IDWRG

Innsbrucker Diskussionspapiere zu Weltordnung, Religion und Gewalt

Nummer 31 (2009)

Figures of Antichrist.
The Apocalypse and its Restraints in Contemporary
Political Thought

von

Giuseppe Fornari
(Università degli Studi di Bergamo)

Innsbrucker Diskussionspapiere zu Weltordnung, Religion und Gewalt

Die **IDWRG** (*Innsbrucker Diskussionspapiere zu Weltordnung, Religion und Gewalt*) verstehen sich als unregelmäßige Reihe zur Veröffentlichung von wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, die im Umfeld der **Forschungsplattform „Weltordnung – Religion – Gewalt"** an der Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck entstanden sind.

Diese Reihe soll dabei helfen, aktuelle Fragen in diesem Spannungsfeld auf wissenschaftlichem Niveau zu diskutieren. Wie die gesamte Plattform möchte sie unterschiedliche Forschungsansätze im Blick auf große gesellschaftliche Probleme der Gegenwart zueinander in Beziehung bringen, und das sowohl ergänzend als auch konfrontativ.

Themen und Methode sind daher grundsätzlich offen und frei. Beiträge aus dem Themenfeld in verschiedenen Stadien der Erarbeitung und Reaktionen auf Arbeiten sind jederzeit in der Leitung der Plattform oder der Redaktion der Reihe willkommen. Nur so kann dem Wesen einer Reihe von „Diskussionspapieren" auch entsprochen werden.

Die in den Arbeiten geäußerten Meinungen geben freilich jeweils die der Verfasser/innen wieder, und dürfen nicht als Meinung der Redaktion oder als Position der Plattform missdeutet werden.

Figures of Antichrist. The Apocalypse and its Restraints in Contemporary Political Thought

Giuseppe Fornari[*]

1. The Antichrist and the *katéchon* in early Christianity

The history of the Antichrist follows the history of Christ like a shadow[1]. This statement is far from banal, not only for its consequences but also because Christianity as currently divulged typically denies that a figure like the Antichrist could be a cause for concern. When confronted with the Antichrist, with Satan in person, the current reaction of many Christians is one of "dialogue". That this may be interpreted, in terms of the doctrine of the Antichrist, as a sign of his proximity passes unnoticed among Christians of goodwill in this day and age. But the devil is never so near as when denied or when, following the dictates of what is "politically correct", we start negotiating with him under names that change to suit the occasion. It is a different matter with regard to the historical phenomena only indirectly related to Satan, that help to hold him as far off as possible, but this eventuality can only be appreciated by those who know the devil, not by those who deny him.

[*] Giuseppe Fornari graduated from the University of Padova and Stanford University and is currently Assistant Professor of the History of Philosophy at the University of Bergamo. He is a René Girard and Eric Voegelin specialist, Italian editor of René Girards works and board member of the "Colloquium on Violence and Religion". His research focus is the connection of literature, philosophy and religion as well as the investigation of the creative potential of mimetic rivalry. An earlier version of this paper was presented at April 23, 2009, at Innsbruck University as "Raymund Schwager Religionspolitologische Vorlesung".

[1] Antichrist written with a capital "A" refers to the person or absolute principle. My use of a small letter has reference to the antichrist as a general function.

Some initial comments of a semantic nature are indispensable and, in virtue of the term's very pregnancy, they lead straight to theological considerations. Antichrist is a synonym of Satan, with the difference that the functional noun, "anti-christ", contains a direct indication of the relationship of Satan to Christ; it is the inevitable consequence of the conflict between Satan and Christ. That consequence can only be negation or opposition. The devil, as soon as he encounters Christ, automatically becomes "anti-", which does not mean a personal antipathy - the devil is not a person so much as the principle that parasitically destroys the person – but expresses the consequence of the demystification brought about by Christ: his mask once removed, the devil reveals his true face as Adversary, as "anti-", and the first figure against whom he directs this being "anti-" is necessarily the one who unmasked him, that is, the Christ. The Greek prefix "anti" in itself indicated the desire to take someone's place and, consequently, to go against that person; and it is this latter meaning that is prevalent in the modern prefix. Satan's intention becomes clear when we perceive the perfect convergence between the two nuances of meaning: taking Christ's place in order to go against him and going against Christ in order to take his place. Initially Satan tries out his old ploy of temptation on Christ, which marks the start of the Son of God's public mission. The conflict is first and foremost a conflict between two functions, between two opposing logics. If Christ were to yield, he would at once fail in his mission from the Father, becoming the antichrist of himself, cancelling out his own function and making the very notion of antichrist pointless. Christ does not yield, but this does not mean that his victory has been secured once and for all. He has confirmed his mission but once this has got under way all are called to enter into his figure, into his saving function, to become "Christ", which implies that the devil will repeat his temptation with everyone called by Christ. And Christ being present this time, yielding to temptation marks out the person who yields as "antichrist"; and, since it is hard to resist temptation, there will be a growing number, not to say a multitude, of "antichrists". From the start the word is revealingly characterized structurally by the plural. While numerous "christs" do not exist because to follow Christ means to be as he is and to enter in to be part of him, whereby all the faithful become part of the body of Christ which is the Church, anyone who becomes the "anti" of Christ introduces the germ of plurality and discord, because from that moment on he is the "anti" of the others. The an-

tichrist introduces the poison of the "anti-" into the world – not that it was not there before, but Satan took care to conceal it.

The history of the word shows all this quite well and on the whole recognizably and, if we want to reconstruct in a comprehensive fashion the presence and significance of the Antichrist in history and in contemporary political thought, as well as in the authors that we shall be looking at, then it is absolutely essential to try to understand how such a figure came to develop, along with the idea of an intermediate time and of some restraining factor, the *katéchon*, set between ourselves and the full antichristic disclosure. As occurs with many fundamental concepts of the Christian scriptures, the notion of the antichrist appears to enter by stealth, and then to develop and establish itself within the course of the tradition. Its evolution has been studied using the historico-critical method, quite rightly, but that method should not prevent us from recognizing subsequent developments in their beginnings, nor has it any right to hide or blur the dynamic leading from one to the other. On the other hand, the historico-critical method proves most useful when applied to recognizing the living core of the tradition, separating it out to a certain degree from its historically determined expressions.

The term first appears in the following passage in *1 John*: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (2, 18)[2]. The author is an exponent of the Johannine school and he is warning other members of his Church against a split within it that has carried off not a few of its followers. These are the "many antichrists", Christian heretics, so described because by wanting to take Christ's place they really go against him. They present a damaging split that, in the author's eyes, is evidence of the approach of the last hour, of the final conflict between Christ and the forces of evil. Here there is an ecclesiological nuance of the utmost importance, which is not necessarily intentional but is implicit in the argument: evidently, as long as the Church remained united, it would prevent the coming of the Antichrist, since the split in the Church proclaims it. The approach of the Antichrist is prepared for and proclaimed by the proliferation of the "many antichrists".

---

[2] In considering this passage I took account of R. E. Brown's *Le lettere di Giovanni*, It. transl. C. Benetazzo, Assisi, Cittadella, 2000, p. 458-472, a well-balanced combination of the historico-critical method and a more contextual view.

It would be a serious error in exegesis to circumscribe the significance of the references to antichrist contained in John's epistles, just as it would be so to undervalue their close links with the Gospel tradition. The full extent of the consequences is indicated by the fact of its referring to a precise event such as a schism within the proto-Christian Church: we should not forget that this was one of the communities where the Gospel message was being revised, and that in Christianity what is decisive emerges in the everyday life of single individuals and of the community, into which God himself has deemed to enter completely. From a semantic and typological point of view, the connection with the Gospels is very solid and is, to be precise, with the "false prophets" and "false Christs" announced by Jesus in the more apocalyptic parts of *Mark* and *Matthew*[3]. Thus, in Christ's own words, or rather in their initial revision by his followers, we have the historical and theological concept of "pseudo-Christs" (*pseudóchristoi*, always in the plural), continuing the Jewish idea of false prophets (a match for the term *pseudóchristoi*, in fact) and indicating the presence, alongside Christ's teaching and its dissemination, of an evil will to produce a fake imitation of it, in a proliferation of counterfeits aiming to disorientate and make it impossible to choose the one true Christ.

The *Apocalypse*, which is not by John but is linked to the Johannine school, develops these concepts, reworking the wealth of symbolism originating in myth that is to be found in the *Book of Daniel* and in Jewish eschatology. To my mind, the interpretation that sees the author as taking for his basis the typically Johannine idea of eschatology already realized in Christ is a convincing one, and in fact it in no way conflicts with considerations about the final outcome of human history; indeed, on the contrary, those reflections are freed from the mythological simplifications of millenarianism[4]. The antichristic references in *Revelation* are identifiable in a sort of eschatological

---

[3] My main criticism of the Italian anthology *L'anticristo*, vol. I, *Il nemico dei tempi finali*, edd. G. L. Potestà and M. Rizzi, Milano, A. Mondadori, 2005, otherwise an erudite and extremely useful text, is that the editors have not included the New Testament and Gospel passages preparing the notion of Antichrist, and so applying the historico-critical method turns out to be too restrictive.

