

PHILOSOPHY

GIACOMO MARIA ARRIGO

GNOSTIC JIHADISM

A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY
INTO RADICAL POLITICS

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL



MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

PHILOSOPHY

n. 39





GIACOMO MARIA ARRIGO

GNOSTIC JIHADISM

A Philosophical Inquiry into
Radical Politics



MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL



© 2021 – MIMESIS INTERNATIONAL
www.mimesisinternational.com
e-mail: info@mimesisinternational.com

Isbn: 9788869773044
Book series: *Philosophy*, n. 39

© MIM Edizioni Srl
P.I. C.F. 02419370305

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	7
NOTE ON CONVENTION	9
PREFACE	11
INTRODUCTION	15
CHAPTER 1	
GNOSTICISM AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CATEGORY: A LITERATURE REVIEW	21
1.1 Introduction	21
1.2 Eric Voegelin and the foundation of a theoretical paradigm	27
1.3 Augusto Del Noce, or grace replaced by revolution	47
1.4 Hans Jonas: an existential Gnosticism	54
1.5 Vittorio Mathieu and Emanuele Samek Lodovici: from revolution to protest	59
1.6 Luciano Pellicani's sociological analysis	66
CHAPTER 2	
WHAT IS REVOLUTIONARY GNOSTICISM?	77
2.1 The gnostic pattern: six features of revolutionary Gnosticism	77
2.1.1 Anti-cosmism	79
2.1.2 Tripartition of history	82
2.1.3 Immanentization of the <i>eschaton</i>	87
2.1.4 Gnosis	90
2.1.5 Political-revolutionary self-redemption	92
2.1.6 Sociological dualism	96
2.2 Gnostic revolutions throughout history	99
2.2.1 John of Leiden, the Paraclete of Münster	100
2.2.2 Puritanism and the revolution of the saints	106
2.2.3 The French Revolution and the true Jacobin spirit	116
2.2.4 The twentieth century: Bolshevism and Nazism	125

CHAPTER 3	
RADICAL ISLAM: SALAFISM AND JIHADISM	137
3.1 Pioneering studies	137
3.2 Framing the study of an ideology	146
3.2.1 The first term: Salafism	147
3.2.2 The second term: Jihadism	166
CHAPTER 4	
IS SALAFI-JIHADISM AN ADDITIONAL GNOSTIC CHAPTER?	199
4.1 What is Salafi-Jihadism?	199
4.2 Essential Salafi-Jihadi features	218
4.3 Salafi-Jihadism in light of the gnostic pattern	244
4.3.1 The inescapable background: the secularization	245
4.3.2 The world is evil: anti-cosmism	254
4.3.3 The glorious past: tripartition of history	258
4.3.4 An Islamic humankind: the immanentization of the <i>eschaton</i>	278
4.3.5 The ultimate knowledge: the Gnosis	284
4.3.6 Redemption anyway: political-revolutionary self-redemption	288
4.3.7 The world like a chessboard: sociological dualism	296
CONCLUSION	303
APPENDIX – A CONVERSATION WITH LUCIANO PELLICANI	311
BIBLIOGRAPHY	319

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is essentially my PhD thesis and I am deeply indebted to a number of people for their support while working on it. First, I would like to thank my two supervisors: I am extremely grateful to Alberto Ventura (University of Calabria), who had confidence in me during a crucial period of my life, and to John Nawas (KU Leuven), who accepted to supervise my doctoral thesis with dedication and care. They entrusted me to conduct my own research, helping me refining many ideas and concepts, but always leaving me great freedom in organizing the large amount of material presented here.

During my academic career, I have been lucky enough to meet many people who have encouraged and supported me despite the many difficulties of this job choice. I am indebted to Paolo Branca of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, in Milan, for his constant presence each time I sought him out. I must thank Giacomo Samek Lodovici of the same University, who has distinguished himself as an important and precious teacher and friend. The many conversations with Luciano Pellicani have been of great help in defining the notion of revolutionary Gnosticism, and I owe a lot to him.

Many thanks go to Dario Tomasello of the University of Messina, who has proved to be a great friend. Nicoletta Scotti had the patience to read the section on Eric Voegelin, giving me precious tips on his thinking. Marco Rainini gave me a solid background on the figure of Joachim of Flora. All of them heard parts of the dissertation in its nascent form and encouraged me to keep at it.

I must mention Francesco Botturi of the Catholic University of Milan, always present whenever I looked for him; Alessandro Orsini of LUISS University of Rome, who was so kind to give me detailed comments on the radical mindset of violent extremists; and Claudio Bonvecchio of the University of Insubria for his suggestions on the gnostic religion.

Spartaco Pupo of the University of Calabria and Bert Broeckeaert of KU Leuven have provided me interesting and insightful tips on the use of the category of revolutionary Gnosticism in relation to other disruptive historical experiences.

I will never forget the night spent with Pietrangelo Buttafuoco in Rome, talking about my dissertation, Islam and Christianity, ranging up to the spiritual future of the European continent.

I am grateful to father Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross and to the school he runs, the Advanced School for Interdisciplinary Research, for having let me open my research to new and unexpected horizons.

I have benefitted from numerous exchanges over the years with many friends, old and new. I would like to mention the colleagues of *Occhiali – Laboratorio sul Mediterraneo islamico*, a research center based at the University of Calabria and directed by Alberto Ventura. From the very beginning of my doctoral experience, Alberto included me in the center's pool of researchers, which has been an exciting experience for my study and for my own personal growth. *Occhiali* researchers encouraged me to do better and better, particularly Gianfranco Bria.

