Overwriting the rivalry with God: The ministry period of Jesus in the Christology of Raymund Schwager

Author: Brett McLaughlin

OVERWRITING THE RIVALRY WITH GOD:

THE MINISTRY PERIOD OF JESUS IN THE CHRISTOLOGY OF RAYMUND SCHWAGER

by

Rev. Brett McLaughlin SJ

Professor O. Ernesto Valiente & Richard Clifford

STL Dissertation

May 5, 2020

INTRODUCTION

The tyrants of history were not violent enough and left the underlying structures of violence intact, to the present era.[1] Such is the judgment of Zizek. René Girard and Raymond Schwager examine the cyclical violence, embedded through all cultures, and the saving effects of the Christ-event. Girard develops his theories through the analyses of literary texts, presupposing their accurate reflection of the human emotions. His French intellectual context combined structuralism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis of the period in which he wrote. Witnessing the noble desires of Don Quixote and the characters of French salons, for example, Girard identifies the imitation of desires and follows their effects on societal unrest. Girard would have a profound impact upon Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager SJ. They first met in Avignon in 1975, went on mountain walks in Austria, and visit in the United States.[2] Schwager's notion of rivalry, Jesus' imitation of the Father, and the necessity of nonviolence all were shaped by Girardian theory. In turn, he influenced Girard with a nuanced Christian sense of sacrifice, over against paganism. The two would share fifty-four letters over the course of seventeen years of scholarly, fraternal correspondence.

Although some might label Girard an outsider, he claims a strong sense of connection to the social order throughout his childhood and growth in interdisciplinary studies. Girard had a very pleasant childhood, from which he has clung to many objects with associated happy memories. He cast aside the classic outcast role, that many intellectuals tend to adopt. Instead, he grew up with five siblings; his father was the curator of the Museum of Avignon. Along with being engaged in music and art, René's mother was one of the first women to receive the

[1] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence*, (New York: Picador, 2008), 217.

[2] René Girard and Raymund Schwager, *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence 1974-1991*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), x.

baccalaureat in the region. Her son would make dramatic transitions in scholarly interests from literary theory, anthropology, and religious concerns. Girard attributes his Catholic conversion to his scholarly work, at the same time challenging the rigid discrepancy between intellectual and emotional conversions. He agrees with St. Paul: the "spirit" comprises both the intellectual and emotional sides of a person. According to the French scholar, a series of intuitions occurred in 1959. He had been reading Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Proust, Shakespeare, and Stendhal, which would culminate in his own *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. A very compressed insight arose that would unfold in his career, and he resumed Catholic practice simultaneously.[3] Ultimately, comprehending his famous theory necessitates a conversion in itself, since all human beings remain enmeshed in its mechanisms.[4]

Desire is a universal human phenomenon, even observable in some primates. Girard insists that all human desire is *mimetic*, in imitation of a person or group. No human subjects desire abstractly, acquiring their own objects for desire. Rather than genetically or environmentally pre-determined, the human being is a "highly mutable construct, radically dependent on the desires of others, a fact which each 'me' does not usually recognize except to a very limited extent." The burgeoning of mimetic desires relies upon a certain blindness of human beings, a blindness to their own desires and resulting rivalry. Most significantly, mimesis is a primary factor in the constitution of a human being, as he/she gestures, speaks, and

[3] Brian D. Robinette, "Contemplative Practice and the Therapy of Mimetic Desire," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 24, 2017, 77.

[4] René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 17, 26-7, 45.

comprehends oneself through the imitation of others. Girard's interpreter, James Alison, then names it as interior to the human being; mimesis is not an addendum to the human subject.[5]

Categories of desire exist which range in levels of competitiveness to one's peers. The initial desire, labeled *acquisitive, triangular, or possessive mimesis* is in the mode by which a subject imitates their neighbor's desire for an object, commencing a rivalry. Following this behavior is *conflictual or antagonistic mimesis*, as the object recedes into the background and mutual resentment escalates. At the same time, *unobstacled, nonrivalistic, or pacific mimesis* can occur for a self-possessed agent who has no rivalry. Often this happens when the model is at a great distance in stature or physical location; he/she is only an *external mediator* of mimesis. But pacific mimesis is always prone to conflictual desire, if the model becomes closer. A *nonnaive pacific mimesis* can occur, but only through the profound conversions such as found in the Gospels. Human behavior distinguishes itself from primates, in the transition from acquisitive to antagonistic desires.[6]

A three-stage cycle leads individual mimesis unto communal rivalries and the sacrifice of a scapegoat. The original subject acquires the desire for an object, imitating his neighbor. It is impossible for both to possess the object. Many times the mutual envy and resentment remains hidden and intensifies throughout the community, which is described as *mimetic contagion*. Eventually, a stranger or external person will appear in the community. A surge of uncertainty and perhaps negativity surfaces towards this person; the community truly believes in the guilt or hazard of this person. Either a *unifying expulsion* or *sacrifice* will take place. The final moment

[5] James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 9, 12, 14, 16.