[4] For eschatology already realized in the Apocalypse, see E. Corsini, *Apocalisse di Gesù Cristo secondo Giovanni*, Torino, SEI, 2002, p. 25-30, even if the author starts from the premise that the more normally prophetic reading regarding the future conflicts with the reading of past and present when correctly understood.

trimurti that makes its appearance in Ch. 12, constituting the first three of seven signs to introduce the decisive seven "vials of the wrath of God" poured out by the seven angels upon the earth (16, 1). The first sign, fought by Michael and his angels, is "the great dragon … that old serpent" (12, 9); this development of the serpent of original sin[5] is determined to ensnare and destroy the "woman clothed with the sun" and the child to which she has given birth. The second sign is "the beast …out of the sea"; to this beast the dragon gives "his power, and his seat, and great authority" (13, 2), and "all that dwell upon the earth" worship it except the chosen of the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" (13, 8)[6]: the beast from the sea represents political power in general and with a particular allusion to the power whose presence was most closely felt, Imperial Rome; the negative judgment here needs to be balanced by the underlying observation that it, too, was permitted by God[7]. The third sign is "the beast coming up out of the earth" with its immediately evident imitative features: he had "two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (13, 11), seducing all to worship the first beast and erecting an image to it that comes alive and speaks. The third beast is then openly described as a "false prophet" (16, 13; 19, 20): it is therefore a corrupt religious power which may allude to the degenerated form of Judaism that had rejected Jesus[8] but takes on a wider connotation if understood to refer, as I believe it must, to the future as well. We have here a progressive perfecting of the spirit of deception and lying that is typical of Satan, revealing his nature as the pliant principle of adaptation and transformation of evil to become a politico-sacral institution and in the end a clear counterfeit of the lamb of God with manifestly antichristic characteristics. We should stress that there are not three mythological beings ranged one after the other, but three versions and transformations of the same demonic principle with which Jesus engages in his final battle.

Subsequent Christian reflection, starting with Irenaeus of Lyon (II c.), develops these suppositions, gradually bringing out the close connection between

---

[5] E. Corsini, *Apocalisse*, cit., p. 225.

[6] This interpretation is confirmed by E. Corsini, *Apocalisse*, cit., p. 256-59.

[7] E. Corsini, *Apocalisse*, cit., p. 250-55.

[8] As maintained in E. Corsini, *Apocalisse*, cit., p. 255-71; traditional interpretations see in the second beast an allusion to the idolatrous nature of Roman power (P. Prigent, *Il messaggio dell'Apocalisse*, It. transl. E. Lasagna, Roma, Borla, 1982, p. 180-82).

them and evolving an increasingly personified idea of the Antichrist[9], which leads to unifying the terms and concepts of what had already been said in New Testament writings. This goes together with an obvious concern to explain the postponing of the last hour, which many expected to be imminent, and to interpret events associated with the collapse of the Roman Empire, from an intra- or extra-mundane standpoint, in a reassuring and decipherable way. And it is precisely here, where this highly delicate transition between theologico-apocalyptic revelation and historical and political aspects occurs, that a brief analysis of another important scriptural concept must be inserted: the concept of the *katéchon*, introduced in the Pauline epistles.

The passage occurs in *2 Thessalonians* and is one of the most enigmatic in all Christian scripture, adding to the question of the authenticity of the epistle itself. While closely echoing *1 Thessalonians*, the second epistle corrects the still archaic references made there to a Parousia, to a second coming of Christ, however urgent, and this circumstance makes attribution to a deutero-Pauline writer appear certain[10]. After speaking of the apostasy that is to come and of the "man of sin" who will be revealed "setting himself forth as God" (2, 3-4), the Epistle continues: "And now ye know that which restraineth (*katéchon*, neuter), to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only [there is] one that restraineth now (*katéchon*, masculine), until he be taken out of the way" (2, 6-7). Following this apocalyptic removal of the last restraint, the *katéchon* understood as a force or as a person, there comes the revelation of "the lawless one", "whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power" and who will be destroyed by Christ "with the breath of his mouth" (2, 8-9). That this is an imitatively antichristic power may be deduced not only from the context, (with its reference to the opponent, *antikeimenos*, in 2, 4) but also from its being subsequently characterized as "a working of er-

---

[9] See the texts of Iranaeus collected in *Il nemico dei tempi finali*, cit., p. 29-69, and the related commentary.

[10] The fact that the Epistle's one real theological high point consists in a lowering of the sights as compared to the preceding epistle (and to similar expectations of an imminent Parousia expressed in *1 Corinthians*, posterior to *1 Thessalonians*) is a valid argument for attribution to the deutero-Pauline school (G. Barbaglio, *Le lettere di Paolo*, Roma, Borla, 1980, p. 150-52; see also L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedent of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents*, Leiden, 1996, p. 81-5).

ror" (2, 11), where it is clear that "the lawless one" is able to set himself forth as God because he counterfeits his message. But what is it that "restraineth" the Antichrist?

If we put aside answers of a mythological character, such as identifying the *katéchon* with the Archangel Michael, and interpretations of a more philosophical character, there are essentially two rationally possible answers: the political one, according to which the *katéchon* is the Roman Empire, and the religious one already hinted at in the passage from *I John*, where the *katéchon* is seen as the preaching of the Gospel which, once extended to all mankind, would signal the end of time in accord with the words of *Matthew* 24, 14, bringing together in a more forcible expression what is said in *Mark* 13, 10 and 13: "…this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness (*martyrion*) unto all nations; and then shall the end come". A famous passage in *Luke* 18, 8 ("Nevertheless when the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?")[11] suggests a further development of the second interpretation of the *katéchon*, with the idea that the reference, at least the "objective" reference, might be not so much to success in preaching the Gospel as to a want of success in this world, and so presage the abysmal failure of the Church as an historically effective, perceptible presence. The announcement made to all the world in *Matthew* 24, 14 does not in itself imply conversion, and "witness" (*martyrion*) can be read as martyrdom pure and simple, as appears from 24, 9-10: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake", and the following verse. In these passages the question of chronological term vanishes in the face of the intrinsic logic of the prediction, which is not a simple forecast in time, so much as the identification of a structure active in history. I shall now leave the ecclesiological reading to one side, coming back to it at the end, turning instead to the political interpretation, which is what concerns us most at the moment.

A reading of a political type was followed by many Christians in antiquity who hoped that the Roman Empire would "hold up", seeing it as a bastion opposing the forces of chaos, effectively represented by the barbarian hordes; they hoped, too, for an end to persecution and for some form of collaboration with the imperial power, if not its actual conversion to Christianity. This

---

[11] S. Cipriani, *Le lettere di Paolo*, Assisi, Cittadella, 1999, p. 96.

was to occur with Constantine, an event that it has become fashionable to deprecate, forgetting that the Church would probably not have survived the Arian crisis in the IV century without a period of symbiosis with the Empire. All this implies further development in respect to the *Apocalypse*, where the political power of the beast from the sea is acknowledged but defined as idolatry preparing the way for events to be brought to a head by the false prophet. *2 Thessalonians* corrects the boundless visions of the *Apocalypse*, modifying them in a way as subtle as it is decisive since it transforms the eschatological reading of history into a means to live within history and face up to it, in a period of time no longer compacted onto the final fulfilment in Christ, whether that is regarded as already essentially fulfilled, as in Johannine christology, or shortly to be so, as in the millenarian simplifications given to the message of the *Apocalypse* on many sides.

I am convinced that this development supports and brings out the vision of history, at once both spiritual and demythicizing, and the recognition given to political power that are to be seen in many passages in the Gospels. With regard to the first point, we need to deal with the question of whether Jesus himself, to the extent that his teachings contain an apocalyptic element, thought that fulfilment was at hand. This would seem to be the case to judge from passages such as *Mark* 13, 30 ("this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done") and *Matthew* 24, 34 ("this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled"; cf. 16, 28: "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming into his kingdom"), but these are probably eschatological glosses of the early communities. The Gospel writers themselves, following a verse from another source whose function is to assert the inerrancy of the son of God ("Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"), have Jesus add, and these words are authentic, that no man knows the day and hour, not even the Son, but only the Father[12]. Through a possible allusion to the de-

---

[12] The fact that the phrase posed some difficulty in the early development of Christology proves it to be an original *logion* of Christ, contrary to the view of some commentators for whom the passage already presumes Christological thinking: it is impossibile to see what assumptions might have induced the early Christian theologians to create such an obscure distinction, a source of such doubt that the Gospel writer found it necessary to precede it with an absolute assertion of inerrancy, adapted from another *logion*. Cf. G. Barbaglio, *Gesù ebreo di Galilea. Indagine storica*, Bologna, Dehoniane, 2005, p. 278.

struction of Jerusalem, this dissonant, stratified convergence suggests that, rather than a single event, what the Gospel Jesus is talking about is a key to interpreting events in the near future and history as a whole. Hermeneutically speaking, it seems to me, the most correct reading is that events are to ensue after the preaching of Jesus that will demonstrate its truth quite sensationally, showing mankind as dominated by its stubborn refusal of his message of love: none of the events in this "eschatological" history sees the direct intervention of God and his wrath; the whole catalogue of destruction is brought about by men's hatred. In this context, Matthew 16, 28, besides containing an allusion to the destruction of the Temple, could foreshadow the martyrdom referred to in the pericope of Chapter 24.

