Girard and the Question of Pacifism

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Confronting a Question

Does a theology informed by the thought of René Girard require adherence to a pacifist stance in political ethics? Or does it include an option of adherence to some version of just war theory? Perhaps framing the question in such either-or terms misapprehends the implications of Girard's thought in the first place, and we should let the question go, ensure our seat belts are securely fastened and our tray tables stowed, sit back, relax, and enjoy the flight. Then we might bring up *American Sniper* on the small-screen, a good movie directed by Clint Eastwood, starring Bradley Cooper, based on the memoir of the tragic figure Chris Kyle, who "became the deadliest marksman in U.S. military history, with 255 kills from four tours in the Iraq War" (*American Sniper* in Wikipedia*).*

Only with difficulty can one begin to answer the question whether "mimetic theory" demands a noncompromising political nonviolence or keeps doors open to some measure of just war thinking. The difficulty derives partly from a conspicuous disproportion in the oeuvre of René Girard. That oeuvre contains many analyses of the structured recuperation of mob violence in archaic sacrifice, interpretations of myths and persecution texts and European novels, and Girard's original and brilliant elucidation of the Biblical revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. But it contains much less in the way of analyses of modern political conflicts, and to my knowledge, no explicit or systematic dialogue with the tradition in Christian ethics of just war thinking. While taking up the question of René Girard's relationship to pacifism and nonviolence as political stances raises some obstacles, mediating negotiations between the politics of René Girard and those of Eric Gans would create many more. In what follows, few direct references to the founding texts of generative anthropology will appear. It is hoped, however, that the reflections will show the influence of what one might call the Jewish political realism of Eric Gans's thought.

No disrespect to René Girard has been intended in this observation of the disproportion between his openly sweeping, sweepingly open critique of "violence" and what appears to have been his habit of closeting explicit propositions about the ethics of war. Given the purpose of this special issue of *Anthropoetics,* I will pause to declare that I owe the late

René Girard an unrepayable personal debt: finding a way back to Christian faith without the guidance given by his work might have been impossible for me. Nevertheless, I find the consequences of the key hypotheses in mimetic theory for the call to pacifism enduringly enigmatic. In a footnote to the chapter "Violence and Reciprocity" in *The One by Whom Scandal Comes,* Girard offered this profession: "I should make it clear that I am not an unconditional pacifist, since I do not consider all forms of defense against violence to be illegitimate" (131n13). What the clarification entails, I hesitate to infer. Are the "forms of defense" that Girard considered "not… illegitimate" to be limited only to contexts of interpersonal violence at the level of social groups other than warring peoples or nations—individuals, families, policemen against citizens? Might there operate not-illegitimate "forms of defense" at the level of state-sanctioned military action?

In his authoritative volume *René Girard's Mimetic Theory,* in the chapter "Political Implications of the Mimetic Theory," Wolfgang Palaver seems to limit the adjective *political* to the sphere of interpersonal ethics: "Girard's argument that these institutions [xenophobia and warfare] are based in the scapegoat mechanism shows . . . that all forms of interpersonal violence and hostility begin in the most elementary human relationships. The way out of violence and enmity must be found on these rudimentary levels" (295). Concluding that warfare *begins* at the elementary levels of human relatedness, and thus that the "way out" of it will be found on those levels, concludes little. Indeed, political thinkers might murmur that despite the chapter's title, Palaver's remark cannot be assimilated into a discourse that merits the characterization "political." It would be a mistake to charge Palaver with obscurity, wilful or unwitting; on the contrary, he deserves praise for his fidelity to Girard's texts. Girard's avoidance of explicit political position-taking has not gone unremarked.

Consider, for example, the way that in his attempts to apply mimetic theory to international political conflict, Roberto Farneti thinks in a direction similar to that of Palaver. Farneti values the goal of reflective awareness in individuals as the best step toward "conflict resolution": "A Girardian perspective on conflict resolution must therefore concern itself with making the rivals *reflectively aware* of their mimetic plight" (89); "I believe that reflection, our ability to think 'recursively' about things and about ourselves, and not sacrifice, is the very last protection of which we can avail, after the eventual exhaustion of earlier sacrificial strategies" (137). Witness Giuseppe Fornari's claim: "the question of whether independent political thinking has a rightful place in an age influenced by Christianity . . . is a question that Girard answers in essentially negative terms" (62). I note Jean-Pierre Dupuy's frustrations with Girard's avoidance of the explicitly political.

Yet politics in its noblest moments is able to resort to fiction or make-believe in order to change the world. It has to be said and repeated that Girard's theory leads inevitably to political relativism and even political nihilism. If only to defend itself against this grave accusation, if my conclusions are correct, we see that it needs to jettison one of its key

postulates—namely, the incompatibility between the sacred and self-knowledge. *Is the price too high?* (Dupuy, "Nuclear" 264)Elsewhere (in *The Mark of the Sacred*, a passionate and powerful book), Dupuy describes himself as "intellectually a Christian," a formulation revealing and honorable at once; a formulation that resonates somewhat with Eric Gans's maxim *theology is good anthropology, but almost always bad cosmology* ("Minimal"). Regardless, the theology of James Alison, one deeply indebted to the inspiration of René Girard, informs the field that this study outlines and colors in. He strives to persuade us of the deathlessness of God and seeks to help us make contact with the One God who has nothing to do with violence (*Jesus the Forgiving Victim; Joy of Being Wrong; Raising Abel*; *On Being Liked*). The question for us will be this: what can a God who has nothing to do with violence have to do with any mud-caked, blood-soaked, heavily-armed soldier on the battlefield, a soldier by training prepared to do the enemy combatant unequivocal physical violence, a soldier who might well feel and think himself a Christian? Should that soldier just get himself off the battlefield forthwith, transforming into a conscientious objector? What does mimetic theory have to say, if anything, about the basic and not stupid question, *should a Christian go to war*? How would mimetic theory answer it? Or would mimetic theory provide only long and winding roads toward an agent-relative morality that will not force the issue, which flexibility might itself count as a performance of intra-ecclesial nonviolence?

