History and the Paraclete

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All the Gospel passages we have examined refer to cases of collective persecution which are deplored and condemned in the same way that we deplore and condemn comparable persecutions that occurred in our own history. The Gospels furnish a whole set of texts applicable to a wide diversity of situations. All in all, they contain everything we need to be able to criticize the presentations of such acts of persecution from the persecutor’s standpoint, and to resist the mechanisms of mimesis and violence which hold people prisoners to presentations of this kind.

Martyrs

The concrete influence of the Gospels on these problems first becomes visible in the case of those whom the Christians call their martyrs and the violence used against them. We regard these martyrs as innocent victims. This is the truth history has conveyed to us. The persecutors’ standpoint

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1 In the six previous chapters (IX-XIV) the author has closely examined such passages as John 11:47-53 (Caiaphas’ dictum that “it is expedient... that one man should die for the people”), Mark 6:14-28 (the beheading of John the Baptist), Mark 14:66-72 (Peter’s denial of Christ), Mark 5:1-17 (the Gerasene demoniac), and Mark 12:23-28 (Jesus’ saying “every kingdom divided against itself...”).

2 Représentations persécutrices (here rendered as “presentations of acts of persecution from the persecutor’s standpoint”) is a key term in Girard’s analysis and occurs at least 16 times in this chapter alone. It is defined as follows in ch. I of Le bouc émissaire: “Accounts of real acts of persecution, often collective, composed from the standpoint of the persecutors and consequently subject to typical distortions” (p. 18). In Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde (1978), there is a whole section devoted to “Les textes de persécution” (pp. 136-162). Resisting the temptation to leave the term untranslated, the translator has preferred to use the paraphrase given here or some such equivalent whenever the term occurs in this essay (Translator’s note).
does not prevail. This is the basic affirmation. If there is to be a “sacred” in the mythological sense, the glorification of the victim must be achieved on the same basis as the persecution itself. The crimes alleged by the persecutors must be regarded as real crimes.

In the case of these martyrs there is no shortage of accusations. The most extravagant rumours circulate and even distinguished writers lend them credence. The crimes in question are those traditionally attributed to mythological heroes and appealed to in instances of mob violence. Christians are accused of infanticide and other crimes against their own kin. Their community life is so intense that they are suspected of violating the taboos of incest. Linked with the rejection of emperor worship, these crimes assumed social significance in the eyes of the people and even of the authorities. If Rome is in flames, it is probably the Christians who started the fire...

The embodiment of all these crimes in the final apotheosis would mean the birth of a myth. The Christian saint would then be a mythological hero. He or she would combine in himself or herself the supernatural benefactor and the omnipotent troublemaker, capable of sending some plague or other to punish any slight or indifference towards him or her. The essential character of the mythological “sacred” is to be both maleficent and beneficent at one and the same time. Approaching it as we do from a Christian standpoint, which we take to be the norm though in actual fact it is unique, we seem to be confronted with a double transcendence, a paradoxical union.

The martyr’s innocence is never questioned. They hated me without a cause. The victories over suffering are transformed into concrete truths. Although the spirit of revenge conducts vigorous rearguard actions, the martyrs continue to pray for their executioners: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

The rehabilitation of innocent victims was not something unheard of prior to the coming of Christianity, of course. Socrates and Antigone, to name but two, are usually referred to in this connection, and with good reason. These cases do indeed have features approximating to the Christian understanding of the martyr. But they are exceptional and they do not affect any society in its entirety. The distinctiveness of the martyr lies in the fact that, here, sacralization fails in conditions most propitious to its success, i.e. the mass emotion, the persecuting and religious zeal. This is shown by the presence here of all the stereotypes of persecution. From the standpoint of the majority, Christians constitute a disturbing minority. They are richly endowed with characteristics marking them out for selection as victims. In particular, they mostly come from the lower classes and many of them are women and slaves. Yet nothing here is transfigured. The presentation of the persecution is unembellished.

Canonization is not sacralization. Traces of the primitive “sacred” are certainly to be found in the glorification of the martyrs and later on in the medieval lives of the saints. Some of these were mentioned earlier in refer-

3 Girard has a whole chapter on “The Stereotypes of Persecution” (Le bouc émissaire, ch. II, pp. 23-36). They are: (1) a generalized critical social situation; (2) stereotyped accusations; (3) stereotyped categories for the selection of victims for persecution.
ence to St Sebastian. The mechanisms of violence and the "sacred" play a part in the fascination exercised by the martyrs. In the blood shed in earlier times, it was believed, there is a force which tends to be exhausted unless replenished by fresh blood from time to time. This is quite true in the case of the Christian martyrs and it is undoubtedly an important factor in the influence of this phenomenon and its capacity to spread. But the essence of the matter lies elsewhere.