As regards the relationship to politics, a reconstruction is more immediate, and confirms the spiritual, and at the same time lucidly realistic, significance of the eschatology asserted by Christ, starting with the famous phrase about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's. Christ's teaching never presents itself as subversive with regard to political and historical institutions and those who worked in them by profession and choice, including the Roman overlords themselves, and it appears clear that the expulsion of the moneylenders from the Temple represents a prophetic message relating to his mission, not a politically revolutionary statement. On the contrary, throughout his trial Jesus behaves with dignified respect towards the authorities, accompanying this with the affirmation of his message, silently incarnated in himself. Thus, for his followers, all these elements left a wide margin for reflection and comment: such as Paul himself expresses in recommending political loyalty in *Romans* 13, 1-7, while the author of *2 Thessalonians* starts to take advantage of it, giving the apocalyptic aspects a wider frame of reference, whereas the millenarianism of many early Christian communities would have levelled them down to a state of imminent, neurotic expectancy[13].

Gradually, as Christian eschatology unwinds and extends in an overall, organic vision of history open to the future, it appears increasingly clear that the antichrist and the *katéchon* are not a single event or figure but a series of

---

[13] Jacob Taubes, in his stimulating interpretation contained in *Die politische Theologie des Paulus* (edd. A. and J. Assmann, München, W. Fink Verlag, 1993), underestimates these aspects, which suggest an evolution in Paul's thinking, subsequently pursued by his school.

figures and events obeying a logic, as general as it is strict, establishing themselves, and us with them, at the heart of evolving history, at the vital nerve centres of the civilizations assailed by the new message. The *katéchon* takes shape as the apocalyptic space of politics, as the working condition for politics before the end of time, and is no longer understood by Christians as a resistance to be overcome before the approaching final success, but starts to be seen as the occasion for historical and intramundane commitment: Christians must busy themselves in shoring up the house in which they dwell, while still preparing for the expected fulfilment. This in fact poses a *sine qua non* for politics in the Christian world or in a world influenced by Christianity, since the time when the apocalypse is fully manifested will see the disappearance of politics. When the Antichrist is revealed, historically all space for politics is cancelled out, and that means entering the realm of the irreversible and incalculable. This is a prospect which is hardly likely to have appealed to the majority of believers. After paralyzing all political activism in the initial period under the illusion of an imminent Parousia, this implication ended up encouraging it.

We have then a paradoxical situation in which the *katéchon*/antichrist relationship becomes the driving force within history and politics, continually threatening to end them and influencing one outcome or another according to how the relationship interacts with men's behaviour and choices, according to how those choices and tendencies, from time to time, decide the shape of that relationship. In any case the tendency is to accelerate since, as revelation gradually approaches, the satanic forces challenged by it will concentrate their hostility against it, radicalizing the conflict and increasingly breaking down all intermediate barriers – which means that the various *katéchonta* or *katéchontes* will tend to be ever shorter in duration. Thus we obtain a series of "figures" of the antichrist, in the twofold sense that they prefigure it when disintegration prevails or they limit themselves to "figuring" it, to providing us with an image distinct from the original, when they "restrain" it. The relationship of mutual delimitation and definition with the antichrist and the antichristic forces in fact implies that there are dealings with it, more or less intense but always significant – all which implies that Christ is present, either near or far. Were that presence to be totally denied, then the conditions would be created for the antichristic antiparousia, prelude to the definitive Parousia. Here we can already see how a political read-

ing necessarily leads us towards an ecclesial one but if we are to derive the greatest profit from it, we too must "exercise restraint" and not jump to hasty conclusions.

It will be interesting now for our purposes to compare some twentieth-century interpretations, so providing us with important elements for developing a reading more relevant to our situation today. If the stated criteria are valid they should be seen to emerge in contemporary history, and I shall refrain from making any facile ironical comment about the extent to which history in our time has sought to rival, if not surpass, the already unbridled imaginings of late-Judaic and Christian eschatologies. But there is also an objective reason for that irony rhetorically avoided: the repeated tides of violence rising and sweeping across our times might not correspond to any providential explanation, but be merely the chaos prevailing in a civilization doomed to disappear. We must not forget that what is at stake in the *katéchon*/antichrist relationship is the existence of a providence in history, a providence that founds and supports politics because it can eliminate the latter, and assert itself, at the moment of direst need, when all human restraints have foundered. The *katéchon*/antichrist dialectic can only prosper on radical trust in Christ, where "radical" may also mean, in a modern way, "desperate". What counts in this process is not hope understood as a predetermined expectation, as linear trust avoiding any drama of the unknown since, on the contrary, this kind of hope expresses much more a katechontic faith fated to be removed and cancelled out: the one thing worth doing, in the face of the end of time and its approach, is to trust in Christ over and beyond any calculation, any theological, moral or utilitarian consideration, because only what survives the collapse of all things can reach Christ. From this standpoint, despair is much more "theological" than conventional hope, in the sense that it can become a hope that knows the drama of despair and takes it to itself.

We will now look at René Girard's interpretation of the Antichrist and Carl Schmitt's of the *katéchon*. Thus we can begin to discuss what means we require to diagnose the *katéchon*/antichrist relationship in the contemporary world. Following on from that, to make the actual diagnosis, we will turn to Hannah Arendt's analysis of the concept of totalitarianism, which will also allow a very brief comparison to be made with Eric Voegelin. This reference to totalitarianism represents the most important and incisive part of what I

have to say. In fact, the totalizing, intramundane nature of the Antichrist immediately brings to mind the bloody political experiments of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. The Antichrist seeks to impose its totality, inevitably assuming the shape of an "anti-totality", as the final disintegration of all possible totalities. This is the theoretical and practical challenge with which we are faced.

2. Imitation and the restraining force

Girard's interpretation of the Antichrist is to be found above all in *I see Satan fall like lightning* (1999). In the light of his theory of mimetic desire, he at once recognizes the imitative aspect of the antichrist, which other commentators have systematically undervalued or ignored, although Girard, in his turn, omits to give an historical reading of the idea of the antichrist and makes no reference to its sources in scripture. According to him, the antichrist is an attitude widespread in our world, and consists in aping Christ but finally passing over his most eminent characteristic, the revelation and defence of the victims of man's violence. In fact, in Christ, the victim, whose killing can momentarily pacify the imitative, competitive desires of all men, is plainly revealed; in ancient sacrifices this event was reproduced in a preventative, cathartic form by divinizing the victims, who were seen as causing the whole process, and thereby communities were allowed to exist. That means that the founding basis of every society and institution has now been brought into the open and demystified, desacralized, and so rendered ineffective. Men are silently revealed in their secret nature as the collective persecutors of the crucified son of God are brought face-to-face with their responsibility, and do all they can to avoid this destabilizing truth. Our world is schizophrenically split between a growing awareness as to the existence of victims and the effort to stay far from any revelation of the real causes leading to their persecution. The contemporary antichrist corresponds to the ideological effort being made to show that what is, according to Girard, the principal characteristic of our world, namely the concern for and defence of victims, is performed with infinitely better results by some shared, fashionable ideology, while Christianity is condemned as an essentially intolerant

and violent message. Christianity thus functions as a scapegoat for our age, providing it with unstable surrogates for the ancient sacrificial foundations.

Girard, with his simple but highly effective idea of antichrist, pursues his re-valuation of the apocalyptic aspects of Christianity, which he had already made in *Things hidden since the foundation of the world* (1978), and his reading helps restore full weight to the most startling symbol in the *Apocalypse*: the lamb that appears with its throat cut, the fourth and central sign of the seven apocalyptic signs. For Girard, the apocalypse is the full revelation, at one and the same time, both of human violence and of the mercy of God that can save men from their violence, with perfect ambiguity which is re-solved one way or the other according as we choose, so defining the precise space of man's freedom individually and as a whole. In *I see Satan fall like lightning* Girard also gives an interesting interpretation of the Powers and Principalities that are often mentioned in New Testament writings, main-taining that these are not so much angelic hierarchies or heavenly beings as powers and institutions based on sacrifice, which the New Testament writers recognize as a temporary necessity[14]. Thus there exists an intermediate re-gime corresponding to the *katéchon* in *2 Thessalonians*, as Girard makes ex-plicit:

> St. Paul, in the letter to the Thessalonians, defines it as a *katechon*, as that which *contains* the Apocalypse in the twofold sense of the word as noted by J. P. Dupuy: to have within itself and to hold within certain limits.[15]

Having been given these effective indications, however, we are left to our own devices. Girard's comment about the twofold meaning of "contain" is certainly appropriate but he leaves open the question of how to evaluate the relationship between the two senses of the word, simply passing over the problem by stating that the New Testament writers themselves constantly waver between the two because of the irreducible ambiguity of the powers of this world. Although partly correct, this assertion excludes, in a typical man-ner, any possibility that these texts might contain specific observations as to

---

[14] R. Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, ed. J. G. Williams, New York, Orbis Books 2001, p. 95 ff.