To be fair to Girard, it must be said that *Achever Clausewitz* (2007), in English *Battling to the End* (2010), confronts the problem of modern warfare head-on. But Girard's formulations in that book do not provide a step-by-step exploration, so that even Stephen Gardner, in one of his two very insightful studies of it, has written this:

The upshot of the modern apocalypse, for Girard, is the "renunciation of violence," the right of retaliation, a power of the "sacred" that previously upheld order. Girard makes it clear, though, that he is not a pacifist. How is it possible to renounce violence without embracing pacifism? This and similar dilemmas will perplex readers of this book. Politics is over, [it] seems to say, but not just yet. War is over, but we may still have to fight them [sic] (though not as promiscuously as "Trotskyite rascals" would have it). Is there any way to square this circle of Girard's thought? ("Deepening" 457)I include myself among those who feel "perplexed" by the question Gardner poses: "How is it possible to renounce violence without embracing pacifism?"(1)

This study will deploy the analytical tool of the semiotic square,(2) so as to explore descriptions of four figures of victimization-by-war. Its thesis aims less to argue in debate mode "for" or "against" pacifism than to earn dialectically the proffering of this conditional: if just war can be conducted, then it must seek as its goal paradoxically forgiving punishment or punishing forgiveness. The implicit invitation to restlessly rest in and wrestle with pragmatic paradox—forgiving punishment? punishing forgiveness?—conforms to the prioritizing of paradox as originary crisis in generative anthropology. We experience any

question of real war as a crisis. As for the deployment of the semiotic square, some colleagues once remarked to me: “Gans is dialectical; Girard is rhetorical.” One might present such a four-square “dialectical” testing of descriptive definitions in the spirit of the anthropological austerity of Generative Anthropology, and as a counterweight to the intractably knotted theological route and root of mimetic theory— and in this particular case, the evasion in “mimetic theory” of a terribly difficult question.

The question of the relations between the One God of Jewish and Christian faith and the war-making violence of humankind cannot help but be uneasily asked. I write not as one trained in theology or philosophy or military history but as an amateur long puzzled and provoked by the call of pacifism.(3) My descriptions will cover four different singled-out sacrificial figures: first, the soldier as sacrificial victim bound to the violence of just war; second, the conscientious objector in unjustifiable war as the contrary of the soldier; third, the irrecoverable victim of originary scapegoating, accessible to us only through the intimations of what I will call “exterminating violence,” the negation of just war; fourth, the violent Love of God, the paradoxical subcontrary of exterminating violence.

I. “Just War” and the Soldier as Sacrificial Victim

The measured caution one finds in Jean Bethke Elshtain’s *Just War Against Terror*: *The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (2003) and in Nigel Biggar’s impressive, indeed stunning, *In Defence of War* (2013) should give any fair-minded reader pause. Such volumes prove, if nothing else, that drawing upon Judeo-Christian scripture, the works of Augustine and Aquinas, considerations of historical experience and moral intuition, the Christian thinker can give reasons so that certain wars might be considered just. The ethic animating just war thinking foregrounds restrained and reluctant punishment; it foregrounds protection of the innocent against unacceptable injury. Elshtain and Biggar preserve Augustine’s concepts of harsh love and kind violence (concepts which may ring oxymoronic in pacifist ears). Biggar by no means exonerates war sweepingly. Biggar firmly owns that “the New Testament does forbid certain kinds of violence” (49). Let us pause over those kinds of violence, to consider just how many conflicts they would exclude.

The New Testament does forbid certain kinds of violence: [1] that which is disproportionate because motivated by contemptuous or hateful or vengeful anger; [2] that which retaliates in response to trivial or tolerable personal injury; [3] that which lacks public authorization; and [4] that which is inspired by religious nationalism. But its prohibition of violence is specific, not absolute. (49) [enumeration added]Biggar initiates the scriptural basis of his defence by reassessing a certain silence in the relevant New Testament texts regarding soldiers, who seem not to be obliged to abandon their vocation before joining a Christian congregation. (See “The Soldier Narratives: the thin edge of the wedge,” 40ff.)

Now mimetic theory, as a critique of the violence that falls short of what a generative

anthropologist might call the “gospel utopia,” sees in the soldier a sacrificial victim. Girard argued that some primitive warfare seems to have been carried out to supply prisoners taken from the external defeated community to serve as objects of violence in rites internal to the victorious community, performed in due time. Regarding modern warriors slain on the battlefield whose bodies get carried home, just war theory would argue that no shame need attach to the decision to treat them as self-giving sacrificial victims of the people, the nation or the civilization, as they are treated by (for example) the crosses in Flanders Fields.

