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I

Richard Kearney's *Anatheism* brings God to the forefront once more. The hermeneutic approach expressed in the notion of 'anatheism' recalls a God who had seemed to have disappeared from the philosophical scene. Once, metaphysics had offered a solid triad of God, human being, and world, though such solid tripartition made 'God' into a questionable substitute for being. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century attacks on metaphysics have disputed the contents of such being, and even deconstructed any possibility of thinking in such concepts as being and grounds. Consequently, the solid edifice of a metaphysical God became demolished, neglected by philosophical attention, or transformed to a void in postmodern deconstruction. Yet, once the identification of God and being has been deconstructed, room appears for denoting God and the divine in terms of otherness, which defies any move of ontological identification between God and a (ground of) being, or God and the existent.

Kearney's philosophy addresses the reflective challenges of such thinking on the divine in terms of otherness. For what Kearney presents with his *Anatheism* is a philosophical endeavour, in which mental acts and attitudes such as imagination, humour, commitment, discernment, and hospitality create a space in which philosophical meaningfulness may be given to encounters with the Other and with God as an Other.<sup>1</sup>

For Kearney, the Other is that which appears as strange, not connectable with one's own mindset, that which appears as fundamentally foreign, and even appallingly dangerous. The Other has a twofold face. He or she may appear as a guest, asking to be invited, making us hosts, but also as a dangerous stranger, a potential offender who intends to break through the safety of our home or our body. The encounter with the Other can never be moulded in pre-defined criteria. The Other remains a stranger in the sense that the Other cannot be possessed and incorporated into the whole of my presumptions. We may recognise the inspiration by Levinas in such a conception of the Other.

The space of dispossession is particularly the space of expressing the divine Other, God as the Stranger who refuses to be included in our presumptions. With such a view of God or the divine, Kearney places himself in between theism, having a metaphysical and absolutist background in the belief in God, and atheism, posing its dogmatic, absolutist position against the divine.

Thus we meet a fundamental tendency in Kearney to take a middle position: in between metaphysics and postmodernism, or in between theism and atheism. Such a position does not suggest a compromise between two opposites, or a dialectical sublation of thesis and antithesis. It is rather an expression that the middle position refuses the absolutes that are presumed by the extreme positions. Anatheism seeks a stance that precedes any absolute fixation of the meaning of the Other. As such, it is a regressive movement, a return to a stage before literalism and fixation of meaning. At the same time, it is a progressive movement, always urging someone to make a choice for now and the future,

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<sup>1</sup> The five components of the 'anatheist wager' are presented in Kearney, *Anatheism*, 40–56. On the aspect of discernment, cf. Theo L. Hetteema, "When the Thin Small Voice Whispers: Richard Kearney's Anatheism and the Postsecular Discernment of Spirits," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (to be published).

over and over again. Anatheism is the everlasting wager of perceiving the divine as intriguing Other and Stranger, again. In Kierkegaardian terms, it is a repetition forward.<sup>2</sup>

Such a philosophical programme had already been presented in Kearney's *The God Who May Be* and had been elaborated in his *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*.<sup>3</sup> Whereas *The God Who May Be* stressed the philosophical sensitivity to the potential as a means for interpreting the notion of God, and *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* showed the richness of interpreting figures of the divine Other, *Anatheism* focuses on the element of choice in responding to the divine Other, a response fed by imagination, humour, commitment, discernment, and hospitality.

These five components of the wager of anatheism have in common that they contain a poetic element. They are all fed by literature, music, and art. They feature metaphoricity, i.e., the art of seeing the Other as like me but also unlike me, and express translatability, the conviction that the call of the Other can be understood, though a fundamental otherness remains in translation.<sup>4</sup> The anatheistic wager contains a poetics in which 'the figural saves God from the literal'.<sup>5</sup> Poetics saves the divine Other from being dogmatised.

In short, Kearney's anatheism offers a fusion of religion, philosophy, and poetics, meant to offer a hermeneutics of living and responding to the Other.

