



# Terrorism and Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This paper analyses the threat of Jihadism to modern democracies through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory. The study's main contention is that terrorism is caused not only by resentment and nihilism but is also symptomatic of the contemporary malfunction of Religion when deprived of its sacrificial safeguards. Eventually, this paper aims to deduce the requisites for safeguarding democracy and the foundation of a new interfaith dialogue.*

## Keywords

Jihadism; mimetic theory; sacrifice; suicide attacks; Marcel Gauchet; Carl von Clausewitz; Jacques Derrida; Marcel Gauchet; René Girard.

## Introduction

We all bear in mind the images of planes colliding with the head and flank of Manhattan's twin towers. Not to be outdone, many intellectuals and artists openly celebrated the spectacle which German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen called "the greatest work of art in the entire Cosmos"<sup>2</sup>. Bin Laden had achieved his goal: we were *fascinated* by the collapse. But who is this "we"? We, the euphoric minds that had twelve years earlier chanted the "end of history" on the occasion of another collapse, namely, the fall of the Berlin Wall, but who now stood paralyzed by the extreme violence of the hijackers' attacks. Despite important changes since the military invasion of Iraq and the war in Syria, the strategy and tactics of the global jihad are essentially the result to this *fascination*.

The end of history—envisaged by Hegel as "the Emperor, this soul of the world" was passing beneath his windows on horseback—would at length give rise to a naive and dangerous belief in the possibility of eradicating violence. Empire goes hand in hand with

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an updated version of the talk given at the Colloquium "Faut-il avoir peur? René Girard penseur de la violence" the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 at the Institut Catholique de Paris. The French video recording can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqs6eXmKpjk> (accessed December 10, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> "Und das ist das größte Kunstwerk, das es überhaupt gibt für den ganzen Kosmos. ". Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Huuuh! Das Pressegespräch am 16. September 2001 im Senatszimmer des Hotel Atlantic in Hamburg.", *MusikTexte* 91 (November 2001): 77.

non-violence and the pacification of customs, conditions which prove indispensable for the unlimited production of goods. The imperial conscience, which became the “Global Village” after 1989, promoted *doux commerce* as a religion and regarded wars as outbreaks of delinquency, as so many illnesses to be treated with “surgical strikes”. We are no longer *mobilizable*, in any sense of the term. Others are mobilized, however. They are, to quote Gabriel Martinez Gros<sup>3</sup>, the new “Bedouins” of the global empire. These forgotten outsiders haunt our memory, attacking us at the precise moment our sleep is at its deepest, hence the nightmarish images.

Should we be afraid of terrorism? Yes and no. Yes, to the extent this “strange and tedious war”<sup>4</sup>, to quote Pascal, is far from over. No, to the extent that fear elicits a *reaction* to violence without however awakening us from our sleep: that is just what our adversaries are looking for... I just said a forbidden word: *adversary*, not delinquent. This is, perhaps, because I am no longer afraid or because I have become a democrat again; the result is the same either way. Democracy is awakening from the imperial dream. There is no other alternative, with all due respect to those who have grown comfortable with an indefinite state of emergency, who seem so little preoccupied by the possibility of backsliding into a state of exception. The state of exception is the suicidal jolt of the empire, an empire that thinks violence can answer violence. The national and security enclosure creates a little empire within the larger global empire, a place of regional immobility, a temporary escape from history. But this is no way to respond to jihad. We have no responsible union, only a *union sacrée*.