The ethical energy animating such memorials to soldiers who have died for “good” causes, however, does not guarantee any onto-theological propriety in the cultural sacralisation of the soldier. Relevant to the pointing out of the absence of any such guarantee is the fact that mimetic theory itself certainly had difficulties establishing any model of positive sacrificial self-giving. In fact, the establishment of such a model required nothing less than the interventions of Raymund Schwager.(4) To ask whether the self-sacrifice of a soldier could be considered analogous to, or imitative of, the self-sacrifice of Christ forces a return and retreat to those difficulties. Dying for a cause taken up by a warring party may not be dying for the “cause” of Jesus. If the “cause” of Jesus reduces to a morality of nonviolence (mystical and utopian, or pragmatic and activist)—I do not say it does so reduce, but if it does—and if his sovereignty is not that of a political revolutionary, then no intuitively obvious analogy or sanction connects the sacrificial death of the warrior hired by the nation state or the party in a civil war conflict to the death of Jesus. That Jesus the particular historical individual and his disciples were not military figures does signify. Joshua and Saul and David, by contrast, took up arms as military figures; Mohammed, by contrast, cut an undeniably military figure. Those contrasts may help to account for the fact that certain strains of Christian tradition have developed more explicit and programmatic forms of pacifist or non-violent activism than have the Jewish or Islamic traditions.(5)

Any just war theory will subscribe in some way to the doctrine of the double effect.(6) To summarize complex philosophical problems in one sentence: “the principle of double effect is able to make a crucial moral distinction between the effects of an act that I intend and those that I accept with reluctance” (Biggar 93). The Christian soldier intends to punish wrongdoing and to protect the innocent: the intended effects, he hopes, will be good. The “effects [accepted] with reluctance” will be the injury done and destruction caused in service of the desired good effect. The principle of double effect aims to make it credible that even in the eyes of a nonviolent God the intention of a soldier who would rather not kill but does so reluctantly might be accepted as an intention contributing to the good. It becomes possible, from this point of view, to kill enemies “without malice.” Let us attend to Nigel Biggar at length on this point, partly because university intellectuals in the West frequently despise the soldier as an apish armed buffoon of the state and condemn all state violence as inherently immoral.

I can kill you out of contemptuous hatred, intending nothing less that your annihilation,

constrained by no necessity, and with no proportionate reason to prefer another's life to yours. Or I can kill you without malice, with respectful and manifest reluctance, necessitated by love for others, and with sufficient reason to prefer their lives to yours. Not all killing is murder. Morally speaking, there are different ways of causing death. Some are culpable, some are innocent, and some (tragically) are commendable. (92)We will have occasion to consider the notion of killing with a desire for annihilation of the enemy detached from all proportionate reasoning when we consider the imagery of exterminating violence.

Can we say, in the light of Christian revelation as mimetic theory understands it, that Jesus as God *justifies* killing? It would seem to me that this question must be answered with a quiet but uncompromising *no.* If we take seriously the idea that Jesus the crucified *is* God—assuming (with Linda Woodhead among numberless others) that belief in the reality of the man-god Jesus founds the religion of those who have called themselves "Christian" through the centuries down to the present—imagining Divine approval of holy war must entail some squirming oddity. What would it mean for the God who permitted himself to be killed by humans, so as to show humans the folly of their violence, then to enthusiastically approve and endorse killing? Both Nigel Biggar and Jean Bethke Elshtain separate just war from holy war.(7) Jesus will not take sides in human wars just as God makes his sun shine on the just and the unjust alike: when the Christian soldier kills, that soldier should have been ordered to recognize at the same time the divinely-given humanity of his enemy. War is human violence. God is not violent.

However, the historical facts show beyond any shadow of doubt that God permits such killing to the extent that God fails to prevent such killing: from such facts arises the scandal of the seeming historical passivity of the Creator. To the extent that permitting implies "having something to do with it," then some among us might merrily leap to the accusation that not preventing means having something to do with violence. It would be wiser, however, to consider the possibility that a God of Love worthy of the name does not *justify* the violence inherent in human warfare. In this context, the declaration of Jacques Ellul, at first puzzling, plumbs depths in proportion as one meditates upon it: "I even say that it is not so much violence itself as justification of violence that is unacceptable to Christian faith" (140).(8)

Whatever we think about war, thinking "God is on our side only" probably is not the way to go to it. If there can be just war, just war cannot be holy war. For a Christian, the war God as Jesus chose to lose on the cross, chose to win by losing, was and will be the only one holy war.

II. Unjustifiable War and the Conscientious Objector

Taking the second step in our semiotic square, we might try out this claim: standing

opposite as the strong contrary of the Christian soldier who in good conscience fights as a warrior, the Christian who in good conscience *refuses* to fight as a warrior stands defiant as an active dissenting protestor or, at the limit, as one imprisoned by the conscripting state and mocked by a war-accepting public.(9) The conscientious objector seems to transform the double-effect reluctance to kill of the just warrior into a single-minded resolve not to kill in the name of the powers. I say *seems to transform* because such transformations to "nonviolent" action cannot be achieved by simple redirections or cancellations of (all too human) willpower. Consider, for example, John Roedel's description of the struggles in the soul of the nonviolent activist to protect from contamination the intention of love that should animate principled nonviolence. Such intentions easily get lost, according to Roedel, in "tactics" as "means." Strategic nonviolence, when more strategic than nonviolent, risks imitating the violence of its war-accepting rivals. Anyone who understands Girard's elucidation of mimetic rivalry—the way models cannot but help become obstacles, and obstacles become models—will find the susceptibility of the conscientious objector to such unglamorous contaminations wholly unsurprising.(10)

Does God have anything to do with the defiance of the conscientious objector? Surely reconciliation between the spirit of Girard's mimetic theory as a sweeping critique of violence and the politics of active nonviolence comes more easily than reconciliation between it and the politics of just war; the greater easiness itself perhaps connects to the disproportion observed at the outset of this study. I do not think it worth denying that Jesus and his disciples glow with the light of an ascetic gentleness of conduct that would lose its lustre if begrimed by blood from the swords and flags of parties set heavily into an ethic of imperial conquest and limitless consumption.

