even autobiography.[10]

8. On the process of *noesis,* see "What Is Political Reality?" in *CW,* 6:341–412.

9. Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution,* 11.

10. Allen, *The Human Christ,* 5.

Ultimately, however, the abandonment of the Jesus of history had more to do with the evolution of the purpose of Voegelin's scholarship. In *Order and History,* Voegelin's purpose is to explore his theory of consciousness and lay out his philosophy of history. As such, the work is an examination of the symbols of order in light of the experiences that produced them. With this in mind, the symbols cannot be separated from the experiences themselves—that is, the origin of the deformation of reality that occurs in history and culminates in the rise of ideological mass movements. As Michael P. Morrissey points out, the "meaning" of the symbols

> is moored to their source of emergence: the person who experienced, interpreted and understood the transcendent reality they objectified through their symbolic imagination. That 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 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 the recognition and the symbolic representation of it cannot be separated.[11]

With that noted, however, Voegelin's purpose in the *History of Political Ideas* is somewhat different. Voegelin's analysis therein of the Jesus of history is not undertaken to explain his existence; nor is it an attempt to explain the irruption of the divine presence into immanent reality as an exercise of Christian apologetics. Rather, the analysis is done with an eye toward the community that formed around him and the ideas that serve as the evocative underpinnings of that community as a result of Jesus' existence. Voegelin does make note of the historical Jesus research, citing Charles Guignebert's *Jesus* as "the latest authoritative study"[12]; but he does so within the context of lamenting the "Insufficiency of Critical Exegesis of the Gospels" (*CW,* 19:151).

11. Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence,* 233.
12. Guignebert, *Jesus.*

Guignebert concludes that Jesus lacked any sense of being the "mes-siah" and that his ministry on Earth had failed to accomplish its end, which was to bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth in a political sense. Furthermore, Guignebert maintains that the visions of the resur-rected Christ were a result of the enthusiasm of the apostles and were not reflective of a real event. Voegelin finds Guignebert's conclusions un-satisfactory. Ultimately, Guignebert had done little to explain "what in the personality of Jesus should have been the cause for the somewhat surprising effect on the disciples after his life had ended in a black fail-ure" (*CW*, 19:152)—at least according to Guignebert's account. To do that would require a different way of approaching the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Voegelin's Approach to the Gospels

Voegelin's dissatisfaction with the critical exegesis of Gospel sources available to him stemmed from the seeming inability of the exegetes to explore "the religious personality and its effect on the disciples" (*CW*, 19:153). This lack is problematic in an analysis of the birth of the Christian community because, as Voegelin understood, "the constitution of the new community begins with the personality, the life, and the work of Jesus" (*CW*, 19:151). Thus, any attempt to understand the commu-nity must be able to increase our understanding of these elements that contributed to its constitution. To this end, Voegelin proposes

> to start from the assumption that the Gospel of the Markian type
> reflects the personality of Jesus, his life and work, though the de-
> tails may be historically incorrect. We may agree that every single
> miracle report is untrustworthy and still understand the report as
> a whole as substantially reflecting the healing work of the Savior;
> we may agree that the parables and dialogue scenes have little
> chance of reporting correctly the pronouncements of Jesus and still
> be sure that he expressed himself in parables in general and that
> the parables as reported reflect essential features of his teaching; we
> may doubt the report on the baptism by John and still be sure that
> at some point in his life the experience must have occurred that
> started him on his life; and we may doubt the report on the temp-

tation and still assume the existence of the problem of temptation in his life. (*CW,* 19:153)

This method of interpretation, of course, placed Voegelin squarely at odds with the predominant school of thought at the time he wrote the early chapters on Christianity in the *History of Political Ideas.* In the approach he adopted to the critical analysis of the Gospels, Voegelin was again swimming against the tide of what was perceived as the current trend in popular scholarship.

The crucial element in understanding Jesus' personality, a question raised repeatedly in historical Jesus research, was Jesus' perception of himself as the Messiah. Voegelin describes "the question of the self-consciousness of Jesus as the Messiah" as the "most important question" in the exploration of Jesus' personality. But coupled with this assertion is the observation that "it borders sometimes on the comic to see a distinguished scholar pointing the revolver of logical consistency at the Gospel and demanding that the author make up his mind whether Jesus has said that he was the Messiah or not" (*CW,* 19:153). The situation that confronted Voegelin is further complicated by the fact that the general category of the Messianic consciousness and Jesus' self-consciousness in particular is a preoccupation that is peculiarly related to historical Jesus research.

The Messiah and the Self-Consciousness of Jesus

William Scott Green notes "the messiah as a subject of academic study derives not from ancient Jewish preoccupation, but from early Christian work-choice, theology and apologetics." At issue are the twin efforts by the authors of the New Testament to name and to describe Jesus in messianic terms. The first effort is represented by the use of the term *christos,* the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *masshiah,* as a proper surname for Jesus of Nazareth. This is closely related to the second "major achievement of the New Testament apologetics," the transformation of the Hebrew scripture "into a harbinger" of the "career, suffering, and death" of Jesus.[13] Instead, Green argues, the relative scarcity of the use

13. Green, "Messiah in Judaism," 4.

of the Hebrew noun *masshiah* in the extant texts would seem to argue against the notion of a messiah figure as an evocative category in the political and social situation confronting the people of Israel.

The problem with Green's argument, however, is that it contains its own contradiction. If the terms *christos* and *masshiah* were without meaningful content, why were they chosen? Furthermore, if the Israelitic notion of the "messiah" was not categorical in some way, how does one explain the messianic movements prevalent throughout Palestine in the century before and the century after Christ?[14] As Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson point out, "The scarcity of the term *messiah* in the Jewish literature of the time does not mean . . . that there was no expectation whatever of an anointed royal leader. At certain levels of Jewish society, there was indeed some anticipation of a kingly agent inspired by God to bring deliverance to the people. Besides the infrequently attested *messiah,* there were other images that expressed this particular tradition of expectation, the most prominent of which was a Davidic king."[15]

The notions of messianic expectation and the emergence of a Davidic king–like figure are relatively late developments in Judaism in the centuries before the birth of Jesus. In the original development of Jewish eschatological expectation, the covenant between God and Israel would have resulted in the direct rule of God over his people—if the people abided by the law. This oriented Israel toward expectation of the future, since it clearly had not been realized in the present. As Emil Schürer points out in *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ:*