Most observers, even Christian ones, now emphasize the vestigial sacrificial elements exclusively, believing they have identified here the connecting link between the theological aspects of Christianity, assumed to be purely sacrificial, and its social efficacy, also sacrificial. They are on to something real here, but also something secondary, which should not hide from them the specifically Christian process which works in the opposite direction to sacrifice, namely, in the direction of revelation.

That two opposed actions can be combined is paradoxical only in appearance. But a better way of putting it would be to say that this combination reproduces the whole paradox of the passion and the gospels. These are all the more amenable to secondary superficial mythological crystallizations because their very purpose is to reproduce the mythological process as faithfully as possible in order to unmask it and undermine it at the deepest possible level.

In the last analysis, even a purely sacrificial theology of the Gospels must take the Letter to the Hebrews as its basis, and this certainly lends no support to any exclusive stress on the marginal sacrificial elements in the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom. The Letter to the Hebrews, it seems to me, fails to define the real uniqueness of the passion of Christ, though it tries to do so and actually achieves something important by presenting Christ's death as the perfect and definitive sacrifice which renders all other sacrifices obsolete and every subsequent sacrificial enterprise inadmissible. This definition leaves obscure the absolute uniqueness of Christianity, which is what I am trying to identify here. It nonetheless excludes any relapse into the primitive repetitive tradition of sacrifice, which is what happens when martyrdom is interpreted exclusively in terms of the mechanisms of violence and the sacred.

Because myth-making fails in the case of the martyrs, historians are enabled to understand in a rational light, for the first time and on a broad scale, the accounts of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutors and the acts of violence presupposed in these accounts. We catch the crowds actually at work creating myths and this is not as pretty a sight as those who theorize about myths and literature may imagine it to be. Happily for anti-Christian humanism, it is still possible to deny that the process involved here is the same as that which everywhere else engenders mythology.

The very fact that the scapegoat mechanism has been exposed by the passion of Christ means that it is no longer effective enough to produce a genuine myth. It is impossible to demonstrate directly that it really is a
question of this generative mechanism here. On the other hand, if this mechanism retained its full efficiency, there would have been no Christianity but only another mythology and everything would now appear to us in the form of genuinely mythological themes and motives, in any case already transfigured. The end result would be the same: even here it would still be impossible to recognize the generative mechanism. Anyone claiming to identify it would be exposed to the charge of equating words with realities and of inventing the real persecution behind the noble mythological imagination.

In the lives of the saints, the model is always Christ's passion; it is always this passion which is slipped in beneath the particular circumstances of a particular persecution. But this is not simply a rhetorical exercise, a matter of routine piety, as our pseudo-debunkers imagine. This is where the critique of accounts of persecution from the persecutor's standpoint begins; its initial results are stiff, maladroit, and even biassed; after all, it is a process previously inconceivable and one which demands a long apprenticeship.

Someone will object that the rehabilitation of the martyrs is a partisan business, rooted in the shared beliefs of the victims and their defenders. It is only its own victims whom "Christianity" defends. Once Christianity is victorious, it becomes itself a tyrannical and persecuting oppressor. It displays the same blindness to its own acts of violence as that displayed by those who once were its persecutors.

All this is true, just as true as that martyrdom has a sacrificial significance, but once more this is a secondary truth which obscures the primary truth. A tremendous revolution is taking place. People, some of them at least, are no longer willing to be taken in even by persecutions appealing to their own beliefs, above all to "Christianity" itself. The resistance to persecution springs from the very heart of the world of persecution. I have in mind here, of course, the process I described in detail at the beginning of this book, namely, the exposure of the truth about witch hunting and the abandonment by a whole society of its crudest forms of a persecuting and magical mode of thought.\(^5\)

Presentations of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor have been losing their credibility and substance throughout the whole of Western history. Not that violence necessarily diminishes in incidence or intensity. But persecutors can no longer invariably impose their standpoint on the people around them. It took centuries to expose the medieval persecutions for what they really were; it takes only a few years to discredit our contemporary persecutors. Even if tomorrow some totalitarian system were to extend its grip over the entire planet, it would not succeed in imposing its own myth, i.e. the persecuting and magical aspects of its thinking.

