

# *Karl Löwith and Eric Voegelin on Christianity and History*

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QUESTIONS ABOUT THE relationship of modernity to Christianity are frequently raised, not least by conservatives of theological as well as political varieties. Does a Christian view of history and society demand a negative appraisal of the modern world? Or should a Christian be at peace with the world, be it modern, postmodern, or of some other classification? A debate which was opened up 50 years ago may offer an enlightening inroad to understanding and answering such questions.

Around 1950 two books appeared that were destined to create a stir among historians and philosophers alike. Both books questioned in a most basic way what came to be called the legitimacy of the entire modern age. These books, Karl Löwith's *Meaning in History* (1949) and Eric Voegelin's *New Science of Politics* (1952), are complex yet concise and immensely readable works by two German thinkers whose thought was profoundly affected by the rise of Nazism in their native country. In both Löwith and Voegelin we find an attempt to return to classical and Christian sources of politi-

cal thought in order to counteract the totalitarian tendencies of the twentieth century. What this attempt amounts to in Löwith as well as in Voegelin is a strong condemnation of modernity: The roots of modern totalitarianism are not to be found in the madness of a few disturbed individuals; nor are totalitarianism and modern barbarism simply a "recurrence" of non-liberal streams of ancient and medieval thought. Rather, totalitarianism is a distinctly modern phenomenon, the result of a way of thought that builds on a Christian foundation, but that at the same time has forgotten crucial insights best articulated by thinkers associated with Greek and early Christian thought. On the basis of this, Löwith and Voegelin have often been characterized as *secularization* theorists in the sense that they are thinkers who believe that modern thought has taken over important traits from Christianity, while at the same time adopting a thoroughly this-worldly ontology. Or, to put it differently, Löwith and Voegelin are thinkers who believe that the modern age builds on distinctively Christian elements, has maintained many of Christianity's most important features, but has left out the most important element of it: belief in a transcendent God.<sup>1</sup>

This essay will attempt to re-focus our attention on certain key points in Löwith's

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and Voegelin's critique of modernity. The two certainly have their internal differences. Overall, Löwith seems harder to place as a thinker. He has been described as an Augustinian, an Aristotelian, and a Stoic.<sup>2</sup> Voegelin also defies easy classification as a thinker, but it seems fair to say that there exists an Aristotelian grounding for his political philosophy, and Voegelin is often thought of as a more explicitly Christian thinker than Löwith, even though Voegelin's personal as well as philosophical relationship to Christianity has been hotly debated.<sup>3</sup> For the limited purpose of this article, however, it is legitimate to treat Löwith and Voegelin together, since their aim in the two books under consideration is much the same. Indeed, Löwith's book was an important source of inspiration to Voegelin during the latter's work on the *New Science of Politics*.

In order to place these two thinkers in a fruitful and challenging context, I will draw on some perspectives from a famous critic of Löwith and Voegelin, Hans Blumenberg, who on a broadly Cartesian and Kantian basis has tried to revise and eventually discard the theory of secularization found in Löwith and Voegelin. Finally, I will revisit two contemporary Christian thinkers, the evangelical theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg and the Catholic historian of ideas Francis Oakley, who have both put forward an alternative to what we can call the Löwith-Voegelin thesis, as well as Blumenberg's "self-assertion" theory. All these thinkers make an important contribution to a debate which is neither dead nor irrelevant as we stand at the dawn of the third Christian millennium: the *Querrelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.