[6] Ibidem, 13, 15.

occurs as *revealed discovery*. Biblical texts have a major role in this final stage, as they have bared the victimization, especially in the Christian accounts that narrate Jesus' passion.[7]

In premodern societies, the provisional peace that follows the expulsion or sacrifice, generates wondrous attention that prompts culture and institutions. The amazing peace after the sacrifice associates the victim with the sacred. Alison sketches, "we have the genetic model which enables us to see how the very constitution of human culture is shot through with violent mimesis. All human sociality is born thanks to the victim, and particularly, to ignorance of the victim(s) that gave it birth." The group engenders social unity by replicating the process that led to the miraculous peace, whether using humans or animals as victims. Eventually, each culture composes its own foundational myths, including the original murder. Myths differ from Biblical accounts, since they conceal the murder and translocate it onto the gods. The Greek authors uncovered these truths somewhat in the tragedies, but the Hebrew Scriptures regularly expose the surrogate victims.[8]

Girard assumes those classical expositions of the Incarnation-event, Resurrection, and Trinity. In fact, the French thinker espouses the virginal conception as a direct sign of the *peaceful* generation of Christ. The Church's articulation is not akin to those aggressive divine conceptions, present in myths. The Resurrection stands as a clear break of natural laws, as well as a sign of divine power over mimetic contagion. The latter event does not receive a read through Girardian lens; like eschatology, it remains mystery. Girard attributes the legacy and promulgation of the Resurrection to the disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enabled them to overcome their own sinful guilt and conduct sweeping evangelization. "Girard

[7] Alison, 10-12.
[8] Ibidem, 10, 19, 20.

describes the Holy Spirit as the mimetic agent of intradivine unity, recalling the traditional designation of the Spirit as *vinculum amoris*—bond of love—between the Father and the Son." Schwager develops this further: the threefold love of the Trinity surpasses the hazards of mimetic desire. Girard himself proposes the entrance into such Trinitarian love, as the means to overcome suffering and mimesis.[9]

Since Girard strives for a broad audience, he balances literary theory, anthropology, and scripture--a methodological paradox. Alison stresses that the French scholar does not consider mimetic theory as his own theory; instead, he makes more coherent a basic truth sketched by authors before him. Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Proust, Shakespeare, and Stendhal all can be determined to have cognizance of desire as imitative and the ubiquity of violence in human societies.[10] Girard assumes that many potential readers will ignore his tracts if he immediately turns to God or Christian doctrine. Reason has a more potent effect, if the a priori truth of religion waits until a final stage. Nevertheless, "He unashamedly declares the Gospels to be part of a new science or knowledge of humanity." It is the Gospels that provide new insights in social-science. At the same time, Girard denies those scientific approaches to analyze the Gospels.[11]

Duquesne theologian Kevin Mongrain explains that Girard prefers to present himself as a cultural anthropologist, identifying false and authentic forms of conversion. Girard proffers a cultural pattern of conflictual rivalry, desire, and establishment of violence as the underpinnings of all cultures. The scapegoat permeates all cultures; only the Christ-event reveals its dangers.

[9] Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 88-9.

[10] Alison, 21.

[11] Cowdell, 91-2.

According to Girard, mimetic theory cannot be parochially deployed for theological agendas. He instead speaks on the largest scale about God's relationship to the world, in its entirety. Girard regularly censures the "mythic" and "pagan" facets of contemporary religion. "Girard, like Balthasar, resists 'false gnosis' that pretends to be about spiritual transformation toward likeness to the biblical God, but which in fact is instead a theoretical exercise in the speculative transformation of Christianity away from the biblical narrative and toward 'mythic' and 'pagan' religion."[12]

Critics often charge Girard with a negative anthropology and denial of human freedom. These critics allege that, in Girard's theory, people constantly are affected by mimesis and unable to act peaceably. In response, Girard holds that some people successfully resist the pull of desire and the road to violence. Citing Matthew 18:7-8, he puts forward that scandals are bound to happen in communities. Jesus did not imitate this pathway to violence. Christians endeavor to foster a trail of pacific imitation, as exemplified by many saints.[13] A secondary critique is the mechanistic, closed system that appears in his explanation of human violence. Mongrain offers that Girard seems to exclude God and human freedom, perhaps a form of "philosophical hubris." The scapegoat mechanism appears to regulate and manipulate human beings everywhere, despite their intelligence or good intentions. Compared to theology in general, God or divine redemption is rarely discussed. Hans Urs von Balthasar fears that Girard

[12] Kevin Mongrain, "Theologians of Spiritual Transformation: A Proposal for Reading René Girard through the Lenses of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Cassian," *Modern Theology*, vol. 28, no. 1, January 2012, 81-4.

[13] René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 222.

sets forth a temporal, anthropocentric articulation, that obliterates the classic engagement of faith and reason.[14]

Besides, mimesis in itself allows for human freedom, according to Girard. Von Balthasar has brought this critique. For Girard, if human beings had no model for imitation, their desires would sit on predetermined items or stir only from instinct. Without mimesis, human beings would not have the capacity for altering desires. Cowdell puts it, "This plasticity of human desire, entirely on account of its mimetic nature, ensures that determinism will never hold sway over human freedom." The varying sequences of mimetic acquisition imply that no determinism is possible, for human desires fluctuate and break with instinct.[15]

Nor may Girard be considered a Pelagian, as if human beings refuse or engage in mimesis without the effects of God's grace, in my opinion. Mongrain notices Girard repudiates a Pelagian notion of "exterior grace;" God transforms the heart in order to escape conflictual desire. Mongrain cites *Battling to the End*, as saints undergo a sequence of "innermost mediation" in being converted from destructive mimesis to nonviolent behavior. Mongrain identifies that "the Christ he is speaking of here is the interior Christ of the contemplative tradition, the Christ of Paul's 'it is no longer I who lives by Christ who lives in me'[16] and the indwelling Johannine Christ."[17] Christ sets a unique model of renunciation and nonviolence, calls for imitation, and dwells among striving human beings.