The process is the same as in the case of the Christian martyrs but cleansed of all remaining traces of the "sacred" and radicalized, since it demands no community of belief between the victims and those who expose the truth about the system which persecutes these victims. The clear

\(^5\) Cf. op. cit., pp. 7-21.
proof of this is the language employed. It is always this language that we use, there is no other.

No connotation of injustice attaches to the word *persequi* in classical Latin. It simply means to take legal proceedings against someone, to take someone to court. It was the Christian apologists, Lactantius and Tertullian in particular, who turned the word *persecutio* in the direction of its modern connotation, i.e. the very un-Roman idea of a legal machinery serving injustice rather than justice, systematically twisted by the distortions of persecution. Similarly, the Greek word *martyr* means witness and it was Christian influence which resulted in its acquiring the modern connotation of an innocent person who is persecuted, a heroic victim of violence and injustice.

When we exclaim: "This victim is a scapegoat", we are employing a biblical expression but one which no longer has the meaning it had for those who participated in the ritual of the same name. It has the same sense as the innocent sheep in Isaiah, as the Lamb of God in the Gospels. Every explicit reference to Christ's passion has disappeared, but it is always this passion which is set alongside the accounts of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor; it is the same model which serves as a decoding stencil but we have now become so accustomed to using it that we always do so automatically without any explicit reference to its Judaic and Christian origins.

When the Gospels tell us that Christ is now in the place of all victims, we tend to regard this as mere sentimentality and pious rhetoric, whereas in fact it is literally true from an epistemological standpoint. It is only by putting their innocent victims in Christ's place that human beings have learned to recognize them as such. This is something very clearly understood by Raymond Schwager. What the Gospels are mainly interested in, of course, is not this intellectual process but rather the change of attitude it makes not necessary, as some absurdly insist, but possible.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Then the righteous will answer him: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?"

And the King will answer them: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and

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you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Then they also will answer: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty, or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:31-46 RSV).

This passage is parabolic in the sense that, in order to speak to violent people who are unaware of their real character, use is here made of the language of violence, in such a way, however, that its meaning is quite clear. It is not the explicit reference to Jesus which now counts. Our relationship to the demands created by the revelation is determined solely by our concrete attitude to victims and this can become effective without Christ himself ever being mentioned.

When the Gospel text speaks of the universal spread of the Gospel, this does not mean that it entertains utopian illusions either about the nature of future adhesions to it, or about the practical results of the slow penetration in depth which will accompany its spread. It anticipates not only the superficial adhesion to the Gospel of a still pagan world, the “Christian” Middle Ages, but also the indifferent or surly rejection of the Gospel by the world which succeeded it, a world influenced more secretly by the Gospel revelation and often constrained by this very fact to set up anti-Christian parodies of the universe of the Gospel in opposition to the paganized Christianity of yesterday. The cry which finally decides the death of Jesus is not “Crucify him” but “Release Barabbas!” (Matt. 27:21; Mark 15:11; Luke 23:18).

The evidence of the texts seems to me to be irrefutable, yet it is almost impossible to point this out without raising a veritable storm of protestation, a concert of angry voices now almost universal since the latest generation of nominal Christians gladly joins in the general outcry. It may be that the texts themselves are now so potent that even to quote them and to make their relevance plain smacks of polemic and persecution.

Many people, on the other hand, still cling to the traditional modern view of Christianity as persecuting by its very nature. This view is based on facts of two sorts, too different in appearance for their concordance not to appear decisive.

From Constantine onwards, Christianity triumphs at the level of political government itself and wastes no time in lending the weight of its authority to persecutions akin to those in earlier times when Christians themselves were the victims. Like so many subsequent religions, ideological and political movements, Christianity was persecuted when it was weak but became itself a persecutor when it was strong.

Science and myth

This view of Christianity as a persecutor, just as much as or even more so than the other religions, was reinforced rather than diminished by the
ability of the modern Western world to decode the accounts of persecution presented from the standpoint of the persecutor. As long as this ability is restricted to the immediate historical context, i.e. to the superficially Christianized world, religious persecution (the violence sanctioned or inspired by religion) appears rather like a monopoly of that world.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, on the other hand, Westerners turned science into an idol the better to worship themselves. They believed in an autonomous scientific mind of which they supposed they were at once the inventors and the products. For the ancient myths they substitute the myth of progress, i.e. the myth of a strictly unlimited modern superiority, the myth that humanity is being gradually liberated and divinized by its own capacities.