> It was . . . expected that Israel's faithfulness would be suitably rewarded in the life of both the nation and the individual. Yet it was obvious that in actual experience the reward came neither to the people as a whole, nor to individuals in the proportion anticipated. Accordingly, the more deeply this awareness penetrated into the mind of the nation and of the individual, the more they were forced to turn their eyes to the future; and of course, the worse their present state, the more lively their hope. It may therefore be said that in

14. See Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus.*

15. Ibid., 93.

later eras religious consciousness was concentrated upon hope for the future. A perfect age to come was the goal to which all other religious ideas were teleologically related. As the conduct of the Israelite was essentially observance of the Torah, so his faith was centered on awaiting God's kingdom.[16]

In the historical development of Israel, the conception of the social organization of a chosen people under God was transformed by the external pressure of other peoples and nations upon it. Voegelin notes that the constitution of the people of Israel as a religious order under God took place at a time in Israel's history and in "an environment of nomads where the tribal and clan organizations were in flux" (*CW,* 19:111) and that the initial constitution formed by the first *berith* between God and Israel placed God as the head of his united people in what Martin Buber has called a "theo-political" act.[17] Ultimately, the development of an eschatological outlook on history was, to some degree, contained in the notion of the initial covenant between God and Israel and the experience of the Exodus that culminated in the events at Mount Sinai recounted in Exodus 19. As G. R. Beasley-Murray observes: "Israel's unique achievement of an eschatology in relation to history was conditioned by the uniqueness of the revelation it experienced, the covenant into which it entered, and the history in which it was set and to which the whole complex gave rise. From the events at Sinai onward, the tribes were a group on the march under Yahweh; they were on the way to a new life in a new land, to a future that was in the hands of the Lord."[18]

Despite the uniqueness of the revelation it received and the covenant into which it entered, the exigencies of Israel's political and social existence required a social organization more in keeping with the political organization of the rival power centers that threatened Israel. As a result, Israel cried out for a king "like the other nations," despite Samuel's warnings that such an institution would cause God to turn away from his people (1 Sam. 8:4–21).

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16. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ,* 2:492.
17. Buber, *The Kingship of God,* 24.
18. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God,* 18–19.

The institution of the Israelitic monarchy was a violation of the original covenant by which Israel was created, and it led to the rise of the prophets who challenged Israel to fulfill its share of the bargain so as to reap the rewards promised. The import of prophetic utterances moves through successive stages to reach its culmination in Ezekiel (36:26–27) and Jeremiah (31:31–34) and the promise of a "new covenant" to be "written on the hearts" of the people of Israel. But the institution of the kingship made two new formulations possible: Instead of God acting to redeem Israel, a king of Davidic origin might be the agent of supernatural transformation; and in contradistinction, the notion also arises, from the peasant countryside, "of a leader riding on an ass as did the charismatic war leaders of the pre-royal time (Deborah song, Judg. 5:10)" (*CW,* 19:109–16).

As a result of these conflicting images, there emerged what Voegelin describes as "the profound confusion of eschatological sentiment." This situation was further exacerbated by a seemingly endless series of debasements and defeats suffered by Israel. To be sure, Israel had violated its obligation under the original contract; and because of that, Israel had been, and was being, punished through its subjections to the other nations, though ultimately it would emerge victorious as God's chosen. However, as disaster piled on disaster, "it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain this position." The reason is clear: "the sinfulness of Israel, however great it may be, is not greater than that of other nations, and, furthermore, what can be the meaning of being God's chosen people if the result of the choice is endless abasement." It was against this backdrop of abasement, "out of the immense faith" of the people of Israel and their "equally profound despair" that "one of the greatest creations of mankind . . . the Suffering Servant of the Lord," emerges (*CW,* 19:116–17).

It is no wonder that, given the confusion of sentiments, the symbol of the Suffering Servant is notoriously difficult to explicate. From Voegelin's perspective, there is something of a synthesis between the idea of the people as an instrument of redemption and the appearance of a savior who will lead them to it. Voegelin maintains that the image of the Suffering Servant acted upon the Israelitic mind to explain the intense suffering endured by Israel. In the Servant Songs, the suffering of Israel is made the catalyst by which not just Israel but potentially all of humanity may experience the redemption of God. Voegelin argues that "the

disproportionate suffering" of Israel "makes sense . . . only in a world plan in which the suffering becomes the means of redemption for the whole world. Under these conditions the faith can be maintained, the suffering can become bearable, and the identity of the people . . . can be preserved with the utmost tenacity" (*CW*, 19:118). It is through the Suffering Servant that Israel is elevated to the status of world redeemer, and the complex of symbols emerges that will be used to demonstrate to the world that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise.

The image of the Suffering Servant "is still deeply embedded in the particular Israelitic experiences and sorrows," but "the image of the future Savior appears lucidly before the background of anguish." Voegelin notes the parallel language in Psalm 22:1 and Mark 15:34: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In his discussion, Voegelin argues that the statement from the cross is not meant as "an utterance of ultimate despair, but, as a quotation from Psalm 22," and as such "a self-interpretation and identification with the symbol of the Suffering Servant" (*CW*, 19:119). But this does not really answer the question regarding the self-consciousness of Jesus as the Messiah under the methodology employed by Voegelin. Voegelin's own answer to the question of Jesus' self-consciousness as the Messiah and primary locus in the drama of salvation is cryptic:

> If we take . . . the Gospels as the reflection of religious processes, it seems clear that the Messiah consciousness did not appear at any definite time in the life of Jesus, but that it was an experience that could become stronger at times, and at times be weakened. We may assume that the preoccupation with his quality as the Messiah was increasing toward the end of his public life when believers more strongly and in greater numbers responded to him as the Messiah; but to the end, to the prayer in Gethsemane . . . we feel the tension between the messianic and nonmessianic personality in Jesus: he, as the man, submits to the possibility of being the Messiah. (*CW*, 19:162–63)

Yet even if there was vacillation between the messianic and nonmessianic elements of Jesus' personality, there can be no doubt that the messianic consciousness had grown beyond the images of the Messiah as a war

leader who would crush those who had oppressed and inflicted suffering upon Israel. Voegelin notes that Jesus' teaching "had far outgrown the cruder form of the turning of the tables; his realm was not of this world. If he was the Messiah, his fate differed widely from the images of victorious royal glory and resembled rather the Suffering Servant of Isaiah" (*CW,* 19:163). Indeed, this simple fact explains the effectiveness of Isaiah as a justification and explanation of Jesus as the Christ. Furthermore, this parallel would have been appealing, given the apparent prominence of Isaiah in rabbinic Judaism in the century preceding Jesus' birth.[19]