The easier way of thinking, however, does not always lead to the whole truth. A blanket counsel to perform "renunciation of violence" cannot generate a system of ethical principles. Eric Gans himself has courageously pointed out this fragility in "mimetic theory" more than once. Once again cautioning that I mean no disrespect to René Girard, I feel compelled nonetheless to acknowledge that the works of Walter Wink and Jacques Ellul offer much more help than do the writings of Girard in presenting systematic descriptions of what nonviolent conduct might look like and what disciplinary taxes it might exact from the ordinary person attempting to put "renunciation of violence" into practice. Wink and Ellul concretize "renunciation of violence" in ways Girard does not. Girard did not hesitate to describe himself as primarily "an academic man" and a "researcher," whose interests did not include policy formation or programmes of training. As we have noted, Girard exhibits some disdain for the political and a tendency to locate questions of human conflict at the level of the moral and ethical. War is a political problem; insofar as he avoided the explicitly political, Girard to some extent avoided the problem of war—strange thing for a thinker so preoccupied by collective violence. Few of us personally know somebody who has been the victim of deadly ritual sacrifice or its secular analogues in media scapegoating, but we all know somebody who has been directly harmed by war. The statistical victims of war

outnumber those of ritual sacrifice exponentially. A theory of violence that does not explicitly address the theory of war has not been completed.

In any case, and furthermore, because pacifist morality can lead to "violent" verbal condemnation of those who *do* go to war in good conscience, pacifism will not be free of "violence." The title of John Roedel's study—"Sacrificial and Nonsacrificial Mass Nonviolence"—implies there is mass nonviolence that is sacrificial, thus violent. Nonviolence can be active, aggressive, with programmes designed to shame and weaken the powers that be. Those who have no acquaintance with peace-activist literature might be surprised to learn how frankly workers in nonviolent protest admit the requirement that they pursue psychological harm of their opponents. Take the following passage from Walter Wink, who entered into dialogue with Girard at the 2006 meeting of COVR in Ottawa, Canada.

Nor should nonviolence be misconstrued as a way of avoiding conflict. The "peace" that the gospel brings is never the absence of conflict, but an ineffable divine reassurance within the heart of conflict: a peace that surpasses understanding. Christians have all too often called for "nonviolence" when they have really meant tranquility. In fact, *nonviolence seeks out conflict, elicits conflict, even initiates conflict, in order to bring it out into the open and lance its poisonous sores*. Nonviolence is not idealistic or sentimental about evil; it does not coddle or cajole aggressors but moves against perceived injustice proactively, with the same alacrity as the most hawkish militarist. (*Powers That Be* 121) [emphasis added]It seems to me Wink walks a tightrope not unlike that walked by the battlefield Christian soldier when he writes, on the preceding page: "Nor does active nonviolence preclude the use of coercion. But nonviolent coercion is noninjurious; it relies on the force of truth in a universe that bends toward justice" (120). Coercion that does no injury may strike us as ethically counter-intuitive in rather the same way killing without malice seems ethically counter-intuitive. One's confidence in the "noninjurious" quality of the "force" and "coercion" depends entirely on one's confidence in the "truth" that one as a nonviolent activist defends. Such unswerving ascetic conviction resembles the warrior's sweaty adherence to the long-term truth that the good of his injurious violence will outweigh its undesirable effects after all. In both cases a body of thought with its feet firmly planted in convictions of possession of the "truth" performs the juggling of unevenly weighed moral bowling pins. Furthermore, the "double effect" has kicked into operation into both cases. This does not mean that the differences between peaceful protest and taking up arms lack meaning. But the self-righteousness animating the rhetorical violence of the protesting pacifist may be stronger than that animating the physical violence of the marching soldier.

Approaching the crucifixion of Jesus as the most significant example of nonviolent action performed in opposition to what Walter Wink names—not entirely appropriately in my opinion, the capital-D, capital-S "Domination System" (*Powers* 37-62)(11)—creates risks not unlike those created for the would-be just warrior: growing into a snakeskin of certainty

that one's choices are the *only* choices the God of Love who has nothing to do with violence has called for.(12) *How dare you take up arms? —No, how dare you refuse to take up arms while the innocent are persecuted?* I feel obliged to suggest as well that the political stance of what Wink describes and condemns as "the myth of redemptive violence" can be assimilated to the stance of just war theory only at the cost of reducing the latter to a distorted caricature of itself. No doubt the "myth of redemptive violence" promotes immature, vulgar indulgence in nationalist warmongering; it does not resemble the painful, reluctant restraint intrinsic to just war thinking. Recall Nigel Biggar's claim that the New Testament forbids both violence "which is disproportionate because motivated by contemptuous or hateful or vengeful anger" and violence "which is inspired by religious nationalism" (49). Such restrictions go a long way toward disarming many of the engines gunning to take off into the realm where the myth of redemptive violence holds sway.

III. Exterminating Violence and the Non-Accessible Scapegoat

I have attended nine of the twenty-five meetings that *The Colloquium on Violence and Religion* has held since its inception, as celebrated at the vibrant and stimulating Saint Louis meeting of July 2015. Speaking from the experience of having heard many papers at those meetings, I believe that it cannot be stressed enough, as Girard reminded his interlocutors, that true scapegoating happens as *an event necessarily lost to collective memory*. Scapegoating proper, unlike sacrifice, is mindless, thoughtless, non-conscious, and inaccessible to the recall and rational assessment of those swept away into its mechanism.(13)

