

Faith beyond the Messianic Violence of Terror and Empire

The unspeakable horrors of 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' have put a big question mark on the future of Islam's dialogue with modernity. The total collapse of moral order in the gruesome chain of kidnappings and decapitations in Fallujah and the annulment of war ethics and sanctioning of sadistic savagery in Abu-Ghuraib are hardly likely to promote further conversation. Any Muslim reflection on modernity as a universal insight into the human condition has therefore little meaning in a world where the Muslim has to run constantly for cover. Modernity's claim for authority has now been eclipsed by the imperial demands for compliance and acquiescence – not only politically but also ideologically, not only militarily but also morally. What cogency then can an Islamic critique of modernity have, when the authority of modernity now simply reads as the power of Empire?

True enough, for the radical Islamist, there never was any moral calling worthy of summoning the intellectual resources of his faith for the envisioning of a political future within the regime of modernity. And yet, the tragedy is that he/she too is a child of modernity. The radical Islamist's politics of terror and suicide are only possible in a world without transcendence, in a consciousness where God is dead, and where history alone remains. Terror, in other words, is a gift of modernity, not of Islam. It is a fact which even outsiders have not failed to acknowledge. 'The logic of violence', one analyst admits, 'does not have its roots in what goes by the name of terrorism. Rather, the opposite is the case: "Terrorism" has its roots in the logic of violence!'

For Muslim conscience, then, the only cogent reading of contemporary violence in the merciless world of Fallujah and Abu Ghuraib is that the nihilistic logic of modernity has triumphed over the demands of faith and humanity. Even for the zealots of Islam, history and politics have precedence over spirituality and transcendence. If we have to defeat this nihilism with an Islamic face, if we are not to be made hostages to the dysfunctional logic of violence and counter-violence, if we are not to become prisoners to the Manichaean rhetoric of Empire and Terror, a dialogue with modernity on the pivotal issue of transcendence must go on. Islam means peace and the Muslim community of today must move beyond the violence of Terror and Empire both. It is for this reason that we examine here some works that deal with the problem of terror and violence as it appears in the mirror of modernity.

Works Discussed in this Essay

War and Modernity. By Hans Joas. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003 (www.polity.co.uk). Pp 248. ISBN: 0-7456-2645-9

The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence and the Will of the People. By Jonathan Schell. Metropolitan Books, 2003 (www.henryholt.com). Pp. 433. ISBN 0-8050-4456-6

Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. By Giovanna Borradori. The University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. 208 (www.press.uchicago.edu). ISBN 0-226-06664-9

AL-QAEDA and what it means to be Modern. By John Gray. Faber and Faber Ltd, 2003 (www.faber.co.uk). Pp. 145. ISBN 0-571-21980-2

Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11. By Bruce Lincoln. The University of Chicago Press, 2003 (www.press.uchicago.edu). Pp. 142. ISBN 0-226-48195-6

When Religions Become Evil. By Charles Kimball. Harper Collins, 2002 (www.harpercollins.com). Pp. 237. ISBN 0-06-050653-9

Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham. By Thomas L. Pangle. The John Hopkins University Press, 2003 (www.press.jhu.edu). Pp. 285. ISBN 0-8018-7328-2

Does modernity's claim for authority inevitably translate into the logic of Empire, or, like any other universal vision of the human condition, is modernity plagued too by its own unresolved tensions and inner contradictions? Is modernity inherently an imperial enterprise, which its rhetoric of 'enlightenment' and 'freedom' merely seeks to mask, or does it genuinely cherish hopes of a universal peace that is based on justice and equality for all? Do the power-brokers of modernity, to say it bluntly, honestly believe in a world order without the exploitation and enslavement of the weak by the powerful, or do they employ their rhetoric in a cynical vein just to further their own interests? Indeed, to come to the most disturbing insight of all, is modernity's commitment to *freedom* incommensurate with a world order in which *justice* is the defining norm?

