

greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" The aphorism affirms the eternal return, but it reveals the engine of that return: the collective murder of arbitrary victims. It goes too far in the revelation and destroys its own foundations. Owing to the very fact that it bases the eternal return on collective murder, its true foundation, violence, which should remain hidden in order to be a foundation, is undermined and secretly sabotaged by the very thing that it believes it is triumphing over: Christianity. Nietzsche's entire tragedy is *to have seen but to have not wished to understand* the undermining performed by the Bible. Violence no longer has any meaning. Yet Nietzsche tried to reinvest it with meaning by betting on Dionysus. In this there is a terrible tragedy, a desire for the Absolute from which Nietzsche was not able to extricate himself.

We have discussed the underground passion that motivated Clausewitz. However, he did not sink into despair *because there was the army*, that aristocratic model, that outlet that Nietzsche was lacking. Nietzsche was totally involved in what was supposed to be the creation of values, a re-invented aristocracy—which was in reality the abyss of a will to power. Clausewitz is much cooler. Without really thinking about it consciously, he glimpsed the corrupted sacred that remains in violence and war, and he made that sacred into something transcendent, *an ideal to be achieved*. What he seemed to secretly desire was everything that frightens the tiny archaic societies and that they try to ward off through prohibitions. However, such societies are very fragile; they are not powerfully armed nations. This is why any form of encouragement of heroism seems to be either behind the times or dangerous. In the latter case, what is in question is less heroism than the "military genius" or "god of war," in other words, something both very new and very primitive.

#### THE ENEMY FACING ME

BC: Levinas was not far from what we are trying to describe. In *Totality and Infinity*, he wrote that war is a means of escaping the totality that enslaves parts to the whole, individuals to the group, existences to essence. He went so far as to write that "war is produced as the pure experience of pure being."<sup>27</sup> He thus took to their extremes the Hegelian analyses of war as renunciation of selfish interests. However, a fight to the death is no longer a sacrifice of individual interests to the general good. It is the first stage of an exit from the state-legal totality, which is to be accomplished fully in the relationship to the

Other. Levinas therefore gave love the eminent role that is its due. War is no longer man's essence. Man escapes that reductionist essence in his relationship to the Other, who is already the living enemy facing him:

Only beings capable of war can rise to peace. ... In war, beings refuse to belong to a totality, refuse community, refuse law. ... They affirm themselves as transcending the totality, each identifying itself not by its place in the whole, but by its *self*.<sup>28</sup>

It is as if we had to go through the ordeal of the real to escape Hegel and his divinization of the state. It is in the confrontation with otherness that the individual acquires self-consciousness. The self has no meaning except in the relationship, *even when the relationship takes the form of a duel*. Can we not say, following Levinas, that only experience of war can allow us to think about reconciliation?

RG: It would literally be a trial by fire. You are reacting to what we have just found in Clausewitz, which frightens us. What I understand from your quote is that once again humanity is born from war. Indeed, you have introduced Levinas at precisely the right time to help us conceptualize the duel. From this perspective, heroism would be the test for freedom. We are not so far from Clausewitzian "initiation." Levinas was not a warmonger and he clearly did not believe in regeneration through war, but there is a criticism of pacifism in his position. He *finished Hegel*, just as we are trying finish Clausewitz. He took a trend in philosophy to its logical conclusion, just as we are doing with a trend in anthropology. Beyond war, Levinas thought about a relationship to the Other that would be purified of all reciprocity. Beyond undifferentiation and its implacable structure, we are trying to imagine the Kingdom. Levinas' text is frightening if we read it as an apology for war. Yet it is instructive if we read it as an exploration of transcendence in the etymological sense of the term, in other words, an *escape* from totality. Levinas attacked the state and totalitarianism. Hegelianism was clearly in his sights.

BC: Levinas concluded that all ontology is warlike in the sense that it sacrifices the individual to the city, the part to the whole. We therefore have to get away from the ontology whose essence is revealed by war. Ethical relations, the original relationships that envelope the duel itself, are what makes it possible to escape from totality.

RG: I am rather in agreement with this approach. Through Hegel, Levinas went beyond an entire philosophical tradition. However, I think that my theory is both close to and yet different from what I understand by this. I wrote that in the history of Western thought, Plato represents less

a forgetting of being than a deliberate dissimulation of the violence that he saw at work in imitation. Imitation frightened him, and he had a very clear understanding of its relationship with religion, in other words, with violence. He would have liked to perpetuate repression of that knowledge. For example, look at the fate he reserved for poets, those dangerous imitators. However, refusing to see imitation also means depriving oneself of the only means of escaping the primacy of the whole over the individual. With Aristotle it is already too late in a way: *mimesis* had already become peaceful, and would remain so until Gabriel Tarde. Which is to say that the falsehood has simply grown. It is in this sense that we can say that ontology is warlike: it wants peace, not war; order, not disorder; myth, not revelation of the violent origins of myth.

Revelation of the falsehood specific to totality requires the duel and thus reciprocal action. There is violence in the revelation. It is proportional to how much we do not want to see mimetism and the play of false differences. Clausewitz is one stage in the late, apocalyptic emergence of awareness of this. That a philosopher like Levinas should be interested in violence as a "pure experience" can therefore only spark my interest. By taking Hegelian thought to a more radical level, he revealed its weaknesses. This brings about a troubling yet healthy return of what Hegelianism had repressed. According to what you have said, Levinas saw the duel, like love, as an escape from totality that we absolutely need. However, it is in the sense that it *explodes* totality.

BC: Indeed, this contains a deep eschatology: turning towards the Other also means destroying totality *through the duel*. Did Christ say anything different when he said he brought war and peace?

RG: No. He let the cat out of the bag by revealing the essence of totality. He thus placed totality in a frenzy because its secret was revealed to the light of day. This would be the ordeal of war: the revelation of the essentially violent nature of all ontology. However, what Levinas did not seem to see is the mimetic nature of rivalry, which is at the heart of violence. Yet the "pure experience of pure being" is perhaps a necessity. In that respect, we cannot refuse to think about war, or to engage in it if circumstances require. Thus, if I understand what you have said, it is a way of expelling Corneillian honor and heroism.

BC: When Levinas wrote that the process of escaping totality also has to be thought of as a passage from the sacred to the saintly, from reciprocity to relationships (in other words, religion), he was at the crux of our discussion of the transformation of heroism into saintliness.

RG: So long as there is no return into Hegelian error. There is no possible passage to reconciliation. That Promethean hope has been cast away forever. Our apocalyptic rationality forces us to be somewhat brutal. With Christ, a Model of sainthood became a part of human history once and for all, and superseded the model of the hero. Trying to reconstruct a heroic model can lead only to the worst, as we see with Clausewitz.