According to Voegelin, partly building on Karl Löwith, the essence of modernity is its immanentism. This can be contrasted with St. Augustine's model for a Christian view of history, which accorded

real meaning only to transcendent history.<sup>4</sup> With the term "transcendent history" must be understood the history of the *civitas Dei*, i.e., the history of eschatological fulfillment. This is a history that is certainly also reflected in life on earth; in the sacred history of the Old Testament, in the appearance of Christ, and in the earthly pilgrimage of the Church. But it is not a history which foresees any imminent, this-worldly resolution to profane life and its many problems. It is a history which after the resurrection of Christ has entered its last and "old" age (the *senescens saeculum*)—which, according to the Augustinian scheme, is the sixth and final age, in which the world must patiently await the *pax coelestis*, the heavenly peace. The rise and the fall of empires in this final age point to no coming earthly paradise toward which human beings can work and strive. Man must "merely" be patient and hopeful.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the cyclic history of the Greeks; it is a conception of a history with a beginning and an end. But both the beginning and the end are in the hands of a God whose ultimate purpose is known only to Him. It is, in Löwith's words, not a "philosophy of history," but only "a scheme of redemption through Christ."<sup>6</sup> It is impatience with this defeatism with regard to the mundane sphere of existence that in due course produced a new kind of eschatology, according to Löwith and Voegelin. With Joachim of Fiore (1131-1202) we see a first attempt at an "immanentization" of historical meaning, still fairly closely connected to a Christian worldview, but nonetheless containing a detailed speculation about profane history, which is clearly non-Augustinian. When this develops even further—into what Voegelin calls the "second phase" of immanentization, or the process "from humanism to enlightenment"<sup>7</sup>—meaning in history has become completely this-worldly, and we have

reached the stage of secularization.

This brief summary of the road from Augustinian Christianity to secularization describes traits we find in both Löwith and Voegelin. But Voegelin famously adds to this picture by describing the modern view of history as a new version of an ancient heresy, Gnosticism.<sup>8</sup> Gnosticism, in all its varieties, deals essentially with the escape from the world. In its original forms this “escape” or “deliverance” was the work of a hidden, mysterious God who was juxtaposed to the force of evil that had created the chaotic world in which we live. In modern Gnosticism the deliverance is seen to be an event in profane history through, for instance, the dialectical process envisioned by Communism (Marx), or the assumption of a will of nature which transforms man into “Superman” (Nietzsche).<sup>9</sup>

In Löwith, the major element of the emergence of modernity is not Gnosticism specifically, as it is in Voegelin’s *New Science of Politics*, but more generally a revolt against the Christian view of history. In Löwith’s view, the original Christian understanding of history, with roots going back to St. Augustine and to the New Testament itself, gives to mundane events no transcendent meaning. According to this view, history is meaningful only insofar as it pertains to salvific history. Only the revealed acts of God, most significantly the incarnation of God through Christ, are truly meaningful in the proper sense of the term. The incarnation is the “central event” that gives meaning both backwards and forwards in history. There is thus no “Christian interpretation of history” that can be seen apart from the incarnation.<sup>10</sup>

This is what is lost so thoroughly, according to Löwith, in the philosophies of history of thinkers such as Voltaire, Comte, Hegel, and Marx. The central event of Christianity—the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ—is dismissed as

either insignificant or as part of a “larger” meaning; in either case, profane history is made the focal point and purveyor of meaning, the here and now is made the scene of the unfolding of the deliverance from hardship and evil; the patient waiting for a promise of transcendent bliss is exchanged for an “activist” and “immanentist” view of history.

Both Löwith’s and Voegelin’s accounts of this movement in history are rich and many-faceted. Here, however, I will concentrate on the one aspect which makes their theories *secularization* theories, and which thus says something about the relationship between Christianity and modernity. According to these thinkers, modernity has its origins “in Christianity itself,” to quote Voegelin.<sup>11</sup> The modern historical consciousness is “as Christian by derivation as it is non-Christian by consequence, because it lacks the belief that Christ is the beginning of an end and his life and death the final answer to an otherwise insoluble question,” writes Löwith.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the typically modern this-worldliness that has given rise to liberal democracy and totalitarian speculation is inconceivable without the Christian view of a linear history with a meaning, in itself a departure from the Greek, cyclic view of history. But, on the other hand, what secularization amounts to is the forgetting of the indispensable presupposition for any Christian view of history: the transcendent God and His incarnation through Jesus Christ.