The scientific mind cannot be first. It assumes a renunciation of the ancient preference for the causality of magic and persecution, a causality which our ethnologists have defined so clearly. Given a choice between natural, remote and inaccessible causes, on the one hand, and socially significant causes permitting corrective interventions, i.e. the victims on the other, humanity has always preferred the latter.

If people are to be guided towards the patient study of natural causes, their attention must first of all be diverted away from their victims, and what better way of doing this is there than by showing them that persecutors now hate without a cause and with no noticeable result? If this miracle is to be performed at the level of the multitudes and not just of a few exceptional individuals, as in Greece, an usual combination of intellectual, moral and religious factors is called for, and this the gospel text provides.

It was not because science had been invented that witch hunting was abandoned, but because witch hunting had been abandoned that science was invented. Like the spirit of economic enterprise, the scientific mind is a by-product of the influence of the Gospel text in the hidden depths. Modern Western society is forgetful of the revelation and only interested in the by-products. It exploits these to create weapons, instruments of power, only to find today that the process backfires. Convinced it is a liberator, it turns out to be a persecutor. Children anathematize their parents and parade as their judges. Contemporary scholars discover vestiges of magic in all the classic forms of rationalism and science. Our predecessors thought they had leapt at one bound out of the circle of violence, but, far from this being the case, all they had done was to reconstitute weakened versions of myths and rituals.

Our contemporaries criticize all this. They loudly condemn the arrogance of the modern West only themselves to fall into an even worse form of arrogance. In order to dodge recognizing our own share of responsibility for the deplorable use we make of the huge advantages conferred on us, we deny these. We abandon the myth of progress only to fall again for the even worse myth of the “eternal cycle”. To judge by our scholars, we are now no longer troubled by any ferment of truth; our history has no meaning, the very notion of history is nonsense. There are no signs of the times. We are not engaged on the unique adventure we imagined we were. There is no such thing as science; no such thing as knowledge.
Our recent intellectual history increasingly resembles the convulsive spasms of a maniac who apparently prefers death to the cure that threatens him. We must be extremely suspicious of the advent of a knowledge coming it seems in the guise of an enemy when we barricade ourselves as we do against every possibility of knowledge. I have tried to show that a great many things in our world are determined by the halt called to the decodage of accounts of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor. Some of these accounts we have read for centuries, others we do not read at all. Our capacity to dig down to the truth here is limited to the area defined by this capacity itself as the historical. Naturally enough, we have exercised this capacity first of all on the accounts closest to us, the easiest to decode because they have already been weakened by the Gospel revelation.

But the difficulties are now no longer enough to explain why we drag our heels. Our culture is simply schizophrenic when it refuses to extend to classical and primitive mythologies the procedures which can rightly be applied to them. We try to protect the myth of Western humanism, Rousseau's myth of the natural and original goodness of humanity.

In reality, however, these myths hardly count. They are only the outposts of an even more stubborn resistance. When mythology is decoded, when the role of “scapegoats” in every cultural system is exposed, when the enigma of primitive religion is resolved, this necessarily paves the way for the vigorous re-entry of the biblical and evangelical revelation. Once we really understand the myths, it is no longer possible for us to regard the Gospel as just one more myth, since it is the Gospel which enables us to understand them.

It is against this light, seen as a threat, that all our resistance is directed. For a long time now, this light has illuminated a great many things in our life but it had yet to illuminate itself. We contrived to believe that it came from us. Quite improperly we claimed it as ours. We mistook ourselves for the light whereas we are only witnesses of the light. But once the brilliance and range of this light augment a little, it emerges itself from the shadows, is reflected back upon itself and illuminates itself. The light of the Gospel reveals its own distinctive character in the process of being applied to mythology.

In short, the Gospel text is in the process of justifying itself at the end of an intellectual history which seemed to us alien to it because this history was transforming our vision in a direction alien to all the religions of violence with which we were absurdly equating it. Now, however, there is a new advance in this history, one which, though small in itself, is full of consequences for our stable intellectual and religious positions, puts an end to this mistaken identification and reveals that this critique of violent religion is in fact an essential meaning of the Gospel revelation.

