On the philosophies of Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, and Eric Voegelin

Western Civilization in the Light of the Philosophy of History

Glenn N. Schram

We must begin by asking what the philosophy of history is. Unlike the German historian Leopold von Ranke, the philosopher of history is not content to describe simply “how it actually was.” The philosopher of history looks, rather, for recurrent patterns in historical events. At his most ambitious, he tries to find recurrent cyclical patterns, or series of successive events. But, as we shall see, not all the recurrent patterns sought by philosophers of history are cyclical.

Our concern will be with the three philosophies of history which come most readily to mind when one considers the present and prospective state of Western civilization in the light of the “lessons of history.” The philosophies are those of Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, and Eric Voegelin. We shall be concerned with their philosophies, not for their own sake, but for whatever light they may shed on Western civilization as it exists now and as it may evolve in the future.

I

Our first task is to sort out what Spengler, Toynbee, and Voegelin were and were not doing. Toynbee was plainly responding to Spengler; and Voegelin, to Spengler and Toynbee. However widely they cast their nets, it is clear that Spengler and Toynbee were primarily concerned with two civilizations—the Greco-Roman, which they considered one, and which Toynbee persisted in terming the Hellenic, and our own Western Christendom, as Toynbee called it. Similarly, Voegelin was primarily concerned with Hellas, the ancient Near East, and the modern West.

Of the three philosophies, Spengler’s was the most deterministic. Spengler maintained that civilizations pass through springs, summers, autumns, and winters as ineluctably as years do. But for all his rejection of determinism, Toynbee tried very hard to force all the civilizations of the world, including our own, into the cycle of events that he observed in the Hellenic civilization, his difference from Spengler being his concessions that the fit is not a historical necessity, and that there is no reason in principle why a civilization must die.

But for all his rejection of determinism, Toynbee tried very hard to force all the civilizations of the world, including our own, into the cycle of events that he observed in the Hellenic civilization, his difference from Spengler being his concessions that the fit is not a historical necessity, and that there is no reason in principle why a civilization must die.
The key to Voegelin’s approach to these matters is contained in the following sentence from the first page of the first volume of his Order and History: “[W]hile there is no simple pattern of progress or cycles running through history, its process is intelligible as a struggle for true order.”

While Voegelin thus rejected Spengler’s and Toynbee’s attempts to find a recurrent cycle in the histories of civilizations, he was nonetheless concerned to see patterns in these histories, and he conceived of two basic types.

In the first, where the society is thought of as a microcosm of the universe, or a cosmion, the rulers of the society are seen as representatives of the gods of the universe. In the second type of historical pattern, where the society is viewed as a macroanthropos, or man writ large, the social order reflects the orders of the souls of the rulers, if indeed their souls are ordered. Souls consist of reason, spirit (in the sense in which one speaks of youthful high spirits), and appetite. A soul is ordered if reason is in the ascendancy in it owing to its attunement to transcendent reality, or God. Aberrations from this latter, paradigmatic state of the rulers’ souls result in social disorder.

Despite his expressed intentions, however, Voegelin was not above detecting cyclical patterns in the histories of civilizations; for he maintained that the pattern described by Plato in the Republic, whereby societies descend from timocracies to oligarchies, then to democracies, and finally to tyrannies, had occurred, in however blurred a fashion, in many real-world civilizations, presumably including our own, although we have not yet reached the stage of tyranny, at least not in America.

While we are still dealing with the methods and purposes of our philosophers, it is necessary to introduce Voegelin’s concept of the self-interpretation of a society in its relation to transcendent reality, for the subject arises at the beginnings of both Order and History and The New Science of Politics. The second and third sentences of the former read:

Every society is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human. And the attempts to find the symbolic forms that will adequately express the meaning, while imperfect, do not form a senseless series of failures.

In the third sentence of The New Science of Politics Voegelin promises the reader “an exploration of the symbols by which political societies interpret themselves as representatives of a transcendent truth.”