According to this point of view, modernity is somehow illegitimate. It has taken a uniquely Christian view of man and history and perverted it by subtracting the element most important to all truly Christian thought: the transcendent God. It follows from this that the illegitimacy thesis of Löwith and Voegelin cannot be reduced to a simple “copyright” problem. Löwith and Voegelin are not merely out to trace the origins of modern ideas and then point to a seeming incon-

sistency between modernity's self-understanding on the one hand and its origins on the other.<sup>13</sup> The point is that man's view of reality has become skewed. This comes out most clearly in Voegelin.<sup>14</sup> In a number of essays, especially in *Anamnesis*, modern immanentism is portrayed as a revolt against essential humanity. Voegelin claims that man historically has understood himself as existing in a *metaxy*, in the tension between the divine and the merely profane. Once the divine is locked out, no longer taken into consideration—and, as an extension of this, when history is considered as expressing a progress that is meaningful without any reference to a transcendent “beyond” that structures and limits this meaningfulness—man is deprived of “his specific humanity,” according to Voegelin.<sup>15</sup>

Wherein lies the importance of the philosophy of history with which we are presented in *Meaning in History* and *New Science of Politics*? Why does it deserve our attention now, more than fifty years after the end of the Nazi horror, which so decisively influenced its formulation?

An answer can be fashioned along the following lines: It seems that Christianity is in more need than ever of understanding its relation to history and to progress, since the latter seem to be moving at an ever-faster pace, requiring serious decisions, not least of a moral kind, as technological advances suggest new and hitherto unknown possibilities and challenges. Löwith and Voegelin manage to fashion an Augustinian response to the predicaments of this modern—or, as some now prefer to call it, post-modern—world. Along Augustinian lines we are firmly reminded that we live in the final age, the age in which the meaning of history has been shown to us through the resurrection of Christ, and where the waiting for His return—whether it is to last one, one hundred, one thousand, or

hundreds of thousands of years—constitutes an historical phase that has no intrinsic meaning apart from that waiting. Empires will come and go, suffering and poverty will persist, the good will be admixed with the bad, and the Christian can do nothing but offer charity and compassion and try to ensure that the moral and religious life of the Christian can be led by as many as possible. The grand schemes, the revolutionary ideologies, the cry for final solutions, and the untempered belief in technological advance constitute antitheses to this view of history.<sup>16</sup>

To many, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, an Augustinian approach to political philosophy implies a Christian realism of sorts, in which all attempts at establishing worldly order are seen as fragile, albeit necessary so as to stem the tide of sin. For Niebuhr this led to a strong repudiation of pacifism as well as an attack on idealistic, liberal internationalism.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Christianity must represent a realistic voice emphasizing order, tranquility, and moderation. Much of the same attitude can be gleaned from the philosophy of history advocated in the books under consideration by Karl Löwith and Eric Voegelin. First of all, the argument is clearly based on strong opposition to totalitarian government. But that is not all. As Voegelin emphasizes towards the end of the *New Science of Politics*, it is important to uphold strong institutional traditions, and to avoid the scientific splitting of peoples into different classes, castes, and races through “economic materialism, racist biology, corrupt psychology, scientism, and technological ruthlessness.”<sup>18</sup> We find here a strong warning against millennial ideology and secularized absolutism. But there is at the same time an emphasis on preserving a sort of institutional unity that can infuse order into the unrestrained technological and scientific *hubris* of modern man. This demands a moderate view of

government, not an unreflective call for "less government" nor an unrestrained belief in "big government." Government must not become an instrument of oppression, but neither can governmental institutions be jettisoned. We are here speculating, of course; I am not claiming that the Augustinian philosophy of history and politics presented in Löwith's and in Voegelin's works implies any definite view of political regimes and institutions. But we can, at the very least, say that there is to be found in these thinkers a strong warning against all extremism in politics and against all attempts at absolutizing and divinizing the political realm. From this perspective it seems that the more fervent forms of religious conservatism of the so-called religious right, as well as the more extreme versions of economic liberalism that comprise part of the political right, should be viewed with skepticism and watchfulness by conservatives, not least due to their absolute character as well as their anti-institutionalism.