[15] R. Girard, *I See Satan*, cit., p. 186. In a note to this passage Girard cites Wolfgang Pa-laver's study *Hobbes and the "katéchon": The Secularization of Sacrificial Christianity*, in *Contagion*, Spring 1995, p. 57-74.

laws or tendencies recognizable in those waverings. This last step is however of huge importance, since the question of whether independent political thinking has a rightful place in an age influenced by Christianity depends on it, a question that Girard answers in essentially negative terms. Although his interpretation moves in the most stimulating direction – supporting the underlying themes of New Testament writings and evidencing their intrinsic rationality – a great many problems are left open, bound up with the more general organization of his thinking and his characteristic lack of nuance. Temporary acceptance of the "powers of this world", in Girard, is not accompanied by a really positive evaluation of human culture and the sacred: recognition of institutions founded on sacrifice both before and after Christ is defined in terms of accepting a state of necessity, not as bringing to light what put man in a position to conceive authentic transcendence. As a consequence of this imbalance Girard leans towards an apocalyptic levelling-down somewhat in the style of the early Christians, obviously from a contemporary standpoint but with a similar reluctance to recognize the sphere of political and historical action as really significant; formulated as it is in modern theoretical terms and not according to the densely theological imagination of two thousand years ago, this reluctance leaves the impression that the apocalypse is settled by Girard's theory and that subsequently, with its assertion of the centrality of the victim, there is really nothing else to worry about[16]. In that sense, the implications of the idea of *katéchon* are left out of the picture, and the very idea of antichrist remains inert.

In a conversation with Maria Stella Barberi, Girard states that to argue in terms of *katéchon* means having a crisis in mind, and we cannot but agree, however, he adds that thinking of a crisis "signifies returning to a notion of circularity of a pre-Socratic type", which is indeed partially true but it amounts to eliminating history and its differences, and to denying the possibility of the human and political sciences, based on the idea of order, by reason of the Christian, and Girardian, revelation of the reality of disorder[17]. The following claim that politics plays an ever-diminishing role in our world, with economics taking over its role as *katéchon*, shows the shortcomings of

---

[16] This tendency has been confirmed and strengthened in R. Girard, *Achever Clausewitz. Entretiens avec Benoît Chantre*, Paris, Carnets Nord, 2007.

[17] *L'envers du mythe. Entretiens avec Maria Stella Barberi*, in R. Girard, *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2001, p. 150-51.

this reflection, tending to blend fascinating discoveries and summary generalizations[18]. While there is certainly something real about this step, Girard fails to realize that it transforms rather than eliminates the political sphere. And just as he underestimates the human potential for good, the same potential for evil is equally underrated. Girard reminds us repeatedly, and opportunely, that Satan, after his defeat by Christ's revelation, spreads over the earth sowing disorder and violence of every kind, but this all remains rather vague. It is not clear exactly what this satanic manifestation consists in, except the reappearance of already-familiar mechanisms that must fall within Girard's formulations. All we can do, then, is to draw on the results of his work at its best, and attempt some redefinition within a wider, fuller context.

In this perspective, Carl Schmitt's political thought turns out to be more useful and articulate. Girard links himself to Schmitt in the texts cited earlier, at the prompting of other scholars long in dialogue with him rather than because of any real relationship rooted in the formation and development of his own ideas[19]. Schmitt, political scientist and constitutional lawyer, has made theorization of the *katéchon* one of his strong points. He is aware of the essentially apocalyptic character of Christian history, but his acute insight into history and law allows him to see how the various ages in Western history, not without the help of certain great personalities, have been characterized by a series of supremacies and powers making it possible for mankind, under the influence of the Christian message, to maintain a balance for its survival and expansion. Here again, then, is the *katéchon* understood both as an impersonal force and as a single figure that incarnates it. With the skill of a great constitutionalist and jurist, Schmitt explores the structures of the various *katéchonta* and *katéchontes* that have followed one another, especially in modern and contemporary history, and records their rapid move into danger and collapse. This course is distinguished by the sea, which comes to predominate in the age of the great geographical discoveries, an unstable and formless element as compared to the land with its juridical and sacral sys-

---

[18] R. Girard, *L'envers du mythe*, cit., p. 153-54.

[19] The reference is to Wolfgang Palaver and Maria Stella Barberi who, from different viewpoints, have studied Schmitt in relation to Girard. Naturally, this does not mean to say that points of convergence between Girard and Schmitt's ideas are not to be found but they must be looked beyond the rather restrictive terms of Girard's thinking.

tems[20]. Schmitt notes how Hobbes' Leviathan is superimposed on and combines with Jewish images and with the beasts of the *Apocalypse*, remarking how the symbol of Leviathan in Hobbes remains unresolved between its original mythical dimension and the rationality of an artificial machine: the "restraint" exercised by Leviathan is therefore irremediably provisional, even if it is symptomatic that Schmitt in his turn "restrains" from giving the symbol of the Antichrist a more thematic treatment[21]. Within the sphere of modern politics a gigantic struggle is being waged between order and disorder, and Schmitt reconstructs it with all the tones and features of epic, identifying with the great political thinkers of modern times, such as Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, de Maistre, Donoso Cortés and Tocqueville, who recognized the fearful creakings coming from the machinery of the modern state at a time when it was still being developed and established. First, the turmoil of the wars of religion and then the upheavals of the revolutionary period demonstrated how fragile and temporary were all attempts at restraint, however wise, and now in the present age the very notion of restraint seems to be nullified by the limitless opening up of spaces for expansion and dominion, comprising even the conquest of the air and extraterrestrial space.

Schmitt, too, takes a look over the edge of the abyss, without Girard's somewhat linear rationalism and with greater historical awareness of the forces at work and their resources: while Girard, thinking that he has in some way theorized the abyss, brusquely takes no further interest in politics, Schmitt clung obstinately to what was left by way of a political project in the contemporary age, and ended up seriously compromised in historical events in his own country. His support for the Nazi regime when it first came to power appears to have been motivated by a fundamental desperation that made it acceptable for him to come to terms with Hitler in power under the illusion that he could influence him from the height of his superior historical aware-

---

[20] C. Schmitt, *Land und Meer. Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1954; Id., *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1974.

[21] See Schmitt's observations in *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes. Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*, Köln-Lövenich, Hohenheim, 1982. In one of his very early works, however, Schmitt reflected more intensively with the topic of the Antichrist. See C. Schmitt, *Theodor Däublers "Nordlicht". Drei Studien über die Elemente, den Geist und die Aktualität des Werkes*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991, pp. 61-64, 70.

ness of the *arcana imperii*. In doing so, he was probably guilty of the sin of intellectual pride, in the belief that Hitler was too mediocre to be the antichrist, failing to realize that the secret of the antichrist in its Hitlerian guise was precisely to have raised mediocrity to the level of a general law: not the *katéchon* then, but a crazily expansive principle, with its only limits the physical constraints of destruction pure and simple. Here, probably, the constitutional lawyer in Schmitt, moved by personal motives as well, not excluding indeed some human ambition, played a nasty trick on the political scientist and prevented him from seeing things more clearly and fully.

The real, expansive, creative nature of the antichrist that Girard is unwilling to look at and that the jurist Schmitt did not dare probe more deeply, emerges from the analyses of a great thinker who never argued in terms of foundations or theologico-political history but who analyzed modern totalitarianism with extraordinary sensitivity to its phenomena, made more acute by the still fresh and bitter lessons of direct experience: Hannah Arendt.

3. The totalitarian formula for the Antichrist

To explain why I resort now to Hannah Arendt, I should point out that, in the past, starting from Girard, I interpreted European history in terms of a delicate balance between attempts to maintain a founding structure originating in sacrifice to prevent societies from collapsing into disorder, and a tendency to overcome and dissolve those barriers through a process of a global kind; and I recognized the two tendencies in two opposing concepts, *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, that have played an important role in philosophy and in German historicism in particular, and have their exact correspondences in various European cultures, in France and Italy, for example[22]. I still believe the distinction to be objectively valid and functional but its initial formulation, while already moving in the direction that I am now developing, suffered from Girard's inadequate valuation of culture with its excessive level-

---

[22] G. Fornari, *Fra Dioniso e Cristo. La sapienza sacrificale greca e la civiltà occidentale*, Bologna, Pitagora, 2001.

ling down onto expectations of an apocalyptic type[23]. While it is true that the forces at work are relatively simple, it is no less true that the situations created by them are extremely subtle and complex. The tension between the two poles of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* is not to be resolved by a negative evaluation of either, since the opposition between Christ and Antichrist is virtually present in both: sacrificial *Kultur* opposes the forces of chaos but at the price of violence, and *Zivilisation* colonizes the forces of chaos and transforms them into a means of revelation, entailing, however, growing weight for options of a destructive character. In that sense, civilization can be thought of as the gradual revelation of the tension between Christ and Antichrist in human history, in which it becomes imperative for us to understand the basis for recognizing Christ's presence, and this is not a purely eschatological matter since if Christ were to restrict himself to overcoming the institutions of this world his message would be a sort of paralyzing historical acosmism. That is the danger contained in Girard and in an over-simplified approach to his ideas. But the very existence of Hannah Arendt's enquiry, which unfolds with a conceptual wealth unknown to Girard, continuing and completing Schmitt's investigation, proves that reasoned argument is not only possible but essential even on the edge of the abyss, above all on the edge of the abyss. If in fact any margin exists before we plunge over the edge, only superhuman lucidity will allow us to exploit it; there is a risk that just repeating that we are falling and might avoid it with a little goodwill becomes a declaration of impotence, or an exercise in intellectual vanity. Let us now pass on now to explain and discuss Arendt's interpretation, revised by myself and integrated in the light of theoretical awareness of the forces of the foundation, and of the world-shaking conflict between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, between Christ and Antichrist within each of them.