The phenomenon to which Voegelin refers in these two passages is sometimes called a civil theology, and this usage is unexceptionable as long as one keeps in mind the fact that, when Voegelin uses the term “civil theology,” he has in mind something different. To avoid semantic confusion, the matter must be adumbrated.

St. Augustine, in the City of God, quotes the Stoic Varro as having defined the civil theology of ancient Rome, in contradistinction to the “fabulous” and “natural” theologies, as “that which citizens in cities, and especially the priests, ought to know and to administer.” Varro continues on the subject of the civil theology: “From it is to be known what god each one may suitably worship, what sacred rites and sacrifices each one may suitably perform.” Now this civil theology in the sense of popular religious beliefs and rites is plainly not what Voegelin has in mind at the beginnings of his two great works. The careful reader of The New Science of Politics must keep in mind the ambiguity of the term “civil theology” if he is not to be confused by Voegelin’s subsequent assertion that Hobbes intended to establish Christianity as “an English theologìa civilis in the Varronic sense.”

Before leaving the subject of the relations between Augustine and Voegelin, we ought to deal with the nature of order itself. “Order,” according to Augustine, “is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place.” Voegelin sometimes speaks as if a ruler in Whose soul there is little or no order may
nonetheless ensure a kind of order in Augustine’s sense, as he does, for example, to the extent that he enforces the civil and criminal laws. The same ruler may contribute to social peace, peace and order being virtually synonymous in Augustine’s vocabulary, wherein the peace of a body consists “in the duly proportioned arrangement of its parts.”

II

Let us now look in greater detail at each of the three philosophies. We shall begin with that of Spengler, which was temporarily the first, the original German edition of The Decline of the West having appeared in 1918. Spengler presents extreme difficulties for exegesis, for he addresses himself to so wide a range of issues that, even when he is talking about something in which one has some expertise, one cannot be sure whether one is dealing with profound insights, the sheerest speculation, or a little of both, and frequently one concludes that one is probably faced with a bit of both. We must postpone for a moment a discussion of Spengler’s concept of civilization, and note simply that he identifies two different “souls” with the Greco-Roman and our own Western civilization.

He wrote at a time when it was common to describe phenomena in terms of dualities of pagan deities and mythic heroes. Just as Nietzsche discovered the spirits of both Apollo and Dionysus, the former characterized by freedom under law and the latter by drunken revelry, at the heart of Attic tragedy, and just as theologians sometimes conceive of two basic types of sin, the Promethean (or sins of pride) and the Dionysian (or sins of sensuality), so Spengler urges our belief that the “soul” of the Greco-Roman world was Apollonian and that the “soul” of our own part of the contemporary world is Faustian.

There are two problems here. One wonders, first, what happened to the Dionysian aspect of Greek tragedy, and, second, how the author can consider all the following to be Faustian: “Galilean dynamics, Catholic and Protestant dogmatics, the great dynasties of the Baroque with their cabinet diplomacy, the destiny of Lear and the Madonna–ideal from Dante’s Beatrice to the last line of Faust II.” Also Faustian is the painting “which forms space by means of light and shade.” Faustian existence is led “with a deep consciousness and introspection of the ego, and a resolutely personal culture evidenced in memoirs, reflections, retrospects and prospects and conscience.” What all this has in common and how it all connects with Faust is hard to say, although I suspect that Spengler may have thought the common denominator and the point of connection to lie in dynamism and a will to power. It should be added that he speaks of a third type of soul, the Arabian or “Magian” of the ancient Near East, but it is of less interest than the Faustian and Apollonian souls.