However, the passage by Levinas gives us a glimpse of something. A theory about the Other puts totality into a panic because it reveals its warlike essence. By affirming that the duel is already the relationship to the Other, it shows that the relationship sits at the heart of violent reciprocity. In the same way, we could say that it is because he has survived the duel with Tiresias that Sophocles' Oedipus goes with Antigone towards the sainthood of Oedipus at Colonus. Oedipus says nothing; he is dazed. Instead, he lets the people around him speak. The sacrificial victim has put a wrench in to the works of the sacrificial mechanism. Though expelled from the city, he is not banished to the outer darkness. This was the time of Greek cosmopolitanism, which freed the city. This is the price of sainthood.

Levinas was perhaps touching on the mysterious similarity between violence and reconciliation that we were speaking of earlier. However, this is on the condition of pointing out that love does violence to totality, and shatters the Powers and Principalities. In my mind, totality is actually myth, but also the regulated system of exchange, everything that hides reciprocity. "Escaping totality" thus means two things for me: either regressing into the chaos of undifferentiated violence or taking a leap into the harmonious community of "others as others." It means that each must stop being a simple link in a chain, a part of a whole, a soldier in an army. We can feel that Levinas was trying to go beyond the Same, beyond the ontology that makes individuals interchangeable, to find the Other. Going beyond the Same would require first a theory of the duel. In a way, I can also love the person whom I am fighting. The law of war codified the special relationship between adversaries. The consideration due to prisoners was for a long time tangible proof of this, though we know that time has now passed.

BC: You are saying that the truth about combat, and the truth about violence is undifferentiation. In order to identify a real difference, or to make identity itself a difference, we thus have to pass through undifferentiation. This puts us on dangerous footing. Péguy wrote that, faced with the "hatred that binds us together more deeply than love ... we need an immense dialectic to only begin to recognize ourselves in it."<sup>29</sup>

RG: At that point, Péguy must have thought he was on to something absolutely essential. I am linked with the other through mimetism, the growing resemblance between us which finally engulfs us. We are in the Same, to use Levinas' vocabulary. War is indeed the law of being.

BC: It is because adversaries do not want to see their growing resemblance that they embark on an escalation to extremes. They will fight to the death so as not to see that they are similar, and thus they will achieve the peace of the graveyard. However, if they recognize that they are similar, if they identify themselves with each other, the veil of the Same will fall and reveal the Other, the vulnerability of his face. I can lower my guard before the otherness of the person I am facing. Confrontation is not inevitable.

RG: What you are calling *identification* would be resistance to imitation, a rediscovered distance. You are being very optimistic. Lowering your guard before the sudden epiphany of the face of the other supposes that you can resist the irresistible attraction of the "same" that the "other" incarnated only a few instants before. It supposes that we both become "others" at the same time. This process is possible, but it is *not under our control*. We are immersed in mimetism. Some are lucky enough to have had good models and to have been educated in the possibility of taking distance. Others have had the bad luck to have had poor models. We do not have the power to decide; the models make the decisions for us. One can be destroyed by one's model: imitation is always what makes us fail in identification. It is as if there was fatalism in our violent proximity to the other.

The event you are suggesting is thus rare, and presupposes an education based on solid, transcendent models, what I call external mediation. We should keep in mind that it also corresponds to a period of war that is now obsolete. Given the increase in undifferentiation at the planetary level and our entrance into an era of internal mediation, I have reasons to doubt that this paradigm can be generalized. The escalation to extremes is an irreversible law. It is because we are irresistibly drawn to one another that we can no longer go from war to reconciliation. Of course, brotherhood would consist in acknowledging that we are all similar. If we were not so mimetic, we could even do without violence. However, the problem is once again that mimetism defines humans. We have to have the courage to look squarely at this aspect of reality.

As we have seen, Clausewitz was not interested in peace: he was a war theorist. The attacker wants peace and the defender wants war, so the latter will win. What is interesting about this notion is that it goes beyond the well-defined area in which Clausewitz thought it applied. What Clausewitz

glimpsed is the reality of the trend to extremes and not its mere possibility. This is fundamental. This is why we should not spend too much time on the duel: it is fascinating but will result in nothing but violence. We have to at all costs avoid thinking of war as a *passage* towards reconciliation. In our critique of Hegel and his dialectic, we saw that such a passage was impossible. Postponing reconciliation always causes violence to increase. Levinas does not say that such a passage is possible. He says that outside of totality, there is war and love. We are faced with this alternative more than ever.

Escaping totality means disturbing its mechanism. Totality that is no longer closed on itself, that no longer has its secret hidden, transforms into pure violence. War is the first stage in the fury, but then there is something beyond war, we know that now. Is it tangible on this Earth? I doubt it because we have rejected the only Model that we have been given to follow. At least we can say that holiness prefigures that hereafter.

BC: Thus, you go so far as to think that unleashing of violence goes hand in hand with revelation of the divine nature of the Other?

RG: In effect, that is the paradox that interests me.

BC: Thus, it would be the essentially religious nature of reconciliation that would unmask violence? Thinking about the religious dimension of love, as Levinas does, would be to *finish* the world, in both senses of the word. From this point of view, Nietzsche would be right: the Biblical and evangelical tradition would be the worst thing that could happen to humanity.

RG: Yes, because it suggests that humanity can become divine by renouncing violence. This paradox corresponds to reality, but Nietzsche was wrong to reject it. Christianity invites us to imitate a God who is perfectly good. It teaches us that if we do not do so, we will expose ourselves to the worst. There is no solution to mimetism aside from a good model. Yet the Greeks never suggested we imitate the gods. They always say that Dionysus should be kept at a distance and that one should never go close to him. Christ alone is approachable from this point of view. The Greeks had no model of transcendence to imitate. That was their problem, and it is the problem of archaic religions. For them, absolute violence is good only in cathartic memory, in sacrificial repetition. However, in a world where the founding murder has disappeared, we have no choice but to imitate Christ, imitate him to the letter, do everything he says to do. The Passion reveals both mimetism and the only way to remedy it. Seeking to imitate Dionysus, to become a "Dionysiac philosopher," as Nietzsche tried to become, is to adopt a Christian attitude in order to do the exact opposite of what Christianity invites us to do.