One may start this inquiry by listening to the internal debate on the problem of organized violence in the name of the state that constitutes, in theory if not in practice, a formidable challenge to modernity's rationalist world outlook. Here Hans Joas's work offers an intense meditation on the issues of war in the sociological and philosophical discourses of modernity. Despite the density of its labyrinthine German style, not to mention the studied opacity of its 'message', it is a rewarding work that provides no simplistic reading of the martial text of modernity. Joas's starting point is that for anyone who confronts

the history of modern violence in all its bloody seriousness, it is difficult to be seduced by the myth of progress. And this is despite the fact that the optimistic worldview of Enlightenment, shared both by liberalism and Marxism, promises us a world without violence. History, it is also worth recalling, constantly reminds us of its tenacious persistence. Indeed, war and violence are to be construed as intrinsic to the modern project, and not merely parts of its prehistory. And yet, modernization theory, the standard interpretation of contemporary history, posits, more or less implicitly that modernity is peaceful. In fact, in the post-World War theory, the non-violent resolution of conflicts is presumed to be the defining feature of modernity. Not surprisingly, Joas muses, 'the major theories that are the subject of general discussion today – let's take Habermas, Luhmann or the post-structuralists – contain hardly any mention of war and peace.' (126)

On the other hand, as suggested by Michael Mann, there exists a strong 'militaristic' counter-tradition, usually traceable to non-liberal currents, within the annals of sociological thought itself. Here, one finds an over-emphasis on power and violence that is the obverse of their neglect by liberals and Marxists. These anti-liberals and staunch defenders of bourgeois society fear that 'a peaceful civilization and the disappearance of warlike virtues would lead to a general decline in morals and a rise of softness and effeminacy.' (31). In Germany, old-fashioned militarism is couched in the language of *Lebensphilosophie* or existentialism: 'violence as creativity, struggle as inner experience, the community of soldiers at the front as the inspiration of a new type of state-order.' (32). The most influential theoretician of the 'existentialist' school was, of course, Carl Schmitt whose conception of *the political* was nothing but a recasting of the biological maxim of Darwinism – the survival of the fittest - in a metaphysical mould.

For all these internal contradictions or external challenges, it is well-worth emphasizing that the most fundamental tension within the political thought of modernity concerns the dreams of a pacifist utopia and the realities of power-politics. Obviously, like any other universal vision, modernity cannot escape the logical contradiction, and existential unity, of the Empire-Mission nexus. It too exhibits the logic of *Din* and *Dawla* as the two opposite sides of the single coin of its project. The most disturbing insight into modernity's intrinsic unity of the discursive and the coercive however comes from the sombre sociological studies of Zygmunt Bauman whose inquiry into the Jewish Holocaust led him to conclude that the Holocaust does not constitute a peculiarity of the German history, or an aberration of the modernist ethos. There is instead a direct link between modernity's bureaucratic rationality and its politics of genocide – a practice that was by no means rare in the modern enterprise of the colonization of non-European peoples.

In a radical but well-documented work, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1991), Bauman demonstrated that the Holocaust is the obverse of modernity; that it represents 'another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body.' The Holocaust, he insisted further, cannot be dismissed as the failure of civilization, as the

'hiccups of barbarism' that humanity has to suffer through only temporarily. No, it is part of the same 'morally elevating story of humanity's march towards greater freedom and rationality' that forms the imperious, nay imperial, myth of modernity and Enlightenment. Of course, modern civilization was not, according to him, the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; but 'it was most certainly its *necessary* condition. Bauman further insinuated that reason not passion, civilization not barbarity, science not superstition, imperils the existence of man as a moral being. He even argued that the bureaucratic logic of the modern state inevitably translates into the imperative of 'final solutions' and that the value-free epistemology of modern science indubitably redeems its claim in the merciless world of the gas chambers. Obviously, Bauman's work has great relevance for any non-Western attempt to appraise modernity as Empire.