Very early in The Decline of the West, Spengler makes observations relevant to the work of the two greatest twentieth-century critics of modern political thought from a classical perspective, Voegelin and Leo Strauss. Voegelin, as we shall learn, sees the spirit of a twelfth-century monk, Joachim of Floris, as animating most modern political thought, which, insofar as it is so animated, Voegelin calls gnostic. When Voegelin was still young enough to be one of Spengler’s pupils, Spengler was describing the influence of Joachim and identifying it with gnosticism. In a passage lacking Voegelin’s precision, but containing ideas which would later become associated with Voegelin, Spengler writes:

On the very threshold of the Western Culture we meet the great Joachim of Floris (c. 1145–1202), the first thinker of the Hegelian stamp who shattered the dualistic world-form of Augustine, and with his essentially Gothic intellect stated the new Christianity of his time in the form of a third term to the religions of the Old and the New Testaments, expressing them respectively as the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son and the Age of the Holy Ghost. His teaching . . . awakened a world-outlook which slowly but surely took entire possession of the historical sense of our culture. . . . Ibsen treats it
with thoroughness in his *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), in which he directly presents the Gnostic world-conception through the figure of the wizard Maximus...  

As for Strauss, in reading him I had often wondered whom he had in mind when he denounced the historical relativisms of values and beliefs which he termed historicism. Spengler, it turns out, was the probable enemy; he actually bemoans the lack in the typical Western thinker of insight into the historically relative character of his data, which are expressions of one specific existence and one only; knowledge of the necessary limits of their validity; the conviction that his "unshakable" truths and "eternal" views are simply true for him and eternal for his world-view; the duty of looking beyond them to find out what the men of other Cultures have with equal certainty evolved out of themselves [Spengler's emphasis].

We come now to the aspect of Spengler's work which is the most important to us in our search for insight into the nature of Western civilization. Spengler speaks of the transitions of societies from cultures to civilizations. It does not make a great deal of difference to me whether he is right in placing the Greco-Roman transition in the fourth century B.C. or the modern-Western transition at about A.D. 1800 (though he also says that it took place during the course of the nineteenth century), or that he places Kant on one side of the dividing line and Hegel, along with Schopenhauer, on the other side.

Nor am I bothered by the fact that Spengler's distinction may have played into the hands of twentieth-century German romantics who used it as a false basis for asserting the virtues of German Kultur over Western Zivilisation. Nor am I disturbed by the fact that Hamburg and Berlin today are proud to call themselves Weltstädte, or world cities (Spengler's translator uses the unfortunate term megalopolis), whereas Spengler employed the concept as one of abuse. The important fact is that a transition of the kind that Spengler has in mind has occurred in the West, and that we are poorer as a result. In a culture, ethics is mainly a matter of instinct or intuition, and philosophy can afford to devote itself largely to metaphysics. In a civilization, intellectual life is so dispirited and right and wrong are so much debated, that philosophy becomes little more than ethics, and utilitarian ethics at that, quite in keeping with the decline in art and the growth in mechanics which are also part of the transition from culture to civilization. Intellectual life moves from Athens to Alexandria, from Florence, Nuremberg, and Bruges to artificial and rootless existence in such world cities as Paris, Berlin, and New York—small pockets in which everything is decided.

In the West, from the Dutch masters with their metaphysically significant hues of brown, painting moves to the superficialities of impressionism before petering out altogether; and similar developments take place in architecture, which by now can only copy great styles of the past, and in music, about which Spengler would no doubt have said more had he fully experienced the works of Arnold Schoenberg and had he lived to read Thomas Mann's discussion of Schoenbergian nihilism in his novel *Doctor Faustus*, the last major work of literature produced in the West (Mann wrote it in exile in Los Angeles, with Theodor W. Adorno, known to most social scientists as a co-author of *The Authoritarian Personality*, advising him on musicology). In short, a civilization is a culture which has become spiritually spent, and, implicitly, there is little hope for the life of the mind in it, beyond sheer antiquarianism, unless a spiritual reawakening occurs among the agents of cultural formation in the society. Two passages make these points effectively:

And the bitter conclusion is that it is all irretrievably over with the arts of form [painting, architecture, sculpture, music] of the West. The crisis of the nineteenth century was the death-struggle. Like the Apollonian the Egyptian and every other, the Faustian art dies of senility, having actualized its
inward possibilities and fulfilled its mission within the course of its Culture.19