Revelation through the Spirit

If this were not what the Gospels are about, their own history would elude them. They would not be what we see them to be. But, under the rubric of the Spirit, this is what they are about. The great passages on the Paraclete illuminate the process we are now living through. This is certainly
the reason why the apparent obscurity of these passages is beginning to be dispelled. What illuminates the passages about the Spirit is not the déco­
dage of mythology but the Gospels themselves which, by reducing the myths to vanishing point after having penetrated them with their light, enable us to understand words which seemed nonsensical, steeped in vio­lence and superstition, because they announce this process as a victory of Christ over Satan, or of the Spirit of truth over falsehood.

The passages devoted to the Paraclete in John's Gospel are located in the farewell discourses of Jesus to his disciples which constitute the climax of the fourth Gospel. I suspect that modern Christians are somewhat embarrassed by the reappearance of Satan at so solemn a moment. John is affirming that the vindication of Jesus in history, his authentication, is inseparable from the annihilation of Satan. This single yet double event is presented as already completed by the passion of Jesus and at the same time as not yet completed, as still to come, since it is still invisible to the disciples themselves.

And when he (sc. the Paraclete) comes
he will convict the world
of sin and of righteousness and of judgment:
of sin,
because they do not believe in me;
of righteousness,
because I go to the Father,
and you will see me no more;
of judgment,
because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:8-11 RSV).

Originating in the world itself, in the violence of the world, there is an abyss between the Father and the world. The return of Jesus to the Father signals the victory over violence, the spanning of this abyss. At first, however, people do not perceive this. Violence being for them their environment, they see Jesus only as one more dead person among the many. Once Jesus has returned to the Father, there will be no radiant message either from him or from the Father. Even if Jesus is divinized, it will always be somewhat in the manner of the ancient gods, within the perpetual cycle of violence and the sacred. In these circumstances, the victory of the presentation of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor seems assured.

Yet this is not how things will turn out, says Jesus. By his fidelity to the word of God to the very end, even in dying for it, Jesus crosses the abyss which separates us from the Father. He himself becomes our Paraclete, i.e. our defender, and sends us another Paraclete who will work ceaselessly within the world to bring the truth to light there too.

Our sages and scholars suspect that we have here an imaginary, fic­
tional revenge of the kind that the vanquished in history usually contrive in their writings in order to comfort themselves. Yet even if we are surprised by the language used here, even if the author of the text sometimes seems to us to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of his vision, we cannot possibly fail to recognize here what we have ourselves just been speaking about. The Spirit works within history to reveal what Jesus has already revealed, namely, the scapegoat mechanism, the genesis of all mythology, the nullity
of all the gods of violence. In other words, in the terminology of the Gospel, the Spirit completes the defeat and condemnation of Satan. The world, of course, founded as it is on the presentation of persecution from the persecutor's standpoint, does not believe in Jesus or believes in him in a distorted way. It cannot conceive the revelatory power of the passion of Jesus. How could it possibly do so? No system of thought can really entertain the thought capable of destroying it. To convict the world, therefore, and to show that it is reasonable and right to believe in Jesus as the envoy of the Father who returns to the Father following the passion, i.e. as a divine figure who is totally different from the divinities of violence, there is need for the Spirit in history to work for the destruction of this world of violence and gradually to undermine the credit of all the gods of violence.

It might even seem that the Spirit also discredits the Christ himself, inasmuch as the Christian Trinity seems to be implicated in religious violence through the fault of us all, believers and unbelievers alike. In reality, it is only the incompleteness of the historical process which perpetuates and even intensifies the unbelief of the world, the dream that there could be a Jesus demythologized by the advance of science, eliminated by history along with all the other gods. History only has to go a little further and it will be seen to confirm the truth of the Gospel; it really is “Satan” who is discredited and Christ who is vindicated. The victory of Jesus is indeed established immediately in principle in his passion but for the majority of human beings this victory only becomes concrete at the end of a long history secretly ruled by the revelation. The victory of Jesus becomes luminous when we recognize that in fact, thanks to the Gospels and not despite them, we are at last able to demonstrate the utter emptiness of all the violent gods, to declare every mythology null and void.