The novelty of Girard's theory lies in that his work shed light on humanity's inability to discuss imitation and its inherent hiddenness. The schools of behaviorism and Freud refuse to

[14] Mongrain, 92-3.
[15] Cowdell, 95.
[16] Gal 2:19-20.
[17] Mongrain, 98-9

acknowledge imitation within the realm of human activity. But contemporary culture evades discussing imitation too. Girard guesses that "one of the reasons for this general avoidance is that the concept of imitation, removed from its conflictual element, is too 'simple' and disappoints the present (very mimetic) appetite for 'complexity.'"[18] Schwager has made known, Girard's theory always necessitates a conversion, because everyone remains part of the mimetic mechanism.[19] Not only has mimesis lasted undiscovered by humanity for centuries, but also it is not stylish or attractive enough to deem conversation.

Swiss Jesuit Raymund Schwager advances mimetic theory with his theological approach and application of *dramatic theology*. Like his peer Von Balthasar, Schwager notices the varied emotions of the Father towards human beings in the Old Testament. It is problematic how inexplicable and arbitrary the supposedly gracious God's anger flares towards human beings. *Dramatic exegesis* "gathers together larger groups of texts under key words and coordinates them on the model of conflictual action." Schwager remains concerned for the *total picture* of the Father, Jesus, and Jesus' work. Moreover, the *dramatic point of view* explicates the relation of the present and future kingdom of God.

Mimetic theory and dramatic theology combined offer a rich, compelling synthesis of the Jesus-event for the twenty-first century. Girard and Schwager challenge the hidden violence, dangerous envy, and false images of God present in contemporary society. Schwager proposes the loving face of the Father and the necessity of nonviolence. This dissertation will proceed in three parts. In chapter one, I will explore the components of mimetic theory, including Girardian sacrifice, Satan, and the scapegoat mechanism. Chapter two will discuss Schwager's

[18] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 60.
[19] Ibidem, 45.

Christology, a Jesus who overcomes the threat of the Father and violent pressures of first century Israel. Chapter three will dialogue with these author's main critics, John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, Geza Vermes, and Mary Ann D'Angelo.

CHAPTER ONE

The Mimetic Spirit of Lies and Violence: An Assessment of René Girard and Raymund Schwager

René Girard and Raymund Schwager synthesize a novel framework for the exposition of sin and violence, present in ancient stories and contemporary life. *Mimetic theory* stipulates an escalation of desire among neighbors, resulting in interpersonal violence, after an object has been acquired through imitation. According to Girard and Schwager, the Christian Bible evidences this dynamic in multiple episodes, found in both the stories of the Patriarchs and the Passion. Mimesis fulfills itself through the identification and destruction of a victim in the form of a *scapegoat*, prompting a provisional peace in the community. Girard and Schwager, moreover, have a robust opinion of the activity of Satan.[20] His advent is the rise of murderous envy and communal disruption from desire. The Jesuit Schwager incorporates an added element with *dramatic theology*, striving to explicate the portrayal of the Father's anger, judgment, and forgiveness as recognized in the arc of Scripture. A fellow proponent, Hans Urs von Balthasar had introduced *Theo-Drama* as an explication of salvation history and the seemingly varied attitudes of the Father, with a marked attentiveness to the events of the Passion.

In this chapter, I will appraise the substructure of Schwager's theology in Girardian mimesis and dramatic theology. Girard revises normative exegesis and theological ethics in his espousal of envy as the primary source of human transgressions. These thinkers' notion of religion pivots on sacrifice, a perspective perhaps seen most clearly in Leviticus. Sacrifice is one form of ritual, a "planned controlled, mediated, periodical, ritualized, surrogate violence" that

[20] Girard holds that Satan is the seducer and accuser, a violent contagion that convinces a community that guilt is real and punishable. See *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, p. 35.

resolves communal crises. It becomes institutionalized to regulate emergencies.[21] Girardian theory firmly outlines the temporary cessation of accelerating desires and rivalry in the scapegoat.

I. Mimetic Theory

Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what other desire because we imitate their desires.[22] The development of desire distinguishes human beings from animals; no person exists as a fully autonomous, political actor. Girard selects the Greek work *mimesis*, as "imitation" has become exhausted in contemporary parlance.[23] Unlike animals who are directed by instinct, human beings acquire desires through relations with others. Desire is not correlated with appetite, which happens naturally.[24] Practically nothing in human comportment is not learned; all learning is acquired through *mimesis*. Rampant imitation is the scaffolding of all culture.[25] Girard presupposes that human beings are essentially social,[26] and desires are "mediated" by the desires of other people that we imitate. Desire is not inherent in objects or people, but the worth fixed on the item by human agency and attention. In actuality, selfhood constructs from socio-cultural contexts and those surrounding a person.[27] Innsbruck scholar Wolfgang Palaver

---

[21] René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origin of Culture*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 71-2.

[22] René Girard, "Generative Scapegoating," *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, 122.

[23] René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 18.

[24] Grant Kaplan, *René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 23.

[25] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 7.

[26] William Lloyd Newell, *Desire in René Girard and Jesus*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 144.

[27] Brian Robinette, "Contemplative Practice and the Therapy of Mimetic Desire," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 24, 2017, 84.

emphasizes that Girard's anthropology is starkly differentiated from Aristotle. Rather than peaceable social animals, Girardianism is located between the optimism of Thomistic anthropology and Hobbes' view of occasional viciousness.[28] Human children exhibit the most conspicuous demonstration of mimesis in the contemporary period: the struggle over toys. Adults manage to disguise their desires more cleverly, but in no way do such desires cease with human maturity.[29]

The dawn of mimetic desire inevitably leads to a relationship of rivalry and violent impulses. The imitator acquires the desire for the same item as his or her model.