Mana, Metanoia, Spirit, and Faith: The Community Substance

In examining the personality of Jesus and the community that grew up around him, Voegelin focuses upon events recounted in Mark 5:25–35. As Jesus is moving through a large crowd, a woman suffering from hemorrhaging reaches out to simply touch his cloak, because she believes that by doing so she will be healed of her affliction. According to the account, upon touching Jesus' cloak, "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering" (Mk. 5:29). Jesus stops and turns because he feels that some power has gone out of him. Voegelin notes: "The historicity of the incident is irrelevant; what matters is the conception of the healing process. Jesus is possessed of a mana . . . that he can communicate to other persons." However, in order for that communication to occur, there has to be a reciprocal relationship between the mana of Jesus and the faith of the believer. "The *metanoia,* the turning, the healing, the state of faith, had to spring from the soul forces of the individual; there is no sign that Jesus ever attempted to heal or convert persons who did not respond to his call" (*CW,* 19:154). Thus in life, Jesus created the conditions for the emergence of a new community based on faith, but it was to a faith that emerged in response to the call.

According to Voegelin's account, the mana of Jesus carries with it the potential for the realization of a new community. Voegelin writes, "the

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19. On the prominence of Isaiah, see Sawyer, "Isaiah and Christian Origins," in *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity,* 21–41, and Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Own Interpretation of Isaiah.*

mana of Jesus and the faith of the believer are corresponding personality elements that can communicate with each other and thus constitute a kind of community substance. This interaction between Jesus and the faithful is the closest we can come through our sources to the constitution of the Christian community as a divine and at the same time historically active substance" (*CW*, 19:155). It is important to note in the descriptive passage, however, that the community as it exists under the dynamic interaction of the mana of Jesus is a community between Jesus and those who follow him. The distinctly *Christian* community of Jesus' followers does not emerge until the death of Jesus and the visions of the resurrected Christ to individuals and groups of people, some of whom had followed Jesus the man and, in the notable instance of Saint Paul, at least one who had persecuted his followers.

In the emergence of the new Christian community, it was the death and resurrection that constituted the true birth of the new community. As Voegelin notes, "The visions of the disciples in the days after the death of Jesus are the fundamental evocative acts of the Christian community" (*CW*, 19:163). It is the death and resurrection of Jesus and the witnesses of the risen Christ who testified to the occurrence that transform the potential for a new community of faith into the reality through the evocation of the visions. Voegelin argues,

> In order to understand properly the function of the visions, we have to imagine the main alternatives. If Jesus had been the Messiah according to the older Israelitic tradition, his death would have been proof of his failure, and the community of his followers would probably have dispersed. If he had been no more than a prophet, he could still have become the founder of a religion of salvation comparable to Buddhism. If his life and death had fallen under the sway of Hellenic or Roman religious forms to a larger extent than it did, he could have become a cult deity. None of these possibilities was realized. There developed, instead, the unique phenomenon of a community under the leadership of a historic personality who at the same time was a manifestation of God, so that the community of believers with the man Jesus could be continued after his death with the living divine personality of Christ. The Spirit of the Resurrected (Gk. *pneuma*) took as the community substance the place of the mana (the *dynamis*) of the living Jesus. The precondition for

this community of believers with the living God was the visionary conviction of his personal presence. (*CW,* 19:164)

While "Jesus, the man," may have died on the cross, "Christ lives, and under the guidance of his spirit the community continues to exist as it did when he was present in the flesh" (*CW,* 19:165).

While the new community is constituted by the Descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the individual becomes a member of the community by responding to the call through faith. The faith in Jesus the man is transformed into faith in the risen Christ. The essence of faith in the Hebrew tradition had been oriented to the "god of history leading his people to supreme victory" (*CW,* 19:113). With the Descent of the Spirit, the element of faith is transformed into the means by which *metanoia* itself is achieved, and the individuals who experience it are taken into the community of Christ as described in the Epistle to the Hebrews. As Voegelin writes:

> The image of the indwelling of Christ, the priest, in the house of his community receives conceptual precision through the doctrine of faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" ([Heb.] 11:1); Faith is not a subjective attitude of the individual, a belief, but the community substance itself, created by the appearance of Jesus. . . . The awakening of the faith and the consequent partaking of the Holy Ghost are, therefore, not an intellectual process but a transformation of the whole personality, the process by which man is integrated into the community substance. . . . The community is imagined as a field in which "power" circulates; faith is the process through which a man becomes a unit in this field, permeable for the circulating power substance. (*CW,* 19:167)

As with the hemorrhagic woman of Mark, the awakening of the faith requires the conscious desire of each individual human being who would take part in the community to yield to the call.

A Community for Human Existence: The Pauline Compromises

The Christian community might have remained confined as an obscure sect of Judaism in the Near East but for the genius of Paul and his

capacity to conceive of an overarching community of faith that would be cognizant of the inherent weaknesses of human nature, the natural gifts of man, and the realities of the world. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author, who was either Paul himself or a member his circle—the authorship of the letter is a matter of some debate—notes that because Jesus "himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:18). Paul understood the nature of human being as a fallen one that only the grace of God could redeem from his own experience and critical examination of it.

> I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. . . .
>
> When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!
>
> So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Rom. 7:18–25)

This understanding of the spiritual anthropology of human beings in which the passions, "the law of sin at work in my members," predominates and conditions Paul's speculations regarding the essence of a new community that would be a fit repository for the spirit of Christ and would prove practical as well to the existence of human beings in their lives. Voegelin notes:

> The greatness of Paul lies in his quality as a statesman that enables him to fill in the abstractions of Hebrews, and to transpose the community of the perfect with Christ into an idea that took into account the practical problems of a community that did not at all consist of perfect saints. The Epistles of Paul present the momentous step from radical perfectionism to the compromise with the realities of the Christian community in its environment. From Hebrews the path could have led to a small community of saints; Paul opens the way to imperial expansion, the way to Rome. (*CW,* 19:169)

These "compromises" with the realities of the world would create the conditions by which the followers of an itinerant rabbi could lay claim to the Western world. Voegelin argues, "The main function of Christianity, as far as its rise belongs in the history of political evocations, was the creation of a new community substance that would be grafted, with varying degrees of success, first on the population basis of the Roman empire, and later on the tribes of the Great Migration" (*CW,* 19:150).