This language [of conscious purpose and deliberate planning] is legitimate, I believe, in the case of ritual sacrifice, but not appropriate in the case of the original scapegoating, which must be completely spontaneous, unplanned, and even unconscious in the sense of the victim being misunderstood for a real culprit, a powerful troublemaker responsible for the ills from which the community suffers. If the victimizers realized that their victims are arbitrary, they would not be unable to transfer their hostilities on them, and peace would not be restored. Effective scapegoating, it is evident, entails unanimous self-deception. ("Violence Renounced" 309)However flawed and imperfect, Christian just war thinking as the explicit codification of certain violently sacrificial practices *does* give reasons—it is not "spontaneous, unplanned, and unconscious." Just war theory resists, therefore, the mindlessness of scapegoating. It reasons about human conflict, about the circumstances that make it justifiable to declare war, about the norms of conduct that should govern soldiers' activity during war, about what treaties might create an enduring peace after the battlefields have been cleared of bodies. The contradictory of just war as sacrifice would have to be a form of conflict between human groups resembling originary scapegoating as closely as possible. I will call its visible intimations "exterminating violence." To some extent, exterminating violence does not merit the title *war*: even the most unjustifiable war displays a rationality that exterminating violence lacks.

In exterminating violence, the all-against-one mob converts itself into the-many-against-the-few or the-armed-majority-against-the-unarmed-minority. Exterminating violence celebrates slaughter and massacre; it feeds upon atrocity; it sanctions genocide; it invites the nuclear-armed nation to bomb the nation with none; the Holocaust displays it. Exterminating violence cannot conceive of punishing an enemy one might respect or love, but throws itself into annihilating enemies that have been hated for so long, the hatred needs no explanation. The Nazi project (now the troublingly under-feared Islamist project) of wiping all Jews from the face of the earth remains the paradigm of exterminating violence. The Nazi death camps were hidden from the front lines, not part of the war effort proper: they were not "sacrificial" practices in the normal sense. Attentiveness to exterminating violence puts a greater strain on theodicy than does attention to justifiable or limited warfare. It stretches to the snapping point any elasticity in our capacity to withhold resentment of the seeming historical passivity of a purportedly benevolent Creator.

For the killer given over to exterminating violence, there can be no double effect, for there will be no reluctance. In contrast to the primitive warfare that supplied archaic communities with prisoners, exterminating violence follows the slogan "take no prisoners." For warriors who try to limit killing, enemy combatants on the defeated side might live to tell tales, which might be tales of having learned from their punishment. The transformations of German and Japanese society after 1945 offer hope that defeated peoples might learn from their defeat. Exterminating violence, however, excludes the very possibility of learning from punishment in that it sees its targets as there simply to be annihilated, neither corrected nor forgiven.

Failures to complete projects of exterminating violence leave behind, as did the killing fields of Cambodia, leave exposed, as if in the bewildering glare of police lights at a bloody night-time crime scene, the sickening worst of the cost of the freedom God has given us to give ourselves over to sinful violence, to limitless self-and-other destruction. Jesus' counsel takes on new meaning when we ponder the horrors of exterminating violence.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 44-45, RSV)This counsel does not oblige us to disbelieve in the reality of enemies; it does not demand that we be so nice about avoiding trigger warnings as never to call another group of humans "enemies." It presupposes that one might have real enemies, just as evil might be real. It presupposes we can recognize our enemies as such, not having philosophized away their concrete enmity as a delusion we suffer under the effect of mistaken social constructions. Attention to atrocity might nudge us toward feeling that just war theory could regain some breath of whatever credibility it may have lost under blanket judgments that lump all forms of collective violence into one thing to be "renounced." The moral intuitions grounding objections to exterminating violence most certainly do not require Christian revelation. Military actions taken to stop or limit it might seem more than reluctantly justifiable. Going to war to stop exterminating violence against one's neighbours might well seem to be a simple human duty. The replacement of

the thick virtues of early Christian just war theory with the thin deliberativeness of liberal human rights theory, a replacement partially responsible for the failures of the "international community" (another oxymoron?) to prevent genocide in (for example) Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia, might well be considered an historical misfortune for the West.

IV. The Violence of God's Love

Exterminating violence, I repeat, offers only intimations of the horror of scapegoating proper; we cannot see originary violence. The contrary of originary scapegoating, I propose, would have to be a form of violence that would rule out any possibility of conflict between human groups; and therefore, it would have to be a form of violence that reconciles humans in one group and as one group. Insofar as Christian teaching invites us to think of the killing of Jesus as the quintessential enactment of humankind's violent unity, the crucifixion stands contrary to all inter-human and intra-human violence.

The anthropological strangeness of the cross radiates partly from its emblematizing our desire to destroy the God of Love in our midst. We prate about loving God. But inside, if we listen, we will hear ourselves resenting and even wishing to kill the central Person. Father Schwager was no fool when he reiterated the phrase *the hidden will to kill* in his ground-breaking work, *Must There Be Scapegoats?* (14)

Is not a war of all humankind against one man irrational, the most unfair of fights, the beyond-absurd infliction of violence unthinkably disproportionate? Yes. That disproportion infuses the horror of the cross. By submitting to the most unfair fight in all the history of warfare, Jesus will show the goal of all human warfare. Human warfare tries to expel and to bury the truth that the Creator, despite all appearances, never has wanted humans to have to go to war, never has wished upon humankind any necessity of war. "God has nothing to do with violence" does mean that God would prefer that *we* the children have nothing to do with violence. To show the Divine distaste for war, God shows humans its ugliness in the most absurd conflict of all: our trying to kill, and our failing to kill, Jesus the One God. In this context, we may find significance in the enigmatic rhetorical question in the gospel of Matthew that Jesus asks the man accompanying him who has just taken out his sword and sliced off the ear of the slave of the high priest. The arresting crowd, armed with clubs-and-swords, would be listening.