Not only on a political, but also on a metaphysical level, the Augustinian reminders of Löwith and Voegelin give cause for afterthought. The problem of the existence of evil in a world created by a good God is a deep-seated one in Christian thought. And in a world where Christians are becoming ever more aware of the pluralism of beliefs and of the existence of an immense variety of political and ideological evils, the question emerges again: Wherein lies the *meaning* of all this? Basing our argument on a Voegelinian approach, we should at least be aware of two pitfalls to avoid. The one is the immanentization of the spiritual, where all events and movements of the world, in something like the original Calvinist fashion, must be understood and judged as parts of God's pre-ordained plan. There is a strong call in Voegelin's thought to withhold spiritual judgment of events in secular history. Certainly, a

Christian must believe that God rules the world, but the Voegelinian approach warns against human attempts to understand and to judge all the events of the world—and thus find hidden meanings that should lead to political action. The eternal truth of Christianity cannot be given any representation in the power organizations of this world simply because it is a truth which is not of this world.

But against this, the danger of the other pitfall must also be emphasized, namely, that of inactive indifference. Withdrawal from the world is equally as much a Gnostic temptation as that of violently transforming it. Indifference to suffering, as well as to radically nationalist and isolationist ideologies that scornfully ignore the fates of people because they belong to some other culture, "race," or nation, represents an attitude very much in conflict with the reconciliation with and love for this world found in the Christian Gospel.

Hans Blumenberg is probably the most famous of those theorists who have tried to defend modernity against the secularization charges of Löwith and Voegelin. In his book *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966) he attempts to show how modernity represents an overcoming of problems that occurred within Christianity, but to which Christian thought in its medieval form had no ready answer.

Interestingly, Blumenberg, like Voegelin, takes Gnosticism as one of his points of departure. While the first part of his book is a general answer to Löwith's thesis, the second part is in essence an attempt at confronting Voegelin's Gnosticism thesis. However, Blumenberg, in his own words, interprets the relationship between Gnosticism and modernity in the reverse sense from Voegelin—as the overcoming of Gnosticism.<sup>19</sup>

Blumenberg contends that the secularization thesis of Löwith is highly im-

probable. There is no continuity between the eschatological expectations and Messianism of Christianity on the one hand and the modern view of progress on the other, according to Blumenberg. The older theological view came to be a hindrance to the realization of man's possibilities and the satisfaction of his needs.<sup>20</sup> Therefore man had to take control by asserting his own will and responsibility. Modernity thus signifies a break and not a mere transformation.

It is probably right to say that Blumenberg to a certain degree misrepresents Löwith and Voegelin, and, together with them, a host of secularization theorists, such as Jacob Talmon and others. As David Walsh rightly points out, it would be hard to find among any of these thinkers "any assertion that the salvation-history model was the only influence in shaping the secular philosophies of history."<sup>21</sup> Yet it is easy to misrepresent Blumenberg's case, too, by stressing that modernity is "unique" and represents an "epochal break." After all, Blumenberg is careful to note that the modern age, as reflected in the thought of, for instance, Descartes, Bacon, Kant, and Nietzsche, clearly is unthinkable without the Christian background. The point for Blumenberg is that modernity does not merely represent a transformation of the Christian view of history, but is a *new* answer to the problems posed by Christianity. And this is where Gnosticism comes in. The Gnostic heresy had confronted the problem of evil in its most basic form, and it had answered it by positing a God who was not all good.<sup>22</sup> To Christian thought this Gnostic idea of the world as a prison and as the creation of an evil God stood as a serious affront to the teaching of the love of God for all of His creation.