This grafting was possible only because of a series of compromises made by Paul in the nascent days of Christianity. Voegelin identifies five: a compromise with history; a compromise with the weakness of human beings as realized in the differences of gifts that accrue to the members of the mystical body of Christ; the addition of the law of love to the codified law of the Old Testament; the eschatological indifference to social problems; and the compromise with authority by the acceptance of governmental authority as being ordained by God. The present study will collapse these five into three major compromises that tend to subsume the others. The eschatological indifference to social problems may be considered part of Paul's compromise with authority, and the addition of the law of love is directly related to the compromise with history. Thus, the three major headings of the compromises of Paul would be: the historical horizon, the body of Christ, and the powers that be. It is to the historical horizon that we first turn in our analysis.

The Historical Horizon

The first compromise made by Paul and identified by Voegelin is a "compromise with history." This particular compromise deals specifically with the world and the peoples in and among which Christianity emerged. The compromise with history consisted of identifying Christianity with the social world that gave it birth and that world's three realms: the pagan, the Israelitic, and the Christian. Subsumed in the limitation Paul imposes on human history by his civilizational and geographical construction are the two ideas of history as having a directional quality, as in the case of the Israelitic experience, and the periodization of history into epochs.

The second idea, strictly speaking, is also based in the experience of the people of Israel, to the degree that the myth of the metal ages first

seen in Hesiod finds its place, in the book of Daniel, in the speculation upon the experience of Israel as a conquered people tossed about by a succession of empires. In interpreting the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel describes a series of empires that will dominate Israel, the fourth of which will be "a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (2:31–45). This construction of history into epochs with an eschatological direction is an important element in understanding the historical justification that underlies the emergence of the Christian community.[20]

With the eschatological understanding of Israel and the periodization of history, the new Christian community was seen as the beginning of a new age. As Voegelin writes, "The new community between Christ and the faithful is not just any community that now enters the scene of history, but it is the realm of the new epoch. The epochal consciousness is fully developed: the appearance of Christ is the dividing line of world history" (*CW,* 19:168). Thus, history is now conceived of in terms of past, present, and future, with the decisive event in the center of history that imbues it with meaning. History becomes the drama of salvation. Karl Löwith observes that "the articulation of all historical time into past, present, and future reflects the temporal structure of the history of salvation. The past points to the first things, the future to the last things, and the present to a central presence which connects the past with the future through teleological succession."[21] And For the Christian, that "central presence" is the Spirit of Christ. Voegelin writes: "The idea of Hebrews envisages the aeon of Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of history and the preceding period as a preparation in accordance with the plan of God. The existence of mankind in time has from now on the meaning that we properly call *history* because God is the divine partner of the process that unfolds according to his providence" (*CW,* 19:168–69).

With the realization of the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God in Christ, the eschatological notions that served as the backdrop for the appearance of the Messiah were also transformed. In the Pauline vision

20. See *CW,* 19:121–22.
21. Löwith, *Meaning in History,* 185.

of the resurrected Christ, the eschatological idea of the coming Messiah created the possibility for the development of an apocalyptic understanding of the kingdom of God. "The eschatological expectation of the kingdom implied that the Messiah would appear at a given point of time in the near future and replace the present world order by the kingdom of God." Since, from the perspective of Paul and the Christian community, the Messiah has in fact appeared, a new understanding of the kingdom itself was necessary. "The apocalyptic idea implies that the Messiah has appeared and that his realm is actually established as the community between him, the Resurrected, and his believers." Voegelin maintains that the "eschatological sentiment has not disappeared completely by any means, but the apocalyptic sentiment, the belief in the revealed community, is growing and finally overshadowing the expectation of the end in the main line of Christian evolution" (*CW,* 19:166).

Contained within the apocalyptic idea is the danger that the reality of the revealed community between Christ and the faithful may not live up to the expectations of those who experience it. This phenomena of frustrated expectations, combined with the fact that the eschatological understanding of history remains present in the background, would prove extremely problematic—especially since the Christian community had now embarked upon a period of waiting for the second appearance of the Savior to gather his flock to him. The belief in the revealed community helps make possible the unification of humanity under God, but it also carries with it the potential for difficulties that can be a source of disturbance and disorder into the future. The problem is that "Christian existence is set between an accomplished redemption and an awaited consummation, and it involves dependence on the grace of the Lord who has come, is present and is to come."[22] As Löwith remarks:

> Invisibly, history has fundamentally changed; visibly it is still the same, for the Kingdom of God is already at hand, and yet, as an *eschaton,* still to come. This ambiguity is essential to all history after Christ: the time is already fulfilled and not yet consummated. The Christian times between Christ's resurrection and his reappearance

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22. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God,* 22.

are definitely the last times (1 John 2:18; Matt. 12:28); but, as long as they last, they are penultimate times before the completion of the present, though hidden Kingdom of Christ in the manifest Kingdom of God beyond historical times. On account of this profound ambiguity of the historical fulfillment where everything is "already" what it is "not yet," the Christian believer lives in a radical tension between present and future.[23]

Christ may have "laid open to us both past and present history, and has given us an anticipatory taste of the future as well,"[24] according to Barnabas; but while the end of history may be known for human beings in their immanent lives, the process of history itself is still a mystery.

Closely related to the "compromise with history" is the adoption of "the law of love" into the community of the faithful (Rom. 13:8–10). In accomplishing the compromise with history, Paul had created the historical horizon by the recognition of the civilizational orders with which he was familiar. The laws of Israel and the new law of Christ "were insufficient as an empirical pattern of civilization." To overcome this difficulty, Paul "retains the epochal function of the appearance of the Messiah but he adds to the Israelitic law a natural law, a law of the gentiles. God has revealed himself to the gentiles through his creation (Rom. 1:19–20), to Israel through the written law, and now to mankind through the pneumatic law of Christ that is engraved in the hearts of the believers through their faith" (*CW,* 19:170).