It is only in virtue of the account of persecution from the persecutor’s standpoint, regnant everywhere prior to the Gospels, that Satan reigns. Satan, therefore, is essentially the accuser, who deceives people by making them regard innocent victims as guilty people. Who then is the Paraclete? The Greek word paraklētos is the exact equivalent of advocate in English, avocat in French, derived from the Latin ad-vocatus. The paraclete is summoned to the side of the accused, the victim, to speak in his stead and on his behalf, to act as his defender. The Paraclete is the universal advocate, the counsel for the defence of all innocent victims, the destroyer of every account of persecution from the persecutor’s standpoint. He is certainly the spirit of truth, therefore, the one who disperses the mists of every mythology.

We cannot but wonder why so outstanding a translator as Jerome, not normally lacking in boldness, should have hesitated as he did when he came to translate this very ordinary common Greek noun paraklētos. He is taken by surprise, in the literal sense; he cannot see the appositeness of this word and decides in favour of a straightforward transliteration: Paracletus. His example is followed religiously by most of our modern languages, giving us Paraclete, Paraclet, Paraklet, etc. By its very opacity, this mysterious word has continued ever since to be a concrete expression not of the unintelligibility of the Gospel text, which is really quite intelligible, but of
the unintelligence of its interpreters, precisely the same lack of intelligence with which Jesus reproaches his disciples and which is perpetuated and often even aggravated among the peoples reached by the Gospel.

Countless studies have been devoted to the Paraclete, of course. But none of them offer a satisfactory solution since they all define the problem in narrowly theological terms. The enormous historical and cultural significance of the term remains out of their reach and the conclusion generally reached is that if the Paraclete is anyone's advocate it must be that of the disciples before the Father. This solution appeals to a passage in I John: “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (parakłétos) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2: 1 RSV).

This Johannine passage and the fourth Gospel itself make Jesus himself a Paraclete. In the Gospel of John, Jesus appears in fact as the first Paraclete sent to humanity:

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor (paraklētos), to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him or knows him (John 14: 16-17 RSV).

The Christ is the Paraclete par excellence in the struggle against the persecutor's presentation of persecution, since the revelatory power of the passion of Christ is the foundation of every defence and rehabilitation of the victims. Once Christ has departed, however, the Spirit of Truth, the second Paraclete will make the light, which is already there in the world but which people contrive as long as possible to avoid seeing, shine for all human beings.

The disciples certainly have no need of a second advocate with the Father when they already have Jesus himself. The other Paraclete is sent among us and into history; we must not try to rid ourselves of him by piously dispatching him to the transcendent sphere. The immanent nature of his action is confirmed by a passage from the synoptic gospels:

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11 RSV).

This passage itself presents certain problems. It does not quite say what it means to say. It seems to suggest that the martyrs need not worry about their defence, for the Holy Spirit will be on hand to argue their case successfully. But an immediate triumph is excluded. The victims will not rout their accusers in the actual course of the trial; they will indeed become martyrs, countless texts exist for us to be quite sure of that; the Gospels are under no illusion that they will put an end to persecutions.

What is envisaged here is not individual trials nor some transcendental trial in which the Father would play the part of Accuser. To think in these terms always means turning the Father, with the best of intentions — the
road to hell is paved with them — into a Satanic figure. What is envisaged here, therefore, can only be a trial midway between heaven and earth, the trial of the “heavenly” or “worldly” powers and of Satan himself. The reason why the evangelists sometimes make this trial either too transcendent or else too immanent is certainly their inability sometimes to define where it is taking place. And the modern commentators have never surmounted this twofold hesitancy because they have never understood that what is at stake in the battle between Satan the Accuser and the Paraclete as Counsel for the Defence is the destiny of the violent sacred in its entirety.

What the martyrs say is not all that important, for they are witnesses not to a set belief, as we tend to think, but to the appalling propensity of human beings in groups to shed innocent blood in the interests of restoring unity to their community. The persecutors strive to bury all the slain in the tomb of the presentation of persecution from their own standpoint but the more martyrs there are, the feeble this presentation becomes and the more luminous the testimony of the martyrs. This is the reason, of course, why we still go on using the term martyr — meaning witness — for all the innocent victims, irrespective of differences of belief or doctrines, just as the gospels themselves proclaim. As in the case of the term “scapegoat”, so too in popular usage the term martyr goes further than scholarly interpretations and suggests to theology things it does not yet know.

The still untouched world can make nothing of what transcends the account of persecution from the standpoint of the persecutor; it can neither see nor know the Paraclete. The disciples themselves are still hindered by illusions which history alone can rid them of as the influence of Christ’s passion reaches ever deeper. The future will recall to disciples things said to them which escape their attention now because apparently devoid of meaning:

I have spoken these things to you
while I am still with you.
But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you all things,
and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you
(John 14:25-26 RSV).