Hannah Arendt highlights, in totalitarianism, the most ingenious and perverse attempt made so far to react against the "anti-foundation", towards which universal *Zivilisation* tends, while nonetheless making use of its internal genetic structure. Hitler and Stalin's totalitarianism, as it emerges from her analyses, is not simply an ineffectual effort to return to sacrificial foundations and political power centred on *Kultur*. But if we are to understand

---

[23] These further developments are contained in the second enlarged edition, published with a slightly altered title, *Da Dioniso a Cristo. Conoscenza e sacrificio nel mondo greco e nella civiltà occidentale*, Genova-Milano, Marietti, 2006.

these analyses better, we need to correct certain incomplete aspects in her approach.

One limitation of Arendt's observations is her insistence on Hitlerism and Stalinism as the sole examples of totalitarian regimes, perceiving the premises for them almost exclusively in the growing disintegration of European societies. Undoubtedly this phenomenon occurs but it is accompanied by efforts at cultural and political development and by authoritarian regimes that pave the way for more advanced and morphologically, or rather pathologically, perfect forms. And it is here that the distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* that I have drawn on, set against a background of a theorized perception of the sacrificial foundation, serves to develop and integrate Arendt's formulations. Unquestionably, both Leninist Bolshevism and Mussolini's Italian fascism played a part in constituting the phenomenon of totalitarianism, the former being the greatest result of the "antichristic" forces on the *Zivilisation* front while the latter is the first important precursor on the side of *Kultur*. There are significant differences between the two phenomena that allow us to see how Hitler came to create National Socialism: while Lenin aimed to overcome the State by means of the soviets, Mussolini sought to make the State itself the main defence against the forces of chaos. As a result, Hitler took from Leninism the idea of a movement subject to continual renewal through a "revolutionary" impulse, and from Mussolini the idea of a refounding leader seen as supreme guarantor of a reconstituted sacrificial order, with clear indications of the necessity for utilizing the movement concept, which had its origin in socialism, in paramilitary formations. Without doubt Mussolini provided Hitler with his prime model, while the mass scenarios and teeming millions caught up in the Bolshevik revolution fired his consistent megalomania for world dominion till it ran wild. But how did these results come about? What we have at this point is a more unified picture, one into which, it seems to me, Hannah Arendt's observations fit to perfection.

The institutions and ideology of the nineteenth-century Nation-state, - this hybrid created between the centralized organization of the Absolutist state, with its sovereignty and tendency to universalism, and the idea of the nation, understood as the expression of a particular people and membership of an ethnic group[24] -, are unsuccessful in dealing with the collapse of a society di-

---

[24] H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego, Harcourt, 1994, p. 229 ff.

vided into classes, with the growing fusion of all social ranks in one mass melting-pot[25]. While this permanent lack of distinction opens up unprecedented possibilities for individuals, it exposes them to the constant danger of existential and moral confusion. The creation of a mass society occurs, moreover, against a background of globalization, brought about by the very success of the European powers that contributes to foment the forces of chaos. The First World War with its moral and material damage acts as a detonator on terrain already liberally sown with explosives over the preceding decades[26]. While socialism and communism respond by pressing harder the demands of the lower classes that began to be heard with the French Revolution, an attempt is made from the other side to put fresh life into the moribund liberal State, transforming it into a new "concrete totality" in the Hegelian mould. There can be no doubt that Giovanni Gentile's philosophical interpretation of fascism fits very well into this picture. And it hardly needs to be added that it did not all come about quite suddenly but resulted from a gradual series of combinations, adjustments and influences. Mussolini, with great political and tactical intelligence, carried over elements from his socialist past into the Fascist movement under his leadership and joined them with futuristic, reckless intuitions coming from d'Annunzio's experience in Fiume. The poet accused Mussolini, not unfairly, of stealing his idea but naturally failed to see the political inadequacy shown by himself in Fiume or that any similar enterprise, sure to end in catastrophe, was hardly desirable. Mussolini attained his goal applying the typical formula of heedlessly making flatly contradictory statements and claims, in the knowledge that his attitude was certain of success in a society where people were in serious difficulties and ready to believe anything, and thus the crown and conservatives were induced to call on him to form a government at the head of a revolutionary movement. But the solution was to be the merging of the movement with the state, or rather making them coincide, as Gentile's ingenious political formulation was to put it, philosophically mistaking conceptual consistency for an institutional consistency that there will never be. Schmitt in 1933 was cer-

---

[25] For a mimetic reading of the mass phenomena at the origin of modern democracy see R. Hamerton-Kelly, *Popular Sovereignty and the Sacred: A Mimetic Reading of Rousseau's Doctrine of the General Will*, in *Paragrana. Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie*, 4 (1995), p. 215-44.

[26] See *The Origins*, cit., p. 267-69, where Arendt's description of the situation in Europe following the First World War is worthy of Thucydides.

tainly moving along analogous lines with his attempt to return the moribund Weimar Republic to the *Führer-Prinzip* as the effective principle of sovereignty.

But Arendt shows us how totalitarianism far exceeds this definition, developing to maximum splendor – I might add – the brilliant, complementary tactics of Lenin and Mussolini. The katechontic aspect still perceivable in their actions was soon to fade out, as their hostile, alienated attitude to religion proves, a clear sign that these ideologies lacked any effective transcendence and would have to seek it, not in ideas and words, since these had been emptied of all content through their tactical use and so become increasingly propaganda, but in some new and unprecedented form of historical action, as had already been theorized with sinister clarity from their respective viewpoints by Marx and Nietzsche. The essence of Hitlerism and Stalinism in fact consists not in making the movement a "tonic" to restore the State to health, but in keeping the movement alive and fiercely active *alongside* the State, making it the real unseen centre of sovereignty. Thus the State is emptied out parasitically by a monstrous political force that exploits its residual representative force and its powers of social control as a cover from behind which to lay its plans. This front becomes an excellent propaganda weapon, to the extent that it remains detached from the face of the person embodying power; it is a real institutional and verbal mask and when seen more closely signifies nothing, like an idol, but nobody who is not at the centre of power itself can describe it to the others and stay alive, or even just be believed. Every political intelligence automatically implies transformation into persecutor or victim, unless one chooses instant flight or silence, equivalent to death in historical and social terms; in between comes the vast mass of the unintelligent, filled with euphoria at their re-found identity and unaware of bringing together, in one infernal cauldron, extremes whose agitation was once confused and unrelated, from the philistinism of the lower middle classes to the world of crime pure and simple, both indispensable for giving orders and carrying them out, while the supreme decisions are not "given" but imposed with the fatality of destiny.

The advantages in terms of re-foundation are obvious, as also the consequences as soon as we place together the main aspects of the process. To understand it, we need only join up the phenomena investigated by Arendt to

Girard's foundative insight and Schmitt's awareness of the independence of the political sphere. The result is explosive. Analysing this will enable us to come to some conclusions about the antichrist and the *katéchon*, a temporary conclusion obviously, not only because they are vast and complex in character but also and above all because they are by nature essentially a process; and still more of a process is their reciprocal relationship: powerful, changeable and unstable as only mass movements can be. This takes us back to what causes the hurricane, huge undifferentiated masses that generate huge conflicts, creating an unimaginable vortex from their midst.

Hitlerism and Stalinism are the reaction to a crisis of such proportions that it sums up and surpasses all previous crises: vast, intercommunicating and interdependent societies, gripped by war, social disorder and economic recession, and more and more tormented by the absence of identity, that is, of what makes a human being human. This state corresponds to what Girard calls the sacrificial or doubles crisis but goes well beyond his definitions, not only through the effect of the old principle by which quantity becomes quality but also because of the stunningly resourceful capacity shown by human inventiveness when in dire straits. The most devastating factor in this crisis is precisely the most widespread and invisible: the breaking-up of the public, acknowledged world, which is shown by Arendt in her comparison of ancient and modern life in *The Human Condition*. This disintegration can be validly interpreted as the loss of any sacrificial centre whatsoever, and in many cases it leads to despair (or to a hope that overcomes despair because it knows what it is). The lack of any religious, cultural and social adhesive that might provide answers for men and women and hold together their fragile individual and social unity, and the resulting atomization, certainly do cause individuals to turn to any unifying motive that looks strong enough in its absurdity to constitute an alternative, where even the maddest of absurdities ends by appearing to be the only appropriate remedy for a state of collective madness.

There is one aspect here that the apocalyptic literature of two thousand years ago fails to express adequately, obliged as it was to use the religious and political imagery of the time. This limitation becomes very apparent at certain points in the Pauline epistles, where the apostle and his school continue to reason in collective and organic terms with no idea of the moral and existen-

tial disintegration that would be experienced by post-Christian societies many centuries later: from this, too, comes the characteristic moralism of certain passages trying to bring the forces of the "flesh" and sin back to a world of shared norms. Over the centuries, this moralism was accentuated through its literal interpretation by the ecclesiastical authorities, convinced that it provided the one definitive remedy, forgetting or not mindful enough that the remedy comes not from the norm but from the source that puts life into it. However, the katechontic nature of the moral apparatus itself, and of the visible ecclesiastical institutions sustaining it, becomes apparent as soon as Paul brings them into contact with the incandescent source that is their justification, with the scandal of the Cross which is the heart and soul of his thinking, and that achieves maximum visibility in the Gospels where the spiritual and foundative significance of the crisis emerges once we possess the contextual and symbolic means to decipher it. The evangelists and the early Christian communities found themselves faced with the task of reconstructing this powerful semantics, which emerges from the laborious collage of the apocalyptic pericopes, which tend to record even what they cannot understand, permitting themselves certain adjustments that usually do not alter the overall sense but only try to explain it better. What I am saying is that the apocalyptic processes of Christian and post-Christian history are characterized on one hand by a mass, global dimension that, on the other hand, causes a final desperately individual need to emerge, inconceivable to men and women in the ancient world two thousand years ago but fully recoverable in the light of the mystery that clarifies all other mysteries, the mystery of a God abandoned, betrayed and crucified. At the foot of the cross, or rather on the cross itself, all is reconciled.