As for the social rules to govern the new community, Paul was, in Voegelin's words, "strongly traditional," by which he means that Paul imports the written laws of Israel as the social code to be followed (*CW,* 19:171; Rom. 13:9–10). This importation of a well-established social code was of immense significance in the organization of the first Christian communities. Having the "character of divine law," the social codes of Israel "were received by the Christian community, and Christianity was thereby saved from becoming just one of many similar Hellenistic mystery cults. Possessing the complete Israelitic law was the most important asset of

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23. Löwith, *Meaning in History,* 188. See also Collingwood, *The Idea of History,* 46–49.
24. "The Epistle of Barnabas," 159.

the Church when it had to face the task of ordering social life in the Roman empire" (*CW,* 19:113). Important as well was the content of the law regarding the treatment of the poor and the dispossessed within the society. This was especially true with regard to the creation of the *corpus mysticum.*

The Body of Christ

The second compromise made by Paul is specifically with the weaknesses of human nature brought on by humanity's fallen condition. Voegelin notes that "the renovation of the personality in the Spirit of Christ would in most cases not be so radical that frequent lapses would not occur." The experience of *metanoia,* the turning around by which Paul argues that a human being is made anew, is a fragile thing, given the weaknesses of the flesh. For this reason, "a natural hierarchy" would exist within the Christian community "of higher and lower degrees of perfection that expresses itself in a social stratification into apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers whose function is 'the perfecting of the saints . . . till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:11–13)" (*CW,* 19:170).

But despite the stratification of the society, there is a unity of the Spirit that transforms individuals into integral parts of the new spiritual body of Christ. Voegelin notes that "Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians elaborates the idea of the body of Christ in which every personality type has its function, the types complementing each other as the members of the body; the unity between them is constituted by the Spirit by which they have been baptized." Baptism is thus the symbolic representation of the Descent of the Spirit and delivers the baptized individual "into the *corpus mysticum* of which Christ is the head" (*CW,* 19:170).

This organic construction of the whole of the Christian community is important to the expansion of Christianity and its transformation into the political rationale for the imperial order and for the Church as an institution existing in parallel with that order. In *Race and State,* Voegelin argues that "the idea of the kingdom and body of Christ as it was articulated by Paul and his circle expanded in the course of Christian history

into the idea of the spiritual-worldly empire." Voegelin goes on to note, "The idea of the *corpus mysticum* did not spring entirely new from the ideas of Paul; the ground had been prepared by the Hellenistic idea of the heavenly person and his embodiment in the cosmos, and especially by the doctrine of the second Adam" (*CW,* 2:132). The Hellenistic idea proceeds from the Stoic perception of the *apospasma,* the piece of the divine logos that pervades the cosmos as the equivalent of the human soul naked before God.

In defining Christ as "the second Adam," Paul was calling upon both the traditions of Israel and the spiritual anthropology that served as the basis for his understanding of the reborn community. In the case of the traditions of Israel, of course, Adam as the first man is the father of humanity. The symbolism of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 spiritualizes that condition to make Christ "the spiritual father of the reborn Christian personality" (*CW,* 19:170–71). With regard to the second Adam, since human beings participate in existence with their entire beings, body and soul, the relationship to Adam, the relationship by blood, has an appeal. As Voegelin notes, "The idea of the *corpus mysticum* . . . does not entirely relinquish its grounding in the animal world—without the resonating image of a second Adam, of a second man as the ancestor of a new humanity, it would hardly have attained as strong a response" (*CW,* 2:138).

In addition to the Hellenistic and Adamic elements, the traditions of Israel provided a background for the Christian use of the organic symbol. Although Voegelin himself does not make the linkage between sections of the *History,* in his commentary on Israel he points to the *berith* by which David is installed as the king of Israel and the people of Israel gather together to proclaim that "we are thy bone and thy flesh" (2 Sam. 5:1; 1 Chron. 11:1). Voegelin comments, "The organic symbolism indicates the idea of the mystical body that is created through the choice of a head for the bone and the flesh. The *berith,* instituting a king, is the act that creates the permanent historical personality of the people" (*CW,* 19:111). It creates the idea of the people of God, who compose the community of the Christian faithful, as an organic, interrelated whole through the symbolism of the body.

The compromise with the weaknesses of human beings, in addition to providing the impetus for the creation of a spiritual-worldly empire,

also provided something else. In adopting the organic symbolism of the body, Paul had helped to illuminate the perception of the spiritual equality of human beings before God, performing essentially the same function as Plato's Phoenician Tale in *The Republic*. The social stratification is not reflective of greater or lesser worth on the part of the individuals involved but is rather a reflection of the spiritual gifts that are measured out according to the dictates of divine providence. Within the community, these gifts are to be used for the benefit and expansion of the Christian community of the faithful, but before God and Christ each member of the community has value and worth. This is a profound sentiment that, as the community of faith expanded into the imperial sphere, would have profound implications in the development of ethics, politics, and social structures and conventions.[25]

The Powers That Be

The relationship between the Christian community and governmental authority was very simply defined by Paul in Romans 13:1–2: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad." The purpose of government is to maintain the peace and "to wield the power of the sword over evildoers; resistance against the government would be resistance against the will of God." Voegelin argues that this relationship "is . . . determined not by a rule that envisages a permanent establishment, but as a provisional arrangement that is necessitated by the coexistence of the invisible realm with the world until, with the second coming of Christ, the tension between the two is resolved into the visible supernatural glory of the kingdom of God" (*CW,* 19:172).

The provisional nature of this arrangement may have been necessary given the emergence of the Christian community in a Roman province,

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25. Also see Voegelin's discussion of the symbol of the body in "The Growth of the Race Idea," in *CW,* 10:27–61.

the antipathy of the Jewish communities, and the community's expansion into the pagan world beyond, which included Rome itself. In Acts 19:23–40 the story is told of a riot that is narrowly averted when a silversmith who made icons of the goddess Artemis rallied his workmen and other artisans against the Christians in Ephesus because they might be bad for business. In Rome itself, the destination of the Pauline epistle, the various Jewish communities had already been restricted by the law on congregations from forming any sort of community beyond the individual synagogues. As for Christians, Ernst Bammel argues, "Oriental cults, while permitted with great liberality outside the *urbs,* still came under the critical eye of the city prefect within Rome during the early principate and could only hope to be tolerated if their loyalty and good behavior was beyond question."[26] Thus, the letter of Paul may have been preemptively defensive, intended to make the point that Christianity did not represent a threat to the established order.

The idea that all government is ordained by God is not new either with Paul or within the Christian community. In interpreting the "handwriting on the wall" for King Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, the prophet Daniel notes "that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and sets over them anyone he wishes" (5:21). So Paul's dictum in Romans 13 is a continuation of the prophetic tradition that defined human existence in the world as existence under God. Since God rules all, all that rule must be ordained of God.