## II

It is this blend of religion, philosophy, and poetics that explains Kearney's use of literature, the narratives of inspiring lives, and religious texts such as the Bible and the Quran. The poetics of an anatheistic wager can be fed by all kinds of cultural expressions, presented in art, film, literature, and music, as well as in religious expressions. The anatheistic wager can be nourished by sacred books such as the Bible and the Quran, which, as a matter of fact, have functioned as sources of cultural inspiration throughout their existence.

As for the Bible, this sacred book is for Kearney the 'other formative source of Western "wisdom" along with Greek philosophy' that takes its place in the anatheistic wager.<sup>6</sup> With this point of view, we may understand how biblical stories have a place in the anatheistic wager; they offer a poetics that, by imagination, shapes our sensitivity in responding to the Other. The encounter with the Other is always a wager: we cannot know beforehand what the character of the Other is that presents itself to us. This ambiguity of the Other explains why Kearney has a great interest in biblical stories on meeting a stranger who might be a divine stranger: Abraham's encounter with three visitors at Mamre (Gen. 18) and the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38). Stories like these poetically explore the possible responses of hostility and hospitality towards the divine stranger.<sup>7</sup>

It is at this point that I want to connect to Kearney's philosophical endeavour: the biblical poetics as exploration of encountering the divine Other as stranger. I am convinced of the fruitfulness of introducing biblical poetics into systematic reflection.<sup>8</sup> I derive this conviction from the work of Paul Ricoeur, who recognised the value of biblical stories for philosophical reflection, interpreting these

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<sup>2</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 17–30.

<sup>8</sup> As in Theo L. Hetteema, *Reading for Good. Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the Perspective of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics* (Kampen: Kok, 1996).

stories not as mythological or protological counterpoints to thinking, but as figurative forms of reflection.<sup>9</sup>

My intention to put forward biblical poetics into a reflection on the merits of atheism comes from a systematic theological view. I have good reasons to put forward such a view, because Kearney himself favours a theological locus, namely the locus of eschatology. For Kearney, the Other is principally not someone or something present, i.e., at hand. The Other is always appearing, the Other arises in front of me, unexpected, uncontrollable. Exactly this element of uncontrollable appearance makes the Other a stranger with a twofold face, at once terrifying and friendly. The problematic of such uncontrollable appearance rises to great height when the Other is interpreted as divine. God is not present in the sense that He is at hand in a controllable experience. His appearance is in a mode of arrival, in a perpetual act of coming.

In traditional dogmatics, the locus of eschatology reflects on God's coming in the world as an appearance once to be realised in future. Kearney transforms such eschatology into an unremitting appearance of God as coming. One cannot speak of God apart from being the Other who is coming to us. God's coming is not restricted to a certain moment in the future, but is the fundamental aspect of his appearance in time and place, now and here. Kearney's eschatology is an '*amor mundi*, love of the life-world as embodiment of infinity in the finite, of transcendence, of eschatology in the now.'<sup>10</sup> The divine appearance can only be a real appearance here and now, but we must keep in mind that it is an appearance that is not incorporated by the rules of the here and now. It is in this tension that eschatology develops its view of the divine.

It is not only in *Anatheism* that Kearney uses the tenets of eschatology as a means of exploring the character of the (divine) Other. Already in his earlier hermeneutics of religion, he could use the notion of eschatology to express 'the other's future possibilities which are impossible for me (to realise, possess, grasp).'<sup>11</sup> In other words, '...I understand eschaton here precisely in the sense of an end without end – an end that escapes and surprises us, like a thief in the night – rather than some immanent teleological closure.'<sup>12</sup> Kearney observes how the otherness of the divine leads to two different attitudes. On the one hand it gives rise to an exalted mystical communion, as a 'saturated phenomenon' beyond any name and identification.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, there is a tendency to favour a

"dark god" – an ambivalent deity which transcends our conventional moral notions of good and evil and summons us to discover our innermost unconscious selves, to "follow our bliss" ... In this order of spellbinding sublimity, "God is horrific" .<sup>14</sup>

Between such extremes of non-verbal communion in divine presence and 'apocalyptic traumatism', Kearney searches for a third way, which 'might help us to eschew the excesses of both *ecclesiastical mysticism* on the one hand (Marion and certain negative theologians) and *apocalyptic postmodernism* on the other (Zizek and the prophets of the sublime)'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thus Paul Ricoeur, from his programmatic statement 'The symbol gives rise to thought' in *La symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960, 1988<sup>2</sup>), 479-488 until Paul Ricoeur and André LaCocque, *Penser la Bible* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Kearney, *Anatheism*, 166.