People would probably have preferred to remain children, as Saint Paul suggests, even though they would have been losing out. They would not have been able to become adults. We thus have to view optimism with suspicion. The gravity of our time requires it. We are not necessarily moving towards reconciliation, but the idea that humanity has no salvation other than reconciliation is indeed the opposite of the escalation to extremes. This is why Pascal says that truth fails to calm violence and can only "irritate" it. The truth that irritates violence dates back to the founding murder that no one wants to see. It points it out and nullifies it.

Levinas did not write an apology of war. He says that it is an experience that we cannot get away from. Of course, heroism may be another path, but it is unpredictable. No one can talk about it until it has happened. Heroic models, understood as models that can be imitated, are now null. This is why totalitarian regimes have always tried to construct them. The latest, and most difficult to understand, is indeed the terrorist model. We are now beyond tests of strength, beyond the point at which you rightly hope that we will pause to make the distinctions we have made. War is absolutely not justifiable: it is not something that we necessarily have to undergo. Its intensification, in contrast, reveals that a truth is in the process of emerging.

BC: Are you suggesting that the heroic approach can be nothing but a plan to dominate?

RG: That's right. The heroic approach appears with the failure of Revelation in the background. It presupposes imitation of the other, a desire to appropriate the other's strength and to dominate him. The confrontation necessarily results in an escalation because the other appropriates the desire for appropriation. Intelligent imitation, which is self-conscious, is something else entirely. Think about the conversion of Saint Paul. He keeps repeating, "Stop imitating one another and making war; imitate Christ, who will link you with the Father." Christ restores the distance with the sacred, whereas reciprocity brings us closer to one another to produce the corrupt sacred, which is violence. In primitive societies, violence is one with the god's proximity. Gods no longer appear today because violence no longer has an outlet; it is deprived of scapegoats (those divinized victims) and is bound to escalate. Hölderlin was the only one at the time of Hegel and Clausewitz to have understood the danger of proximity among humans. Indeed, the Greeks had a name for the god who mixed with men, the god of reciprocity, of mimetic doubles and contagious madness: Dionysus. That is the name the Greeks gave to the fear they felt when the god was too close.

### THE APOCALYPTIC TURN

BC: So, what is the violence that was awakened when Christ revealed to humanity the workings of human relations and the danger of reciprocity?

RG: It is less Dionysus than "Satan falling like lightning," Satan deprived of his false transcendence.<sup>30</sup> Satan is not an obscure god. It is the name of a decomposing structure, the very one that Saint Paul called "Powers and Principalities." From this perspective, if we agree to follow Christianity, violence is laid bare, unleashed, and its sterility revealed in the eyes of all. Christ replaced Dionysus, which is something that Nietzsche did not want to see. Violence now founds nothing; only resentment is constantly growing, in other words, mimetically, faced with the revelation of its own truth.

Saint Paul shows this in his Epistle to the Colossians, when he writes that Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it."<sup>31</sup> Christ exasperated mimetic rivalries. He agreed to be their victim in order to reveal mimetic rivalries to the eyes of all. He caused them to appear everywhere: in the society, in families. There is no totality that does not run the risk of being affected by the doubling that used to be contained by sacrifice. The linear time that Christ forced us to adopt makes the eternal return of the gods impossible, and thus also any reconciliation on the head of innocent victims. Deprived of sacrifice, we are faced with an inescapable alternative: either we acknowledge the truth of Christianity, or we contribute to the escalation to extremes by rejecting Revelation. No man is a prophet in his own land because no land wants to hear the truth about its own violence. It will always try to hide it in order to have peace, but the best way to have peace is to make war. This is why Christ suffered the fate of prophets. He came close to humans by throwing their violence into a panic, by showing it naked to all. In a way, he was doomed to failure. The Holy Spirit, however, is continuing his work. It is the Holy Spirit that teaches us that historical Christianity has failed and that the apocalyptic texts will now speak to us more than they ever have before.

Greek tragedy is a decisive stage on the path to this discovery because it challenges the mythological solution. There were many doubles in Greece, and duels always occurred. There was neither the singular nor the plural, but always a crisis. There are Eteocles and Polynices, *Seven Against Thebes*, the famous chorus, which is also double. I always see the duel as the end of misleading differentiation. Rivalry between twins always precedes a murder that re-establishes the unity, the false peace that every society needs. *Totality of*

the city, *duality* of enemy brothers, *unity* of the victim: this is how the victim-based polarization works. The city controls its own violence by concentrating it on a third party.

This is why the apocalyptic process consists in turning all human foundations on their heads: the unity of the consenting emissary-victim, the duality of war, the imminent explosion of totality. It is no longer men who create gods, but God who has come to take the place of the victim. The prophets and psalms prepared this fundamental interpretation of the coming of God, who is simply one with the cross. *Here, the victim is divine before becoming sacred.* The divine precedes the sacred. It re-establishes the rights of God. The God, the Other who enters, then upsets the "whited sepulchers." He destroys the whole system. This is why Saint Paul said that the Powers and Principalities had also been hung on the cross, exposed to the eyes of all. They will never recover.

BC: We are, in fact, at a point when the duel can no longer be an institution, when the mechanism of war has been destabilized for good.

RG: Yes, in order to leave the way open to the possible explosion of totality. Not only can the duel no longer be an institution, but it is what all institutions have tried to dissimulate in order not to disappear. We can even say that institutions are held together only by resistance to the emergence of the duel. In Clausewitz's day, war was still an institution. It was codified and controlled by politics, or at least he pretended to believe it was. It still hid the principle of reciprocity to some extent.

This is why Clausewitz sees the escalation of the duel, the confrontation between two nations that go from hostile *intent* to hostile *feeling*, but refuses to take his thought about this trend to its logical conclusion: the pathology of national interest to which it leads. Indeed, the emergence of the duel presupposes the disappearance of differences, the end of all the institutions whose only purpose is to control violence. Clausewitz's military voluntarism, which is implied in his definition of "military genius," played a role in what came to be called "Prussianism" and later "Pangermanism." His refusal or inability to take his thought on the dynamics of the duel to its logical conclusion was symptomatic of both a conceptual defeat and a regression of European history towards a corrupt form of the sacred, in other words, the destruction of everything. However, the destruction concerns *only* the world. Satan has no power over God.