One of the most influential Christian thinkers to try to confront the Gnostic challenge was St. Augustine, himself a Gnostic (Manichee) in his youth. By com-

bining a neo-Platonic view of the nature of evil with his understanding of Adam's sin (based on a reading of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, especially chs. 5, 7, and 9), Augustine came to accentuate man's own responsibility, going back to the first man, Adam, and transmitted from him through the procreative act—that is, the teaching of "original sin."<sup>23</sup>

As Blumenberg sees it, Augustine's solution to the problem, while immensely influential, was not successful in solving the basic problem. If man's freedom had led to evil, why had God created man to be free? Did not God, in some sense, have to shoulder the responsibility? Or, at the very least, must we not admit that rationality breaks down in the ultimate attempt at understanding the relationship between God's omnipotence, man's free will, and the existence of evil? In the face of Aristotelian scholasticism, which tried to erect a coherent understanding of these questions through a synthesis of Aristotelian, neo-Platonic, and Christian elements, the Gnostic question resurfaced, and late medieval voluntarism and nominalism tried to give the question its definitive answer. As Blumenberg puts it, the evil demiurge of the Gnostics became transposed into the "hidden God" of late medieval nominalism and His absolute sovereignty. Man was confronted, once again, with the terror of standing face to face with a creator who may not be good.<sup>24</sup>

Blumenberg concludes that the self-assertion of reason that is so characteristic of modernity is man's entirely legitimate self-defense against a God who is terrifying because essentially unknowable as well as omnipotent. Modernity represents the second overcoming of Gnosticism, the first one, that of St. Augustine, having been unsuccessful. The alternative that is gradually carved out by the moderns is "the immanent self-assertion of reason through the mastery and alteration of reality."<sup>25</sup> However, Blumenberg stresses that the questions which man

strives to answer are not in themselves new. We are faced with what we may call re-occupations—new positions are taken on centuries-old problems.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the idea of progress (in the sciences, in technology, *etc.*) takes on the role that theodicy, the attempt to understand and justify the relationship between the good God and the existence of evil, had originally played. This “re-occupation” thesis can also be taken to mean that totalitarian ideologies, which for Löwith and Voegelin (as well as for Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, Zygmunt Bauman, and others) must be viewed as essential signs of modernity’s failure, can be seen by Blumenberg’s thesis as “unsuccessful re-occupations,” or even as recurrences of ancient and medieval solutions that have not yet been replaced by the self-assertion of man.

To be fair it must be noted—which, alas, has not often been—that the Löwith-Voegelin-Blumenberg debate on a certain score is a debate at cross-purposes, simply because the focus is on different thinkers in Blumenberg as compared to Löwith and Voegelin. Blumenberg concentrates on the late Middle Ages and the Reformation, especially the nominalism of the Ockhamists. This is a period not at all dealt with by Löwith in *Meaning in History*, and only barely by Voegelin in the *New Science of Politics*. And, conversely, Joachim of Fiore, the central medieval figure for Löwith and Voegelin, is not mentioned in Blumenberg’s book. This does not mean that the debate is illusory. We are certainly confronted with radically different understandings of the origins of modernity. But the fact remains that Blumenberg’s thesis hinges not on an understanding of the Joachitic philosophy of history, but rather on an interpretation of Christian solutions to the problem of evil in general, and the solutions presented by the nominalists and voluntarists of the late Middle Ages

in particular. If it can be shown that there are serious problems with his interpretation of these traditions and positions, we may also be able to see more clearly the strengths and weaknesses of his approach.