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"
(Matt. 26:52-54, RSV)(15)Mimetic theory would lead us to reject interpretations to the effect that Jesus means, "the angels are standing down now, but no worries, we'll get our revenge later. These Roman bastards and their temple hirelings will get pummelled in due apocalyptic time." A more rewarding interpretation, ventured in the light of Girard's

thought, might be something like this: “I am guaranteeing that even the legions of angels who could interfere do not, so as to make my aloneness perfectly clear to you: it is as if you, who have come to arrest me, are making the *strangest* kind of war on me—all of you, against one of me, even though I would do you no harm.” The crucifixion stages a cosmic confrontation: humankind must expel God, as those on the originary scene must consume the central food object and come to know their consumption as significant, as violent.(16) But God does not fight back. God has nothing to do with violence.(17)

Another consequence of our insisting on humankind’s unity in the killing of Jesus may be the idea that his death was not (is not) that of the originary conscientious objector. Jesus’ standing up for certain types of people, his showing the way of active nonviolence as an alternative to the ways of those cruel powers running the “Domination System,” his dying for the poor and oppressed or for the most recent jet set of persecuted minorities, may well not be the primary or ultimate meaning of the passion.(18) Contrary to the inclinations of, for example, not only Walter Wink or John Howard Yoder but also the re-Christianized Marxist Terry Eagleton, I hesitate to tint Jesus’ self-giving with the stained glass that would make it first a political act. Do we petition the Creator as a politician? Do we demand that God have a politics? Must God be for some, against others? On the cross, may Jesus not present himself only as the chosen One, opposed to the violence of all humankind? Or is the wondering hesitation and hesitating wonder expressed by such questions little more than the betrayal of radical historical concreteness by rootless dialectical abstraction?

For René Girard, all violence was modelled either on the upsetting revelation of Christ—which comes from outside culture—or on the mystifications of historical scapegoats, through which Satan casts out Satan. To continue with our semiotic analysis, let us notice that subcontraries stand related as a pair or propositions that cannot both be false at the same time, although they may be true together. “This violence is modelled on the crucifixion” and “this violence is modelled on exterminating violence” cannot be false together: all violence must be modelled as derivative of either the one or the other. To elaborate on this either/or: if I understand him correctly, Girard has taught us that the contrary of scapegoating is the Christian revelation, the exposure of scapegoating to the unsettling daylight that clarifies things such that we become free to choose or not a life indebted to the grace of Jesus, the Forgiving Victim (see James Alison’s series of lectures). Girard suggests we each must choose: either one remains faithful to the mystification of scapegoats whose victimization has founded the particular cultural configuration on which one now depends, or one tries out faith in the revelation of the violence of God’s Love, its violence of demystification.

Subcontraries, although they cannot both be false, may be true together. How could the crucifixion and originary scapegoating be “true” together? They could be so in this sense: the truth of the Crucifixion is the untruth of the scapegoat mechanism revealed. For the scapegoat mechanism to remain unrevealed would entail our continuing to be restricted to

the kinds of “gods” who blame us, and ask us to blame them, for violence, in the bountifully available human-deity dialogues characteristic of war-loving mythologies the wide world over. In the conjunction of the Crucifixion’s truth as the scapegoat mechanism’s lie, however, “irrationality” persists: the idea of a God who forgives us for having crucified him must strike us as wholly unreasonable. Surely, any “supernatural” agent worthy of worship and deity status would take revenge for such an outrage. Surely, such forgiveness must be unreal; there must be a catch; our mortal coil will catch on the barbed-wire fence between us and this “god,” we think.

In the resurrection, Jesus as God returns, embodying the healing power of forgiveness. The paradoxical violence of God’s Love entails there is no barbed wire, no catch. It may seem strange to speak of this forgiveness as the violence of God’s love. But such talk does not reduce to ornamental metaphor. Such forgiveness, if accepted, forces, forces the recognition that every scenic center one has ever held sacred cannot compare to the destabilizing, disorienting strangeness of this new scenic center. The God who refuses to participate in the escalation to extremes appears as the One who tears apart the assumptions and dynamics that found human cultures unchanged by such a revelation. Some remarks of the activist Duncan Morrow, whose on-the-ground work has been informed by the thought of René Girard, resonate well in the context of these contentions.

What is already clear is that Northern Ireland is deeply ambivalent about this experience. Forgiveness and contrition are very painful; and it is my deep experience that all of us *fight like tigers* to avoid the unveiling of our secrets, and to keep the consequences of the revelation of our complicity with violence as far away as possible. The price of freedom, of knowing that we are all brothers and sisters, and of stopping the game of dividing between the good guys and the bad guys, is paid in profound and disturbing dis-illusion about ourselves. (180)We experience as terrible (at first) the lesson that one is being loved by the God who forgives our part in the worst warfare, for such charity violates all laws of blame-based thinking. But the Divine Way is to *contain* human violence, to *limit* its punishing effects, always to give to defeated enemy and to penitent killer alike a second chance, always to offer hope.

To conclude and to review: limitless exterminating violence reveals the horrifying underside of limited but unjustifiable war; it reveals the chaos into which limited but unjustifiable war threatens to descend. On the other side, the irrational forgiveness of the God who refuses to punish us is the difficult-to-grasp underside of just war, the basis of the hope for the possibility of just war. The *scapegoating / violence of God’s love* opposition suggests one lesson for those who seek to root Christian morality exclusively in non-retaliatory pacifism. To dismiss any possibility of a warrior imitating the perfectly non-punishing self-restraint of God may be too easy in our time, worn down and wearied as we might feel by gruesome records of the horror and frequent futility of war. The other side of the coin, however, shows that we might exercise caution regarding the authenticity of rushing into forgiveness.

Human forgiveness detached from punishment risks the failure to demonstrate that wrongdoing was wrong.