*Sacrée*. Sacred. The word has been said. And it might well appear a new faux pas. Just a few years ago, in a world presumably rid of religion, the word “sacred” was a near profanity. At the conclusion of *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), René Girard announced that we would witness “the spectacular return of an essential violence”<sup>5</sup>. All that could be said was said in those few words. The violence that turns our sleep into a nightmare is the empire’s monstrous double. We prefer not to see that behind the exchange of goods is the exchange of blows, that the difference between war and commerce is one of degree rather than of kind, as Clausewitz said<sup>6</sup>. The duel structures the exchange. This is the original sin of every human culture. But there are imperial wars and democratic wars, offensive wars and

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<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Martinez-Gros, *Fascination du djihad : Fureurs islamistes et défaite de la paix* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> “It is a strange and tedious war when violence attempts to vanquish truth. All the efforts of violence cannot weaken truth, and only serve to give it fresh vigor. All the lights of truth cannot arrest violence, and only serve to exasperate it.” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées & The Provincial Letters*, tr. W. F. Trotter and Thomas M’Crie (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), Letter 12, 498.

<sup>5</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 318.

<sup>6</sup> “The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is in commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements actually occur, they can never be entirely absent.” Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 97. See also René Girard, *Battling to the End. Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 58-61.

defensive wars. This is what needs to be reiterated today, what so urgently needs to be thought anew.

## I. An explosive context

Before discussing the situation of the global village, let us begin by inquiring of our local village: France. What have we experienced since January 2015? The French 9/11, one might call it. Thus far the French state has held its ground. One even notes a temporary failure in the strategy of the Islamic State between the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 (*Charlie Hebdo*) and the recent assassination of a police officer on the Champs-Élysées. Instead of dividing the country, these attacks have left the unity of France intact. Many Muslims were crushed to death under that cargo truck in Nice. Many more joined the tribute paid to Father Hamel at Rouen Cathedral.

The notable success of the French response remains nonetheless precarious given that the strategic aim of the attacks is not to provoke a *response* (which presupposes political responsibility), but a *reaction* in both senses of the term (meant to drive the country into a downward spiral of violence). If we want to build in France (and in Europe more broadly) something other than a *union sacrée*, namely, a responsible union, one capable of mounting a *political and not merely a religious response to the politico-religious disorders that threaten us*, then it is up to us to hold firm on three fronts:

- On the warfront with the Islamic State, our external enemy deploys its forces in one of three military modalities, depending on the theater of operations: army, guerilla warfare, and terrorist attacks. If its “soldiers” strike blindly, the Islamic state convinces us it is masterminding this blindness. But who are our adversaries? In the first place, our fellow citizens. In December of 2016, about two thousand individuals in France enrolled for jihad.
- Consequently, we must fight on a second front as well, that of protection and security. We do this by identifying internal enemies (using a juridical arsenal that keeps our state of emergency from backsliding into a state of exception). We know, notably thanks to René Girard, that societies under threat have a tendency to turn spontaneously against “internal enemies.” It is therefore imperative that we remain calm; we should suspect neither our institutions nor our fellow citizens *a priori*.
- We must hold our ground on the battlefield of prejudices. I am thinking of the tendency we all have to put responsibility for our own failures onto the shoulders of others. The current tendency is to scapegoat Islamism and those we think embody it. There is a related tendency to suspect religious *people* as such or *religion* in its entirety: this is the dead end of a certain kind of secularism which in France is called “laïcisme”

In brief, it is incumbent on us to know how to accuse others *and* how to accuse ourselves, to wage an external and an internal war. This twofold war has only one name: democracy. Democracy assumes among other things that we break the taboo on religion. The cause of our current fear is both the return of “our” jihadists to France and the more general and fantasized return of *religion in its entirety* to our country and the world at large.

Our dream of peace is one and the same with this denial of religion and *its* violence. What we fail to grasp is that to fear religion is to act in a religious way. Instead of fearing religion, we must seek to understand it. Only then will we be able to act in a political way.

As the war that affects us is both *political and religious*, only a sound *understanding of religion* will enable our democracies to resist the challenge posed by global jihad, the fruit of a resentment that is at once theological, economic, and political: the theological resentment of a third, insufficiently recognized branch of monotheism; the economic resentment of the poor against the rich following the North-South split; the political resentment at the margins of our “global village”, which serves as a reminder of the violent origins of market dominance and the individualism that founds it.