Instead of observing secularization as somehow a movement *away* from Christianity, it can certainly be contended, as many have done, that Christianity contains within itself secularizing tendencies.<sup>27</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, partly building on Friedrich Gogarten, has tried to expand on this line of thought in a direct answer to Blumenberg’s book.<sup>28</sup> In Pannenberg’s view, Blumenberg over-emphasizes the role of the problem of evil and theodicy within medieval Christianity:

Christianity came to terms in a decisive way with the evil and wickedness in the world not by removing responsibility for the world from the creator, but by belief in the reconciliation of the world by the God who took upon himself the burden of its guilt and misery and so set men free from it. It is strange that in Blumenberg’s book this central Christian theme is scarcely mentioned.<sup>29</sup>

According to Pannenberg, Blumenberg and others have over-dramatized the effects on Christian thought of the delay of the *parousia* (Second Coming). It is true that early Christians lived in an immediate expectation of the return of Christ and the final judgment, but the affirmation of the present world that Christ effected through the incarnation made a positive acceptance of the present world possible, Pannenberg maintains. In the light of this, he claims that theological absolutism, and its accompanying dread of a terrifying God, was neither the logical nor the actual outcome of scholasticism, as Blumenberg contends. Rather, the prevailing element of scholasticism, which lived on into the late Middle Ages

and the Renaissance, was the affirmation of the worth of man within the scheme of creation. To make an extreme version of Augustinian predestination theory the hallmark of medieval, including late medieval, Christianity, is for Pannenberg a “perverse” rendering of scholastic thought.<sup>30</sup>

Pannenberg also points out that the emphasis on God’s *will* in voluntarists such as Duns Scotus did not lead to a denigration of man’s will. Rather, the opposite became the case; as voluntarism was stressed ever more in theology, so the emphasis on the importance of human will became more central in anthropology and ethics.

Francis Oakley also accentuates certain important points of continuity between medieval and modern thought on politics and ethics.<sup>31</sup> Oakley’s point is that many elements which later came to constitute central tenets within European thought on constitutionalism, the rule of law, and popular consent, had their basis in the nominalist controversy of the fourteenth century. However, while Blumenberg sees the nominalists as essentially unsuccessful in maintaining a picture of a loving and trustworthy God, and the following century as breaking away from Christian thought, Oakley believes that the nominalists (or, to be more exact, the voluntarists) did not fare that badly. Specifically, he claims that the doctrine of the two powers of God—the *potentia absoluta* (absolute power) and the *potentia ordinata* (ordained power)—actually managed to preserve and bring central tenets of the natural-law realism of High Scholasticism into the divine voluntarism of the Scotists and the Ockhamists. This so-called voluntarist framework in turn came to constitute the root of what Oakley calls “the covenantal tradition,” with clear affinities to later social contract theories. The important point for our purpose is that this covenantal tradition, which empha-

sizes the absolute freedom of God, does not lead to a view of God, man, and nature in which God becomes a terrifying tyrant. Rather, both Duns Scotus and Ockham, as thoroughgoing voluntarists,<sup>32</sup> emphasize God’s love as the constant which nothing can overturn.

It is a fact, furthermore, that the emphasis on God’s will as the lawmaker of the world leads to parallel thinking about *man’s will*—*i.e.*, as the fountainhead of the laws of *this* world (a point alluded to above). For Blumenberg, the ideal of God’s self-binding through his *potentia ordinata* comes across as a somewhat lame and unfruitful attempt at saving the goodness and constancy of God. According to Oakley, the distinction between the *potentiae* of God created a powerful and influential alternative to the hierarchical ontology that had been dominant since St. Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius—an alternative that managed to preserve the idea of constancy and a natural moral law in spite of the critique of scholasticism and realism, while also facilitating a greater stress on consent as an important element in political philosophy.

Thinkers such as Pannenberg and Oakley stress the Christian reconciliation between God and man. Their emphasis is on God’s love and mercy rather than on His incomprehensibility and the terror He generates. What they both delineate is a view which challenges Blumenberg’s influential portrayal of the high and late Middle Ages as a period that created insoluble problems for Christianity, and that in the end separated worldly man from the omnipotent, transcendent God in so radical a fashion that man had to re-assert his own dignity in order to escape from the terrifying absolutism of God. On the other hand, Pannenberg and Oakley also, albeit indirectly, challenge Löwith’s and Voegelin’s views. For Pannenberg and Oakley, modernity does not, or at least not merely,

represent falsifications and illegitimate expropriations of previous Christian positions. Rather, they point to a (legitimate) continuity that the so-called secularization theorists have underestimated.