Every soul has religion, which is only another word for its existence. All living forms in which it expresses itself—all arts, doctrines, customs, all metaphysical and mathematical form—worlds, all ornaments, every column and verse and idea—are ultimately religious, and must be so. But from the setting-in of Civilization they cannot be so any longer. As the essence of every Culture is religion, so—and consequently—the essence of every Civilization is irreligion—the two words are synonymous [Spengler's emphasis].20

The gravity of these matters might be relieved, and the transition from Spengler to Toynbee facilitated, by citing a couple of anecdotes. Spengler and Toynbee wrote at a time when relations between Germany and Great Britain were severely strained. Though their works are remarkably free of jingoism, Spengler could not resist recalling in The Decline of the West the words of George Canning, the British statesman, at the beginning of the nineteenth century: “South America free! and if possible English!”21 Nor could Toynbee abstain from relating in A Study of History how Field Marshall Gebhard von Blücher, on a visit to London after the Battle of Waterloo, is supposed to have exclaimed upon seeing a street which surpassed anything in Prussia: “What plunder!”22

III

With Toynbee we come to a writer who is remarkably free of the style of German metaphysical philosophy which Spengler affected and which makes him difficult to read, both in the original and in translation. In Toynbee we find a writer whose measured, cadenced prose recalls, at its best, that of Macaulay among English historians and who, while unmetaphysical in a philosophical sense, is certainly not irre- ligious. The first three volumes of his A Study of History were published in 1933 and the next three in 1939; the six remaining volumes, as well as D. C. Somervell's two-volume abridgment of the first ten volumes, appeared after World War II, Somervell's first volume in 1947, and his second in 1957.

We shall begin by examining cursorily Toynbee's account of the pattern whereby civilizations rise and fall; we shall then look at his account of why they fall; and we shall conclude with a study of how our contemporary Western civilization fits, or fails to fit, into Toynbee's scheme. It will be recalled that Toynbee, like Spengler, treats the Greco—Roman, or Hellenic, civilization as one. On the subject of Rome it would probably be best to listen once again to Spengler, this time as he treats Rome in the context of the transition from culture to civilization in the classical age:

So, for the first time, we are enabled to understand the Romans as the successors of the Greeks. . . . Unspiritual, unphilosophical, devoid of art, clannish to the point of brutality, aiming relentlessly at tangible successes, they stand between the Hellenic Culture and nothingness. An imagination directed purely to practical objects—they had religious laws governing godward relations as they had other laws governing human relations, but there was no specifically Roman saga of gods—was something which is not found at all in Athens. In a word, Greek soul—Roman intellect; and this antithesis is the differentia between Culture and Civilization [Spengler's emphasis].23

Let us agree from now on to apply the word civilization to the conglomerate which Spengler would describe as a culture together with its successor civilization. Thus we can in good conscience refer with Toynbee to the Hellenic civilization. Unfortunately, Toynbee is of little help in the definition of civilizations; he conceives of them as nonprimitive societies which are “intelligible fields of study.”24 Still, he offers a description of the pattern whereby civilizations rise and fall; if we concentrate on the highlights, the pattern is quite simple.

There arise in a society a creative minority and a group of followers; the ascendancy of the minority is ensured by mimesis, the practice whereby their ex-
ample is imitated by the followers. Then there occurs a breakdown in the civilization, or a failure of self-determination. An examination of the historical record would prove a "broken-down society... to have forfeited a salutary freedom of choice through having fallen under the bondage of some idol of its own making," such as individual parochial states in which the society may have "articulated" itself. The breakdown may occur relatively early in the history of the civilization and many centuries before it ceases to exist. In the Hellenic civilization it occurred with the Atheno-Peloponnesian War.