Against the backdrop of colonialism and the genocide of non-European peoples, which went hand in hand with the unfolding of the modernist project, all these theories smack of insufferable sanctimony. (But then it has to do with modernity's construction of the *Other* and the Pandora's box of moral paradoxes that it opens!) Colonial wars, even from the universalist perspective of Enlightenment, were not only necessary; these actually worked in the service of peace! For it has been constantly proclaimed and untiringly reiterated to this day that 'the War and world dominance of Western powers serve the cause of strengthening and disseminating universalist values.' (9)

Joas's work is commendable not only for exploring the agonizing issues of war, on which the theoreticians of modernity, he admits, are curiously reticent, but also for earnestly confronting all the moral and pragmatic arguments of pacifism and *Realpolitik*. It is also to his credit that he never loses the moral compass and succumbs neither to the logic of force, which legitimates itself in the name of some putative human nature, nor to its total renunciation for the realization of utopian dreams. For instance, he does not shy away from facing 'the empirical persuasiveness' of power-political realism but asks: 'Are the social sciences obliged to see the world without illusions as an eternal of conflicting interests, or can sociology prove that '*realpolitik*' is itself an ideology.' (32). From his dialectical approach, it appears that 'there is not just an analytical need, but also a moral one, to create or increase our sensitivity to the distinction between different kinds of acts of violence, instead of applying a global formula that reduces them all to the same level.' (10).

Joas's work significantly is about war and modernity, and not about modernity and Empire, a subject of crucial importance for any understanding of modernity as a historical project. And this is despite his recognition that 'phenomena such as the use of power to *perpetuate* the inequalities in development are never discussed' by the ideologues of modernity. (47; emphasis supplied).

Covering the same ground but far more lucid in style is Jonathan Schell's courageous and eloquently articulated argument about the obsolescence of the imperial dream. In fact, *Unconquerable World* provides a most felicitous expression of our longing for a world beyond the logic of Empire and the

obscenity of terror, beyond even the rational calculus of war and the irrational cult of violence. Violence as a political instrument, he maintains, has now become dysfunctional and the world is no more conquerable. So reads the inspiring message of this book. In these dark times, when every conversation is saturated with apocalyptic imagery, Jonathan Schell, the author of the highly acclaimed work, *The Fate of the Earth* has succeeded in producing an optimistic vision of the future. It is an optimism, however, which comes from a bold and innovative reading of history and which is not a product of wishful thinking or day-dreaming. On that score alone, it is worthy of the serious attention of all who are disgusted by the Manichaean rhetoric of Empire and who refuse to wallow in the visions of doom and gloom.

Some of the most important changes for the future of war, Schell observes, have come from within war itself. In the modern age, war has in fact undergone a metamorphosis so thorough that its existence has been called into question. The advancement in the technology of war have given us the unusable nuclear weapons and the development of people's war has taught us that popular resistance can bring down the fall of the dictators or the defeat of the imperialists. This is the gist of the thesis advanced in this volume, but it is a thesis which is presented with a thorough survey of the history of events and ideas that have produced the paradox of violence being the midwife of nonviolence. Schell's book is as much a history of politics as that of ideas, but its principal virtue is lucidity; a joy to read. It is also panoramic in scope, giving full attentions to the arguments of 'realists' and 'visionaries' both (Gandhi receives as much attention as Clausewitz), assiduous in the pursuit of details, but imaginative in its grasp of the whole.

What Schell has to say on contemporary realities is no less insightful, courageous and candid: 'None of the structures of violence – not the balance of power, not the balance of terror, not empire – can any longer rescue the world from the use of violence, now grown apocalyptic. Force can lead only to more force, not to peace. Only a return to structures of cooperative power can offer hope. To choose that path, the United States would... have to choose the American republic over the American empire.... In an imperial America, power would be concentrated in the hands of the president, and checks and balances would be at an end; civil liberties would be weakened or lost; military spending would crowd out social spending; the gap between rich and poor would be likely to increase; electoral politics, to the extent that they still mattered, would be increasingly dominated by money, above all corporate money, whose influence would trump the people's interest; the social, economic, and ecological agenda of the country and the world would be increasingly neglected.' (345)

