patience with sloppy scholarship or ideological glossaries. But strict accuracy itself, linked with an attempt to make sense out of history, demands either that “leap into faith” which first produced history; or it demands that fall from faith which permits the historian to invest the future with a teleological dynamism intrinsic to the historic process. In any event the practice of history demands the Faith. A secularization of historia sacra is intelligible only in the light of the Sacred History of which it is a debasement.

Here is the supreme irony that runs through Israel and Revelation. Those of us who are Jews and Christians must thank Eric Voegelin for having brought it to light because only we can enjoy it. But the unbeliever himself must be willing to live this irony if he wishes to live within history. In the words of Hilaire Belloc: “Outside it is the night.”

The World of the Polis

The second volume of Eric Voegelin’s study of Order and History* appropriately takes its grand theme from St. Augustine’s De Vera Religione: “In the study of creature one should not exercise a vain and perishing curiosity, but ascend toward what is immortal and everlasting.” Voegelin’s own statement of his theme implies as well his philosophy of history: “Human existence in society has history because it has a dimension of spirit and freedom beyond mere animal existence.” (p. 2).

In man’s relationship to man, Voegelin has found that the enduring substance of history springs from man’s conscious relationship to God, to his awareness that “the destiny of man lies not in the future but in eternity.” (p. 4). Through revelation and social response, history merges with mystery. The recipients of revelation, whether priests, poets or philosophers, become the true prophets of history; they create the symbolic forms by which the substance and processes of history can be understood. Therefore, as Voegelin contends: “The Logos of history itself provides the instruments for the critical testing and ranking of the authoritative structure.” (p. 7). It follows from this that the chief problem in historical studies is to determine man’s conception of the nature and will of God, as revealed symbolically in the common order of society, and man’s response to that order, or to deviations from it.

Contrary to what might be supposed by contemporary secular-minded sociologists and historians, Voegelin’s philosophy of history and method are not based upon an a priori act of uncritical faith applied dogmatically to past civilizations. He has not

arbitrarily assumed a religious principle of order in history, and then utilized the scientific method to describe it. Quite the reverse. In his empirical examination of the minute texture and basic structure of past civilizations, he has discovered that the social order of each civilization is invariably embodied in its myths, philosophy and religion. Voegelin would certainly have agreed with Burke that history, in its empirical details and especially in the structure and movement of its basic order, reveals “the known march of the ordinary providence of God.” Therefore, Voegelin is wholly justified in asserting that “a philosophy of history . . . must be a critical study of the authoritative structure in the history of mankind.” (p. 7).

The full perception of a religious order in history is possible only after the historian has studied the past with a sympathetic mind, a mind that believes in order to understand. Conversely, the empirical-rationalist historian, in pursuit of supposedly “objective” scientific truths, frequently dismisses the symbolic forms of myth and religion as so much “prejudice” or “superstition.” The desire to be wholly emancipated from the myths of the past leads such historians to become doctrinaire a priori pseudo-scientific theorists. The boasted liberalism of such liberal historians is not liberal. They pre-judge the past before they have examined it, and can never truly understand it because their doctrinaire denial of myth blinds them to its symbolic meanings. This is particularly true of the various Gnostic theories of history, assumed or expounded by such men as Voltaire, Hegel, Marx, and Spengler, who either posit the idea of history as progress, or declare the end of history. As a corrective and challenge to such rationalist speculative philosophers and historians, and to all modern Gnostic movements which are blind to the religious order in history, Voegelin’s Order and History is an indispensable work.

In Volume I, Israel and Revelation, Voegelin examined the spirit and freedom of man in society as contained in the cosmological myths of the Mosaic and Sinaitic revelations, which gave historical consciousness, through symbolic forms, to the Chosen People of God. In The World of the Polis, his study of the Hellenic polis or city-state, in the Aegean area, “from the rule of the minos to the exhaustion of substance in Plato’s time” (p. 48), reveals a further range in his philosophy of history.

Before noting some of Voegelin’s outstanding historical insights, it is necessary to understand the origin and nature of the polis, and its relation to order in history. The polis probably derived from Hellenic tribes, military units and ship settlements, and in its origins was a “closed order of blood relationships.” (pp. 14-15). Although it originated in an aristocratic society, it received its dynamics from the people at large. The tensions between these groups converted the polis into “the autonomous, non-tribal unit of political order.” (p. 117). Except for emergencies which required a common defense, as against the Persians, attempts to federalize the polis generally failed; they were held together by force, or united loosely in spirit through common religious beliefs. The polis “began with Solon and the tyrant Peisistratus, and it came to a close with Cleophon, toward the end of the Peloponnesian War,” when it was “conquered by urbanized democracy.” (p. 120). The polis is significant because “effective participation in the history of order requires” at the least, “city-state cultures.” (p. 53). Not that the polis is an ethical norm for civilized culture. As Voegelin noted, the wars of the Greek polis were so atrocious that it was “considered a proof of humanity if only half the population of a city is massacred.” (p. 28). But the symbols of order were embodied in the polis, which provided a common organization of power based on a common myth.