We should take a closer look at Clausewitz's proximity to the "god of war," who bore the name of Napoleon at the time. We now know that the emergence of reciprocity leads to the escalation to extremes. That process

overwhelms individuals and nations; we cannot do anything about it. Something panics; the secret underlying the Powers and Principalities is disclosed and the edifices crumble. To acknowledge this truth is to complete what Clausewitz was unable, or did not want, to finish: it is to say that *the escalation to extremes is the appearance that truth now takes when it shows itself to humanity.* Since each of us is responsible for the escalation, we naturally do not want to recognize this reality. The truth about violence has been stated once and for all. Christ revealed the truth that the prophets announced, namely, that of the violent foundation of all cultures. The refusal to listen to this essential truth exposes us to the return of an archaic world that will no longer have the face of Dionysus, as Nietzsche hoped. It will be a world of total destruction. Dionysiac chaos was a chaos that founded something. The one threatening us is radical. We need courage to admit it, as we do to resist giving into the fascination of violence.

BC: Remaining alert and trying to turn back the course of events would thus be taking care not to renew the escalation? Could this precautionary principle be extended to all areas: political, military, technological and environmental?

RG: But it might be too late. Historical Christianity has failed, and with it modern society. Christ's denunciation of sacrificial mechanisms constantly exacerbates violence. This is simply to say, once again, that the Other's coming is in the process of destroying totality. I think that this is the price of eschatology. It is because the Model of holiness appeared once in the history of humanity that so many heroisms are trying to suppress it. Heroism is a value that is too corrupted for us to trust: in a way, scoundrels have always been infiltrating it, especially since Napoleon.

This is why we should not waste time on the duel, but see it as a clear sign of what is coming to fulfillment. The reason that people fight more and more is that there is a truth approaching against which their violence reacts. The Christ is the Other who is coming and who, in his very vulnerability, arouses panic in the system. In small archaic societies, the Other was the stranger who brings disorder, and who always ends up as the scapegoat. In the Christian world, it is Christ, the Son of God, who represents all the innocent victims and whose return is heralded by the very effects of the escalation to extremes. What will he declare? That we have gone crazy, that the adulthood of humanity, which he announced through the cross, is a failure.

No one wants to see or understand that Christ's "return," in the implacable logic of the apocalypse, is simply the same thing as the end of the world. Contrary to what Hegel wanted to believe, humans are not only *not* embracing

one another, but have become able to destroy the world. I think we have to be very clear on this point, for continuing to "think war" on the level of heroism will quickly lead us, like Clausewitz, to return to the supposed sacredness of violence, and the belief that it is fertile. There is nothing it can establish now. To believe there *could* be is to accelerate the trend to extremes. Sin consists in thinking that something good could come from violence. We all think this *because we are all mimetic*, and we stick to our beloved duel.

To convert is to take distance from that corrupted sacred, but it does not mean escaping from mimetism. We have just understood that the process supposes a passage from imitation to identification, the re-establishment of distance within mimetism itself. This is all very easy to say, I will grant you that. Especially since violent reciprocity will always win.

BC: Levinas chose to begin by situating himself in a relationship. He says little about reciprocity. We therefore have to think about relationships within reciprocity. This would be more concrete, and perhaps less idealistic.

RG: In fact, we always have one foot in each camp.

BC: This is the position that enables you to expose the traps of reciprocity. I understand that Clausewitz helps us to think about an acceleration of history that we can fear will lead to the worst, but your assessment of this process seems too global. I do not want to give up so soon on the possibility that we could resist this course of events.

RG: You are right to insist that our resistance has prevented the world from exploding for a long time. How much longer will it be able to do so? This is the question we have to ask, and you are making me point out one of my weaknesses. I tend to believe that the Christian perspective will allow me to go far beyond these things and to look at them from a distance. My attitude towards Clausewitz has perhaps been too mischievous. It is my romantic side, which is repressed in a way, but always crops up. I come to Clausewitz through Chopin, feeling uninvolved, finally. Indeed, I should say that in a way all that is obsolete, no longer true.

My big excuse is eschatology. Is eschatology compatible, as you would like it to be, with heroic resistance to the course of events? Yes, in so far as it can produce examples that can be imitated, but they will always remain "invisible to eyes of flesh," as Pascal says. No man is a prophet in his own land. Since we have spoken of Corneille, why was there no eschatology in the Christianity of the seventeenth century? There was a little in Bossuet's writings, but not much. It is very interesting to wonder about the various contexts that Christianity has had. In the Middle Ages, it had apocalyptic periods in which Christians realized they were in the process of completely failing.

However, Christianity has always been too young for eschatology. Perhaps it is ready now, for what is threatening us has become tangible.

In a way, Clausewitz *made war on eschatology*, and this is why I can correct him, catch him red-handed acting like a dilettante. I have the impression I can tell him: "You just wait, you'll see!" He remained a servant of politics; he admitted it himself. He was a classical aristocrat, but also a man of the Enlightenment because he had perhaps understood more about the French Revolution than he says. The rationalism in which he was steeped makes him forget, or fail to recognize, that religion is nothing like an ethereal sphere, as he seems to suggest. Clausewitz is all the more upsetting because he formulates the apocalypse without realizing it. He therefore never says it outright. In some ways, he reminds me of Chateaubriand, who was also secretly more of a rationalist than a romantic. Clausewitz was a super Chateaubriand because he found a topic with a real future. God knows that it even has a terrible future. I see this as more on the level of a discovery, almost a literary goldmine, which is all the more exciting because it is never really made explicit.

The escalation to extremes resulting from reciprocal action is such a major discovery that it extends to surprising areas. It tends to become a universal law. We are thus dealing with a forceful writer, who is all the more powerful because he refuses to take his intuition to its logical conclusion. We thus have to complete what he has given us to read. In this respect, Levinas's sentence is impressive: "war is produced as the pure experience of pure being,"<sup>32</sup> the only possible escape from totality. Perhaps we have no choice. Perhaps we have to go through this.

BC: When Levinas thinks about the Other coming towards us, he leaps into eschatology. If the course of time were literally reversed, what conclusions could we draw?

RG: That it is urgent to take the prophetic tradition into account, including its implacable logic, which escapes our narrow rationalism. If the Other is approaching, and if a radically different thought about the Other is becoming possible, perhaps it is because time is approaching its fulfillment.

BC: The discussion about the duel was thus necessary, even by default. Carl Schmitt's great mistake, though his reading of Clausewitz was very profound, was perhaps to have believed in the fecundity of violence, whether it is founding or instituted, war or law.

RG: But Schmitt is interesting to study for this very reason. We have seen that his legal construction of the enemy was obsolete with respect to what was emerging behind the general principle of hostility. It was impossible to redefine law based on violence when widespread destruction of all

foundations was already underway. Clausewitz was announcing the end of Europe. We see him predicting Hitler, Stalin and all the rest, which is now nothing, the American non-thought in the West. Today we are truly facing nothingness. On the political level, on the literary level, on every level. You will see; it is happening little by little. Corneillian heroism is from a time when people thought war could still establish law. It was in this spirit that we have often talked about Marc Bloch, the perfect example of the Resistance.