In this brief summary of the discussion on modernity and its disputed legitimacy, I have taken as my point of departure works by Karl Löwith, Eric Voegelin, Hans Blumenberg, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Francis Oakley. Thereby we have been able to delineate two different positions on modernity as a project: either as "legitimate" or as "illegitimate." The basic question remains, of course, what is actually meant by these terms. From my reading of the texts under consideration, I take the legitimacy question to be centered around two major issues: self-understanding and a truthful approach to "the human condition."<sup>33</sup> The first has to do with whether modernity is as modern—that is, as progressive and as enlightened—as it claims to be. The second deals with whether it accurately diagnoses—and thus properly recommends the right handling of—the place of man in the world and in the cosmos. As far as I can see, the Löwith-Voegelin-Blumenberg debate takes both of these

points into consideration, which is exactly why it comes across as so meaningful and so important.

It would be a drastic misinterpretation of a complex and many-faceted twentieth-century debate to claim that all the possible views have been presented here. The protagonists are many and the nuances are no fewer. But the scholars discussed above instructively show that there is a debate about the legitimacy of the modern age as such, and also about whether modernity represents a break with or a continuation of important facets of medieval Christianity. These views can in turn be combined so as to form several different theoretical standpoints, at least three of which have been presented here: illegitimate continuation (Löwith/Voegelin); legitimate break (Blumenberg); and legitimate continuation (Pannenberg/Oakley).<sup>34</sup> Let me conclude with David Walsh's recent claim that "The conception of a secular society, existing without reference to any transcendent source and drawing its legitimacy entirely from humanity's autonomous self-assertion, has begun to lose its appeal."<sup>35</sup> If that is true, then the debate described here is highly relevant for modern man.

[Author's Note: An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Eric Voegelin Society in San Francisco in September 1996.]

1. A fine discussion of the various ways in which the term "secularization" has been put to use in the 20th century debate can be found in Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York, [1967]1990), 106. 2. Cf. Berthold P. Riesterer, *Karl Löwith's View of History* (The Hague, 1969), 11. A useful discussion of Löwith's thought and its relationship to Christianity can be found in Arnold Levison, "Introduction," in Karl Löwith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism* (Evanston, 1966). 3. Cf. Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Christianity and Political Philosophy* (Athens, Ga., 1978) for one of the strongest attacks on Voegelin's depiction of Christianity. For a more

reasoned discussion of the same, see Voegelin's answer to Professor Thomas J. J. Altizer's review of *The Ecumenic Age* (Vol. IV of *Order and History*), in Eric Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God?'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. XLIII (1975), 765-772. A good discussion of Voegelin's contributions to Christian theology can be found in Michael Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame, 1994), e.g., 5 ff. 4. Cf. Voegelin, *New Science of Politics* (Chicago, 1952), 118 ff.; Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949), 160 ff. See also Ernest L. Fortin, "Introduction," in St. Augustine, *Political Writings* (Indianapolis, 1994), xvii ff. 5. A fine summary of the Augustinian scheme can be found in the chapter on Augustine in Voegelin's originally unpublished *History of Political Ideas* (in Voegelin,