After the breakdown, mimesis ceases to work, and the creative minority becomes a dominant minority; the followers become a proletariat, defined in non-Marxian terms as "any social element or group which in some way is in but not of any given society at any period of that society's history." More particularly, there develop an internal proletariat in the territory proper of the civilization and, beyond the frontiers, among those who once bathed in the glow of the civilization, an external proletariat. From the latter are recruited the "barbarian war-bands" who, after what may be a centuries-long period of disintegration, ultimately administer the coup de grâce to the civilization.

Toynbee is adamant on the point that civilizations fall as a result of self-inflicted wounds frequently incurred in interstate or interclass warfare. Interstate warfare, he says, is always a danger.

On the other hand, the horizontal schism of a society along lines of class is not only peculiar to civilizations but is also a phenomenon which appears at the moment of their breakdowns and which is a distinctive mark of the periods of breakdown and disintegration, by contrast with its absence during the phases of genesis and growth.

A related problem is the rise of barbarism from within civilizations themselves.

A complete elimination of the barbarism of the external proletariat would warrant no more than a mild elation, since we have convinced ourselves (if there is any virtue in this Study) that the destruction which has overtaken a number of civilizations in the past has never been the work of any external agency, but has always been in the nature of an act of suicide.

As specific examples of barbarians arising within a civilization Toynbee cites the Fascii di Combattimento in Italy and the Sturmbaetteitung (SA, or Storm Troopers) in Germany.

As for the fit, or lack thereof, of contemporary Western civilization into Toynbee's scheme, two general observations can be made. First, the articulation of Western civilization in nation-states presents problems for the use of mimesis as a concept. It may just be permissible to conceive of an entire nation, such as Italy during the Renaissance, as a creative minority exercising a mimetic attraction over the rest of the civilization. But the utility of the concept becomes questionable when the author attributes the French Revolution to both the presence and the absence of mimesis. The French revolutionaries of 1789 are described as behaving mimetically toward their English predecessors of a century earlier and toward the American patriots of 1776; but at the same time revolutions are ascribed to an absence of mimesis, presumably in the sense that, had (in the instance of France) the ancien régime exercised exemplary leadership in dealing with social problems, the revolutions would never have broken out.

Second, Toynbee seems to be unsure about whether and, if so, to what extent, Western civilization has broken down and gone into disintegration. On the one hand he tells us that the abandonment of a traditional artistic style, such as we have observed in the West, "is an indication that the civilization associated with that style has long since broken down and is now disintegrating." But he also tells us that, while the Orthodox Christian civilization broke down at the outbreak of the Romano-Bulgarian War in 977, "the sister civilization, which is our own, was unquestionably growing for several centuries.
When Toynbee sees health in the Western status quo, he finds it in the continued vitality of religion. When he holds out hope for change for the better, he sees it as lying in a religious renaissance. In the attitude which holds religion to be a fiction and an object of jest, he sees the danger of a spiritual vacuum.

This attitude of mind, which sterilized fanaticism at the cost of extinguishing faith, has lasted from the seventeenth century into the twentieth, and has been carried to such lengths in all parts of our Westernized "Great Society" that it is beginning at last to be recognized for what it is. It is being recognized, that is to say, as the supreme danger to the spiritual health and even to the material existence of the Western body social—a deadlier danger, by far, than any of our hotly canvassed and loudly advertised political and economic maladies.

The mention of religion calls Voegelin to mind, and it is interesting to observe that there is a point at which Toynbee, for all his lack of metaphysical philosophy, seems to resemble Voegelin; for he speaks of the universal states into which civilizations organize themselves as they approach the ends of their histories (e.g., the Roman Empire) as cosmions (to use Voegelin's term) in which the states are considered representative of the universe. It is unclear, however, to what extent their rulers are considered representatives of the gods of the universe, and thus we must be wary of a too facile equation of Voegelin's and Toynbee's views. In any case, it is to Voegelin that we now turn.