Democracy’s flexibility, vigilance and steadfastness must be structured by a renewed secularism. This is the only way of responding to the attacks against us, attacks which aim to harden our institutions and our hearts. For a state of exception is always more fragile than a democratic one. These are the conditions: (1) of a *responsible union that would not be a union sacrée*; (2) of a democratic policy that would draw from the *resources of its religious understanding*.

## II. Religion as seen from above

How have we grown so ignorant of the religious foundations of political order? Historical contingencies doubtless play a part. Returning to the French example, we could mention our struggle for the separation of church and state. This political neutralization of religions does not presuppose their exclusion (which constitutes the lasting contradiction of the doctrine of *combisme*). Instead, it supposes an articulation between religion and politics. In France, the sterile struggle between clericalism and anticlericalism has beclouded understanding of this separation *and* articulation. Our inability to adapt our current world to the reality of Islam is in part a consequence of this.

More generally, struggles for the separation of church and state are rooted in the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment (particularly in its emphatic prejudice against religions) and later in the great Hegelian narrative which, by reducing the Christian religion to philosophy, consecrated the law as the overcoming of religion and as a means of bringing history to completion. This is why the Hegelian theodicy of the spirit provided such a powerful philosophical justification for what would become, after the collapse of the Berlin wall, the empire of the global market.

And yet religion and religions have resisted this reductive philosophical assessment. They returned in the form of the great totalitarianisms (and their genocidal policies) and in the form of the Iranian Revolution (1979). We have no choice but to believe the lesson was never learned, since it was after all a new form of the Hegelian narrative that prevailed in France and Europe at large. Marcel Gauchet’s *Disenchantment of the World* (1985)<sup>7</sup> is in many respects an important and symptomatic book of what remains a lasting trend.

Let us recall the main thesis of this important book. The transition from the heteronomy of the first human societies to the autonomy of democratic societies, from

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<sup>7</sup> Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

“religion in its pure state” to democracy, from the immobility of primitive tribes to the “movement” of modern societies, was made possible by the revolution-revelation of the Christian event that would free us of religion: Christianity is “the religion of the end of religion”. It is from this *unconscious* depth, says Gauchet, that our societies should draw their political thinking—from this deactivated memory that we should nonetheless gratefully acknowledge.

As convincing as this account of the passage to the secular age may be—a passage through the inception of empires and the invention of the state, from primitive religion to democratic societies—we are nevertheless entitled to ask whether it demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In other words, we might wonder whether Gauchet merely perpetuates in his own way Auguste Comte’s positivist conception of religion as the infantile stage of humanity, a stage from which we must finally emerge, that must at last come to an end.

This is what we might call religion as seen *from above* in two respects: religion is both analyzed from the transcendent viewpoint specific to politics and underestimated as regards its genealogical function. Indeed, Gauchet’s book is subtitled *A Political History of Religion*. He therefore proceeds from politics to the study of religion (and not from religion to politics in the manner of René Girard). In an effort to complete Pierre Clastres’ anthropology<sup>8</sup>, Gauchet conceptualizes a “religious decision” of the first human societies: a decision *not to enter* history, a decision to *resist* history and the state.

This “religious decision”, whose power would be political in nature, not only fails to account for the prevenient religious conditions—that is, the violent conditions of politics—it bears witness to a negative vision of religion from the outset: religion is what permits humankind *not to enter* history, *not to give* birth to the state. For René Girard, on the contrary, religion is what enabled human societies to enter history—by inventing sedentarization, for example. Sacrifice is the *cunning* that made the regulation of violence possible. One of the keenest readers of Girard’s work, philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy, observes that religion functioned to *contain* violence in both senses of the word.<sup>9</sup> Though it *was* itself unquestionably violent, it also *prevented* violence from overflowing.