*History of Political Ideas, Vol. 1: Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity* [Columbia, Mo., 1997], 210 ff.); Voegelin builds especially on *De genesi contra Manicheos*, Bk. I, ch. 23-24; cf. note 16 below. **6.** *Meaning in History*, 191. See also Henrik Syse, "Augustinian 'History' and the Road to Peace," *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 31 (2000), 225-239. **7.** *New Science of Politics*, 119. **8.** Cf. James Patrick, "Modernity as Gnosis," *Modern Age*, 31 (Summer/Fall 1987), 222-233. (This same issue of *Modern Age* contains several useful and perceptive articles on the crisis of modernity.) **9.** Cf. Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Washington, D.C., 1968), 11. **10.** Cf. *Meaning in History*, 184-185. **11.** *New Science of Politics*, 107. **12.** *Meaning in History*, 197. **13.** This seems closer to what Alasdair MacIntyre tries to do when he points out that the anti-traditionalism of Enlightenment liberalism has itself become a tradition (cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* [London, 1988], 326-348). I do not believe that this is the most important point for either Voegelin or Löwith. **14.** David Walsh notes that Löwith's "studies of the ideological constructions of history as attempts to bring about an innerworldly eschaton, have fully exposed their inadequacies but left the alternative understanding of history that is to replace them in a state of obscurity" (David Walsh, *After Ideology* [San Francisco, 1990], 32). Voegelin, one might say, is more specific as to the "alternative understanding of history." **15.** Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (Columbia, Mo., [1966] 1978), 104. **16.** Voegelin also writes about this in his *History of Political Ideas*, Vol. 1, esp. 210-212. It is interesting to note that Voegelin in this manuscript, written in the early 1940's, takes a more negative view of the fact that Augustine's theorizing left current secular history without any inherent meaning. Cf. "Augustinian 'History'," 227-233. **17.** Cf. Michael Cartwright's account in "Biblical Argument in International Ethics," in *Traditions of International Ethics*, ed. Nardin & Mapel (Cambridge, 1992), 285-287. **18.** *New Science of Politics*, 188-189. **19.** Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass., [1966] 1983), 126. **20.** Cf. *ibid.*, 31. **21.** *After Ideology*, 104. **22.** As a model for Gnostic thought, Blumenberg takes Marcion, who was excommunicated in Rome in 144 A.D., cf. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 129. **23.** Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, e.g., XIII, ch. 14; XIV, ch. 11. See also

the incomplete work *Against Julian*, II, and *Marriage and Concupiscence*, II; the latter two are referred to and discussed in Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago, [1929] 1996), 102. **24.** Cf. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 135. **25.** *Ibid.*, 137. **26.** Cf. *ibid.*, 466 ff.; see also David Ingram, *Reason, History, and Politics* (Albany, 1995). **27.** Max Weber's thesis about the innerworldly asceticism of Calvinist, monotheist Christianity is only one of several theories positing an intimate link between movements within Christianity and the this-worldly character of Western modernity, Löwith's and Voegelin's being others. Cf. Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 2. **28.** Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom* (Philadelphia, 1973), 178-191. **29.** *Ibid.*, 183-184. **30.** Cf. *ibid.*, 187. Pannenberg takes as a case in point John Duns Scotus of whose thought Blumenberg has created a false impression, according to Pannenberg. **31.** Cf. Francis Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant, and Order* (Ithaca, 1984); "The Absolute and Ordained Power of God," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59, no. 3 (1998), 437-461; "The Absolute and Ordained Power of God and King," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59, no. 4 (1998), 669-690. Other important medievalists who have worked along the same lines are Paul Sigmund, Cary Nederman, and historian Brian Tierney. Cf. Syse, *Natural Law, Religion, and Rights* (South Bend, Ind., forthcoming), ch. 2. **32.** But they were not both nominalists. Duns Scotus's ontology is clearly *realist* (albeit different from that of St. Thomas). **33.** For an enlightening discussion of what "legitimacy" might mean, see Stephen A. McKnight, *The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom* (Columbia, Mo., 1991), 7. **34.** I have not touched on Leo Strauss in this article, since his discussion of the relationship between the ancients and the moderns, while important, leaves out many of the aspects of the Christian Middle Ages which have concerned us in this article. However, if Strauss were to be placed within the scheme proposed here, he could be said to view the turn to modernity as an "illegitimate break," since it breaks thoroughly with the view of right and morality prevalent among the ancients, and since it consciously discards ancient wisdom and thus undermines wise and morally legitimate political rule. **35.** *After Ideology*, 1.