Philosophy, it is often argued, is indifferent to history. It reflects on eternal truths, not on contingent events. However when certain contingent events become the defining moments of history, when these are perceived as watersheds in the political landscape of an age, philosophical reflection becomes ineluctable. With her own intimate and traumatic experience of the September 11 attack on Manhattan, Giovanna Borradori, an associate professor of philosophy at Vassar College, conceived the idea of a

philosophical inquiry into phenomenon of terror. The project came to realization just a few weeks later when she sat down with Jürgen Habermas and the recently departed Jacques Derrida, two of the foremost representatives of the western philosophical tradition, for separate interviews. In this volume, Borradori judiciously introduces the modern philosophical scene, presents the interviews themselves and then supplements them with extensive emendations and notes of her own. The result is a lucid and stimulating work that is rich in analysis but not lacking in candour; less hysterical in tone but by no means unmindful of the political, and symbolic, import of the fateful event.

In many ways, we are informed, this is the first real engagement between these two eminent thinkers who disagree on most issues and who are generally perceived as speaking from the opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. Habermas's discourse is, as expected, dense, elegant and unmistakably modernist. Derrida on the contrary takes a long, tortuous and often unpredictable path. Central however to both these philosophical vision is a deep suspicion of the concept of 'terrorism', and they both agree upon the need for a transmission from classical international law, premised on the model of nation-states, to a new cosmopolitan order based on a new kind of international sovereignty. Most significantly, they both discard the intellectually facile and morally problematic rhetoric of good and evil. Their intense philosophical gaze, it is apparent, shatters the chalice of Manichaeic rhetoric which holds the sacrament of the Empire!

The most notable feature of Habermas's response is that it is uncompromisingly committed to Enlightenment rationality and universalism. Out of this engagement comes a moral sensitivity which does not relinquish its calling even at the time of tragedy and pain. Not impressed with modernity's worldly triumphs, he expresses his misgivings in a strongly worded statement as: "However, the asymmetry between the concentrated destructive power of the electronically controlled clusters of elegant and versatile missiles in the air and the archaic ferocity of the swarms of bearded warriors outfitted with Kalashnikov on the ground remains a morally obscene sight." (28) Further, 'The world has grown too complex for this barely concealed unilateralism. Even if Europe does not rouse itself to play the civilizing role, as it should, the emerging power of China and the waning power of Russia do not fit into the *pax Americana* model so simply.' (27)

Habermas is perceptibly sad and pensive; he was supposed to be in New York on that fateful day, nevertheless he shows no signs of allowing his grief, and the sense of doom and hysteria that was natural in the wake of the September 11 tragedy, to stand in the way of his philosophical analysis. Indeed, despite his unswerving allegiance to the European tradition, he displays not only the proverbial stoic calm of the philosopher but also remains steadfast in his commitment to the universality of values. Not surprisingly, he upholds the essentially religious notion of tolerance, which, incidentally, is derided as 'paternalistic' by Derrida, without dilly-dallying with any kind of postmodern relativism.

Predictably, then, Habermas is able to reiterate the liberal mantra without diffidence, namely, 'that the complex life circumstances in pluralistic societies are normatively compatible only with a strict universalism in which the same respect is demanded for everybody – be they Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Muslim, Jewish, or Buddhists, believers and non-believers' (32). Even if the Muslim has no compunction agreeing with him, it is impossible not to discern the secular moorings of this universalism. Religious allegiance is for him without any political quotient, and hence innocuous and inconsequential for the public square. It does not cause his liberal conscience any discomfort and may therefore be tolerated. The snag however is that the liberal cannot vouch any form of universalism in which nation, state or citizenship are equally inconsequential and their diversity is simply a matter of personal choice! Liberal universalism remains subservient to the sovereignty of the liberal polity and the world order that sustains it. Be that as it may, in this interview, Habermas comes across as a very gifted, articulate and affable personality.

For all his volubility, Derrida, on the other hand, remains largely inaccessible to the uninitiated reader. His is a veritable sophist's discourse that advances by questioning everything and that perpetuates itself by answering every question with a question. (Not a surprising strategy for a philosopher who claims that 'the more one decodes a text, the more one encodes it.')