The point to grasp in our world today is that contemporary mass-man can bear to put himself on the cross even less than his fellowmen in earlier times because he is accustomed to arguing in terms of rights and expects to enjoy all the comforts established for him by society and promised by science and a dynamic economy. He is therefore that much readier to unload the cross onto someone else, anyone else, as long as they are close at hand. However, this can only be done by joining a group, since crucifixions require some technical division of labour, and hands and ropes ready to put up the crosses. And so it is that the despair of contemporary atomized man breeds a spontaneous neo-tribalism which only flourishes the more for being systematically

ignored by official culture, aided and abetted by a religious culture that insists on thinking in the moralistic, collective terms of centuries past. The pre-totalitarian and totalitarian movements are thus admirably suited to this purpose, indeed they arise for no other reason. They offer a victimary reorganization built around some category of enemy, among the many on offer in our contemporary disintegration, and in that way the particular enemy once more restores an identity that seemed irreparably lost. Totalitarianism keeps its promise to return to the victim but it is the originality of the ways in which this is done that makes it so exhilarating, admittedly with a series of "side effects" that lead eventually to the patient's death. However, death of any sort seems preferable if it can guarantee moments of elation to be relished before the end.

Totalitarian neo-tribalism functions by indicating not just one victim but a whole mass of victims, because the victimary choice has to be in proportion to the mass disintegration that it intends to remedy. Since there is no going back to the concealment of former times or to the old convictions, totalitarianism devises a constantly fluctuating combination of display and concealment, of wild arbitrariness and relentless necessity. Any pretext suffices for becoming the victims of a neo-tribal movement; the more gratuitous and incomprehensible those pretexts are, the more they assert the group's strength and cohesion, its crazy sovereignty, destructive of the very basis that should sustain it. Gratuitousness is a poison to be taken in small doses, but all notion of dosage is lost in this mass sacrificial partying, where any guest at the feast may find himself served up to his fellows as a new exciting titbit. However, more than the failure of the system, which understandably the analyst wants to arrive at as soon as possible, this illustrates the very secret of how totalitarian movements function. Since we can no longer believe in the ancient gods, whose transfiguring cloak covered the victims that they devoured, the repetition itself, organized technically and transformed into bureaucracy, becomes the serial substitute of concealment, a guarantee as well to each single member to make him more hopeful that he will not be ground up in the mechanism, devoured by the machine enabling him to devour. This explains the necessity, highlighted magnificently by Arendt, of absolutizing the movement, making it an entity parallel to the state and to a society by now incapable of picturing itself as a nation. In order for the movement to function, it must, like a retrovirus, take over the genetic code of the state apparatus, since

its aims could never be fulfilled without the power of the state, but to succeed in this it must remain distinct from the organism that it parasitizes and from the fragmented society itself, to which it represents the alternative[27]. It must renew itself continually, and can only do so by ceaselessly repeating the unifying selection that enables it to exist. In this wise, the workings of Satan, who always needs to possess someone in order to assert himself, take on a new, serial and strictly technicized form. The two aspects of Leviathan distinguished by Schmitt, the mythological and the technico-scientific, come together inauspiciously.

Consequently, victimary inflation occurs on a dual level, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative, because the dynamic nature of the movement requires the persecutory processes sustaining it to be continually repeated: at one time the founding was done by the concealed, divinized victim but now a sort of perpetual "para-foundation" can be seen, concentrated in the act of discriminating, expelling and killing, taken up with itself and transformed into an automatic action, a ritual gesture entirely worldly in nature, where the one, deceptive vestige of transcendence remains in the person who is the representative and guardian of the movement's law, its Führer or little father. This means that it is the repetition itself of the act of deporting and killing that provides the collective concealment no longer afforded by a single victim. How can we in fact dub as "murder" what is automatic killing, repeated times without number on the basis of impersonal rules? Quite rightly, Arendt notes how we lack the very vocabulary, moral and juridical, to express such a frontier of evil[28]. As her analysis of the figure of the refugee and stateless person shows[29], this reified process of mass persecution implies radical "de-ontologization" of the victims, who will be effective only so far as they are declared to be non-existent, or rather are implicitly understood not to exist. Any bothersome feelings of pity or residual human sentiment are thus obviated a priori and the machinery of deportation and massacre can run at

---

[27] The virus image is already found in Arendt but the discovery of HIV means that it can be further improved. It is indicative that totalitarianism should be best described in terms of those living phenomena closest to the inanimate.

[28] This is a leitmotiv running right through Arendt's thinking about totalitarianism, and forming the premise for her analysis of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).

[29] H. Arendt, *The Origins*, cit., p. 274-302.

maximum efficiency, giving a pernicious illusion of stability, comparable to the apparent calm of a river as it nears the edge of a thunderous waterfall.

The passage concerning the intrinsic non-existence of victims as refugees and deportees is of enormous importance, and is so much more remarkable in that Arendt perceived this without access to any victimary categories as theoretical tools, whereas Girard himself ignores the matter, never having investigated the literally monstrous resources that the victimary system is capable of[30]. In Girard's eyes, totalitarian systems are a straightforward attempt to return to the ancient unanimism, which is a true statement but so generic as to lose sight of the essential, that is, the ways in which this happens and the prodigious, truly diabolical, capacity for exploiting the hidden resources of the act of killing itself, transforming it from a divine gesture into a technical formula, a mechanical theorem. The contemporary search for victims entails destroying them as representative before their destruction in a physical sense, and the major concern of totalitarian regimes in our time has been to seek out "non-persons" to kill with impunity, and so much the more "non-persons" because perfectly innocent, given that a capacity for moral or legal attribution is always proof of existence. And since the tendency of every inflating system is to increase the quantity inflated to an abnormal extent while reducing its value infinitely, till the system itself collapses, this explains another characteristic of totalitarian regimes, one that we shall grasp if, once more, we are not in too much of a hurry to escape from the nightmare that their definition itself comes to embody.

Arendt observes how once these regimes have taken over government, and after an initial phase of settling accounts with any remaining opposition not already intimidated or destroyed during the rise to power, they require a

---

[30] What Girard has to say, in *Job: The Victim of his People*, transl. Y. Freccero, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 147-52, about trials under totalitarian regimes is interesting though finally disappointing. He regards them as a more disintegrated and less convinced version of the ancient persecutory unanimism while, on the other hand, defining the Aeschylean ideal of justice as "pre-totalitarian". Palaver opposed Girard's view of Aeschylus to Arendt's vision of the ancient world (*Foundational Violence and Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy*, in *Paragrana*, cit., p. 166-76), but it is worth noting that Arendt managed to be more phenomenologically sensitive to the real functioning of political systems precisely by excluding a more explanatory approach, while Girard remains less phenomenologically sensitive precisely by following a more explanatory approach.

huge population on which to draw for the huge reserves of victims indispensable for their functioning. Among other things, this means that totalitarianism cannot develop successfully in small or insufficiently populated countries but it also entails finding new populations elsewhere, after a certain time has elapsed, to add to the reserves, feeding the never-satiated system with fresh categories of "non-existent" persons. Politico-military expansionism is therefore the inevitable consequence of these premises, with a dramatic reversal of the self-centering attitude of the old *Kulturen*, constituted on the basis of borderlines and territorial balance. And it is obvious that there tends to be no end to such expansionism until it embraces the entire planet, which can provide it with the greatest possible number of victimary categories and with the resources needed to kill them, rendering them non-existent in actual fact at the very instant that their existence is revoked. This gigantic "detail" would suffice in itself to show how contemporary totalitarianism goes beyond a simplistic return to the eternal return of the pre-Socratics that Girard talks about, and how it does this at the precise moment when it renews and extends its impetus serially transforming it into a lunatic law of mankind.

All this brings totalitarian systems to destroy themselves sooner or later, as has always happened so far; they find their way blocked by some enemy power, even by another totalitarian system, as was the case with Hitlerism and Stalinism, and eventually, having eroded the foundations of their crazy edifices, they can only collapse on themselves. But we should beware of heaving a sigh of relief, more than justified though it is, at history's ambiguous, elusive judgments. The role and destiny of these pathologies of civilization cannot be calculated in terms of political, military or economic defeat, as is generally maintained. Totalitarianism can in fact rise again from its ashes because its balance sheets are not to be judged by the common measures of debit and credit, a utilitarian double-entry system that history has too often proved wrong for it to be a criterion for political forecasting. And here we come back fully to our initial argument regarding the Antichrist, since it is clear that the guiding criterion of totalitarianism, its "black" soul, is an immanentized, deviated transcendence, a monstrous spiritual principle.