It therefore comes as no surprise to find Marcel Gauchet declaring in *Le Monde* (November 2015) that the Bataclan theatre massacre (carried out in the name of Allah) featured “the paradoxical sign of the end of religion”<sup>10</sup>. Wishing to bolster his thesis, Gauchet references Olivier Roy on the “Islamization of radicalism” where jihadists are described as uprooted and desperate individuals, converts to violence and the heaven they hope thus to attain. This is jihadism as nihilism, nihilism festooned in the tinsel of religion. Gauchet’s “scientific” explanation is compelling and demands to be taken seriously. But

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> “For religion contains violence, in the compound sense of blocking it while at the same time harboring it within itself.” Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 104.

<sup>10</sup> Marcel Gauchet, Nicolas Truong, « Le fondamentalisme islamique est le retour paradoxal de la sortie du religieux », *Le Monde* (November 21, 2015), [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/21/marcel-gauchet-le-fondamentalisme-islamique-est-le-signe-paradoxal-de-la-sortie-du-religieux\\_4814947\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/21/marcel-gauchet-le-fondamentalisme-islamique-est-le-signe-paradoxal-de-la-sortie-du-religieux_4814947_3232.html) (accessed September 4, 2017).

does it fully account for the phenomenon of modern day jihadism? In other words, have we really broken free from religion?

### III. Religion as seen from the bottom

Nothing authorizes us to say that we have rid ourselves of religion. Jihadism is more nearly a *religious phenomenon* than one that merely dons the guise of religion...as though it were able to choose the costume it wears! The idea that religion is a superstructure dates back, as we know, to Marxist prejudices against the “opium of the masses”. Though Marx recognizes the messianic dimension of the Judeo-Christian message, we find in his work the old Hegelian gesture: the philosophical reduction of religion, somewhat brutalized but “put back on its feet”. Marxism *reduces* religion to law and politics, then in turn reduces politics to relations of production.

But in order to understand jihadism, we must approach it from another direction. We cannot reduce religion to reveal politics. Instead we reduce politics to disclose the religious phenomenon *per se*. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the *political project* of those who incite murder and the motives of those who kill without regard for their own lives. This is what I shall now call religion *as seen from below*.

From this perspective, jihadist acts stem from a messianism superseding that of Judaism and Christianity: a religion of the oppressed, the poor, and unloved standing against its predecessors (deemed “falsifiers”) and against the better part of the world population (deemed “infidels”). Islamism claims both a theological priority over the religions from which it stems, and a revolutionary political project. It draws its energy from revolution *and* religion, that is, from the known articulation of these two orders, the political and the religious. The former provides it with a warlike and conquering vigor while the latter *fundamentally* justifies this pretense.

We therefore exceed the myth of the “Muslim theocracy”. Islamism presupposes two distinct orders, one struggling against the other, two orders that paradoxically reinforce instead of neutralizing each other. The Islamic state is, as Stéphane Lacroix has noted, the culmination of a “salafization of jihadism”; the orthodoxy of Wahhabism (supported by Saudi Arabia) reinforces the revolutionary project of the Muslim Brotherhood (founded in Egypt) from the inside. Here Daesh becomes a formidable competitor for all pretenders to the Caliphate.

The more the West bombs Syrian, Iraqi and African deserts, the more it reinforces this political and religious project which in turn benefits from a nearly infinite supply of human and technological resources (human, because it fuels the resentment of the oppressed, the poor and unloved; technological, because it benefits from oil money). By an exceedingly perverse logic, the existence of this paranoid minority is made possible by its opponents. We do not forget, as Olivier Roy reminds us, that “Daesh’s worst enemy is Daesh”: the deadly enemy of Al-Qaeda, the rival of Saudi Arabia and Iran, Daesh opposes even Turkey in its caliphal pretensions. The absurdity of this situation is that the West finds itself participating in an internal conflict of the Islamic world, a conflict it manages only to exacerbate by claiming to seek its resolution.

#### IV. Mimesis & Violence

Let us now focus our study more precisely on the motivations of the various actors. Let us attempt to reveal the religious phenomenon at its root. It is precisely here that René Girard's work is able to enlighten us. At once *mimetic* and *sacrificial*, inter-relational and religious, his theoretical model comes fully to grips with the reality of the terror attacks we face.