Probably, it is because of the spin that has gone into the making of 11th September as the watershed of current history that Derrida seeks to deconstruct it first. At any rate, the perception of the singularity of 11th September, he feels, is 'less spontaneous than it appears: it is also to a large extent conditioned, constituted, if not actually constructed, circulated at any rate through the media by means of a prodigious techno-social-political machine.' (p. 86). Being extremely 'attentive to the phenomenon of language, naming and dating', and to the 'repetition compulsion (at once rhetorical, magical, poetical)', Derrida comes to the conclusion that the most powerful and destructive appropriation of terrorism is precisely its use as a self-evident concept by all parties involved! Thus, the discourse of terrorism appears in the light of Derrida's philosophical analysis as a kind of language game which defines history by its own vision and by so doing seeks to control it.

A very different portrait of terrorism as a radically modern phenomenon, sprung from the loins of a totalitarian, positivist and imperial modernity, emerges from John Gray's brilliant little volume, *Al-QAEDA and what it means to be MODERN*. Indeed, Gray who possesses exceptional facility with language, being able to express complex ideas in the simplest words, also has the enviable gift of analysis and perception. He exposes the intellectual and moral pretense of modern ideologies as no one else, and his writings have attained the status of being the veritable landmarks of cogent and powerful *kulturkritik*. Gray is censorious of all kinds of totalitarian projects and universalist visions which give rise to illusions of omnipotence and megalomania. Modernity's mistress, science with a capital S, he believes, is the mother of the mythic belief in humanity's ability to control its destiny.

Al-Qaeda's closest precursors, we are informed in the beginning, are the revolutionary anarchists of late nineteenth-century Europe: 'If Osama bin

Laden has a precursor, it is the nineteenth century Russian terrorist Sergei Nechaev.' (21). Hence, to view Al-Qaeda as an anti-modern movement, a relic of the past, is, according to Gray, simply wrong. 'Like communism and Nazism, radical Islamism is modern. Though it claims to be anti-Western, it is shaped as much by western ideology as by Islamic traditions. Like Marxists and neo-liberals, radical Islamists see history as a prelude to a new world. All are convinced they can remake the human condition. If there is a uniquely modern myth, this is it.' (3) An even more sombre insight is expressed as, 'the conflict between Al-Qaeda and the West is a war of religion. The Enlightenment idea of a universal civilization, which the West upholds against radical Islam, is an offspring of Christianity. Al-Qaeda's peculiar hybrid of theocracy and anarchy is a by-product of western radical thought. Each of the protagonists in the current conflict is driven by beliefs that are opaque to it.' (117)

In brief sketches, Gray presents a history of modernist illusions, paying equal attention to their political, economic and ideological matrices. Whatever the topic, be it positivism or globalism, free-market or *Pax Americana*, limits to growth or the end of history, his is a lucid and intellectually gratifying analysis. Nor is there any reticence when it comes to describing the follies of the modern ways. Some examples: 'It is a mistake to think that opponents of liberal values are enemies of the Enlightenment... The European right is not so much a return of fascism as an attempt to modernize it.' (14-15); 'French nation is an artifact of military conscription and the school system.' (19); 'America's peculiar religiosity is becoming ever more strikingly pronounced. It has by far the most powerful fundamentalist movement of any advanced country... In truth, the US is a less secular state than Turkey.'(23); 'The limits to growth have not disappeared. They have re-turned as geopolitics.' (61); 'The aftermath of September 11th has produced a new kind of unlimited war. The Hobbesian anarchy that flows from failed states has enabled stateless armies to strike into the heart of the world's greatest power. In response, the US and other liberal regimes are turning themselves into Hobbesian surveillance states.' (84); and, finally, 'Globalization begets de-globalization.' (112)

John Gray is a highly perceptive, outspoken and eloquent critic of modernity's totalitarian – missionizing as well as imperialistic – theories and practices. His numerous writings, especially an earlier work *Enlightenment's Wake* (Routledge, 1995), are indispensable for any Muslim attempt to understand modernity as a Western enterprise of *din* and *dawla*!