> But the model soon begins also to imitate the imitation of his or her 'disciple', and in this process both becomes doubles or 'enemy brothers'. Their rivalry can easily grow into open aggression, even into homicide. In the wake of imitation [mimesis] evil spreads further like contagion, for it draws still other people and all realms of life—even reason—into its domain[30]

Not surprisingly, the rising violence and conflict does not resolve or simplify the situation. Girard refers here to the characters of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Mimetism can cycle even during predicaments; Girard points to Marmeladov's wife in *Crime and Punishment*.[31] Rivals will collude with one other for their achievements, meanwhile resenting the other's attainments. Models can paradoxically exist as idols and archenemies.[32] Girard will employ equivalent terms for this effect, including triangular desire, desire according to another, conflictual desire, and imitated desire.[33] Rivalry has the capacity to rapidly accelerate and utterly confuse relationships.

---

[28] Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 36.

[29] Kaplan, 22.

[30] Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, (Leominster, U.K.: Gracewing, 2006), 15.

[31] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 75.

[32] Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*: *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 11.

[33] Palaver, 35.

If a subject is proximate to his model, *internal mediation* occurs with his/her *double*. Many human beings idolize a movie or sports celebrity; this is mere *external mediation*, without possibility of conflict. A different situation occurs with those models found in the same relative location. In the latter, the same items and people are available and rivalry surfaces. Internal mediation self-reinforces, as subjects intensify in their desire and rivalry. The flow towards symmetry manufactures *doubles*, or intense rivals. Girard discerns that the crucial moment arrives when the object disappears from significance; the rival only seeks to defeat the other, and the object exists only to prolong the conflict. The rivals lose their differentiation, and become doubles.[34] Doubles themselves attract attention, inviting mimetic attractiveness to the object of their dispute.[35]

Groups of children often serve as the most vivid exemplar of conflictual desire. Girard stipulates that children have relationships of external mediation with adults, generally positive, since they cannot obtain the same objects and instead have role models. For those children of the same approximate age, rivalries are apparent. Girard looks to Augustine, who noticed that two babies will even compete for the nourishment from a wet nurse. "Even though this example is mythical somewhat, it symbolizes very well the role of the mimetic rivalry, not only among infants but also within humanity in general."[36] Children playing with toys can easily acquire the desire for a plaything, from their peer. Competition for the limited number of toys follows.

Mimetic behavior does not happen on a purely reflective, or rational level, but usually remains obscure and stays in the subconscious. Girard concurs with modern psychoanalysis, that many impulses arise from a pre-reflective subconscious. He disagrees with Freud that these

[34] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 57.
[35] Ibidem, 64.
[36] Ibid., 61.

impulses have their source in sexual motivations. In fact, mimesis can operate out of a passionate blindness. Schwager explains, "Since it is powerful, reason and good will can hardly resist it head-on. But since it is also blind, it easily loses sight of the object of its arousal and jumps to another object. Because of this, anger can be manipulated."[37] Human beings become the most blind in the midst of crisis.[38]

Significantly, not all mimesis is negative, nor do all human relations follow the mimetic pattern. The parent-child relationship within families does not illustrate a progression of envy and malice. What's more, the erotic bond between husband and wife, sexual desire and pleasure, does not involve mimesis.[39] Girard acknowledges that his utilization of the term "mimesis" usually denotes the mimesis involving conflictual rivalry. Viewed in itself, mimesis opens the individual to other beings; it can be the basis of heroism or teamwork.[40] Without mimetic desire, human beings would have fixed affinities; it is inherently good, because it allows for freedom and humanity.[41] Most conspicuously, Jesus embodies an imitation of the Father and renounces all conflictual desires. His expressed intent to match the Father's Will shepherds other human beings to renunciation.[42] "Jesus imitates God in a spirit of childlike and innocent obedience and this is what he advises us to do as well. Since there is no acquisitive desire in God, the docile imitation of God cannot generate rivalry."[43] Mimesis in itself is beneficial to human beings, but its predominant conflictual form spreads hostility and disruption.

---

[37] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 3, 5.
[38] Newell, 164.
[39] Palaver, 38.
[40] René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams, (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 63-4.
[41] René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 15.
[42] Palaver, 219-220.
[43] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 197-8.

Acquisitive mimesis stands apart from mimetic desire, a neutral activity in itself. Mimetic desire defines the activity by which human beings receive all their desires, mediated by another person. No desire arises directly from sensing an object. Importantly, there are a variety of desires, and acquisitive mimesis is not the only form. Girard admits that occasionally he employs "mimetic desire" when he means acquisitive mimesis.[44] Mimetic desire in itself, opens the subject from selfish desire, so has no inherent danger.

Triangular desires inescapably encounter the *scandalon*, a stumbling block to the attainment of one's desire. Girard also renders the Greek as "obstacle," "pitfall," or "snare."[45] He defines the former as empty aspirations and hostility, stemming from unfulfilled desires.[46] This impasse or frustration of desire strangely drives individuals to reduplicate their desire and injury. "Each [subject] consistently takes the opposite view of the other in order to escape their inexorable rivalry, but they always return to collide with the fascinating obstacle that each one has come to be for the other. Scandals are responsible for the false infinity of mimetic rivalry."[47] The snare ushers forth greater violence and the emotions of the rivalry. Personal scandals become so bitterly frustrating that individuals gravitate towards broad elimination of the scandals in sum. Instead of wholesale communal violence ensuing, a single victim receives the violence and extinguishes the rivalries in a provisional manner.[48] The various scandals of the community must coalesce in energy into a single movement, quenched temporarily by the death of its scapegoat.[49]

---

[44] Chelsea King, "Girard Reclaimed: Finding Common Ground between Sarah Coakley and René Girard on Sacrifice," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 23, 2016, 65.
[45] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 16.
[46] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 82.
[47] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 16.
[48] Ibidem, 24.
[49] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 66.