BC: "La vraie saison des juges," republished in the 1990 French edition of *Strange Defeat*, is a remarkable text. In it, a few weeks before he was shot by the Germans, Bloch said that justice is not vengeance, but that it has to be severe when it acts in truth. His own death can be seen as an example.

RG: But are we still in a world where force can yield to law? This is precisely what I doubt. Law itself is finished. It is failing everywhere, and even excellent jurists, whom I know well, no longer believe in it. They see that it is collapsing, crumbling. Pascal already no longer believed in it. All of my intuitions are really anthropological in the sense that I see law as springing from sacrifice in a manner that is very concrete and not philosophical at all. I see this emergence of law in my readings in anthropology, in monographs on archaic tribes, where its arrival was felt. I see it emerge in Leviticus, in the verse on capital punishment, which concerns nothing other than stoning to death. This is the birth of law. Violence produced law, which is still, like sacrifice, a lesser form of violence. This may be the only thing that human society is capable of. Yet one day this dike will also break.

## CHAPTER 5

## Hölderlin's Sorrow

### THE TWO CIRCLES OF THE GOSPELS

Benoît Chantre: When we dig a little deeper into the phenomenon of war as Clausewitz described it, we find that politics is part of violence, not violence part of politics. The institution of war did not elude violence, but tried to slow its escalation. We have seen that this institution no longer exists. Yet should we not keep trying to maintain this resistance?

René Girard: Of course, but individual resistance to the escalation to extremes is essentially vain. The only way it might work is if it were collective, if all people stood "hand in hand," as the song goes. We have to give up this happy automatic escape, which underlies every form of humanism. However, we also still have to keep in mind the possibility of positive imitation because we have seen that imitation is central in the genesis of violence. Nonetheless, the great tragedy of our era of "internal mediation" is that positive models have become invisible. Recognizing imitation and its ambivalence seems to be the only way of feeling that it is still possible to go from reciprocity to relationship, from negative contagion to a form of positive contagion. This is what the imitation of Christ means.

However, this transition is not a given, and it is even less conceivable: it is on the level of a specific conversion, of an event. It cannot be denied that the Gospels contain a formidable intuition about mimetism: Christ invites us to

work from within mimetism. However, the Spirit takes us where it will. We thus have to reason more and more at a global level, leave behind strictly individual perspectives, and consider things "in big chunks." From this point of view, the apocalyptic narratives are crucial. They are the only ones that force us to take a radically different point of view. Why have they been concealed to such an extent? The question has never really been asked. They were very present in the first period of Christianity. In the Middle Ages they were read from the point of view of the Last Judgment in a way that was much more naive than in the time of Saint Paul, but they were still known. Look at the tympanums in cathedrals.

We have to maintain the force of the Scriptures because the apocalyptic texts have gradually been forgotten, just when their relevance is more and more obvious. This is incredible. The joyful welcome of the Kingdom, which the texts describe, has been smothered by a double trend: catastrophic darkening on one hand, and indefinite postponement of the Second Coming on the other. The constant, slow distance in relation to the Gospels casts a shadow on what was supposed to be luminous, and delays it. The anti-Christianity that we see today thus reveals this in a striking way as the next step in a process that began with the Revelation. The "time of the Gentiles"<sup>1</sup> that Luke describes suggests the Judgment has been delayed, and this has gradually imposed a new perspective on the Gospels. It has injected an insidious, growing doubt about the validity of the apocalyptic texts. The "time of the Gentiles" is nonetheless an extraordinary period, that of a civilization that is incommensurable with others and that has given humanity power that it had never had before. Thus, if we exaggerate a little, we can say that that time has gradually confiscated the Revelation and used it to its own ends, to make atomic bombs.

This is why I draw attention to these texts in order to advocate a more passionate reading of the Scriptures. I think that there is no complete text without the apocalypse to conclude it: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"<sup>2</sup> The evangelists insist on this question. This is where the apocalyptic question arises, less perhaps in the apocalypse of John, to which everyone rushes when eschatology is at issue, than in the texts of the three other evangelists, Mark, Matthew and Luke, who always precede it with the story of the Passion. The Synoptic Gospels have a fundamental structure in which human history is inserted into that of God. The second circle of history (and its catastrophic end) is contained in the first circle, which finishes with the Passion. Luke very enigmatically implied that after Jerusalem falls there will be a "time of the Gentiles":

For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

All the exegetes want to see this as an allusion to the destruction of the Temple by Titus in A.D. 70, and they conclude from this that Luke's text is later than the three others. These theories are completely uninteresting because the fall of Jerusalem does not mean only A.D. 70, but also 587 B.C. The evangelists were continuing the Jewish prophetic tradition, which was attentive to "signs of the times." Here too human history is caught within that of God. The fall of Jerusalem is thus primarily an *apocalyptic theme*: Christ is not a soothsayer but a prophet. One of the wonders of the texts is that they make it impossible to know whether or not they are speaking of Titus. However, historians mix everything up without even realizing that the mixture is part of what they are talking about, and that what they are talking about could not care less about them.

There is no doubt that the apocalyptic passages refer to a real event that will follow the Passion, but in the Gospels they were placed before it. The "time of the Gentiles" is thus, like the seventy years of servitude to the King of Babylon in Jeremiah, an *indefinite time between two apocalypses*, two revelations. If we put the statements back into an evangelical perspective, this can only mean that *the time of the Gentiles, in other words, the time when Gentiles will refuse to hear the word of God, is a limited time*. Between Christ's Passion and his Second Coming, the Last Judgment, if you prefer, there will be this indefinite time which is ours, a time of increasingly uncontrolled violence, of refusal to hear, of growing blindness. This is the meaning of Luke's writings, and this shows their relevance. In this respect, Pascal says at the end of the twelfth Provincial Letter that "violence has only a certain course to run, limited by the appointment of Heaven."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, this is the idea that Hegel tried to recuperate when he imagined a true history beyond apparent history: a theodicy of the Spirit beyond historical contingencies, a "ruse of reason" in which Napoleon himself was to play a role and which was also to use Napoleon mercilessly. Hegel saw modern escalation as increasingly rational, when of course the opposite is true. Hegel's was a very powerful enterprise, which was only natural since it was based on the best of the Christian tradition, but, as I have said, it degenerated very quickly. Therefore we must not leave history, but try to understand it in a more realistic manner as acceleration towards the worst, which must have an apocalyptic meaning.