If we effect a phenomenological reduction, moving not from politics to religion, but from religion to the psychology that makes religion possible—if we separate for the sake of analysis Girard's first two intuitions (i.e. mimesis and sacrifice)—a pathological relation to others stands revealed in the jihadist's acts of violence. It is for the self-proclaimed jihadist to show he can kill (and kill himself) with complete indifference, that he is indifferent toward the world, though he remains anything but indifferent toward himself. What he aims to demonstrate is, first, a *sovereign detachment* with respect to others and life in general: "You love life; we love death", say the jihadists today, echoing the infamous words of Bin Laden: "We love death. The U.S. loves life. That is the big difference between us".

In the symmetries of Bin Laden's formula ("You/we.", "death/life") a counter-society appears, one that opposes the global world in which it acts out. Daesh claims to promote a "community of brothers", a community at war against a society of atomized and corrupt individuals. This counter-society pretends to restore order. In reality, its members are rebelling against a society they want to believe (and make believe) rejects them, a society they implicitly believe has already won the day. Their "impotent hatred", in Stendhal's words<sup>11</sup>, is then transformed into a religious motivation: they die to obtain "in Heaven" the salvation of their relatives, the only renegades whose existence they still accept.

Here a difference between jihadi and "traditional" religion becomes readily apparent. Jihadists do not sacrifice themselves to save lives; they kill themselves to save themselves by multiplying victims. Whether they like it or not, they are therefore under the influence of the model they wish to subvert, namely, the despised individualism of the Western world. Resentment here is stronger than religion *per se*; resentment surpasses any justifications it might contrive for itself. But the violent act as such has nevertheless become a religious one, even when the religion concerned is adulterated or of an exceedingly poor quality.

The jihadist attack is therefore chiefly an *anti-sacrifice* (since it aims to produce disorder instead of order); then too it is an *auto-sacrifice*<sup>12</sup> (since it demonstrates a desire to win paradise by sending others to hell). Jihadists seek to be saved *from* history and from *within* history. In actuality they suffer a twofold annihilation: that of themselves and of others. The community for which they destroy themselves is reduced to that of their own family. We are unable to discern a universal dimension here, one evident in the kingdom of heaven for which the Christian martyrs died, they who "entered with fear into the ordeal", as Girard reminds us, and who did not desire death... except in the hagiographic narratives.

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<sup>11</sup> Stendhal, *Mémoires d'un touriste* (Paris : Folio/Gallimard, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See also Jacob Rogozinski, *Djihadisme : Le Retour du Sacrifice* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2017), 241-242.

Jihadism is more than simple nihilism, contra Olivier Roy. We have to do here with a breakdown of religion as evidenced by the desire for a strictly personal resurrection, a resurrection from the victim's ashes. This phenomenon is *firstly psychological*. It shows us individuals caught up in an attraction-repulsion relationship, fanatics hating the globalization that holds them in thrall. Caught in this *double bind* or contradiction, they catastrophically intrude upon a world they say rejects them. *The phenomenon therefore appears to be religious*. To borrow a line from Frédéric Worms, the "internal violation of a relationship"<sup>13</sup> has religious effects.

Girard helps us understand another phenomenon. The jealousy of these marginalized assassins prompts them to pose as victims of the people they "victimize," to shoot on the crowd of their so-called persecutors, to deliberately choose the martyr's place. They replay here the Christian position in reverse, caricaturing the scene of *all against one*, the lynching or original murder that Girard, after Freud, brought to light as the matrix of religion. Here we find new evidence that the terrorist's act is anything but a founding event. In his analysis of terrorism in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Girard calls it a "sacrificial miscarriage"<sup>14</sup> [fiasco sacrificiel].

