

# ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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## *The Search for World Order*

Over the Christmas holidays, I read two books that probed the search throughout history for world order. My strong opinion is that every Christian believer should read these two books. Equally important, every political and economic leader should read them. The first is *World Order* by Henry Kissinger; the second is *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* by Francis Fukuyama. I want to summarize the arguments of both books and then, using Psalm 2, add a biblical perspective to their arguments.

- First, a summary of Kissinger's *World Order*. Kissinger primarily gives focus to the modern world's search for world order. He begins with the order established after the calamitous Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which decimated northern Germany and produced an unimaginable loss of life and property. It was the last of the great religious wars that stemmed from the Reformation; it exhausted the states of Europe. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the War, produced a system in which each ruler agreed not to impose his religious convictions on other states and the major powers of Europe agreed not to interfere with issues of domestic order within the respective states of Europe. The result of Westphalia was an acceptance of religious pluralism and a tacit agreement that these religiously plural states would collectively search for order in Europe—i.e., seek a balance of power. The French Revolution and Napoleon upset this order, which was restored by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. To Kissinger, real statesmen always seek to maintain this fragile balance of power. Kissinger sees Islam, especially its manifestation during and immediately after the Ottoman Empire (1517-1919), as disastrous for the concept of world order. Even today, Islam often seeks forced conversion and uses military power (jihad) to impose its version of order on the world. He spends considerable time on Iran, especially the Iran since Ayatollah Khomeini, which has been disastrous for the world's balance of power. For Kissinger, the Islamic worldview sees states as "impediments to the transcendent obligation to convert unbelievers. Today's Iran endangers world order both as the legatee of an empire and as a revolutionary project" (from James Traub's review of Kissinger's book). One of the strengths of Kissinger's book is that he calls for a renewed realism in the Middle East "where jihadists have shattered the nation-state system in their quest for global revolution based on extremist religious values." Finally, Kissinger views America's emergence as a world power during World War I as the harbinger of global democracy—the key to a new world order, which, it hoped, would replace the balance of power concept that governed Europe since the 1815 Congress of Vienna. Woodrow Wilson's idealism was destroyed by the dictators that led the world into the carnage of World War II. Wilsonian idealism still persists in America, most recently in the vision of

George W. Bush, who sought to promote democracy in the Middle East, with rather disastrous results. Finally, Putin's Russia and nonstate actors like al Qaeda and ISIS are not interested in world order, a balance of power maintained by a values-neutral pursuit of strategic interests. One important "take-away" from this vital book is the need for humility, not only for people but for nations, including the United States. Kissinger writes: "Making progress toward a world order based on individual dignity and participatory governance [remains a lofty ideal.] But progress toward it will need to be sustained through a series of intermediate stages." Kissinger believes a restored balance of power is possible, but it will take time and patience.

- The second book, by Francis Fukuyama, is more nuanced and complicated. It is actually the second of a two volume study, the first of which was entitled *The Origins of Political Order*. Sheri Berman of Barnard College, summarizes Fukuyama's argument from volume one: ". . . political order was all about institutions, and that liberal democracy in particular rested on a delicate balance of three distinct features—political accountability; a strong, effective state; and the rule of law . . . A true liberal democracy needed to have its institutions of accountability supplemented by a central government that could get things done and by rules and regulations that applied equally to everyone." This second volume, which I read, traces these themes from the Industrial Revolution to the present. Among many other themes in his complex book, Fukuyama is interested in the United States, which, to him, demonstrates that a democracy can build a strong state. As he sees it, this occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century largely due to the efforts of the Progressives in the early decades and to the New Deal of FDR. Strong democratic institutions were formed and have endured. Central to his overall thesis is the proposition that neither democracy nor capital markets can flourish properly in the absence of a competent state. His greater concern now is that the US could also be a prime example of a democracy that atrophies, for its institutions no longer function well. Regarding the US, he concludes that its state is now weak, inefficient and corrupt. For Fukuyama, this has resulted from extreme income inequality, and the rise of powerful interest groups, which are "collectively unrepresentative of the public as a whole." Berman captures his overall conclusion well: "The result is a vicious cycle in which the American state deals poorly with major challenges, which reinforces the public's distrust of the state, which leads to the state's being starved of resources and authority, which leads to even poorer performance." European democracies are facing the same challenges, but their solution is the European Union, which attempts to deemphasize the single nation state for the greater good of the Union. This solution is not working very well either.

Institutional failure across the board for the world's democracies is producing an inglorious paradox: Democracy is still the best choice for nation states, but they no longer function well in meeting the challenges of the globalization and interdependence of the postmodern world. Few would choose China, or Russia or Islam as viable alternatives. China is trying to demonstrate that you can create a competent state without the benefit of the Western traditions of democracy and rule of law. Can China successfully mix state capitalism and totalitarianism? Democracy has failed in Russia and in an innumerable host of Middle Eastern nations (think Arab Spring) due to the absence of necessary institutions to facilitate

it. So, in the end, Fukuyama argues that political decay (i.e., the failure of institutions) slowly, but perceptibly, takes away all the advantages that political order delivers—a stable, prosperous and harmonious society. Following this conclusion, it is difficult to be optimistic about the future of the United States or of Western Europe, or for that matter of the entire world.

- Finally, permit me to add an insight from Psalm 2. The first three verses of this Messianic Psalm (one which celebrates the coming rule of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus) give focus to the human rebellion against God and His anointed one (the English translation of the Hebrew term, Messiah)—especially the rebellious plot of humanity's leaders. The reason for the rebellion is that living under God's rule is like being in fetters or chains. Humanity seeks to be free of God. God's response to the rebellion (vv. 4-6) is a scoffing rebuke. His answer is His king, His Messiah, who will rule from Zion (Jerusalem). As this paragraph makes clear, the Son will crush the rebellion. God will bring it to an end (vv. 7-9) and his Son will rule, fulfilling the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:16). The psalmist then calls on the rulers and judges of this world to respond in wisdom to the message of this Psalm: Kiss the Son; pay homage to the Son. He ends with, "Blessed are those who take refuge in Him." The Son, the Davidic Messiah, is the only solution to the world's search for order. It will never come until Jesus returns, ends the rebellion, vanquishes evil and ushers in His kingdom. The two books I have discussed in this *Perspective* illustrate from different vantage points the futility of humanity's search for world order. Good rulers are a mark of good stewardship, but humanity will not attain an orderly world where there is peace and stability until Christ returns. Human rulers may be wise and efficient rulers, but they can never solve the core problem of the human condition—sin. Only King Jesus can do that and He accomplished it through His death, burial and resurrection. The solution to the search for world order is to "seek refuge in the Son," which means to place faith in Him. Until and unless the world does that, there will be no orderly world.

See John Micklethwait's review of Kissinger's book and Sheri Berman's review of Fukuyama's book in the *New York Times Book Review* (14 September 2014); Walter Isaacson, "The Lion in Winter," *Time* (22 September 2014); James Traub's review of Kissinger's book in the *Wall Street Journal* (6-7 September 2014); and *The Economist* (27 September 2014), pp. 85-86.