Reality is not rational, but religious. This is what the Gospels tell us. This is at the heart of history's contradictions, in the interactions that people weave with one another, in their relations, which are always threatened by reciprocity. This awareness is needed more than ever now that institutions no longer help us and we each have to make the transformation by ourselves. In this, we have returned to Paul's conversion, to the voice asking, "why do you persecute me?" Paul's radicalism is very appropriate for our time. He was less the hero who "rose" to holiness than the persecutor who turned himself back and falls to the ground.

BC: Does the "time of the Gentiles" in Luke refer to the time when institutions will resist the rise of the principle of reciprocity?

RG: Precisely, and in a way, that time is in the process of coming to an end. This is why Luke tries to maintain a separation between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, which will come after the "time of the Gentiles." There are no such historical clues in Mark and Matthew, which indicates that they were both written prior to the year 71. However, what is essential is that Luke went deeper and in greater detail into the apocalyptic tradition. Note in passing that the exegetes never reflect upon this kind of thing. What does Luke tell us? That Gentiles are new, and that they have to be given the time to experience Christ. Paul said the same thing in the Epistle to the Romans: the Jews failed everything despite the prophets, and the Christians have to be careful not to do the same thing. What is the Holocaust if not that terrifying failure?

Christians have to assume their responsibility for that horror. They had been warned 2000 years ago and they have proven incapable of avoiding the worst. It would of course be absurd to deny, out of repentance for this, the Jews' share of responsibility for Christ's Crucifixion, but no comparison is possible between the death of one they considered a troublemaker and the millions of victims of the Holocaust. John Paul II's request for forgiveness at Yad Vashem is sublime, and has to be seen as a sign of the times: that of a reconciliation that is more necessary than ever between Jews and Christians, who carry the same message, who are the vessels of the same eschatological truth.

BC: Could you go back to your view of this structure of the Gospels?

RG: There is an initial circle, which is Christ's life and ends with the Passion. There is a second circle, which is human history and ends with the apocalypse. The second circle is contained in the first. Human history, undermined by a destructive principle, an escalation to extremes that now threatens the whole world, becomes a prelude to the Passion. What could be suggested by this structure if not Christ's return at the end of history? Paul

had a premonition that the Jews would be reintegrated in the return, that they would end up understanding that Christianity was not a conspiracy against them. The classical interpretation of this reconciliation is as a sign of universal reconciliation.

Luke places the "time of the Gentiles" between the Passion and the Last Judgment. He thus makes a clear distinction between the two. This involves deep reflection on the meaning of the Gospels and of history from the evangelical point of view. There is nothing nihilistic about the apocalyptic spirit: it can *make sense* of the trend toward the worst only from within the framework of very profound hope. However, that hope cannot do without eschatology. Identifying the dangerous emergence of the principle of reciprocity and showing it at work in history should be the rule of all apologetics. Mimetic theory is essentially Christian. I would even go so far as to say that it tries to take Christianity to its ultimate meaning, to complete it in a way, because it takes violence seriously.

At the San Francisco Seminary, there was a Catholic exegete who was very well considered by historians, even atheist historians: Raymond E. Brown. He placed a lot of emphasis, and with reason, on the fact that John was writing without having read the Synoptics. This seems essential because it allows us to appreciate the symmetry of the intuitions and the insignificance of the small differences, of dates and various inconsistencies, of everything that is so delicious to the great-grandchildren of Renan. There is thus a *reason* for the apocalypse. Luke may have taken Mark and Matthew deeper, while John may have been writing without having read them, but he said the same things. How do the texts shed light on the system of relations among humans? This is the crucial question. In order to comprehend their importance, we have to see the texts' anthropological and theological dimensions, and understand that the apocalypse is the point when the two dimensions meet.

Therefore it is much more interesting to say that Luke saw the efficiency of violence when it is performed by a group, that he understood that bad violence reconciles enemies. This is a brilliant intuition. After the Passion, it is written: "That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies."<sup>5</sup> People once again imagine that this is a historical clue, but in fact the meaning of this verse can be only anthropological. From this point of view, historicism is only a double of archaic reconciliation. This is all we have to show in order to refute the idea that the Gospels are anti-Semitic. Why do you think there was a small crowd that asked that Jesus be put to death? Bad violence reconciles enemies. It reconciled Pilate

and Herod. They participated in the Crucifixion together, and then they were reconciled. Bad violence was unanimous against Christ; they were part of it. We find this only in Luke.

This is an obvious revelation of the founding murder, which is a mechanism that no longer works after the Passion, or rather, it runs on empty because its workings have been exposed to the light of day by the Crucifixion. The "times of the Gentiles" are the times of gradual disintegration of sacrifice's effectiveness. In the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the most ancient text of the New Testament, which experts consider to date from less than 20 years after the Crucifixion, Paul tries to soothe the faithful, who were disappointed by what they saw as the regrettable delay of the Second Coming. He told them not to be impatient, to *both believe and not believe* in the Powers and Principalities. There is no point in getting impatient, and especially one must not rebel because the system will collapse on its own. Satan will be increasingly divided against himself: this is the mimetic law of the trend to extremes. Mimetism is contagious and will *attack nature itself*. We are thus in the process of seeing that, far from making them obsolete forever, the confusion between nature and culture in the apocalyptic texts, which used to be seen as naïve, is becoming unexpectedly relevant, with the ultramodern theme of the contamination of nature by human hands.

Look at Matthew 24, which is similar to Mark 13 and Luke 17, and also located right before the Passion. It tells us that we are at "the beginning of the birth pangs":

Beware that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But anyone who endures to the end will be saved.

And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

A text like this is powerfully concrete and relevant. As we read it, we enter the heart of reality. What is Christ announcing in this passage from Matthew? That the escalation to extremes (note the mimetic doubles: "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom") will make "the love of many . . . grow cold." Thus, Providence cannot be tied to secular history, as Clausewitz wrote to his wife. Pascal was right: there is a reciprocal intensification of violence and truth, and it now appears before our eyes, or at least before the eyes of a small number, those whose love has not grown cold.

The "time of Gentiles" can be defined as a slow withdrawal of the religious in all its forms, a loss of all guides and markers, a questioning without answers, even an ordeal, especially for the elect, who find no comfort anywhere. This is to such an extreme that Mark (13:19–20) wrote:

In those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days.