Meanwhile, for those who wish to preserve the doctrines of just war theory, another lesson emerges from the *scapegoating / violence of God's love* opposition. Only insofar as human beings in all their fallen imperfection might imitate the Divine Love that forgives rather than punishes is it possible to believe in the paradoxically forgiving punishment that the idea of just war promises. If we take seriously the idea in mimetic theory that God has nothing to do with violence, then even the most "justified" human war must remain still nothing but a human war with human causes and human reasons; and God's causes and reasons cannot be assimilated to ours. As Jacques Ellul claims, the Christian warrior must throw himself on the mercy of God when he ventures onto the battlefield. But it seems to me that all of us, warriors or not, throw ourselves on the mercy of God every day.

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Notes

1. More from Gardner on *Battling to the End*: "A prudent avoidance of unnecessary, unjust, disproportionate, or counterproductive wars is not the same as a pacifist rejection of war itself, in principle. Recognition that wars rarely (almost never) accomplish the aims that motivate them is not pacifism. Girard seems to gesture toward the latter without actually endorsing it, though, leaving readers confused about the precise significance of his two claims or their practical implications" ("René Girard's Apocalyptic Critique" 15). (back)

2. My version of the semiotic square follows partly that of Jameson. (back)

3. Apart from working from the assumption that Girard's sweeping critique of violence at the very least tempts one to pacifist aspirations, I have taken the works of Ellul, Yoder, and Wink as representative of Christian pacifism. I have relied on Gittings for the history of peace movements and nonviolent activism. For the intersections between peace activism and Girardian thought, I recommend the fourteen essays collected in Swartley. I recommend as well the high-quality essays collected in Chase and Jacobs. (back)

4. Bubbio argues that on this score Girard's work might be considered defective: "it is defective in that it does not provide a *normative* account of sacrifice . . . the absence of a positive and active sacrifice (such as the kenotic sacrifice) makes a hypothetical normativity of sacrifice completely superfluous, and even inconsistent with Girard's premises" (*Sacrifice* 158). He seems unaware of the revision of mimetic theory through which Girard integrated a concept of Jesus' sacrifice as self-giving. For some of the history of that revisionary moment, see Schwager, "Mimesis and Freedom"; Moosbrugger, "Raymund Schwager's Maieutics." (back)

5. J. Patout Burns, following up on conferences held in St. Louis (1990) and Washington, D.C. (1991), has edited a useful collection titled *War and Its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions*(Georgetown University Press, 1993). It contains essays by four Jewish contributors (Michael Broyde, Rabbi Everett Gendler, Yehudah Mirsky, Naomi Goodman); five Christian contributors (John Howard Yoder, John P. Langan, S. J., Walter Wink, Edward McGlynn Gaffney Jr., and J. Patout Burns); and two essays on Islam (Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, Michael N. Nagler). The volume establishes rather clearly that pacifism and nonviolence fit more easily with the faith's holy texts and therefore arise more easily from Christian tradition than they do in Judaism or Islam. Given the death of Jesus (a victim of violence), the difference perhaps should not surprise anybody. Broyde writes: "*Theological pacifism has no place in the Jewish tradition*" ("Fighting" 19) [his emphasis]; and he writes: "Jewish law recognized that some wars are completely immoral,

that some wars are morally permissible but accompanied by a very limited license to kill, and that some wars are basic battle for good with an enemy that is evil. Each of these situations comes with a different moral responses and a different right to wage war. In sum, it is crucially important to examine the justice of every cause. However, violence in the service of justice is not to be abhorred within the Jewish tradition" ("Fighting" 20-21). For Jewish pacifism, by contrast, consult Goodman. Sachedina writes: "In the final analysis, Islamic revelation by its very emphasis on justice and equity on earth calls upon its followers to evaluate a specific sociopolitical order and preserve it or to overthrow and transform it" (156). Sachedina does not conceal the legitimation of military force in Islam to defend the Islamic social order: "In addition, Islam as a religious ideology is both a critical assessment of human corporate existence and a divine blueprint that awaits implementation to realize God's will on earth to the fullest extent possible and, if necessary, through force" (124); "Moreover, it [unbelief] came to be identified not only as a religious wrong, to be punished in the hereafter, but also as a moral wrong, to be corrected in the here and now—by use of force if necessary" (124). (back)

6. See Biggar, ch. 3, "The Principle of Double Effect: Can It Survive Combat?" (92-110). He writes: "What this analysis reveals is that intention is not just about deliberate choice, but also about desire; not just about willing, but also about wanting. An effect that I intend, therefore, is one that I both choose and want; and an effect that I accept is one that I choose but do not want" (95). (back)

7. "Just wars do stand in danger of becoming holy wars. Nevertheless, just war need not become holy wars where divine sanction bars no holds; and if they remain faithful to the logic of Christian just war thinking, they will not" (Biggar 168; cf. Elshtain 124, 183, 186). *(back)*

8. I recommend Ellul's work to people working with Girard's ideas. I quote the whole paragraph from which that one sentence comes, so as to clarify that Ellul is much more explicitly and consistently a pacifist than is Girard, while many of his formulations resonate powerfully with those of Girard and synchronize with them: "I have tried to show that, while violence is inevitable and belongs to the order of necessity, this fact does not legitimate it in the sight of God; that indeed violence is contrary to the life in Christ to which we are called. Therefore, as Christians, we must firmly refuse to accept whatever justifications of violence are advanced; and in particular we must reject all attempts to justify violence on Christian grounds. Let me say once more that this applies to the violence of the powerful, of the capitalist, the colonialist, and the state, as well as to the violence of the oppressed. I even say that it is not so much violence as justification of violence that is unacceptable to Christian faith. Violence as such, on the animal level, is the direct expression of our nature as animals; it certainly shows that we live in a state of sin—but that is nothing new. But any attempt to justify violence (by emotional considerations, by a doctrine, a theology, etc.) is a supplementary perversion of fallen nature at the hands of man. Remember Jesus'

accusations against the Pharisees. He did not reprove them for doing the works of the law—on the contrary. What he attacked was their belief that their doing these works proved them *just,* their complacent conviction that their self-justifications were true" (140). (back)