Primarily a literary theorist, Girard's thesis draws from neuroscience and a general rational method. Theologian Grant Kaplan cites the 1996 study by Italian scientists in Parma. *Mirror neurons* were discovered, nerves triggered when witnessing the same movement by another human being. When viewing an action they carry out *themselves*, women and men have neurons that fire witnessing this same action by another.[50] Neuroscientists have associated such neurons to human capacities for empathy, education, and social comprehension. Boston College professor Brian Robinette posits, "Such a discovery lends strong support for Girard's insistence that human imitation is largely pre-cognitive, and that what we call 'the self' is in fact received from the other."[51] According to Kaplan, the French thinker reasoned that only mimesis and the scapegoat process, could account for the proliferation of sacrificial ritual through cultures.[52] Schwager sees his approach as congruent with the natural science's historical method. The theory of evolution is composed in such a manner. "Although its work is never based on direct historical evidence, it is nevertheless able, out of the inner coherence of the theory, to report on real events and time periods in the early history of the earth and the cosmos."[53] Palaver underscores that mimesis is readily self-evident in contemporary advertising. Television commercials regularly portray individuals utilizing objects, activating mimetic desire in the viewer. Only rarely are such advertised products displayed alone, without human use.[54]

Girard locates his anthropology between those precedents of Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Aquinas. Girard accepts Hobbes' posture that human beings will not automatically realize harmonious existence, but rejects his individualism and general

[50] Kaplan, 18.
[51] Robinette, 74.
[52] Ibidem, 35.
[53] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 27.
[54] Palaver, 68.

pessimism.[55] Augustine possesses a similarly balanced view that human beings are certainly social, but prone to squabble. Mimetic theory roughly matches Augustine's concern for idolatry among human beings.[56] Girard repudiates Rousseau's belief that any general will or social contract exists.[57] Finally, the French scholar rejects romantic autonomy, but will not allow for determinism. Romanticism relies upon an original, individual-spawned desire; Girard holds this as unrealistic, as most desires arise from witnessing others. Despite the effects of mimesis and neuroscience, human beings still retain freedom and cannot be wholly schematized. Those unconscious impulses remain affecting factors to this freedom.[58]

Girard and Schwager observe the effects of mimesis in the Biblical setting of human creation, the Garden of Eden.[59] The serpent conducts a deceptive, seductive imitation of God's instruction to Adam and Eve. "This is an attempt to imitate God from the very start, but it focuses exclusively on a single aspect of what he said ('you shall not eat'); through the serpent's misuse of the prohibition the semblance of a perverse idol is produced."[60] The serpent then presents Eve with the opportunity for an immediate imitation of God, by means of consuming the prohibited fruit. Schwager stresses that what seduces Eve is the manner in which the serpent represents the fruit as desirable. Adam then follows Eve's consumption of the apple in an evidently mimetic manner.[61] Girard clearly equates original sin as the improper means of mimesis, initiating the mimetic mechanism as an outcome.[62] In Girard's thesis, God is falsely

---

[55] Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 25.

[56] Palaver, 37.

[57] Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*: *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 1.

[58] Kaplan, 19.

[59] Gen 3:1-13.

[60] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 17.

[61] Traditional interpretations have viewed the serpent as crafty, presenting options to human beings and facilitating the temptation. The serpent questions the freedom given to human beings, requisite obedience, and proposes Adam and Eve could be like God. See *The New Interpreter's Bible,* p. 359-360.

[62] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62, 198.

perceived as a rival to human beings; the Fall leads to a rupture of relationship between the woman and the serpent.

The second generation's fraternal rivalry and fratricide demonstrates a similar harmony with Girardian theory. The original murder occurs with a blunt lie, on Abel's whereabouts.[63] Disastrously, Cain's legacy of the first cities is firmly linked to this violent jealousy.[64] Envy is a clear aspect of the motivation behind Abel's killing.[65] Girard associates this Genesis account with the founding legend of the city of Rome. Romulus also cuts down his brother and founds the city. Schwager points out, "Whoever falls into covetous imitation is immediately seduced into a rivalry that easily grows in various ways into a violent act." In a converse manner, however, the Bible sides with the victim, Abel, while the Roman legend views Romulus as justified.[66] Yahweh repeatedly exemplifies concern for the plight of victims.[67]

The struggle among Jacob, Esau, and the angel displays the same violence among doubles. The brothers battle for their father's blessing, and Jacob wrestles with an angel. Girard explains, "Jacob's adversary is first of all called a *man*; and it is with the defeat of this adversary and his expulsion at the hands of the victor that he becomes a God from whom Jacob demands and obtains a blessing." Jacob expels the man/angel; in the manner of mimesis, this regenerates the provisional peace.[68] Girard emphasizes that both of these scenes have a degree of uncertainty, settled by an expulsion of violence.[69]

---

[63] Gen 4:1-16.
[64] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 20-21.
[65] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62.
[66] Palaver, 206.
[67] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 21.
[68] Gen 32:23-31.
[69] Girard, *Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, 142.

The chronicle of Joseph and his brothers exemplifies the anger turned towards an innocent victim. While Joseph functions as a scapegoat, he is rehabilitated by the end of the story.[70] Well after Joseph is abandoned to slavers, the brothers arrive in Egypt. Joseph then constructs a similar scenario with Benjamin: the brothers must decide whether to cast off their youngest. Judah alone refuses the option, as he cannot imagine returning without Jacob's youngest. Girard notes, "The theme of forgiveness of scapegoating is there, prominent at the end of the story, undertaking a powerful rereading of the mythical accounts, doing it *in reverse*, saving the victim rather than condemning him." The French scholar utilizes the story as an authentic demonstration of mimetic validity, a perennial account of collective violence.[71]

A critical interruption in the cycle of violent, triangular desire comes about with the promulgation of the Ten Commandments. For Girard and Schwager, the tenth commandment forbids a desire, not an act. Most English translations have diminished the full import of this commandment, employing the weakened term "covet." This word simply means desire; the Commandment prohibits *conflictual desire in itself*. If desire over property were permitted, human communities would be consumed by squabbling. Girard further infers that the lawgiver presumes to forbid not only the specified ass and spouse, but all those objects prone to triangular desire. The neighbor's enjoyment of his or her possessions supplies the viewing-individual's longing. "In imitating my rival's desire I give him the impression that he has good reasons to desire what he desires, to possess what he possesses, and so the intensity of his desire keeps increasing." Girard further identifies that Leviticus 19:18 disrupts mimesis. The command to love one's neighbor equal to oneself should prevent the effects of rivalry.[72] The fact that

[70] Gen 37, 42-3.
[71] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 202-3.
[72] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 10-12.