<sup>11</sup> Kearney, *May Be*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Kearney, *May Be*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Kearney, *May Be*, 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> Kearney, *May Be*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Kearney, *May Be*, 34.

Kearney has continued his search for *Interpreting Otherness* by exploring the poetic expressions of both extremes in literature, art, and film. Again, his conclusion is that an eschatological reflection offers a hermeneutic alternative to the philosophical dilemmas of the extremes as described.

Such an eschatological Kingdom .... has not abandoned the hope that the God who makes the impossible possible may return to Being in hitherto unimagined ways. There is an ethical urgency to eschatological expectation. There is an awareness that if the 'possible advent' indeed comes as an unpredictable surprise, like a thief in the night, it always comes through the face of the most vulnerable – the cry of the 'smallest of these', the widow, the orphaned, the anguished, the hungry; those who ask: 'Where are you?' To reply to this ethical call, it is crucial to be able to say *I am* here. And this *being present* here and now before the summons of the fragile other, requires that the *eschaton* still-to-come already intersects, however enigmatically and epiphanically, with the ontological order of being as loving possible.<sup>16</sup>

### III

So far we have seen that Kearney's atheistic project is fundamentally poetic, in all its five elements of being a philosophical wager, and is fundamentally eschatological, directed to the Other as coming. At this point the questions arise as to how these two facets may connect. Does the poetic support the eschatological and vice versa? And especially: how is this relation established in biblical poetics? My contribution is directed to these questions.

My interest in these questions arose when I observed how Kearney treats various examples of biblical passages in the books mentioned above: Abraham's meeting with the three visitors, Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush, Jesus' transfiguration on the mount, and the Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary. In these examples, it strikes me that they all support Kearney's search for figurations of the advent of the Other in encounters of hospitality, which cannot be anchored in fixed patterns of conventional expectations. The examples show how the eschatological aspect of the appearance of the Other is expressed in the imagination of biblical poetics, in its narrative and lyricism. The question for me is whether such support also holds in other biblical cases. In my contribution I search for a more extreme form of biblical poetics, as a means to put to the test the relation between poetics and eschatology as concerns the appearance of the Other. To this end, I turn to the Book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation is a piece of apocalyptic literature, which means that it reveals a hidden message of an imminent catastrophe on a cosmic scale, in which God intends to make a final judgment on the world. At its time of creation (around AD 96), it could rely upon a rather young tradition of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Elements of this literary tradition are refigured in an exuberant way that makes the book into an extreme work in many senses.

First, it is a book that stands at the limit of the Christian biblical canon. It is the last book of the New Testament, but it is also the most disputed and even sometimes removed book from the New Testament canon. Its canonical authority has been far from undisputed.

Second, the book explores the extremes of time and space. The book describes the final days of the present earth, in which time turns to eternal bliss and woe. The limits of place are explored: the entire world is concerned in the description of cosmic catastrophes that scourge the earth, the world's

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<sup>16</sup> Kearney, *Strangers*, 228.

fate runs into the description of a single place, the city of Jerusalem, and this single place is put to extremes when a heavenly Jerusalem descends to take its place.

Third, in describing these excessive events, the Book of Revelation comes to the limits of communication. Communication is important for the author of Revelation. The unveiling of his message is meant as a vital encouragement for persecuted Christians. The idea that the present course of a history of persecution and martyrdom may lead to an ultimate goal of heavenly glorification may encourage them to persevere in their faith. Therefore, the author explicitly addresses his readers in seven introductory letters, stresses the inevitability of the course of events and their ultimate goal, and provides the reader with many explanatory passages, given by guiding angels and even by the most trustworthy messenger of all for the believers: Jesus Christ, appearing as the eschatological 'Son of Man'.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the author meets the limits of communication. He needs all the imagery of Old Testament prophecy and the tradition of apocalypticism to convey his message. However, this imagery also leads him to encounter an impossibility of communication: some messages are not ready to be revealed yet (Rev. 10).