The interminable descent, the corruption that constantly reduces the number of Christians, is dangerous for the elect. However, that small number has to hang on right until the end, despite the false prophets. You can see how the mimetic perspective is fundamental. The false prophets are the ones who claim to "have god," to speak in his name and are therefore to be imitated. It is impossible not to think of the mimetic struggle between Oedipus and Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. At the time of the Greeks, violent reciprocity indicates the imminence of the god, in other words, the violent sacred. What each is trying to snatch away from the other was the divinity that he claimed to have, and the more they fight, the nearer that divinity approaches, until it is tangible in the destruction threatening the group. Everyone is a false prophet at the end of the sacrificial crisis; in other words, everyone is possessed, inhabited by the god. The fascination specific to the sacred is one and the same as the contagion of violence. The clash between Tiresias and Oedipus is a fine symbol of mythological duels, that Greek way of always sparring with chaos, as if it were necessary to negotiate with it.

What does Matthew's text tell us if not that such struggles will return, but in more terrible form. He went even further: conflicts among nations will go hand in hand with "famines and earthquakes," which clearly means that the fighting will have cosmic consequences. It will no longer be the plague in Thebes, but ecological catastrophes on a planetary scale. Suddenly there

is a justification for diminishing distinctions between the natural and the artificial. How is it possible to still refuse to hear these texts? Paradoxically, what strikes me is not only the growing consistency of war with its concept, but of the evangelical text with the period that we have entered: the time of violence's growing sterility. This truth will become, *has become* striking. We are perhaps at the end of the historical circle following the destruction of the Temple, the "time of the Gentiles" that was supposed to last until the end. We have to think about all of this as something that is happening very slowly, and of which we can only suggest the shape. However, it will become clearer.

BC: The end of the world and the advent of the Kingdom?

RG: Yes, that will become clear to a small minority of course, but we have finally completed an era of thought that may be the era of violence itself. The "end of history" or "end of time" may not be the end of the world, even though Christ warned us that there will be famines and earthquakes, but the end of the world in which Powers and Principalities dominate. Naturally, we cannot know whether the end of that domination will coincide with the end of time.

BC: What you are saying is that violence no longer has the capacity to produce law?

RG: That's right.

BC: That it is incapable of producing truth, of producing reason?

RG: Yes, it's finished. It is impotent. Thus, this is real anarchy. We need only a simple example. The people who experimented the most with this reality in the twentieth century were the communists because they very quickly had to resort to violence, and saw and experienced its powerlessness. They were able to defend themselves against German aggression only because of old Tsarist Russia, which was still there. The portrait of General Kutusov was in Stalin's office. They were terribly aware of this since they made all sorts of concessions. Their own violence was sterile, and they finally reincorporated "Holy Russia," in other words, a Christianity which they suddenly found less distant than they had thought.

However, they did not beat the Germans with communism. I think that the point when they became aware of their total failure was when they were going to win because they had used one of Peter the Great's plans, and this was also when they saw that communism did not exist, that it could not have historical reality. In the end, people like Gorbachev were educated by people who had understood this. Look at how he is fighting for the environment now. He has lost all confidence in politics. He did not at all share in Stalin's money-grubbing side. Indeed, that aspect was so rooted in Old Russia that Stalin did not realize it and thought he was a communist.

The Germans were also unable to build anything on violence. The advantage that we have in France today is that nationalism is very weak, so even though we are in a complete fog, we may perhaps finally become aware of all of violence's failures. I think that we are finally *living in the moment of truth*. We have a rendezvous with reality. It is perfectly conceivable that something new will come of this. Violence's barrenness may perhaps be a sign that conflicts will diminish, that there will be a kind of returning undertow.

BC: When do you think violence became unable to establish anything?

RG: It has been less and less of a foundation as history has accelerated and politics has lost importance. Perhaps we could say that, in the Western world, it was able to found things until the time of Roosevelt. The American intervention at the end of World War II was probably the last act of the Napoleonic drama, which was part of the overall European tragedy, in which mimetic hatred had been growing for centuries. In this respect, it was symptomatic that the Holy Roman Empire played the role of scapegoat for three centuries: this was Europe's *only political possibility*, and it was in reference to and against that Carolingian relic that Europeans killed one another. The dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by the Treaty of Versailles shows this powerful resentment. The American landing later highlights the end of European leadership. The very term "American intervention" is interesting in this respect. It proves that we have gone from an era of codified war to an era of *security*, where we think we can "resolve" conflicts just as we cure sickness, with increasingly sophisticated tools. We are far from the worship of the state that is so dear to Clausewitz and Hegel.

BC: But very close to an apocalyptic theme. As I am listening to you, I am thinking about the end of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians (5:1-5), which is strangely consistent with what you have just said:

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

RG: It is very troubling, and this passage clearly has profound anthropological meaning. It explains why Christ says in the Gospels that he has not come bearing peace. He is aware that he is putting an end to the effort to dissimulate the mechanisms of violence. He does not present himself as

a warrior. On the contrary, he claimed membership in the Jewish prophetic tradition, which aims to *demonetize* violence. It is thus *because Christ deprives them of scapegoats* that the Powers and Principalities will be destroyed. People will escalate violence in reaction to the Revelation because they will be increasingly unable to find an outlet for their mimetic struggles.

God, through his Son, subjected himself to human violence. He made violence come out *against himself* in order to reveal it to the light of day. This is the paradoxical reason that the God in the Bible and Gospels appears more violent than the gods of the Antiquity, when in fact He is precisely the opposite. The Greeks hid their scapegoats, which is very different. The Psalms reveal that violent people are not the ones who talk about violence, but that it is the peaceful people who make it speak. The Judeo-Christian revelation exposes what myths always tend to silence. Those who speak of "peace and security" are now their heirs: despite everything, they continue believing in myths and do not want to see their own violence.

The great paradox in all this is that Christianity provokes the escalation to extremes by revealing to humans their own violence. It prevents people from blaming the gods for their violence and places them before their responsibility. Saint Paul was in no way a revolutionary in the modern sense of the term. He tells the Thessalonians that they have to be patient, in other words, to obey the Powers and Principalities that will be destroyed *anyway*. The destruction will happen one day because of the growing imperium of violence; deprived of a sacrificial outlet, it is unable to establish the reign of order except by escalating. It will require more and more victims to create an ever more precarious order. This is the terrifying future of the world for which Christians carry the responsibility. Christ will have tried to bring humanity into adulthood, but humanity will have refused. I am using the future perfect on purpose because there is a deep failure in all this.