Among the more scholarly publications that also focus on September 11, Bruce Lincoln's *Holy Terrors* is worthy of serious attention. It is a theoretical work that seeks to understand, in the light of the notorious terrorist attacks on America, the 'nature and essence' of 'religion'. Central to this project is Lincoln's critique, nay rejection, of Talal Asad's deconstruction of 'religion' as a secular concept (*Genealogies of Religion*. John Hopkins, 1993). Vigorously challenging Clifford Geertz view of religion as a 'cultural system', Asad had shown that the theoretical search for an essence of religion invites one to separate it conceptually from the domain of power. It may be, he observed

wryly, 'a happy accident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our times that it be kept quite separate from politics, law and science - spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctive modern life. This definition is at once part of a strategy (for secular liberals) of the confinement, and (for liberal Christians) of the defence of religion.' His assertion was that no universal definition of religion is possible. Lincoln on his part seeks to reinstate Geertz, and even proposes a set of theoretical benchmarks according to which social activities and discourses may be classified as belonging to the sphere of 'religion' or not. Obviously, to delineate the essence of 'religion' is part of the secular calling and Lincoln's typology too fits squarely in the secular scheme of things.

As a phenomenological study, however, Lincoln's work is quite original and fecund in ideas. A collection of essays on such current topics as 'Symmetric Dualisms' between the rhetoric of Bush and Ben Laden, 'Jihads, Jeremiads, and the Enemy Within', or 'Religious Conflicts and the Postcolonial State' etc it is invariably stimulating. What is more, Lincoln's volume contains a number of original sources, transcripts of Bin Laden's videotaped message, Bush's address to the nation, Pat Robertson's interview with Jerry Falwell, and Mohamed Atta's will, whether spurious or not, that all enhance its scholarly value. It is not polemical against Islam but against religion in general. For all its secular moorings, as an academic effort, it makes noteworthy contribution to the academic debate.

If Bruce Lincoln's effort marks a serious academic response to the terror of 11th September, Charles Kimball's *When Religions Become Evil* is a testimony to the contrition and intense soul-searching of the religious conscience that is also a gift of September 11th. Despite the provocative, if not downright offensive, title, it is neither polemical in intent nor harsh in tone. The author, an academic and a cleric, with special relationship to the Middle East and the Iranian regime, is a teacher at heart who seeks to warn the believers of every faith of the 'five warning signs of corruption in religion', namely, absolute truth claims, blind obedience, establishing the ideal time, the end justify any means, and Holy War or the Crusading impulse. For much of the irenic sentiment that is found throughout the book, the author avowedly feels indebted to W.C. Smith.

Certainly, there is nothing reprehensible in Kimball's plea for the ransacking of the religious conscience, especially when he is evenhanded in his reproach and does not target any single tradition for the sake of political expediency. Further, whatever he says is already part of the general wisdom of all major traditions, which always warn against the dangers of sectarianism, against the lure of turning the universal community into a party. What makes his plea somewhat problematic is the fact that his view of religion too is a thoroughly secular one, that he has internalized secular criticism to the extent of brandishing 'religion', or at least certain sections of it, as 'evil'. Only in the choice of the Manichaean terminology are found any traces of his own faith! A far more revealing, and morally disturbing, study would be the one carrying the title, *When States Become Evil*. Whether Kimball will be tempted to produce such a sequel to his present volume remains however to be seen!

That the 'war on terror' has reintroduced apocalyptic imagery and atavistic rhetoric in the political language is no secret. In fact, Bruce Lincoln clearly shows that there is a veritable symmetry in the scriptural allusions of both Ben Laden and Bush (19-32), not to mention the pious rage against liberalism that pervades the fulminations of rightist evangelists in the US, and which mirrors the anti-modern tirade of Muslim fundamentalists. This, for instance, is how Pat Robinson, whilst welcoming his guest Jerry Falwell, bemoans the tragedy of 11 September: 'And we have thought that we're invulnerable. And we have been so concerned about money. And we have been so concerned about material things. The interests of the people are on their health and on their finances, and on their pleasures and on their sexuality, and while this is going on, ... we have allowed rampant pornography on the internet. We have allowed rampant secularism, and occult etc, to be broadcast on television. We have permitted somewhere in the neighbourhood of 35 to 40 million babies to be slaughtered in our societies. We have a court that has essentially stuck its finger in God's eye...'. These sentiments are further elaborated by Falwell in the following manner: 'But throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make an alternative life style, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point a finger in their face and say: "You helped this happen."' (104ff)