"neighbor" concludes the commandment upholds the *person* as the primary concern, over against his/her objects.[73] Ultimately, the logic of the Commandments proceeds in barring murderous acts and the final, fundamental discouragement of conflictual desire.[74] Jesus' advisement to imitate him in unselfishness, rather than the neighbor, is in the same context of this commandment.[75]

A turning point erupts at the Incarnation, as Jesus practices a consistent nonviolence and exposes the previously hidden mimetic mechanisms. Girard explains that this aforementioned criterion is a clear criteria of the Kingdom of God. If Jesus should alter his peaceable behavior, it would mark the other aspects of the Kingdom as impermanent or provisional. The ethics of discipleship would appear subject to change, perhaps disregarded in times of instability. "Not only does Jesus remain faithful to this Word of Love, but he also does everything to enlighten men about what awaits them if they continue in the pathways they have taken before." Consequently, Jesus is recognized as a blasphemous rival to the Father "in the perfection of the Love that he never ceases to make manifest," as Girard attests.[76] Jesus' steadfast manner of nonviolence even surmounts a burgeoning energy of persecution. In the Gospel of John's story of the adulterous woman[77], "Jesus' challenge to the mob, that whoever is free of sin should 'cast the first stone,' functions as a creative interruption of the collective snowballing occurring around the woman . . . In Girard's words, Jesus puts a stop to the spreading of the mimetic

[73] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 63.

[74] Traditional interpretations view the Tenth Commandment as oriented around destructive desire, when one attempts to possess what is not one's own. The Commandment focuses on economic acquisitiveness, not usually sexual desire. The duty to honor one's neighbor and contentedness should dislodge such desire. This final commandment may well be the climax of the Ten. See *The New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 849.

[75] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 63.

[76] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 181-2.

[77] John 7:53-8:11.

contagion with his own 'nonviolent contagion'"[78] The steadiness and potency of Jesus' nonaggression remains through the gospel accounts.

Girard posits that the wholly nonviolent individual must inexorably become the victim. No compromise or middle posture exists between killing and being killed oneself. The French thinker theorizes that fatal aftermaths occur to the nonviolent, because others refuse to allow the position. Unless they acknowledge their role as persecutors, they are trapped in the mimetic mechanisms. It is necessary for all humanity to forsake violence, in order that the nonviolent avoid persecution. Girard observes, "It is absolute fidelity to the principle defined in his own preaching that condemns Jesus. There is no other cause for his death than the love of one's neighbor lived to the very end, with an infinitely intelligent grasp of the constraints it imposes."[79] Nevertheless, the "logic" of nonviolence overcomes that of violence, since it grasps the logic of its opposite, a feat violence cannot follow. Those who speculate on the futility of nonviolence, fail to realize its circumspection.[80]

Jesus stands apart as the only human being that has abandoned violence and its consequences in the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to Girard. "The epithet 'Son of Man'[81] also corresponds, quite clearly, to the fact that Jesus alone has fulfilled a calling that belongs to all of mankind."[82] Girard is explicit that Jesus' death must take place, as his continued existence would have involved a compromise with violence. The cycle of death and murder is only broken

[78] Palaver, 214.
[79] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 184-5.
[80] Ibidem, 185.
[81] The Son of Man title was most certainly spoken by Jesus. James D.G. Dunn assesses that Jesus may not have clearly linked it to Daniel 7, but could have alluded to "the vindication-following-suffering role" which the role stood for among the people of Israel. Jesus may have used it in the word-play sense of "a man like me." See *Jesus Remembered*, p.759-60.
[82] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 186.

by the willingness to relinquish one's life.[83] "Either you are violently opposed to violence and inevitably play its game, or you are not opposed to it, and it shuts your mouth immediately."[84] Girard underscores that violence had "absolutely transcended mankind" in every culture; Christ is the only individual able to escape and free other human beings from the grip of violence.[85]

Girard categorizes both local rulers in Judea as subject to mimetic contagion in Christ's execution. The gospel writer Luke clearly comprehends the alignment of these two men over his sacrifice. Girard suggests that the evangelist portrays this reconciliation to contrast with the Eucharist; Pilate and Herod's state of mind exists as a paradox, not authentic Christian reconciliation. "Their reconciliation is one of those cathartic effects that benefit the participants in a collective murder, the unrepentant persecutors. It is the most characteristic effect of these murders."[86] Girard surmises that Pilate would have desired to spare Jesus, but he is overwhelmed by the mimetic contagion from the crowd.

Perhaps the most surprising subject to mimetic contagion is Simon Peter the Apostle. He certainly loved Jesus and had followed him for several years. Despite this history, once Peter is juxtaposed to a violent, critical crowd, he mimics their maliciousness.[87] Girard rejects that Peter's betrayal takes place due to his temperament or a psychological flaw. In this way, Peter's failure does not set him apart from the other disciples. He is merely the one subject to the sovereignty of mimesis and only the wholly nonviolent Jesus can resist its pressure.[88]

---

[83] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 187.
[84] Ibidem, 192.
[85] Ibid., 192.
[86] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 132.
[87] See Mt 26:69, Mk 14:66, Lk 22:54.
[88] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 20.