This is why eschatology is simply the obverse of scientific reality when we look at things from a Darwinian perspective. It is because humanity was incomplete, because it was resorting to the falsehood of sacrifice, that Christ came to complete its "hominization." The completion is a coming. Thus, we should take Christ literally when he tells us that he is bringing war: he has come to destroy the old world. However, because of humans themselves, the destruction will take time. Of course, 2,000 years is a short time compared with millions of years: the time preceding the Return, otherwise known as "perdition," will come upon humanity "as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman." The apocalypse thus comes before the Passion. The Gospels had to bring up the possible end of humanity so that Pontius Pilate, ignoring

the depth of his statement, could say to the crowd "Ecce Homo," "Here is the man,"<sup>9</sup> the one who will die because he is innocent.

The relevance of the apocalyptic texts is therefore absolutely striking when we finally accept their meaning. They say paradoxically that Christ will only return when there is no hope that evangelical revelation will be able to eliminate violence, once humanity realizes that it has failed. Christians say that Christ will return to transform the failure into eternal life. Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the insertion of the Spirit into history, nor exceptional individuals, nor the opening of groups to the universal. The Spirit has been incorporated, but the process has failed. The positivity of history should not be eliminated, but shifted. The rationality that mimetic theory seeks to promote is based entirely on the shift. Saying that chaos is near is not incompatible with hope, quite to the contrary. However, hope has to be seen in relation to an alternative that leaves only the choice between total destruction and realization of the Kingdom.

BC: Here, you return to a *reason* for the apocalypse that is indispensable to a clear understanding of your faith. Your approach is all the more original because it is anchored in a Darwinian point of view, and sees the apocalypse as the "completion" of hominization. These analyses don't upset anyone as long as we're talking about archaic religion, but they become unsettling as they bear more on our own time. Claiming that "the time is nigh" means rejecting the distance from religion that Western thought has been taking for three centuries. By making the apocalyptic texts coincide with the modern era, are you not trapped into letting the metaphor lead your argument?

RG: I'd like to reverse your reasoning by saying that it is because we have wanted to distance ourselves from religion that it is now returning with such force and in a retrograde, violent form. The rationalism that you mention was thus not real distancing, but a dike that is in the process of giving way. In this, it will perhaps have been our last mythology. We "believed" in reason, as people used to believe in the gods. Auguste Comte's formidable naïveté is a clear symptom of this. Such positivism is essential for understanding our delay in deciphering the signs of the times.

Positivists believe in reason in order to close their eyes to the catastrophes that are imminent today. Yet reason cannot do everything. Human relations, and the irrational aspects that they involve, will have unexpected consequences: we are more tied to the future of the world than ever before. We have seen Raymond Aron's failure to "contain" Clausewitz. In contrast, Emmanuel Levinas made us take a step towards eschatology. We now have to go further and say two things: *one can enter into relations with the divine*

only from a distance and through a mediator: Jesus Christ. This contains the whole paradox that we have to deal with. It contains the new rationality that mimetic theory seeks to promote. It proclaims itself to be apocalyptic reasoning because it takes the divine seriously. In order to escape negative imitation, the reciprocity that brought people closer to the sacred, we have to accept the idea that only positive imitation will place us at the correct distance from the divine.

The imitation of Christ provides *the proximity that places us at a distance*. It is not the Father whom we should imitate, but his Son, who has withdrawn with his Father. His absence is the very ordeal that we have to go through. This is when, and only when, the religious should no longer be frightening, and the escalation to extremes could turn into its opposite. Such a reversal is nothing more than the advent of the Kingdom. What form will that advent take? We cannot imagine it. We will be able to do so only if we abandon all our old rationalist reflexes. Therefore, once again, everything depends on the meaning we give to religion.

The one that mimetic theory seeks to construct is relevant because it is anchored in a tradition and is also not incompatible with the advances of the "human sciences." Durkheim glimpsed this, but it was precisely his rationalism that prevented him from seeing the difference between Christianity and archaic religion. Only Christians can face the truth of the original sin because they alone assert so strongly that everything began with the founding murder, that sacrifice made humanity. Of course, the Christian religion has some features of archaic religion, but that is because the Passion is modeled on the "folds" and "lines" of the founding murder, and reveals to us all its workings: what was misapprehension has become revelation.

"NEAR IS / AND DIFFICULT TO GRASP, THE GOD"

BC: Could it be the thought about this difference and this resemblance that is at the heart of apocalyptic reason?

RG: Exactly. Proof that it is possible to link eschatology with the modern period, and that I am not falling into the "metaphor trap," is provided in Hölderlin's work. His writings have haunted me for a long time, though I have rarely had the occasion to dwell on them. They suddenly come to mind because they are at the heart of the French-German junction. It is through Hölderlin, and no one else, that we can understand what was happening at Jena in 1806.

This was a decisive date. It was when Hegel saw "the world-spirit on horseback" from his window, and Clausewitz drew nearer to the "god of war." At the same time, Hölderlin was sinking into what was soon to be called his "madness." These three events occur in the same year, and only the long train of thought on which we have embarked can bring them into perspective. Hölderlin withdrew for 40 years into a tower owned by a carpenter in Tübingen. He had visitors, and people spoke with him, but his host said that he spent entire days reciting his works and even prostrated in total silence. Hölderlin stopped believing in the Absolute, which was not the case of his friends from earlier times: Fichte, Hegel and Schiller. However, he never gave signs of excessive madness. We have to rise to the nobility of this silence.

Hölderlin is much less haunted by Greece than we have been led to believe. I see him instead as frightened by the return to paganism that infused the classicism of his time. He is thus torn between two opposites: the absence of the divine and its fatal nearness. This marked two of his major works: *Hyperion: Or the Hermit in Greece* (1797–99) and *The Death of Empedocles* (1798–1800). Hölderlin's soul oscillates between nostalgia and dread, between questioning a heaven that is now empty and leaping into a volcano. By contrast, all of his friends are so troubled by the absence of gods whose return they desired so ardently. Yet the gods are dead for very specific reasons, which are clearly related to destabilization of the sacrificial mechanism. We have seen that the acceleration of history makes these reasons tangible. The absence of the gods and the presence of the absolute are related themes: the first leads to the second. If heaven is empty, how can we people it? As we have seen, Nietzsche asks that question in aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science*. Hölderlin's contemporaries looked to Greece to fill in the vacuum. Hölderlin also let himself fall into that trap for a while, but his withdrawal and immense sadness reveal greater lucidity.

BC: How would you define his apocalyptic thought?

RG: Let's go straight to the beginning of one of Hölderlin's greatest poems, appropriately named "Patmos." Its lines have been commented upon many times, especially since Heidegger saw in it the "enframing" of the world by technology. They announce the return of Christ much more than they do that of Dionysius:

Near is  
And difficult to grasp, the God.  
But where danger threatens  
That which saves from it also grows.<sup>7</sup>