IV

Voegelin's most important contributions to the philosophy of history, as to political philosophy, were The New Science of Politics (1952) and the first three volumes of Order and History (1956 and 1957). His methodology has already been discussed at some length in the first section of this article. Here I should like to begin by discussing the significance of his being Viennese for an understanding of his work. The Daunbian Hapsburg Monarchy, which, according to Toynbee, from the standpoint of London or Paris, was no more than one among several parochial Powers in a politically divided Western World, had all the appearance and properties of a Western universal state in the eyes of its own subjects and also in those of its non-Western neighbors and adversaries, against whom it served as a "carapace" or shield for the whole body of a Western Christian Society whose sheltered members remained unappreciative beneficiaries of the Monarchy's oecumenical mission.

Having lived in a place where the barbarians (or at least the Ottoman Turks) had literally stood before the gates, Voegelin was naturally interested in the subject of invading Eastern hordes. They were of still greater interest when they appealed to the fascination held for him by the religious and pseudoreligious symbols and motives of political behavior. Tamerlane, to whose portrayal by the humanists of the Italian Renaissance Voegelin devoted considerable research, had appeared to Europeans as a savior sent from nowhere against the Mongol Khans, who believed themselves to have divine orders for the subjection of Europe, receive considerable attention in The New Science of Politics. Nor does the author leave the analogy to Soviet Communism solely to the reader's imagination.

When it came to domestic politics, Voegelin had an allgemeine Ideologiekverdacht, or general suspicion of ideologies (he borrowed the term from Karl Mannheim)—a suspicion traceable at least in part to the spectacle of ideologically based parties doing battle with one another in the Austrian and German Parliaments during the 1920s. When Voegelin speaks of the confrontation of "truth" with "truth" (sometimes with quotation marks and sometimes without), it is well to keep these scenes in mind. There is, however, another, more important reason for his distrust of ideologies, and it has to do with the mode of thinking introduced into the
West by Joachim of Floris.

The mode of thought looks for things to get better and better in one or more ways until a state of moral perfection is reached on earth. Toynbee sees what he calls the Late Modern Age (the period from 1675 to 1875) as an age of faith in progress and human perfectibility, but this faith in fact marks the entire modern era. Joachim looked forward to a sort of heaven on earth. Most modern political thought, including most if not all contemporary political ideologies, surpasses him by offering formulae whereby it is believed that through political action the golden age can be attained.

Voegelin calls this way of thinking gnostic because it shares with the gnostics of antiquity the confidence that it has a recipe for deliverance from the evils of the world. He considers it pseudoreligious because it looks forward to conditions comparable to those of the millennium as described in Revelation 20, wherein there is no evil. Frequently the self-interpretations of modern states, or their civil theologies in the non-Varronic sense, are gnostic, Communism being the most obvious and most extreme example, now largely disappeared, is America’s perception of itself as redeeming the world for democracy.

One of the more difficult questions for students of Voegelin is that of the precise nature of his attitude toward contemporary political ideologies. He sometimes speaks as if he believed them all to be gnostic. This point of view, if indeed it is his followers who are Christians and who want to participate in politics without committing a sin. The difficulty with gnosticism, from a theological perspective, is that, in trying in effect to eliminate one or another aspect of original sin from the world, gnostics are guilty of sinful pride; for to remove original sin would be to recreate man, which only God could do.

In particular, what about conservatism in the Anglo-American world and Christian Democratism on the Continent—ideologies which Voegelin’s followers might be especially inclined to adopt? Voegelin addresses himself to these ideologies in his essay, “What Is Political Reality?” He refers to them as secondary ideologies, chiefly because they are reactions to extreme ideologies such as Communism and Fascism. Are the reactive movements themselves gnostic? Voegelin seems to think not, although he criticizes them for failing to clarify, through Platonic reason, the origin of the order of the soul in existential tension with the divine Ground, and thus for failing to offer an effective answer to the gnostic ideologies.