The worldwide catastrophe as foreseen by the author leads him to the limits of narrative and hymnal expression, in an exuberant stylistic attempt to encompass what cannot be encompassed. Illustrative is the manifold number of interpreters. We meet Jesus Christ as the 'Son of Man', explaining the visionary images of the author as apocalyptic events (Rev. 1:9–20); but there is also a heavenly elder, in eternal praise of God's heavenly throne, who provides explanation (Rev. 7:13–17) and we read of a guiding angel who leads the author away in the spirit, as formerly the Old Testament prophets experienced (Rev. 17:3; 21:9). The wish for interpretative clarity leads to a multiplicity of voices.

Another illustration of almost breathless exuberance is the way the author uses series of seven in his narrative. Seven is the biblical number of completion. In a sevenfold series the author of Revelation may express the entirety of his addressees and the intentional completion of a series of events for the whole world. However, with this stylistic numerology, we stumble on the sevenfold series. We encounter seven churches as addressees, represented by seven spirits in heaven and expressed in seven lamp stands and seven stars (Rev. 1:4–20). Then follow seven letters to seven churches (Rev. 2–3). In a vision the heavenly king is seen writing on seven scrolls. Their unsealing leads to a sevenfold series of events (Rev. 5–8). The event of the seventh seal consists in the blowing of seven trumpets by seven angels, introducing a new series of seven catastrophic events (Rev. 8–11). Seven thunders cover what may not be spoken (Rev. 10:4). A fearful beast has seven heads (Rev. 13:1). Seven angels pour out seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev. 16). The steady assurance of a sevenfold series, meant to bring the believers to perseverance, rather leads by its exaggeration to total confusion.

The limits of sevenfold stylistics become clear in Rev. 17:11, where the author refers to the beast with seven heads. It must have been common knowledge for the original readers of Revelation that these seven heads refer to the seven emperors of Rome. But there is also an eighth king: 'He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction'.<sup>18</sup> Here, the sevenfold series needs both an inclusion and extension that cannot be kept in a series of seven. There is another instance where a series breaks down. It is in Revelation ch. 9, where the fifth angel with a trumpet starts a first 'woe', a destruction of a part of the earth. Two more woes are to follow (Rev. 9:12). Indeed, the sixth trumpet

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<sup>17</sup> The expression 'Son of Man' is derived from the Old Testament book of Daniel (7:13–14), for an eschatological figure to whom God gives eternal rule of the world.

<sup>18</sup> It is supposed that reference is made to emperor Domitian, the eighth emperor from Augustus (leaving out the four emperors from the turbulent year of 69 AD).

blow announces the events of a second woe (Rev. 11:14). Now, one should expect a third woe at the blowing of the seventh trumpet. But this seventh blow announces the appearance of the reign of God, without any devastating woe. As a matter of fact, there are more scenes of demolition to follow after this chapter, but a third woe is never mentioned again. The author's style of exuberance seems to go berserk at this point.

We should not interpret this exuberance in style as an expression of literary incompetence. The author shows a firm grip on the structure of the book, by presenting chiasmic units.<sup>19</sup> An introduction to the book as a whole, directed to its readers (Rev. 1–3), is mirrored by a conclusion and appeal to the reader (Rev. 22,7–21). A block of sevenfold series of events (seven seals and seven trumpets) in chs. 4–11 is mirrored by a similar block with the vision of seven bowls of wrath leading to a final vision on the heavenly Jerusalem descending on earth (Rev. 15:1–22:6). These blocks encompass a central block of text (Rev. 12–14) without any sevenfold series, but exhibiting a crucial scene, in which Jesus himself is persecuted, before any apocalyptic praise of his glory and heavenly elevation can be given. It is not that the author lacks any literary command, but he is willing to go to the extremes of what is literally acceptable in his manifold use of repetitions and exuberant images.

There is a fourth point of extremity, concerning a question of faith. The Old Testament has told of an earlier devastation of the earth, by means of a great flood in the time of Noah, after which God declares to Noah: 'Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood' (Gen. 9,11). It must have been a problem for the first Christians how the firm confirmation of a covenant of life could lead to another disaster.<sup>20</sup> Is it indeed a God of salvation that the reader encounters in the dreadful vision of John of Patmos? The Book of Revelation meets these doubts by providing many scenes in which God is honoured by a heavenly court, consisting of elders (24, a doubling of the number of Israelite tribes) and martyrs. It is their praise that grants to God his identity as king over heaven and earth.