Arendt firmly denies any religious or sacral value to totalitarian regimes, where every para-sacral symbol becomes a propaganda weapon, and at the

phenomenological level she is undoubtedly right to do so[31]. It induces her, though, to discount the importance of the symbolical level, whose framework and mere existence, however spurious, reveal an underlying structure, a basis continuing to be operative. I believe that this sparked the controversy with Eric Voegelin who, conversely, shows himself far more sensitive to the spiritual and cultural elements in totalitarianism, especially in Nazism, which he accuses of inheriting an old Germanic rejection of the humanistic and Christian tradition that had made Europe great[32]. Although Voegelin gives a pregnant diagnosis, one that in no way excludes Arendt's analyses, he has nonetheless only a partial grasp of the essentially foundative nature of sacrificial systems. He is astute in identifying certain underlying phenomena of cultural foundations but he never arrives at the burial chamber where the ancient victims were laid to rest, and that reproduces its function even when turned into an unofficial refuse dump or a toilet for tourists. What strength is gained vertically is lost horizontally, and any investigation can only attain maximum breadth and intensity if all structural data, both horizontal and vertical, are acquired: we could say that Arendt proceeds horizontally and not vertically, and Girard vice versa; for their part, Voegelin and Schmitt proceed in both directions on different bearings and with different developments; in Voegelin's case, it is more in the sense of a universal synopsis of civilization never to reach final completion, whereas Schmitt probes to greater depths but seeks to preserve his safe refuge in law. There is no earthly reason, then, why we should not join these forces together and push our enquiry as far as possible using the cultural and philosophical means of our day. And here the Christian apocalypses, in their twofold christic and antichristic aspect, have much to tell us, and no small part to play.

What is missing from Arendt's picture is the foundative and re-foundative aspect of religious systems. By just "adding" this to her reflections, and naturally this is a structural addition, we can verify how totalitarianism takes the barest, most sordid essence of the foundation, detached from its reference to the sacred and to the earth and transformed into a pure power formula, and develops it to become the divinization of the very force that once gave life to

---

[31] See Arendt's essay *Religion and Politics*, in *Confluence* 3 (1953), and then in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, ed. J. Kohn, New York, Harcourt, 1994.

[32] E. Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, edd. D. Clemens and B. Purcell, Columbia-London, Missouri University Press, 1999.

the gods, destroying the image of man itself in order to destroy the problem at the same time.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that totalitarianism is the latest, updated manifestation of what early Christianity in its apocalyptic imaginings called the Antichrist. The manifestation is not complete, since that would have brought history to a close and destroyed mankind but it comes excellently close to it, inasmuch as it has given an immense practical lesson in how to set about destroying mankind. Not a complete manifestation, to the extent that it has had to rely on politics and institutions, made to serve as masks and fetishes, displayed above all in the early stages of gestation, but always performing a temporary symbolic role, albeit a derisory one. This means that totalitarianisms must share in the *katéchon* initially, and must make use of it in order to dismantle it from within. Going back to Hitler's model, Mussolini, at its outset the pre-totalitarian movement of Fascism was interpreted as a *katéchon* to halt the advance of Bolshevism and put an end to the endemic unrest following on from the catastrophe of the First World War, and that was why many politicians and intellectuals viewed it with favour. The katechontic nature of Fascism reached its peak with the Lateran Treaty in 1929, an agreement accepted by the Church out of a sense of political pragmatism, which came to it not from merely knowing the secrets of the Antichrist, about which most Christians have not got an inkling, but from simply, objectively, having those secrets in its keeping. Schmitt deceived himself in thinking that he could do something of the sort with Nazism, and it is symptomatic that what he intended doing was not far different from Mussolini, who told him at a meeting in 1934: "May the State be preserved from the party!", as Schmitt himself relates in an anecdote to Taubes[33]. Of course, the episode is to be taken with a pinch of salt but it does reveal Schmitt's attitude, and a most acute perception of the "restraining" function of Italian Fascism before its fateful embrace by Nazi Germany, a perception by no means foreign to Mussolini at his most clear-sighted. But neither Schmitt nor Mussolini had correctly gauged the spiritual, epidemic nature of the totalitarian contagion: Schmitt was to see himself excluded from an apparatus whose proper working called for mediocrities who asked no questions, not intelligent beings who might look for some motivation for their obedi-

---

[33] J. Taubes, *Die politische Theologie*, München, Fink, 1993, p. 97.

ence; Mussolini allowed himself to be dazzled by the Nazi antichrist's dream of power, so much brighter and more diabolical than the bristly fur of the great grey Russian Leviathan, and met his downfall in the convulsions caused by Europe's collapse: the logic of the totalitarian movement was to drag the state *katéchon* into the abyss, along with those who fooled themselves into thinking that they were its interpreters.

One essential aspect, however, is still missing from my antichristic interpretation of totalitarianism, the one that justifies it and completes the overall picture. This is the Messianic component, which can be grasped at once as long as we avoid lifeless, ahistorical superimpositions. There is no doubt that the antichristological and anti-Messianic aspect of totalitarianism finds implementation through total, slavish imitation of the leader. Arendt rejects Max Weber's theory of the charismatic leader because she quite rightly feels that, with its sociological typification, it is inadequate to explain the terrifying resources concentrated and unleashed by totalitarianism. But by just taking Weber's intuition away from its functional vagueness and applying it to the mechanisms of re-foundation, we can obtain the central variable that serves our purpose. The totalitarian leader is no longer a sacred chief or an absolute monarch, and not even a dictator when looked on as their secular substitute: he is an ordinary man with an ordinary history behind him, a representative of the break-up and despair of the masses who, by taking power, has achieved what every loser only dreams of doing at moments of uncontrolled megalomania. The biographies of Hitler and Stalin both document the fact that the totalitarian chief is a victim who has escaped his persecutors and succeeded in taking over the persecutory system, not so as to forget ever having been a victim, or simply to take revenge, but in order to become the principle of vengeance itself. The leader is the supreme embodiment of the victim and of the persecutory system that produces victims, a real Christ stripped of his divine nature and transformed into a living, operative image of Satan. This last step can be said to complete the antichristic reading of totalitarianism, which is of the major antichristic expression of our time, in principle obviously, not in terms of factual, historical analyses.

Certain questions remain, however, that can only be cause for alarm. And it is to those that I wish to devote the conclusion of the present discussion, trying to keep my balance as I walk along the unstable rope between despair

and hope, where despair should lend seriousness and dignity to hope, and hope give light, at least a glimmer, to despair.

4. A house, empty, swept and garnished

Having cost the lives of tens of millions and destroyed whole nations, the totalitarian inferno vanished as soon as the conditions that had allowed it to form changed, with a suddenness like waking from a nightmare, or like the release from demonic possession. Certainly, it is easier to apply the oneiric image, with its more everyday psychological connotations, not only because hardly anybody believes in hell and its demons nowadays but because there is no evidence that successful exorcisms played a part in bringing Nazism and Stalinism to an end. Besides, the massive scale of those regimes would have called for rituals far in excess of any known ecclesiastical procedures. The exorcism attempted against Hitler by Pius XII before the Second World War had no effect at all; indeed, it was to rebound on the pontiff himself, accused by many people of not having condemned the Holocaust during the war. But it is quite clear, beyond all reasonable objection, that demonic images alone give an adequate idea of what totalitarian regimes were actually like, and not by way of a literary or theological metaphor but because those regimes gave actual substance to them as undeniably as any accomplished fact. I presume that Pius XII's mistake lay not in the idea of exorcism itself, which I consider almost an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, but in underestimating the demonic powers that he faced. The exorcisms that have my support are far more rational, and do not exclude those of the old school but just give them premises easier for us to understand and to manage. It is a question of recovering the profound sense of forgotten teachings, once again brought to our attention by Girard, with his interpretation of Satan which is so true as to surpass his own still grudging formulations.

Our own moment in time resembles more a brief interval of waiting before fresh attacks of possession than the start of a "magnificent and progressive" age blessed by the presence of the Enlightened who want no talk of demons, and have anyway been casting but a fitful light for some time now. If the knowledge that denies demons has so sensationally failed, why not try with

knowledge that is ready to throw more light on them? Isn't it a typical strata-
gem of the one known to the tradition as Lucifer to deny that demonic light
exists? This knowledge, no longer demonic because it is demonological, does
not make us exorcists *ipso facto* but at least it does make us realize that we
might need them, which is better than nothing, better than Nothing. Com-
pared with the pure nothing of material and moral destruction, even *presque
rien* can be transformed into a mountain, – I will not say into the "mountain"
of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Our situation calls to mind the Gospel par-
able where an evil spirit goes out of the body of a man and, after vainly seek-
ing rest elsewhere, returns to his house to find it "empty, swept and gar-
nished", at which he calls "another seven spirits more wicked than himself"
and "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (*Matthew* 12, 43-45).
Empty, swept and garnished: might that not effectively describe our society
today, opulent, full of idle gossip, and strictly aimless? And how many de-
mons might there be who come to make merry in our houses? Seventy times
seven? The present scale of things puts the ancient Gospel figures in the
shade, at the very moment that it confirms their sense, and quite sensation-
ally, too.