If Voegelin were still alive, if he were asked to comment on the present state of Western civilization, and if he answered frankly, he would, I believe, make two major criticisms and one suggestion:

1. Having in mind the idea of society as a macroanthropos, and relying on Plato’s description of the cycle through which societies go in the process of their decline, Voegelin would say that Western civilization is becoming more and more democratic. This observation refers not just to our form of government (which has much to commend it from a Christian perspective), but also to the type of men who are increasingly acquiring positions of power, especially in the entertainment industry. Democratic man as conceived of by Plato is insolent, disrespectful of authority, and given to extreme sensuality; and, when a society is such a man writ large, it is not a happy society. Nor are its prospects favorable. For, while democratic man is far from perfect, he is not nearly so bad as the tyrant who, according to both Plato and Voegelin, follows more or less inevitably in his wake.

2. Voegelin would also be critical of the fact that gnosticism, though generally unreligious or even antireligious since the Enlightenment, is now making increasing inroads in the churches. He would cite a great deal of the peace-and-justice movement as mildly gnostic and liberation theology as more extreme. The problem with mild gnosticism is that it creates a mental disposition toward more extreme gnostic ideologies; the problem with extreme gnosticism is that it requires a totalitarian government to implement its designs.
Ecclesiastical gnosticism is joined by egalitarianism, socialism, some liberalism, and a variety of liberationisms in the secular world to create a civilization whose major theme is gnosticism.

Voegelin's suggestion would be that a renaissance of traditional, nongnostic religion take place, if the danger of recurrent totalitarianism, which feeds on societies dominated by democratic men and beset by gnostic aspirations, is to be reduced. Because of the ongoing danger of totalitarianism, Voegelin believed spiritual regeneration to be the burning problem of the age. It is true that he was a Platonist and a mystic. But he would not let this fact prevent him from recommending doctrinal religion to those who can believe in it.

What are we to conclude about Western civilization from our study of Spengler, Toynbee, and Voegelin? From Spengler emerges the fact that our civilization is so dispirited as to be incapable of significant creativity in the fields of painting, architecture, sculpture, and music. To this list may be added literature, for, after Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus, little if anything remains to be said. Mann himself recognized the import of his novel when he wrote:

[The music, inssofar as the novel treats of it ... was only foreground and representation, only a paradigm for something more general, only a means to express the situation of art in general, of culture, even of man and the intellect itself in our so critical era. A novel of music? Yes. But it was also conceived as a novel of the culture and the era.]

Even if an artist is a man of faith, he will be prevented by the conditions of the current cultural environment from creating a major work. Only a spiritual renaissance among the agents of cultural formation could produce the conditions under which artistic creativity of rank would again be possible.

To be sure, Spengler adhered so rigidly to his cyclical view of history as to believe that Western civilization could do nothing but go off and die. In light of this extreme position, it is important to remember Toynbee's advice that there is no reason in principle why a civilization must cease to exist. Very likely Spengler viewed himself as a product of his time and was not a man of faith, whereas Toynbee and Voegelin in his way were. But all three recognized the importance of religion and would value a rebirth of it in the West if they were still alive.

Toynbee's account of the factors involved in the rises and falls of civilizations is generally inconclusive as far as the West is concerned except for his insistence (1) that a number of civilizations have died at their own hands, (2) that barbarians may arise from within civilizations, and (3) that irreligion is a threat to the very existence of Western civilization. Toynbee's insistence on these points needs to be seen in conjunction with Voegelin's warnings about gnosticism and about the tendency of democracy to give way to tyranny.

If Toynbee and Voegelin are right, as I believe they are, then our Western nation-states, and the United States in particular, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to takeover by tyrants, very possibly tyrants at the head of barbarian mass movements with extremely gnostic aspirations. A renaissance of religion would check the worst democratic tendencies and curb the gnosticism of Western nation-states, thereby alleviating Voegelin's apprehensions; and it would reduce the danger of home-grown barbarians putting an end to civilization in one or more of these states, thereby stilling Toynbee's fears.