A far more sophisticated and erudite, but by no means less passionate, plea for the restitution of the Biblical vision of world order is found in Thomas Prangle's *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*. Here is a very intense academic reflection, in the form of a dialogue between the partisans of philosophical rationalism and scriptural wisdom, that fully reveals the angst and disenchantment that Biblical consciousness feels today. As a very competent exegetical tract, it is also a tribute to the resources of the religious intellect. In fact, Pangle passionately yearns for the kind of transcendence which has been all but lost in the secular nihilism of modernity (Nihilism as a metaphysical predisposition and a worldview, one ought to bear in mind, also characterizes the mind-set of Muslim terrorists!)

Its tenor, however, is best appraised by listening to the concluding statement which says: 'Patriarchy, the Scripture teaches us, is the cornerstone of the right way of life for mankind. The chosen people are a people of patriarchal families.... Through the story of Abraham, the Bible shows forth the exemplary patriarch, in all his pious glory. But patriarchy in and of itself, even patriarchy inspired by Abraham, is far from sufficient. ... (Later in the stories of Isaac and Jacob) we learn why a society of patriarchs requires broadening to a fraternal society..... What Scripture will mean by rule of law is the absolute rule of divine positive law: a code of law made for men, but not by men..... In order to understand the character and the need for such a rule of divine positive law, Israel (and we, vicariously) must first experience the unqualified

rule of man over man; and in order to grasp fully what such a rule implies we must watch as the seed of Jacob experience life under a purely human regime in full development. We must witness the great drama of Egyptian enslavement and Mosaic liberation – the drama whose culmination is the promulgation and reception of the divine law. This dialogue (between Philosophy and the Bible) requires an approach to the Scripture that treats it as a text to be heeded, and questioned in all seriousness, because one takes seriously the possibility that it may provide the answer to the most important question – the question, How I ought to live? If the Bible is true, then what is called for above all is obedience to the Biblical God as simply authoritative...’ (182-3)

Unfortunately, for all its stylistic elegance, scholarly erudition and intellectual acumen, Pangle’s statement also marks the limit of scriptural – fundamentalist - imagination. No viable vision of world order emerges from this reflection, nor does it lead to any genuine dialogue with secular conscience. Further, like Muslim fundamentalists, Pangle propagates a theocratic, imperial vision, just as the positivity that he attributes to the divine law renders it indistinguishable from any secular penal code. Far more problematic is the very choice of Abraham as the patriarch of humanity. For all his preeminence in the Bible and the Qur’an, Abraham/Ibrahim remains unknown to the adherents of non-Semitic traditions. The Muslim is thus obliged to point out that from the standpoint of Qur’anic consciousness, only Adam stands for the whole of humanity. Further, Adam, from the Qur’anic account of creation, may be envisaged in both transcendental and immanentist terms; both as the primordial, eternal man and as the individual, historical human being.

Most significantly, Adam is designated as the Representative or Vicegerent (*Khalifa*) of God; a designation that is pre-eminently moral in scope and purpose. It presents a conceptual scheme that mediates between transcendence and immanence, that bridges the gap between the *de facto* and the *de jure*, the *is* and the *ought*, of the human situation - *without invoking the ontological language of incarnation*. The Qur’anic view of Adam’s *khilafa* is a supremely humanistic doctrine, without the hubris and arrogance of errant humanism that according to the critics of modernity is its bane and the source of its nihilism. In any dialogue with secularism, in any discussion on the problem of world order, the Muslim contribution can only be through a deepening of reflection on Adam’s mission and responsibility.