II. Sacrifice

Sacrifice and ritual remain paramount for the foundation of religion and peaceful maintenance of any society, according to Girardian theory. Ancient societies quickly became cognizant of the perils of reciprocal violence. Therefore, sacrifice was instituted for the purification of disorder, but had no capacity to eliminate it. "In an effort to prevent frequent and unpredictable episodes of mimetic violence, acts of planned, controlled, mediated, periodical, ritualized surrogate violence were put in place." Cultures develop through ritual. Crises of death and disease each generate different forms of institutionalized rites.[89] Although sacrifice was present in the Old Testament, Scripture had relatively sparse descriptions on how it should be understood. Girard advocates that we should allow for the element of mystery in ritual.[90] Criticism of the sacrificial-system erupted in the prophetic period of the eighth century BCE. The sense of atonement in sacrifice only occurred after the Exile. Momentously, Girard and Schwager hold that Jesus' passion was not a sacrifice according to divine plan, rejecting the notion that killing could intend a surrender to the Sacred, as we will see below.

Girard envisages the foundation of the first city with the retribution-penalty following the first murder of Abel. The "sevenfold sacrifice" that follows any reoccurrence of murder, inaugurates a provisional peace. For Girard, "This ritual character is rooted in the lull the original murder produced and the unanimous accord of the community in recollecting the murder."[91] Eventually, this penalty becomes a *founding murder* as it is ritualistically repeated. Girard locates references to a foundational murder elsewhere in the New Testament. The

[89] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion,* 71.
[90] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 22.
[91] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 84.

evangelists Matthew and Luke both cite the murder of the prophets;[92] Luke even mentions that the arc stretches from Abel to Zechariah.[93] In John 8, the devil is described as a "murderer from the beginning."[94] This beginning must refer to the origin of culture, not the universe. Girard insists that Luke equates the foundation of culture with this founding murder, as I will subsequently discuss.

Sacrifice permits the community to rid itself of the social unrest generated by triangular desire. Girard expects that any given community or culture will possess a blood sacrifice in its history, then reduplicated into a ritual of sacrifice. "Real or symbolic, sacrifice is primarily a collective action of the entire community, which purifies itself of its own disorder through the unanimous immolation . . . sacrifice is the resolution and conclusion of ritual," as the killing or discharge of the victim alleviates the crisis.[95] The community becomes unified to the detriment of a victim without self-defense or possibility of vengeance. It must be viewed as a final, conclusive act in the brimming antagonism.[96] It is, in general, an arbitrary act performed between those individuals that must be banished and those violently executed. Surprisingly, the Hebrews function as a sacrificial scapegoat in the Exodus story, seen through the lens of Egyptian myth. The chosen people must be ejected from Egypt, due to the enmity growing in the empire.[97]

Vitally, sacrifice must not be viewed as universally violent or inherently destructive to human communities. Chelsea King points out clear discrepancies with the stereotypical lens on

[92] Matt 23:34-36.
[93] Luke 11:51.
[94] John 8:44.
[95] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 11.
[96] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 24.
[97] Ibidem, 180.

sacrifice. Sacrifice and scapegoat contribute to peace among human beings. While some primeval sacrifices are violent, sacrifices do not continue in such a manner in following centuries. King underscores that "violence may be foundational to human culture, but it is not foundational to human nature."[98]

Schwager refers to Gerhard von Rad that much of sacrifice remains *unexplained* in the Old Testament texts. It is not explained what God brings about through a sacrifice, nor the disposition the agent of the sacrifice should bring to the ritual. Von Rad suggests that an "absolute limit" in the comprehension of sacrifice exists, "a realm of silence and secrecy in respect to what God works in sacrifice," much may lie beyond human grasp. Schwager queries, "How could a killing be understood as a total surrender at a time when belief in an individual resurrection from the dead or in an immortal soul did not exist in Israel?"[99] Even though the priestly tradition communicated a precision in the sequence of sacrifice, the explanation of the inner meaning did not occur.

Schwager further brings to light the critique of sacrifice found in the prophetic tradition. From the eighth to sixth centuries BCE, the prophets set aside the sacrificial system, "they saw in it an expression of that falsehood and mendacity which was responsible for the fatal crisis . . . The prophets called for a true knowledge of God, justice and love, not *in addition* to the sacrifices but *in opposition* to them."[100] Jeremiah challenged the claim that sacrifices arose due to the divine instruction.[101] Schwager notes that the restoration of sacrifice in the post-exilic period, moderates the fierce condemnation of the pre-exilic prophets. The purified form of faith

---

[98] King, 66.

[99] Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 178-9.

[100] Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation*, 180.

[101] See Jeremiah 7:22.

that the prophets had proclaimed, did preserve the Jews over the Babylonian Exile, since they had no temple, priests, or this ritual.