Besides, the image of awakening from a nightmare is not designed to reassure
us, firstly because the nightmare experience can be repeated; and then, on a
closer view, even the relief of reawakening remains ambiguous and reversi-
ble by itself, since the distinction between waking and sleep presumes a cri-
terion of external control called reality. And what is the reality in our re-
awakenings, what guarantees that they really are re-awakenings and not new
dreams to comfort our illusions? Might we not wake up one day to discover
that we were only dreaming an end to horror, while we were actually sleep-
ing in a filthy hole of a concentration camp? Thus there is no comfort for us
even in the psychological dimension, if in our indignation we reject the old
demonology. Nothing for it, then, but to go back to the old Antichrist with
his legions of demons, reinterpreted in the light of modern awareness, and
not so contemptible seeing that everything so far said in this discussion has
built on it. But we must return without the anti-historical amputation that is
one of the more typical antichristic manifestations, today. If history is sys-
tematically influenced by Christ, and, in one way or another, manifests and
confirms Christ, what can the Antichrist do except systematically deny it?

It remains, then, to examine the reasons why we cannot consider ourselves to be really free of the totalitarian Antichrist, and the phenomena in which it lurks potentially. This must be done indicatively because what is so enormous can only be indicated.

Since the Antichrist is a perennial principle of transformation, it never gives up following its defeats, essentially because death and destruction are what it feeds on. The totalitarian retrovirus remains latent, and infection is made more difficult by the multiple – and now global – organism that it has to invade, besides the delicate nature of its molecular structure, liable to break down with any temperature change and below a certain threshold of intensity. But it is always ready to rise again from its ashes since its constitutive elements remain in the very air we breathe, as is proved by the despair, by the desperate crazy ideologies and attempts to conquer bright new frontiers of victimization, which are all typical features of our world. And then there already exist phenomena showing incipient infection that can find a suitable breeding ground in the developing countries. Under pressure from globalization, ancient societies and cultures are desacralized, broken up and gradually made more uniform, at the same time as they experience an exponential population explosion, so that the countries of the second and third world unintentionally but faithfully reproduce the very conditions of social disintegration in which Europe found itself decades ago. Regimes in some of those countries, such as the horrific Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, have repeated the totalitarian nightmare; many others have developed as intermediate regimes, bearing all the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime but not reaching their full maturity, due to inadequate population and resources, or to residual resistance from some traditional structure, without counting the need for administrative and state machinery capable of exercising terror. An example of the latter could perhaps be Maoist China. Following the period of the cultural revolution, which shared several common features with Stalinism, China found the formula for its own *katéchon* in an unprecedented combination of communism and capitalist development, seemingly achieving on a large scale what Lenin set out to do with the NEP (New Economic Policy), the short-lived capitalistic compromise to which Stalin tragically put an end. While the Soviet Union recovered its function as a politico-military *katéchon* for several decades following Stalin's death, before its eventual collapse in the face of economic disaster, in China's case we are witnessing economic expansion

on a scale as never before, which has perhaps exploited the social and cultural hold of structures such as the family. However, we must ask ourselves what the future scenarios might be when, as is to be expected, widespread and far-reaching changes in Chinese society will have transformed the country into a gigantic version of the West. These powerful phenomena, complex enough to foster our hopes, are accompanied by others that seem designed to crush them.

Undoubtedly, we must include global terrorism among the breeding-grounds for infection at the present day, since it has all the characteristics for being a new totalitarian ideology able to endanger the world at large, with huge financial resources and a movement stretching far and wide, that threatens to supplant a great religion now passing through a period of crisis, transforming it and causing it to degenerate into a mass propaganda phenomenon. The evidence pointing this way is extremely disturbing and demands that we remain alert and vigilant, not only through our security systems but also, and I would say primarily, through our analytical tools, the real mental representation for recognizing the various, multiform figures of the Antichrist in these not very pacific times. However, until global terrorism manages to involve great masses of people, it cannot hope to put its delirious schemes for world dominion into effect; and controlling large masses of people always implies control over vast and, above all, densely-populated areas. The question that needs asking is what could happen to Arab and Islamic countries when the oil reserves sustaining many of their governments run out or there is a drastic fall-off in demand, resulting in an economic crisis leading to the break-up of societies already severely tested by changes unforeseen by their proud culture. But the discomfiture of the East is no cause for us to rejoice. What has become of the old West, still dazed by the tremendous convulsions of totalitarianism, and given over to affluence resembling, in Europe at least, a state of retirement in luxury if not a sort of golden second childhood?

A number of breeding-grounds for infection are still to be recognized in our world, proof that we remain as much as ever the place of origin for new species, where the greatest genetic variety is to be observed in the totalitarian micro-organisms that invade the whole planet. So, even if we are no longer centre-stage in history, we may still remain as much as ever its analytical laboratory. What appear as possible strains for new pandemics, always prop-

erly exportable, are the great concentrations of financial and economic power, the means of mass communication, and the technocratic ideology that seeks to subject the very image of man to serve its purposes. Nevertheless, what predominates in these spheres is private interest which, while it goes on ploughing the furrow of cultural and social disintegration where the evil plant of totalitarianism can take root, is unable to establish itself as an ideology and a movement. If there is a candidate among these forces likely to succeed, it is probably the third, technocratic scientism. For a long time it has been refining and relaunching its idols and it could combine with the other two to form a lethal socio-economic movement capable of attaining global proportions. In all these situations there is a marked tendency to create parallel or hidden centres of power, not falling within the State but alongside it rather, exploiting it and emptying it from the outside, in a manner analogous to totalitarian movements. This diagnosis, if correct, is not very cheering but at least it indicates possible lines of action.

In order to control the phenomenon, rather than to go so far as to abolish the hidden centres of power, a step beyond the means of current democracies, the right thing to do would be to make sure at least that several competing power groups exist. Which is obviously by no means reassuring, and gives some idea of the precariousness of our situation which, if not actually totalitarian, is always liable to become such, giving us a foretaste of a whole series of phenomena that it would be right to define as pre-antichristic rather than pre-totalitarian. And it is consistent, and not I believe entirely pointless, to add that the only *katéchon* immediately utilizable is any democratic regime whatever, provided it is functioning. Surely, when all is said and done, this is one more field where Europe can boast of a "first" in creating new species for our utilization. However, democracies, too, totter and collapse when their founding moral pillars are no more. And we need spend but few words of comment on the past and present fragility of those pillars. Hitler came to power by way of elections, and any majority power, in the absence of guarantees of ethical origin, is only lynching, as the Greeks already knew. The totalitarian regimes have shown the remarkable ease and speed with which whole nations, even those with great cultures, can overturn moral standards seemingly guaranteed till then. Totalitarianism is evidence of the fact that there are no guarantees on which we can rely immediately. Once again we find ourselves in the presence of demons, not of simple viruses or retrovi-

ruses, faced with an epidemic not pertaining to the visible world. Any political thinking realistically aware of the antichristic forces continues therefore to pose the problem of how we are to "maintain" the restraint, the way to deal with it and hold it back here with us.

What then precisely is the real or ultimate *katéchon*? The answer is to be found in the other key to interpreting *2 Thessalonians*, that is, in identifying the *katéchon* with the community of believers, the Church, in its actions throughout the world. The hypothesis holds good and functions magnificently once we understand by community of believers not the Church triumphant but a "remnant" that bears witness and fights. That is what happened under Nazism and Stalinism and again since then under the various regimes that have tried and are still trying, with varying degrees of success, to repeat the horrific deeds of those two ominous models. In these cases, as the Gospel states and Schmitt knew very well, the last word, the last "sovereignty" not translatable into political and human terms, belongs to the witness, the martyr. However, even a martyr may have to bear witness before God alone, and no longer before his fellow men where these have become completely degenerate and mad. This takes away none of the value from martyrdom but it does lead us inevitably to make certain concluding observations.

If we push these reflections to an extreme, we reach a point of final disintegration where the testimony of Christ, the crucified and resurrected Son of God, is virtually cancelled out and ceases to have any public effect whatever, a catacomb-like, tomb-like situation embracing the entire world, with no remnants of democracy or any other *katéchon* remaining as a refuge for the oppressed or rather for the more fortunate among them. This nightmare vision finally realized on a global scale is one about which Arendt did not fail to warn us towards the end of her enquiry:

> Suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the number of victims. Human nature as such is at stake, and even though it seems that these experiments succeed not in changing man but only in destroying him, by creating a society in which the nihilistic banality of *homo homini lupus* is consistently realized, one should bear in mind the necessary limitations to an experiment which requires global control in order to show conclusive results. [34]

---

[34] H. Arendt, *The Origins*, cit., p. 458-459.

This warning reminds us of the essential need to defend the revealed victim in a world where movements of masses of people have become a fact of everyday life. And defending the victim, not out of some vague ideals of an intramundane reality immune to all violence, in the name of a reified and unreal kingdom of God that would be an antichristic caricature of the Gospels' depiction, but in defence of the moral and symbolic survival of the human being, on which every other kind of survival depends. The fact that one day the end of the world must come renders it more worthwhile, not less, to struggle with the aim of making that end something other than a horrific revelation, of saving it from being debased, along with the idea of it that accompanies our life's venture, thereby cancelling out not only salvation but the desire for it. How far are we now from that scenario?

Bisher erschienene Nummern

Für mehr Informationen und Downloads siehe: **http://www.uibk.ac.at/plattform-wrg/idwrg**