It would be a mistake to conflate the existence of the governmental authorities as being ordained of God into the conception that it was representative of the community of the faithful. The Pauline theory of the charismata, of the mystical body of Christ, extended to the community of the faithful as distinct from the political community proper. In a footnote, Voegelin argues, "The *exousia,* the governmental authority, is 'ordained' by God, but it is not permeated by the heavenly dynamis; the magistrate is not a member of the mystical body" (*CW,* 19:172n15). The expansion of the charismata to include the temporal ruler does not occur until the conceptual framework provided by the polis is done away with as a result of the Germanic migrations and the formulation of the

26. Bammel, "Romans 13," 367–68.

Gelasian doctrine regarding the specific functions exercised by the temporal and spiritual authorities and the relationship of those authorities to the person of Christ as "the priest-king" (*CW,* 20:62–63).

Obstacles to *Metanoia* and the Social Order

Closely tied to the compromise with the power of political authorities is what Voegelin calls "Eschatological Indifference to Social Problems." And this, in turn, is related to the primary social teaching associated with Jesus in the great sermons recounted in Luke 6:17–49 and Matthew 5–7: the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount. Voegelin presents the arguments of the respective sermons in terms of the eschatological character of Jesus' ministry overall. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was at hand and that the believer should repent and turn away from iniquity and believe to enter the kingdom. With this understanding in mind, the sermons are not actually "social" strictures at all, but rather the recognition of the potential obstacles that face the individual in gaining access to the eschatological kingdom heralded by Jesus.

> The question of property and wealth is not considered a social problem at all, but a personal one. The possession of wealth is a personal obstacle for the rich man to achieve complete *metanoia.* The entanglement in the manifold interests of the world that goes with riches makes it more difficult to turn the heart to the point where the insight into what is right, and the desire to do it, determines the conduct of life and directs it toward the impending kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom that is not of this world is more easily accessible to those whose stake in the world is small anyway. (*CW,* 19:156–57)

As Jesus warns those who are gathered to hear him, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Furthermore, Voegelin asserts, "The rules of the sermon are not a code that can be followed like the Ten Commandments. The radicalism of the demands precludes their use as a system of social ethics" (*CW,* 19:162). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues, "Having reached the end of the Beatitudes, we naturally ask if there is any place on this earth for the community which they describe. Clearly, there

is one place, and only one, and that is where the Poorest, Meekest, and most sorely Tried of all men is to be found—on the cross at Golgotha."[27]

Neither sermon can be read as the pronouncement of a new social code or an advocacy statement on the desirability of redistributing resources. Voegelin notes with regard to the Sermon on the Mount in particular: "The doctrine of the sermon is an eschatological doctrine. It demands a change of heart and imposes rules of conduct that have their meaning for men who live in the daily expectation of the kingdom of Heaven. It is not a doctrine that can be followed by men who live in a less intense environment, who expect to live out their lives and who wish to make the world livable for their families." And, in a passage reminiscent of Machiavelli's warning to *The Prince* regarding speculation on ideal states, he says, "Following the doctrine of the sermon to the letter would in each individual case inevitably entail social and economic disaster and would probably lead to an early death" (*CW,* 19:161). This is because, while love, in the form advanced by Jesus in Matthew 22:37–40, may be the vine on which "depend all the Law and the prophets," it must be filtered through the imperfect vessel of human nature.[28] A person may repent, but human nature remains what it is.

On the other hand, the sermons do serve a social function to the degree that they provide what may be described as an ideal standard of social behavior that can be used as a rule by which to judge the real social order in which people find themselves. This "regulative function," as Voegelin calls it, is its great strength and potential danger. Because "any set of rules that is accepted by a Christian society as the standard of conduct will inevitably fall far short of the teaching of the sermon," their

27. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* cited in Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography,* 85.

28. Voegelin (*CW,* 19:171) notes that Paul argues, "Love is the comprehensive supplement to the old law"; however, Voegelin seems to neglect the text of Matthew 22:34–40: "Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." So, far from merely being a "supplement" to the Law, love is presented in the Gospel account as the spring from which all the Law flows.

very existence as a standard creates an inevitable "tension between the accepted standard and the eschatological sermon." As a consequence, "whenever the standard sinks, it can be pulled up again through a re-orientation toward the radical demands." This lies at the heart of the "wave after wave of *reformations*" that occur throughout the history of Christian civilization in the West. The danger to Christian civilization exists "when the swing toward the eschatological demands goes too far, [imperiling] the civilizational structure, which is based on a compromise with the natural gifts of man" (*CW,* 19:162).

The Sermon on the Mount, in particular, represents a direct challenge to the institutional structures of Israelitic life itself—and by extension, the Christian structures as well. Voegelin's discussion of the sermon is concerned primarily with an exegesis of Matthew 5:1–11, the recounting of those who are blessed. However, Clarence Baumann's analysis of the entire content of the Sermon leads him to observe, "Though the Sermon on the Mount contains no political program . . . and prescribes no sociological lineaments for a new *corpus christianum,* we would miss its social intentions if we assumed . . . that it is inconsequential for the actual structures of life." Baumann argues that the Sermon "takes issue with the fundamentals of institutional life." These include:

> (1) the protection of life in accord with the equity of *lex talionis* ("an eye for an eye") and the social binding of the collective ego ("love your neighbor and hate your enemy"), (2) the preservation of the family (by prohibiting adultery) and its social control ("give her a certificate of divorce"), (3) the confirmation of the religious oath ("you shall not swear falsely . . ."), (4) the public scrutiny and social approval of exemplary behavior patterns involving charity, piety and asceticism (alms, prayer, fasting), (5) the social control implicated by reciprocal surveillance, mutual censure, and democratic correction to conform with established custom and convention (you will be judged as you judge and get what you give), (6) the social ownership of public property ("treasures on earth"), and (7) the economic provision of life's necessities (concerning food and clothing).[29]

29. Baumann, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for Its Meaning,* 410–12.

The presentation of the "Antitheses" of Jesus, as Baumann describes them, is thus considered a call for the "reorientation" of the believer "to the Father in heaven rather than to the social approval of the religious establishment." Baumann maintains, "Point by point Jesus confronts the fixed institutional structures with a new understanding of one's place before God and man in a new kind of relationship characterized as the 'Kingdom of God.'" The sermon is a call to recognize the specific condition of the individual human soul in its relationship to God. Baumann writes:

> The institution insures its perpetuation into the future in continuity with its past while he who seeks the Kingdom of God and his righteousness lives in the eternal Now. His is not a disconnected, solitary, uncommitted, irresponsible, momentary existence but one filled with spontaneously vital meetings with God and other human beings. Jesus assumed the essential nature of man to be structural openness because any programmed depersonalized fixation with his relationships thwarts his spiritual potential and interferes with the "way that leads to life" by stifling the life of the spirit.[30]

Voegelin recounts the episode from 1 Timothy 6 in which Paul admonishes slaves in Ephesus to respect their masters as their brethren in Christ, and he equates it to the sixteenth-century revolt of German peasants "who, like the slaves of Ephesus, fell into the misunderstanding that the spiritual freedom of the renovated personality was a charter of social liberties." Voegelin goes on to note that "the transition from the idea of spiritual brotherhood to social revolt is the inevitable result of the tension between the invisible kingdom of Heaven and the all-too-visible order of this world in which it is embedded" (*CW,* 19:172).

This would seem to ignore the institutional response to very real problems that emerge in the social life of human beings and the unwillingness, or inability of, institutions to confront such problems in a realistic way. The tension between the experience of the individual in a position of immediacy to God and the institutional apparatus that is representative of that relationship is complicated, and the line between reform and

30. Ibid., 412.

revolution is a narrow one. "The goal of the Sermon on the Mount," Baumann argues,

> is not a utopian escape from social existence. Law and the prophets are to be fulfilled not through abolishing all institutions and exploring purely personal ways of conduct that lead directly to life eternal but rather by reifying and reauthenticating the corporate forms of existence so as to fulfill God's covenantal intentions for all his people. . . . The presence of personal openness challenges the institutional fixation from within by creating an intolerable tension which eventually forces it open, relativizes its absolute authority, and qualifies its unconditional validity. In the process of its revitalization, the institution, however, develops an inevitable hostility against the free spirit who surmounts it, resulting in a confrontation which in its crudest form eventuates in crucifixion.[31]

Social revolution is thus more than simply the inevitable result of a new spiritual freedom; it is also reflective of the inability of institutions that are intended to represent the life of the spirit to adapt to the new conditions with which they are presented. The line between reform and revolution is a thin one that requires mediation both individually and institutionally. The problem of Christian political order has been an inability to find the mean between the two.

Saint Augustine and the Construction of Christian History

With that said, however, Christianity made remarkable progress in the world into which it emerged. Already by the early fourth century, Christianity had become prominent enough for the emperor Constantine to legitimately convert to the new faith. This expansion was despite the problems of doctrinal purity and schism, persecutions by and conflicts with the pagans, and the generally unstable atmosphere of both the region and the period.[32]

31. Ibid., 412–13.
32. On the expansion of Christianity, see Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History;* LaTourette, *The First Five Centuries,* vol. 1 of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity;* and Chadwick, *The Early Church.*

This instability was in part what led Saint Augustine to apply himself to the task of explaining the meaning, or lack thereof, of history. Voegelin describes Saint Augustine as "one of the great epochal figures of mankind. His life and work summarize the four centuries of the Roman-Christian age and mark its end; and his work, being the *summa* of the age that has laid the foundation of Western Christian civilization, has remained the foundation of Christian thought to this day" (*CW,* 19:206).

Voegelin notes that by "the time of Augustine [354–430], Christian history had evolved along lines rather different from those envisaged in the imperial idea of Paul. The revealed kingdom of Heaven had progressed stupendously, but by no means to the extent that it could have absorbed paganism" (*CW,* 19:207). This development should come as no great surprise, since the Pauline vision was built around the impending *parousia,* the return of Christ and the gathering of the faithful into the kingdom fully revealed. When this did not occur, the historical existence of the Christian community in the world became somewhat problematic.[33]

The City of God had its origins in the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410. "The conquest of the symbol of Roman eternity by the barbarians had wide repercussions in popular sentiment, the pagans naturally branding the Christianization of the empire as the cause of the disaster, the Christians being deeply perturbed by the fact that even Christianization could not avert it." In response to the attack upon the faith by the pagans and the disquiet among the Christians, Augustine composed his great work. *The City of God,* as Voegelin points out, "began as an *oeuvre de circonstance:* books I–III appeared first as a political pamphlet to deal with the misunderstanding that Christianity was some kind of insurance against disaster" (*CW,* 19:209). In the context of the refutation of the pagans and in his attempt "to repair Christian confidence and to teach Christians what they should expect (and should not expect) of God's sovereignty over history,"[34] Augustine would create a new conception of history and drive the final nail into the coffin of the notion of cyclical recurrence that had been the focal point of Hellenic and Roman historiography.

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33. A contrary view is expressed by C. K. Barrett in his examination of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. See Barrett, "Luke-Acts," 84–95.

34. Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics,* 136.

Augustine retains the epochal construction of history. He divides the history of the world into six ages as "the analogue of creation," correlated to "the life of Christ," divided "by the generations of the ancestors of Jesus," and "as an analogue of the phases of human life." With the coming of Christ, the last age had begun. The world is now the "*saeculum senescens . . .* aging and tending toward an inevitable end." The inevitable end is, of course, the glorious realization of the Kingdom of God, however, for human beings in the here and now a problem still remains. Voegelin notes:

> The construction has only one weak point, but one of decisive importance: the history of the Christian world has no structure of its own. After the appearance of Christ, history simply goes on having no *internal* aim until at some unknown point of time the aimless course is cut short by the second appearance of Christ, an appearance that, as far as the internal structure of the Christian community life is concerned, might come today as well as tomorrow or in a thousand years. (*CW,* 19:211–12)

This understanding is, in turn, premised on Augustine's conception of parallel histories—of the division of history between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei.* In the Augustinian formulation, "History runs on a double plan: it is the sacred history of mankind expressed in the six symbolic ages, and it is the history of the good and the souls, beginning with the reign of God in the angel-state, going through the fall of the angels, the split between good and bad human souls, and ending in the reign of the righteous souls with Christ at the end of the world." However, the division between the two cities cannot be understood with reference to human institutions such as "church and state." The church may be "the militant representative" of the City of God on earth, but it is still simply "the kingdom of Christ *qualis nunc est* [as it is now], though not all members of the historical Church . . . will be members of the final Church, *qualis tunc erit* [as it will be then], when the tares are weeded out" (*CW,* 19:214).

