

Following the latest terrorist attacks, I'd like to examine the nature and the origin of the problems we are presently enduring. Because we are creatures with minds as well as bodies, we can discover the intellectual and spiritual causes of events. Whatever human beings do is not fully explained by materialism, by materialistic causes. There are governing ideas and assumptions behind the whole way we deal with one another. Now let me identify two main aspects of the crisis we now inhabit: Islamic terrorism and secularisation. These two things are governed by ideas and assumptions: particularly ideas and assumptions about God and rationality.

One of the great strengths of Islam is its exalted vision of God. *Allah Akbar! God is great!* For the devout Muslim, God is not a mere metaphor for social welfare. God is real and very, very great. In fact God is so great that we can hardly say anything more about him than *Allah Akbar!* So for faithful Muslims, it is simply a matter of obedience. God commands and they obey. But there are serious problems with this teaching about God. Let me quote the revered medieval Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm who declared:

*God is not bound even by his own word, and nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practise idolatry.*

This leads to profound difficulties – I would even say fatal – difficulties. It creates a radical separation between God and humanity, for it puts God above reason. According to Ibn Hazm and all devout Muslims, God can literally do as he likes. God could, if he so decided, lie to us, trick us, break out in a violent rage and destroy the lot of us. And even as he was thus lying to us and destroying us, we would be obliged to call out *God is great!* It is easy to see how this belief about God could and does lead to the belief that *all* methods of establishing the absolute rule of Allah on earth are permitted, even so far as killing infidels and even – as we have seen – of killing fellow Muslims.

The radical distinction between Islam and Christianity is that Christians believe right at the centre of faith that God is reasonable. The key text is the opening of St John's Gospel, the words we say on Christmas Day: *επ̄ αρχ̄η ην̄ ο λογος* – *In the beginning was the Word*. The Word here – the Logos – means the reasonable power. So the Gospel begins by putting reason at the heart of everything. St John hammers this truth in words of one syllable into our thick heads, and then he repeats his message in case we are still too stupid to understand: *All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made*

So it is the reasonable Word of God which is the heart of the truth about God and about the universe. St John goes on to make the astonishing statement *The Logos, the Word, was made flesh*. The creative rationality of God himself *dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*. Jesus was God's divine rationality on earth. And this is the same Jesus who says *I am the way, the truth and the life*. Jesus, God incarnate, is the truth – the eternal truth. This is the everlasting Covenant between God and humankind in which God declares that he is reasonable and faithful. We can trust him. God does not lie to us. I

will go further and say that God *cannot* lie to us – not because he is bound by some external constraint, but by his own nature – to be ever reasonable and true.

So now let me turn away from irrational Islamic terrorism and consider the other problem by which we are gripped: secularisation. This appears to be quite different. Secularists, atheists, claim above all to be reasonable, to be basing their ideas on rationality. Some secularists are militant, and in the cases of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Philip Pullman, you might even say *malignant*. Others are liberal freethinking secularists. And, while they do not themselves believe in God, they are actually kind enough to allow you and me to believe in God if we wish.

But these liberal secularists say that believing in God is a matter of personal opinion. You are free to make up your own mind. God is like cans of beans: some choose this brand, some another brand; others don't like beans at all. In other words, like Christians, secularists believe in reason. But in their view reason, rationality, starts in the individual human mind and its cogitations: ultimately in *Cogito ergo sum – I think, therefore I am*. For the atheist also reason is at the centre, but its origin is not located in the divine being, but in the individual consciousness. Every atheist, you might say, is his own god.

This kind of rationality is fundamentally irrational because it is both meaningless and implausible. Think about it. *I think, therefore I am* is not a genuine proposition of thought. It purports to prove the existence of an *I*; but it assumes already the existence of this *I* when it says *I think*.

And what is this *I* supposed to be anyhow? When you look at it – when you look into your own being – what do you find there? Only an ever-changing flux of thoughts, impressions, ideas and sensations. It is one of the great moments of outrageousness in the history of philosophy, *I think, therefore I am* – Descartes and all the atheists and secularists think that their own individual existence is more certain than God's existence. How's that for hubris? How's that for the sin of pride? How's that for nonsense?

And secular rationality is implausible. Reason is the principle of order. But atheists believe the wonderful order of the human mind arose out of the chaos of inanimate matter. Atheists say you can't prove the existence of God. I answer, *I don't have to. I know that my mind and my whole being is created by and derived from the being of God*. But let me ask the atheists a question: *What reason do you have for believing that the ordered mind arose by accident out of stuff that is not mind and not orderly? Can you prove that?* And of course, they cannot.

Atheism is not even new. It is usually said to have arisen three or four hundred years ago at the Enlightenment. But you find practical atheism in the Bible where it is put down and ridiculed by the Psalmist and the prophets. Psalm 14 begins: *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*. Jeremiah the prophet mocks the atheists of his day by his analogy of the potter and the clay: Does the clay imagine it made the potter?

The idea that the ordered universe – which can be described in the precise terms of mathematics – arose by chance out of nothing, disorder and chaos is so implausible that we can afford to discard it completely. As the physicist Fred Hoyle said: *To*

*believe that the universe began by accident is as if you should believe that a wind blew through a scrapyard and left behind a perfectly formed Jumbo jet*

So we have these two enemies of truth, and if of truth, then of life itself. We have a murderous fundamentalism which preaches God without reason. And we have a crass and implausible secular atheism which preaches reason without God.

When I say that the only defence against these two forms of destructiveness is to return to the Christian faith, I do not mean to indicate some Patience Strong type of sentimental piety or the mind, body and spirit shelf in *Waterstones*. I mean a return to the Logos theology of St John's Gospel: in the beginning was the Word, the divine reason.

There are two kinds of viciousness: if you try to have God without reason, you end up with suicide bombers and the arbitrariness and cruelty of Sharia Law; if you try to have reason without God, you end up with abortion as a means of contraception, the abandonment of the moral code and its replacement by an amoral permissive individualism. We see the results all around – the collapse of civilised society.

So you see, what happens to a people, a whole society, depends on its core beliefs, its metaphysics. Our core beliefs are derived from the being of God who revealed himself to Moses out of the burning bush as *I am*. The same God who appeared as the Logos – the divine reason in human form – in Jesus Christ.

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not*