A mention to the team of *theSquare – Mediterranean Centre for Revolutionary Studies* and to Jacopo Franceschini, with whom I have had so many discussions on every single topic of this book.

For their friendship and support, I would also like to thank Aldo, Mario, Massimiliano and Federico.

My greatest debt is to my family: my parents, Dino and Rossella, and my brother, Massimiliano. Without their constant support, I could not have done it – and I am grateful to them for more than I could ever say.

Finally, this book is dedicated to Fernanda, my love.

NOTE ON CONVENTION

The transliteration system adopted in the book is the one used by International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES), which is considered a leader in the field of Middle East studies. Some place and people names are transliterated, but names familiar in English are given their usual English spelling (for example Mecca and Baghdad for place names, and Osama bin Laden for people names). For reasons of clarity and consistency, dating throughout this research is according to the Christian Era. The *aḥādīth* (sing. *ḥadīth*) cited in this study have been recovered from the website *sunnah.com*; therefore, for each *ḥadīth* quotation I have provided a direct link to the *sunnah.com* site, so as to compare the different forms of possible quotations.



PREFACE

Why do some people kill other people in the name of Islam? Newspapers and news agencies refer to these people simply as “terrorists”. Others, who want to show some degree of being informed, call them Salafi-Jihadis. But names as such do not explain why adherents to Salafi-Jihadism do what they do. An outsider might say that Salafi-Jihadis just kill other people who happen not to be Muslims, but it remains a mystery to that outsider why they kill their co-religionists as well, sometimes by entering a mosque when people are praying in order to blow themselves up – in the name of the very same God to whom the people assembled were praying. Why do Salafi-Jihadis cut the throats of others or burn a Muslim pilot to death? Why? Why? Why?

Many wonder why and find no answer. An answer is to be found in the book you are now holding. This is the very first attempt to study Salafi-Jihadism as an ideology that is tied to revolutionary Gnosticism. In this study, you will find an interpretative framework that explains Salafi-Jihadism. After reading it, you will understand more of this ideology and why its followers commit crimes in the name of that ideology, which they call religion.

This study adopts an innovative viewpoint to study radical Islamist thought in general. Previously used by other notable scholars, the theoretical notion of revolutionary Gnosticism helps to frame and understand revolutionary phenomena such as Nazism, Bolshevism and Jacobinism, but never before has this notion been adopted in relation to Salafi-Jihadism to help explain it. Studying Salafi-Jihadism from this perspective reveals its intent of saving humankind from Evil (with a capital letter) in order to construct the perfect society.

The consistency of Salafi-Jihadism with revolutionary Gnosticism reveals that the ideological foundation of radical Islamist groups is basically at odds with Islam *tout court*.

By writing this book, Dr. Giacomo Maria Arrigo offers us a daring and cogent explanatory framework to understand Salafi-Jihadism as a

revolutionary gnostic movement and at once he offers us a glimpse at what the future might bring. By reading this book, the reader will gain more insight into the motives of Salafi-Jihadism and will acquire a better understanding of this extremist ideology. After finishing this book, the reader will also have found answers to the questions posed at the outset of this preface. The publication of this book comes at a time in which humanity is confronted with Covid-19, economic recession, changes in world order, and racial conflict. Yes, it is a time to read such a book!

Prof. Dr. John Nawas
Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies
University of Leuven, Belgium



[Matthew 19]
{19:25} And upon hearing this,
the disciples wondered greatly, saying:
“Then who will be able to be saved?”
{19:26} But Jesus, gazing at them, said to them:
“With men, this is impossible.
But with God, all things are possible.”





INTRODUCTION

The study of revolutionary Gnosticism as a philosophical concept is rather new in the academic debate. The same could be said of Salafi-Jihadism, which is the ideological foundation of radical groups such as al-Qā'ida and the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The present research is therefore at the intersection of two underdeveloped areas of study, having to deal with issues that few have written about. However, it is not for a mere exercise in style that I put both notions in relation to each other. There is something more that guides the entire research, something I will explain in this brief introduction.

Revolutionary Gnosticism was introduced in the academic debate by the philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901-1985). He considers this notion as “the propulsive force of the Western revolution,”¹ a rather unusual and intriguing statement indeed. As a matter of fact, in all his intellectual work he delves into the very nature of revolutionary movements in European history, from the 17th-century Puritans to the 20th-century totalitarian experiences of Nazism and Bolshevism. Intrigued by the revolutionary mindset, he first uses the concept of political religion, but then he rejects it for a more comprehensive theoretical model, that is, revolutionary Gnosticism. By adopting it extensively in his work, Voegelin has been able to understand the underlying purpose of every revolutionary movement, namely, to redeem humankind from Evil (with the capital letter) and to build the perfect society ever existed. This claim reveals the Promethean project of the gnostic revolution, which is to eliminate God from the revolutionary perspective and to pretend to take on His creative and redeeming power.

The efficacy of the concept of revolutionary Gnosticism has led several other philosophers and sociologists to adopt it as a useful explanatory notion to frame and define numerous modern and contemporary revolutionary phenomena. Scholars such as Augusto del Noce (1910-1989), Vittorio Mathieu (1923-2020), Emanuele Samek Lodovici (1942-1981) and Luciano

1 Eric Voegelin, *La nuova scienza politica* (Roma: Borla, 1999), p. 189.