Voegelin notes that what is missing from the analysis in the *City of God* is an extended discussion of profane history. For Augustine, the question of profane history was of little consequence because it was merely

a time of waiting for the end. As Löwith points out, however, from the "strictly religious viewpoint" of Augustine, "we cannot expect . . . a detailed interest in secular history as such."[35] The rise and fall of empires was a matter of little consequence for a man with his focus on eternity. Christopher Dawson argues that the Christian view of the mystery of history as expressed by Saint Augustine was "essentially the mystery of eternal life. It was not concerned with the life of nature or with culture as a part of the order of nature, but with the redemption and regeneration of humanity by the Incarnation of the Divine Word."[36]

For this reason, the cataloging and examination of profane history was a task that Augustine passed on to his student Orosius to complete. Both Augustine and Orosius, however, worked within the framework imposed by Paul's compromise with history in the formulation of the constitution of the Christian community: that is, their primary focus was upon the world as it was defined by the experience of the pagan, Israelitic, and Christian experience. The dynasties of the Parthian and Sassanid empires in the East were largely irrelevant. Voegelin notes that "the Orient simply dropped out of the Western horizon, though Eastern power did not show any sign of decline" (*CW,* 19:221)—which would have a profound effect upon the future development of the church when the East was rediscovered.

While Orosius's *Historiiae Adversum Paganos* may be "a systemic part of the Augustinian philosophy of politics and history," it also serves to illustrate the essential difference of Augustine's attitude toward profane history and the direction in which the understanding of profane history was heading. As Ernest L. Fortin observes, "In discharging his mandate, Orosius went well beyond the call of duty. His simpleminded thesis is that, far from boding ill for the Empire, Christianity was responsible for untold favors that had accrued to it in recent times."[37]

Voegelin notices the "symbolic parallel between the closing of the temple of Janus under Augustus and the birth of Jesus with the announcement of peace to all men of good will" (*CW,* 19:221). However, Voegelin

35. Löwith, *Meaning in History,* 171.
36. Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture,* 41.
37. Fortin, "Introduction," to *Augustine: Political Writings,* xvii. Fortin's judgment might be a little too harsh. See Löwith, *Meaning in History,* 174–81.

does not point out that Orosius's parallel construction takes place in the context of extolling the virtues of the empire and the triumph of Christianity by linking them. Whereas Augustine argues that the unity of the empire has been forged with "much slaughter and bloodshed" and extols the reader "who thinks with pain on all these great evils, so horrible, so ruthless," to "acknowledge that this is misery,"[38] Orosius sees in the civil wars the creation of the Christian empire. "Behold how under Christians and in these Christian times civil wars, even when they prove unavoidable are brought to a happy issue. The victory has been won, the city stands intact, the tyrant has been laid low."[39]

While Orosius takes joy in the "common fellowship" provided by the order of Rome, Augustine is more sanguine, arguing that "as far as this life of mortals is concerned, which is spent and ended in a few days, what does it matter under whose government a dying man lives, if they who govern do not force him to impiety and iniquity?"[40] Augustine may have broken the linkage between sacred and profane history, but his student saw in the profane the hand of God at work, moving humanity forward into a new age. Like Melito of Sardis, whom Voegelin quotes at the beginning of the section on the emergence of Christianity (*CW,* 19:149), Orosius sees the future of Christianity in Empire.[41]

The Tyconian Problem

Yet behind the construction of history in both Augustine and Orosius a problem was lurking as demonstrated by the Donatists in Northern Africa and the musings of Tyconius.[42] The issue that led to the schism

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38. Augustine, *The City of God* 19.7.683.

39. Orosius, *Historia* 7.33.

40. Ibid., 5.1; Augustine, *City of God* 5.17.166.

41. The linkage of Roman success to Christianity was, of course, a position taken by many of the Church fathers. See Dawson, *The Making of Europe,* 34–35.

42. See Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa.* On the relationship of Saint Augustine to the Donatist movement in particular, see Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy;* Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 224–48; and Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics,* 139–43. On Donatism and other heretical movements generally, see Clifton, *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics,* and O'Grady, *Heresy: Heretical Truth or Orthodox Error?*

between the Donatist church and the universal church concerned the readmission to the community of the faithful of those priests and bishops who had offered sacrifices to pagan gods under threat of persecution. More specifically, the issue that really caused the schism was the relationship of the sacrament to the priest who administered it. The sacraments of baptism and communion by which a person joined and acknowledged his or her membership in the community of the faithful were considered legitimate by the Donatists only if they were administered by one who had not been tainted by apostasy.

Voegelin lays out the essential doctrinal position of the Donatist church as developed by "its theorist" Tyconius:

> The Donatist Church was the true church, according to Tyconian theory, while the main church, which admitted the fallen brethren, stood outside the true church just as did the pagans. Tyconius went even further and admitted that within the true church there were imperfect members who did not actually participate in the spiritual *corpus mysticum* of the saints. Within the visible true church, there was, therefore, an invisible spiritual church of the perfect Christians. . . . This invisible church was the true *civitas Dei,* while the false brethren, the *separati* of the main church and the pagans, belonged to another unit, the *civitas diaboli,* the city of the devil. (*CW,* 19:213)

But even beyond the doctrinal construction of the two cities, the city of God and that of the devil, the Tyconian construction advocated the use of violence in order to maintain doctrinal discipline against the members of the city of the devil who refused to realize the error of their ways. This factor, combined with a rigid interpretation of the forms of Christian observance, marked the Donatists as among the first of many puritanical groups that would emerge throughout Christian history. Ultimately, the success or failure of the distinct Christian civilization would be dependent upon the ability of the church to either absorb such movements through reformist efforts or crush them so completely they would not emerge to terrorize the great body of the faithful. To the degree that the universal church adopted the rigorous doctrinal standards of the Donatists, however, the less representative it would be of the *corpus mixtum*

represented by the variety of human types that both Saint Paul and Saint Augustine see in the *civitas Dei.*

Conclusion

Saint Paul's dream of universal Christendom was not realized in the history of Rome, despite Orosius's and Melito's confident expressions of the new epoch linking the fate of Rome to the fate of Christianity. The idea of imperial Christianity would reemerge during the Middle Ages as the evocative underpinning of *sacrum imperium,* which is the subject of the next chapter.