I have yet many things to say to you,
but you cannot bear them now.
When the Spirit of truth comes,
he will guide you into all the truth;
for he will not speak in his own authority,
but whatever he hears he will speak
and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
He will glorify me,
for he will take what is mine
and declare it to you (John 16:12-14 RSV).

Of all the passages about the Paraclete this, in the last analysis, is surely the most astonishing. It gives the impression of being constructed of heterogeneous fragments, as if it were the incoherent outcome of some sort of mystical schizophrenia. In actual fact, it is our own cultural schizophrenia
which gives it that appearance. We shall completely misunderstand it so long as we imagine it can be explained by using principles and methods which are necessarily derived from the world and can neither see nor know the Paraclete. The evangelist rains astonishing truths on us so rapidly here that we are neither able nor willing to take them in. We are in grave danger of projecting on to him the chaos and violence by which we are always to some extent possessed. It is possible that the text has been influenced in certain details by conflicts between the Church and the Synagogue, but its real theme has nothing to do with contemporary discussions of the "Johannine antisemitism".

He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law, "They hated me without a cause." But when the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me (ekeinos marturesei peri emou); and you also are witnesses (kai humeis de martureite) because you have been with me since the beginning. I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them (John 15:23-27; 16:1-4 RSV).

This passage undoubtedly reflects the contemporary struggles and persecutions of the time of its composition. It is not in a position to evoke directly any others. Indirectly, however, it does evoke others, all the others, for instead of being dominated by vengeance, it dominates vengeance. To turn this passage into a straightforward foreshadowing of contemporary antisemitism, ostensibly on the grounds that it has never been understood, is to succumb to a delight in giving offence, to turn into a scandal something which, we are told expressly, was given us precisely to preserve us from scandal, given us in order to anticipate the misunderstandings caused by the apparent failure of the Gospel revelation.

Revelation and persecution

The revelation appears to fail; it ends up in persecutions capable, it seems, of smothering it completely but in the end accomplishing it. As long as the words of Jesus do not reach us, we have no sin. We remain at the level of the Gerasenes. The account of persecution from the persecutor's standpoint preserves a relative legitimacy. Sin is resistance to the revelation.

7 Cf. Le bouc émissaire, pp. 233-258.
This resistance inevitably takes visible shape in the hatred and persecution of the revealer, i.e. of the true God himself, since it is he who comes to upset our more or less comfortable little understandings with our familiar demons.

Resistance in the form of persecution — that of Paul before his conversion, for example — makes manifest the very thing it ought to hide in order to resist effectively, namely, the sacrificial mechanisms. It accomplishes the supremely revelatory word, that which discredits the accusation of the persecutor: They hated me without a cause.

We have here, I believe, one of the finest theoretical recapitulations of the Gospel process, that described by all the passages on which we have commented in the preceding pages, the process which is also unfolding in our own history, the process which is unfolding as history openly and visibly now to a vast number of people, and this process is the same thing as the coming of the Paraclete. When the Paraclete comes, says Jesus, he will bear witness to me, he will reveal the significance of my death as an innocent person, the significance of every death of an innocent person, from the foundation of the world to the world's ending. Those who come after Christ will therefore bear witness, like him, less by their words and beliefs than by their becoming martyrs, by dying in the manner of Jesus himself.

This certainly means the first Christians persecuted by the Jews or the Romans, but it also means the Jews who later on were persecuted by the Christians; it means all the victims persecuted by all the persecutors. To what is witness in fact borne? My answer is that the witness is always borne to the collective persecution which engenders religious illusions. And it is in fact to this that the next sentence refers: Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. What we see in the mirror of the persecutions of medieval and modern history are the substitutes for, if not the original foundational violence itself, and these substitutes are all the more deadly because they no longer have any controlling master. The witch hunters and the bureaucratic totalitarian persecutors fall within the scope of this revelation. All violence now reveals what the passion of Christ reveals, namely, the imbecile birth of bloodstained idols, of all the false gods of the religions, political movements and ideologies. Yet the murderers' conviction that their sacrifices are praiseworthy is as strong as ever. They, too, know not what they do, and we should forgive them.

The time has come for us to forgive one another. If we wait any longer, there will no longer be time.