We may add to these stylistic and substantive extremes a fifth extremity: the extremities of interpretation. Any encounter with the Other, we may learn from Kearney, may lead to an attitude of indeterminateness, or to an attitude of horror. When any encounter with the Other takes place between these two interpretative extremes, how much more this applies to the Book of Revelation.

One such extreme is given when the reader directly identifies her or his living conditions with the contents of the Book of Revelation. The rule of dictators, suffering and martyrdom, wars, and natural disasters: they can all be identified in the images and numerology of Revelation. Direct identification makes the Book of Revelation an externalisation of one's fears and wishes for revenge. Such wishful thinking has a bearing on the image of the divine Other, which becomes an exaggeration of hidden fears and forces. For the Book of Revelation, the 'monster god' of direct identification leads to an interpretation in which any advent of the Other goes together with imminent destruction. Not only devilish beasts destroy the earth, but God sends out his own angels with fearful trumpets and bowls of wrath, images that feed any interpretive move of identification with one's feelings of revenge.

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<sup>19</sup> I refer to the exegetical commentaries for a discussion on the topic of the structure of the book of Revelation. There is no unanimity on the literary structure of Revelation. In developing my own interpretation, I considered the works of Charles Homer Giblin, "Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John's Apocalypse," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994): 81-95; James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 160-167; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 344-366; James H. Sims, *A Comparative Literary Study of Daniel and Revelation: Shaping the End* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 119.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. a similar treatment in 2 Peter 3:7 where a second destruction of the earth is explained as destruction by another means: by fire instead of by water.

The other extreme of interpretation is laid down in an attitude of indeterminateness. Such an approach to Revelation is beautifully expressed in the deconstructive analysis by Jacques Derrida.<sup>21</sup> Derrida observes that the apocalyptic text of Revelation intends to reveal a truth about the end that is to come. But when this apocalyptic tone is considered, its claim is not about a certain matter of truth, but about truth itself: 'Not only truth as the revealed truth of a secret on the end or of the secret of the end. Truth itself is the end, the destination, and that truth unveils itself, is the advent of the end.'<sup>22</sup> The aspiration of the apocalyptic tone is high. But its character is always one of an advent that is coming and never present, preceding any event of truth. Finally, then, the apocalyptic tone of Revelation is destructed into an imperative 'Come!' without any determination:

'Come' does not address itself, does not appeal, to an identity determinable in advance. It is a drift underivable from the identity of a determination. 'Come' is *only* derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriable identity.<sup>23</sup>

The claim of a revelatory truth, taken to its utmost claims, leads to an indeterminate, never-ending call for coming. That apocalyptic tone does not only express the tone of Revelation, but of philosophy as a whole, for Derrida, in which any truth claim is deconstructed.

We should not expect Kearney's hermeneutics to provide a middle ground between these two extremes of interpretation, though I can imagine that Kearney has a certain sympathy for Derrida's interpretation, which expresses that the Other cannot be identified in advance. However, there is one aspect that makes the two extremes of interpretation counter the assets of Kearney's hermeneutics: neither interpretation allows a genuine encounter of someone with the Other. When Abraham meets three strangers at Mamre, the Other is unpredictable: the men may be strangers who are after Abraham's life and savings, or they may be bearers of a divine revelation for Abraham's identity and future. But there is for Abraham a possibility of encounter and a moment of decision: it is up to him if he is willing to receive the strangers. Similarly for the Annunciation scene: there is the possibility of a hostile stranger seeking for lust and the possibility of a divine revelation of Mary's future. But it is up to Mary to make this event into an encounter with the divine— it is her decision.