Such is the "jihadist conversion" which starts with a movement of resentment (against a model that both fascinates and stands in the way) and ends in an act of self-deification (that can only be realized through the destruction of this model). We move from a *mimetic* logic (the desire to do away with the model), to a *religious* logic (to act "in the name of God"). But this logic is abortive; it fails. It does not create a religious form; it does not create a political form. It merely awakens a community of murderers.

The goal of the global jihad remains unachieved at this stage. It aims in fact to convert the greatest number to violence. That is why some 20 to 25% of French jihadists come from non-Muslim backgrounds. They come from the Catholic world, the Buddhist world, from what appears to be the wholly secularized world. The violence therefore bypasses the Muslim world *stricto sensu*, even when it finds in the memory of Islam's origins the means of its self-justification. Daesh then intervenes as a *multiplier of violence*, aggravating a resentment that religion can no longer contain.

In this contagious violence, Girard sees all the institution of sacrifice once served to avert: at the level of the first human societies, at that of the more complex groupings they subsequently constituted, and finally at the level of empires, permitting the invention of the state. As a ritual mechanism of re-differentiation, the scapegoat mechanism lies at the origin of every institution, although it *no longer works*. Its gradual disintegration, says Girard, is irreversible. We see this plainly in the phenomenon under consideration here. Instead of *containing* violence, jihadism unleashes it: we are thus witnessing the malfunction of religion rather than its return, its malfunction in the context of the globalization of violence. Instead of nihilism in a religious guise, contemporary jihadism is a mixture of nihilism and denatured religion. The jihadist phenomenon *is* religious to the extent that it constitutes a

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<sup>13</sup> Frédéric Worms, « Pourquoi obéirait-on? La relation à la loi entre attachement et violation », *Savoirs et Clinique*, 1/ 4 (2004) : 83-88. See also Frédéric Worms, *Les Maladies chroniques de la démocratie* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2017) 31-42.

<sup>14</sup> René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2000), 224.

*return of the archaic*. But it is a demonetized archaism—a violence no longer capable of founding anything.

Such are the attacks when we analyze events “from below”, from the closest proximity to the criminal intent of the perpetrators and by means of a reduction that exposes the religious motives of self-proclaimed jihad soldiers: their dynamic is essentially mimetic, that is, suicidal. Jihad soldiers are a threat to Islam *tout court*. Their violence, like that of the Russian anarchists so effectively harnessed by Leninism, is being exploited by the Islamic State, although jihad “soldiers” believe themselves to be freely choosing war with a view to their own salvation.

This policy which “*follows on the heels of war*”<sup>15</sup> employs a delusional strategy (destroying or enslaving a good third of the planet’s population) and a proven tactic (comprising wars, guerrilla attacks and assassinations). The Islamic State is one of the major players in a historic trend now shaking the global village, exploiting a law that Girard, following Clausewitz, calls the “escalation to extremes”<sup>16</sup>. Daesh wants war for the sake of war. It is thus that it claims to revive the conquering Islam of old. The only difference here, we repeat, is that it can neither found nor restore an empire.

Daesh is a black hole, the poisoned fruit of a *religion* in decay: an Islam deprived of its legal restraints and its former political domination. Above all it is profoundly symptomatic of the *decomposition of the religious mechanism in itself*, since the structure of Daesh is manifestly incapable of producing order. It is indeed impossible to see how this violence extending from the margins, exploding everywhere and mobilizing such heterogenous forces, might in time replace the global village. It can do no more than accelerate the decomposition of the empire, an empire whose only feature is the formless form of the global market.

### Conclusion: Messianism and “Messianicity”

While the enigma of jihadism remains as yet unsolved, it seems at the very least necessary to trace its contours. To conclude the aforementioned discussion of the global order—of its reversal by way of the margins—I would like to make a few remarks focusing on the possible reversal of this reversal, a hope lying at the heart of our peril, to speak as the poet Hölderlin (“But where danger threatens/That which saves from it also grows”<sup>17</sup>).