9. Two opposed statements operate as contraries when they cannot be true together, although they may both be false at once. My assumption so far has been that any case of war must be subject to judgment by some form of moral or ethical reasoning as either just or unjustifiable: no act of war may be both just and unjustifiable at once. However, these two characterizations do not exhaust all the descriptions of war, as the later sub-categories of originary scapegoating and the Crucifixion show; in that sense, "this is a just war" and "this is an unjustifiable war" may both be false at once, in that "war" may be conceptualized in the forms of either exterminating violence or the Crucifixion as well. (I think it only fair to concede that some unconditional pacifists—recall our noticing that Girard claimed he was *not* an unconditional pacifist—would reject outright my "assumption so far" above—war, for them, *never* being justifiable for *any* reason.) (back)

10. Roedel: "Beginning with Gandhi, a distinction has often been made between 'strategic' and 'principled' nonviolence. Principled nonviolence is the unconditional embrace of nonviolence, on the basis of a moral or religious commitment. Gandhi spoke of principled nonviolence as a refusal to submit to or inflict violence out of unselfish love for the opponent. He spoke of strategic nonviolence as a means for achieving one's goals; *in his opinion, this was not really nonviolence at all, but a simulacrum of it*. An individual may even sometimes be unable to distinguish the extent to which his own nonviolence is strategic or principled" (222). (back)

11. [no content] (back)

12. My opinion here has been influenced by these remarks by Eric Gans: "No doubt Jesus 'challenged the domination system'—an unfortunate term that washes out all tensions between the Jewish and Roman 'dominators' in a binary opposition between the good oppressed and their evil oppressors. But our own century has surely taught us that political implementations of righteous anger against the social order in the attempt to realize God's kingdom or some secular equivalent on earth are anything but productive of social justice. 'Taking the side of the victim' in the Christian sense is far more than a political act of rebellion against 'the system': it is the concerted and never facile attempt to stand on the side of love against resentment, including the resentment of "the oppressed" that has fueled so many of history's greatest horrors" ("Marcus"). (back)

13. Girard: "Myths justify violence against the scapegoat, the community is never guilty. Thebes isn't guilty with respect to Oedipus, Oedipus is guilty with respect to Thebes. But ritual protects communities from the great violence of mimetic disorder thanks to the real and symbolic violence of sacrifice" (*When These* 33). With the phrase "the great violence of

mimetic disorder" Girard refers to originary scapegoating and its total indifferentiation, as opposed to sacrifice. (back)

14. "The violence was not unloaded on him by chance. He provoked it by claims about who he was. The universal conspiracy against the Anointed and Son of God reveals that in its depth the human heart harbors a grudge against God" (*Must There Be* 196; for the phrase "hidden will to kill," see 183). (back)

15. More context: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?'" The singular *to him* might seem not to permit us to claim with certainty that those present other than the sword-bearing man who injured the slave heard Jesus' speech; but we read the Scriptures as history, not fiction or myth. Therefore, we presume the witness from whom the account derives overheard the saying; and therefore, we can presume it has been overheard by people other than the man who injured the high priest's slave, people who were listening. (back)

16. For an elaboration of this notion, see my "The Object of Originary Violence." (back)

17. Lest these formulations seem too fancifully abstract, I observe the first sentence in the entry for "War" in a standard reference source: "In the Hebrew Bible war almost always refers to armed struggle between nations; in the New Testament the word more often refers to *spiritual or cosmic conflict against evil*" (LaSor) [emphasis added]. Returning to the question of whether scripture makes room for just war thinking, notice the opinion expressed by LaSor in his first sentence of the section "In the New Testament": "Contrary to a widely held view, the position of the New Testament is not total pacifism: that was the product of church fathers, principally Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian." LaSor here seems to agree with Biggar. (back)

18. I am agreeing with (among others) Jean-Pierre Dupuy: "To address the question of inequality by constructing a theory that gives the interests of the most disadvantaged a preponderant and unchallengeable weight in deliberations about social justice amounts in turn, then, to proceeding in exactly the opposite direction to the one that needs to be followed, for it serves only to perpetuate the sacralization of the victim. What, then, *as a practical matter*, can be done?" (*Mark of the Sacred* 169). Notice that in the context of this argument, the sacralization of Jesus as victim is not a problem; the sacralization of human victims appropriating his suffering to improve the public uses of their self-image *is* a problem, and a moral problem. It is that perversion of the gospel that Eric Gans, with a more tireless persistence than anybody else, has exposed and critiqued as *victimary thinking*. Meanwhile, I am aware that later in the same book Dupuy seems to reject without reserve, in far too hasty and apocalyptic a fashion to my mind, anything resembling just war

theory: “These principles—meant to convert war into a ritual that is both violent and measured in its effects, a ritual that *contains* violence by means of violence—died a gruesome death at Hiroshima, and their remains were vaporized in the radioactive blast that then leveled Nagasaki” (178). It is simply not true that those “principles” were “vaporized” by the inaugurating events of the postmodern era. On the contrary, instructors in Western military academics teach those “principles” regularly, as Jean Bethke Elshtain points out. Those at work in the training camps of Islamist suicide bombers do not teach them. That seems to me a factual difference one must take into account. (back)