All this seems to be so far away from the world of Revelation, in which the words 'encounter' and 'decision' do not seem to fit. This is for me the sixth and most confrontational extremity: the Book of Revelation unfolds scenes of disaster and judgment in which no encounter with the divine is realised that incites one to make a decision. The book does not present an appeal to conversion. Its message is one of perseveration: stay to the faith that you have chosen. Of course, the book shows some direct communication from the Son of Man or an angel to John of Patmos, but the narrated content unfolds without any influence or action by the receiver of the message. Is such manifestation of the coming of the Other without any human decisions the end of revelation of the divine Other? In other words, is this the point where the divine Other deforms into a monstrous Other or loses its contours?

At this point of considering extremities, I turn to the centre of the book, the textual block of chs. 12–14. In this scene, we read about a woman who gives birth to a son. A dragon wants to devour the child, but the child is snatched up to God (12:5). It is clear that the child is Christ, who is called a Lamb in the continuation of the scene (12:10–11; 14:1). This Lamb collects the believers who have

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," *Semeia* 23 (1982): 63–98.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, "Apocalyptic Tone," 84.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, "Apocalyptic Tone," 94.

persevered into an eternal bliss. As the apocalyptic Son of Man, Christ judges the earth as in a harvest (14:1).

This crucial scene extends to all other parts of the book. It is a recurrent theme that Christ is both the vulnerable Lamb and the judging Son of Man, who gathers the martyrs and believers in heaven. A superficial reader of the book would expect an order like this: a situation of belief and disbelief, a subsequent judgment of God in which believers and infidels are separated, the believers are rewarded, and the infidels are punished. The actual order in Revelation is rather: a recognition of the martyrs who have died by gathering them around God's heavenly throne, an identification of Christ as Lamb and as judge, a judgment, and a final collection of all believers into the glorification of God on earth and in heaven.

It is the act of perseverant belief and suffering that bears any eschatological appearance of God and Christ. It reminds the reader of the kernel story of New Testament martyrdom: the death of Stephen in Acts 7:54–60. In this scene, Stephen, facing his death, sees Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Dying for one's faith becomes an eschatological, and even apocalyptic encounter with God and his Son, who will come to reign over the world. In the Book of Revelation, a further identification between Jesus and the suffering believers is established: the triumphant Son of Man is also the vulnerable Lamb, persecuted and killed, as the martyrs have been persecuted and killed.

I conclude that God's act of coming in Revelation is an appearance that is borne by the suffering and death of believers. Any poetic figuration of God as the one who comes does not lead to a faceless monstrosity, nor to an indeterminacy of the divine Other, but bears the traces of believers who have experienced a revelatory encounter with God in their suffering and dying.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV

Does the poetic support the eschatological and vice versa? At first sight, it seems that the imaginative figurations of the poetic collide with the indeterminacy of the eschatological, the appearance of the Other as one to come. The biblical poetics of the Book of Revelation at least express a figuration in which the fundamental character of God as coming in the world is borne by experiences of encountering God in the extreme experience of suffering and dying.

We have a present perception of martyrdom that differs from this poetics. Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism have provided us with a picture of martyrs who are willing to die for a holy cause and to receive heavenly bliss as a reward. Such a perception makes it difficult for us to perceive martyrdom as an identity marker for the revelatory appearance of God, in which every martyr refers to the eschatological coming of God as the Other for the world, and to the identity of God's Son as one who has suffered and died, as to annihilate violence and death. However, we have to take into account that the biblical world of interpretation presents another view on suffering and dying: not as heroic examples, leading to violence and terror, but as experiences that refer to an eschatological coming of the Other.

When Kearney treats biblical stories in his *Anatheism*, he focuses upon some stories of encounters with strangers. I would like to urge him to turn to other biblical texts that might, at first sight, be rather bizarre, erasing the face of the Other, or leading to an apparent monstrosity. When

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rev. 4:4—24 elders worshipping before God's throne; Rev. 7:4, 14:1—144,000 sealed believers from the tribes of Israel; Rev. 7:9—a great multitude in white robes before God's throne; Rev. 15:2—believers at a sea of glass; Rev. 19:1—a multitude in heaven; Rev. 20:4—a millennium reign for martyrs; Rev. 21:3—dwelling in a new Jerusalem.

taking seriously both the eschatological character of the Other and the force of biblical poetics, intense expressions of human experiences with the ever appearing Other may emerge, even in literature that for twenty-first century perception may seem rather grotesque.

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