Girard’s third and final thesis (after mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism,) is that of the Judeo-Christian revelation, as we discover in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978)<sup>18</sup>. The revelation shows up the ineffectiveness of sacrifices, sanctioning the birth of the judiciary as the avatar of the sacrificial institution. A “stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks” (Corinthians 1:23), the Cross reveals the absolute innocence of victims, of so many random victims whose expulsion over the course of millennia served to restore order to human groups. Jesus’ crucifixion is a *barren sacrifice* (incapable of reconciling

<sup>15</sup> René Girard, *Battling to the End. Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-25.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos”, in *Friedrich Hölderlin, Poems and Fragments*, tr. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press, 1994), 483.

<sup>18</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundations of the World* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

a community at the expense of a condemned man), and an *unjust punishment* (that denounces in advance the irreducible possibility of arbitrariness, and with it the contingency of the legal and political order). The Christian revelation/revolution subjects the civil religion of paganism to a change whose name is *messianism*.

This time, there is no question of rooting societies in an original debt, of compelling men to “walk backwards,” reproducing through bloody rituals the cathartic effects of their founding murders. On the contrary, the question is that of rooting these societies, of rooting all human societies, in the future of a community of justice that *will always come* and *that never comes*. It is this community *to come* that the Bible and the Gospels call the Kingdom. To pretend to realize this community of brothers down here on earth is to fall into the trap of political messianism. The Kingdom *does not happen*: it transcends and guides history. The Judeo-Christian revelation thus upends the traditional structures of religion: we are no longer rooted in an immanent past, but in the transcendent future of the messianic community.

We therefore perform a final reduction: it is not a peace imposed by the market, but a peace proposed by the messianic revelation to which jihadism reacts. Their fundamental resentment transfixes us as one face of globalization. To end dependence on this logic of death is to hear the *eschatological* dimension of an essentially reactive violence. The attacks multiplying today reveal a furious desire for self-destruction. But they also constitute the negative proof that *something is making its way toward us* in the wake of the catastrophe, a revelation that the world as such refuses to acknowledge or welcome.

Jihadists seek to accelerate the apocalypse, taking the reins from totalitarianism in so doing. It is here that we encounter, again, the danger of *political* messianism, a danger the Gospels of Matthew and Luke denounce specifically: “the Kingdom of God is preached, and all strive to enter it through violence.” (Luke 16:16, Matthew 11: 12). Hence the importance of a phrase we borrow from Derrida’s late work: “*messianicity without messianism*.”<sup>19</sup> This *open* concept of religion helps to extricate us from identities that remain otherwise closed and opposed to each other: Christians against Jews, Jews against Christians, Christians and Jews against Muslims. This messianicity transmits the powerful call of the future, more than a remembrance of the past. It forms the ground of a possible dialogue between the three monotheisms. As Derrida understands it, democracy is something new to Europe, because “the modern figure of the democratic state” is “more Abrahamic than Greek.”<sup>20</sup>

What we are witnessing is less the return of religion than a *return of archaic violence within a religion now incapable of containing it*. Jihadism escapes the control of Islam. It does not react against traditional rivals alone (i.e. the tragic events of the *Hypercacher* or Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray) but *against the elements of messianicity that Islam bears within itself* as the third branch of monotheism. Hence the dream of the “Bilad al-Sham” and its end of the world fantasy, hence the fratricidal rivalries within the Muslim world. Here we find on a broader level, the fundamentally *mimetic*, which is to say, suicidal, dimension of terrorist acts.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 56.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 110.

Jihadism is therefore nihilism's last disguise and the last form of political messianism, a messianism the empire of the globalized world has not seen coming, has not seen awakening at its margins. What shall we do in the face of this catastrophe, this malfunctioning of religion that goes hand in hand with a malfunctioning of our world and its climate? I want to be clear: we shall urgently return to the *history* and the *earth* we left behind. We shall no more refuse to see our own inherent violence. And we shall find in each of our countries, in each of our peculiar and concrete democracies, the conditions for responsible action—towards each other and towards the world.

*Translated by David Dawson*

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