Most of The World of the Polis consists of Voegelin’s description, critical analysis, and evaluation of the work of the great
poets, philosophers, statesmen, and historians who recognized, adhered to, or violated the common order of Hellenic society. The most perceptive insights into the spirit and freedom of the Greeks are revealed in the explication of passages from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the fragments from the Milesian philosophers—Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes—their successors Xenophanes, Heracleitus and Parmenides, the model statesman Solon, the tragedian Aeschylus, and the historians Herodotus and Thucydides.

Homer was the first to record “a symbolism which expressed a new experience of human experience under the gods, of the nature of order and the cause of disorder, and of the historical decline and fall of a society.” (p. 71). The two great instances in Homer of violations of Greek order—the wrath of Achilles (pp. 84-92) and the eros of Paris and Helen (pp. 92-98)—are a masterpiece of lucid explication and historical insight. In these episodes, and in the description of disorder in the *Odyssey* (pp. 98-102), Voegelin draws out the full significance of what it means that “the public knowledge of order, of themis, of what is right, is the foundation for the action of heroes.” (p. 107). It becomes increasingly clear as Greek history unfolds that the knowledge of order and adherence to ethical norms are practically identical. Like Homer, Hesiod held that Zeus was the god of a just political order, that “the rebellion against the order of Zeus is the cause of man’s misery.” (p. 142). Hesiod revealed the intimate relation “between experience and apocalyptic symbol;” in this pattern historians can find the essential order of Hellenic history.

It is clear that since order was an essential part of Hellenic man’s ethical norm, it could not merely be identified with those who possessed political power. Solon was the prototype of the spiritual statesman, like Plato’s philosopher-king, because “he shared the passions of the people;” yet “in his soul these passions had submitted to universal order.” (p. 199). After Parmenides, and increasingly to Plato, the new order in Greek philosophy was centered in the soul of man; the Way of Truth was found in an autonomous spiritual Logos. But as Voegelin says, “the revelation of God to man in history comes where God wills,” and for the Greeks the approximate role of Moses was given to Aeschylus:

If Aeschylus was no Moses for his people, he nevertheless discovered for it the psyche as the source of meaningful order for the polis in history. If he did not bring the law from Sinai, he laid the foundations for a philosophy of history. Plato’s philosophy of history derived from Aeschylean tragedy. (p. 264).

Like Aeschylus, Plato perceived that the tragic decline of Athens and ruinous anarchy of Hellas resulted from the loss of order following the triumph of the Sophists. The Athenian social order was the Sophistic conception of man and life writ large. Sophistic thought at once reflected and extended the moral disintegration of society. The section called “The Sophists” (pp. 267-333), is extremely applicable to twentieth century society. Even more than the post-revolutionary eighteenth century, which Burke condemned as the age of “sophisters, economists, and calculators,” our era reflects the attempt to found the order of man in society on empirical and comparative studies and relativistic morality. Plato condemned the Sophists as unprincipled dispensers of mere information and pragmatic cleverness, who replaced order in the soul with expedient intellectual calculation, and who devaluated the historical order “by the argument that the people change their laws, thereby admitting their injustice.” (p. 281).

But the philosophical paradigms of Plato and Aristotle cannot be dismissed by modern moral relativists as ideal (and therefore unreal) representations of the best polis. Both philosophers perceived the hi-
historical order of Hellas through philosophy, just as the Israelites had perceived their order through divine revelation; but these respective spiritual visions were possible because they were grounded in history. As Voegelin has said: "The Laws is the sublime expression of the experiences which connected the order of classic Hellas with its origins." (p. 44). The truth, therefore, is not that Plato was an unrealistic idealist, but that the Sophists were as blind to the historical order of Hellas as their modern counterparts are to the religious order of Western society. The implications of this spiritual blindness are most evident in Thucydides. In recognizing the common order of Hellenic society, for all his refinements upon the methods of Herodotus, Thucydides could not conceive an alternative to his Periclean prince:

This absence of a spiritual reforming personality not only from the reality of Athens, but even from the imagination of a Thucydides, shows clearly that an age of political culture had irrevocably come to its end. The time of the polis was running out; a new epoch of order began with Socrates and Plato (pp. 364-365).

Without a sustaining spiritual vision of order in history, the polis perished, and with its demise Hellenic civilization declined.

Voegelin's erudite study has not been exercised merely upon perishing empirical phenomena. He has distilled the essence of the world of the polis; he has ascended to what is immortal in Greek civilization, and his achievement is a great monument to the spirit of both Hellenic and modern man.

Plato and Aristotle

Peter Stanlis

The third volume of Voegelin's Order and History* completes his study of Greek civilization by explicating the Platonic and Aristotelian revelations of the cosmos, the polis and man's soul, and presents a view of order and history which is permeated with rich significance for the middle of the twentieth century.

The philosophical conflict which largely determined the course and spirit of order in Greek history was waged between Socrates, Plato and, to a degree, Aristotle on the one hand, as against such Sophists as Callicles, Polus and Thrasymachus, and the pharisaical leaders of the corrupt order

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