Girard wholly denies the sacrificial interpretation of the Passion, maintaining that a more intelligible perspective exists. In fact, the death of Jesus "takes place for reasons that have nothing to do with sacrifice."[102] The death, of course, brings about the salvation of humanity, yet through a different means. Girard castigates those Christians that hold the sacrificial perspective, as Pharisees. Girard scholar William Newell underscores, "The greatest error Christians commit is rendering Christ's Passion a sacrifice, a holy blunder that recapitulates the logic of the violent Logos, a mechanism annihilated by Christ's non-sacrificial Passion."[103] Girard appreciates that Vatican II did not use the phrase "the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," but turned toward praising Christ as crucified, died, and risen.[104] Ultimately, if the Gospel texts are read non-sacrificially, the human sciences can finally recognize the *love* implicit in Jesus' motivation unto death.[105]

In important ways, Girard corrects the atonement theory arising in the theology of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Each theologian shares a dislike for rationalistic proofs, but Girard treasures Scripture as a record of the socio-cultural history of mankind. Both of these men envisage themselves rectifying the traditional explanations from before them. Instead of Anselm's stated predicament of humanity's need to provide satisfaction, Girard proposes the grip of mimetic desire and contagion that human beings cannot extricate themselves from. Jesus' ability to overcome mimetic contagion, in itself demonstrates that he is the God-Man.[106] Girard recasts humanity's situation and God's relation to it, in a far more fitting manner.

---

[102] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 179.
[103] Newell, 170.
[104] Ibidem, 160.
[105] Ibid., 142.
[106] Kirwan, 64-5.

The Parable of the Vineyard in the Gospel of Matthew[107] demonstrates the execution of Jesus as a human response, not a divine plan. In Matthew's version, Jesus queries the disciples on what will happen once the vineyard owner's son is sent to collect. The fact that the disciples predict the death of the son, presumed a violent plan designed by God the Father. But "Jesus lets his death and blind listeners come to *their*, not his, conclusion. The text portrays the listeners as prisoners of their own violence and [does] not put violent words in Jesus' mouth [as] both Luke and Mark did."[108] Girard perceives the Matthean parable as especially revealing, to the human and mimetic component involved in the crucifixion.

Girard theorizes, that since Christians cannot comprehend the meaning behind the death of Christ, they follow the Epistle to the Hebrews. These women and men recalled the sacrifices of the pre-exilic Hebrews and fashioned a congruence with the Passion. But Girard names them *incompatible*. "They have not noticed that the sacrifices of the Jewish religion and the sacrifices of all other religions simply reflect what the words of Christ, and his subsequent death, actually *reveal:* the founding death of the scapegoat."[109] Girard critiques that the Epistle to the Hebrews merely reiterates Christ's Passion as an earlier form of sacrifice, with God's responsibility to some degree. It matches the theology found in Second Isaiah, and avoids any revelation of human violence.[110] Schwager holds that Hebrews links the Old and New Testament under the concept of *faith*, not sacrifice. The believer carries on amidst persecution; Jesus carries on against the challenge of sinners.[111] "His 'sacrifice' was that he had learnt obedience, and this obedience was his *faithfulness* to the message of nonviolence at the time of his greatest

[107] See Matt 21:33-46.
[108] Newell, 147.
[109] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 225.
[110] Ibidem, 231.
[111] See Heb 11:1-12:4, 12:3.

persecution."[112] Girard disputes that any aspects of the sacred take place in the death of Christ, nor does this death have anything to do with life. The crowd taunts Jesus, to come down from the cross and perform a demonstration of power. Girard holds, that if Jesus' death was sacrificial it would imply the resurrection was a fruit of the crucifixion. Theology does not attribute Jesus's divinity to the effects of the crucifixion.[113]

III. Scapegoat

Attempting to resolve reciprocal violence, Girard elaborates how cultures arrived at the scapegoat mechanism, often instituted into ritual. The proliferation of scandals and animosity eventually gravitate toward focusing on a perceived guilty party, sacrificed or expelled to engender a provisional peace. Israel eventually developed an annual rite with a goat, and composed the Songs of the Suffering Servant. In first century CE Israel, the resentment towards the Father resulted in a universal enmity against Jesus.[114] Jesus' exalted claims and nonviolence stirred violence against him. The mimetic potency of the persecution overcame any resistance of the Roman governor or even his disciples.

Schwager believes that much of the scapegoat mechanism develops without the conscious knowledge of the community. The energy behind the scapegoat mechanism manifests from an eagerness for violence, awakened by conflictual desire. The frustration of desires and scandals rises to a pitch, then objects or targets fitting for such anger present themselves,

[112] René Girard and Raymund Schwager, *Correspondence 1974-1991*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 53.

[113] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 231-3.

[114] This is one of Schwager's major claims that I will develop in the second chapter.

according to the French scholar.[115] Amidst the growing mimetic violence, the reciprocal belligerence comes to aim at one particular individual.

> The others, the all, will transfer upon this single person [scapegoat] all their aggressions and projections. They will attribute to this victim both blame for the outbreak of violence and credit for the sudden and seemingly wonderful return of peace. They are not aware of the reason for this 'miraculous' return, which occurs because of the unperceived working of the scapegoat mechanism[116]

Even though the resolution originally erupted spontaneously, the effects of provisional peace are so cherished that sacrifice becomes ritually repeated.[117] Schwager outlines that the surviving community persists as oblivious to the notion that their own collective transfer of diffuse violence, generated the fear, peace, and sanctification. Even in rather serene periods, the scapegoat method remains indispensable, due to its effectiveness. A dependence on the ritual develops, as communities savor its tranquilizing effects.[118]

Certain preferential signs encourage communities to select specific members as scapegoats. Girard highlights that women and men have a natural distaste for physical abnormalities and exceptional characteristics. These *preferential signs* are stipulated as the cause for attack on the victims. Most often, these criteria are ludicrous and inadequate, but a level above pure random victimization. Persecutors target handicaps or repulsive traits as cause for confronting these victims. Girard discusses witches and particular racial traits such as those of the Jewish people. Commonly, these victimized people of history were illustrated with distorted faces and handicaps.[119]

---

[115] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 156.
[116] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 15.
[117] Ibidem.
[118] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 20-21.
[119] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 68.

Although most noted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the scapegoat mechanism has features found universally in cultures, and consolidates group identity. The latter largely occurs without the full cognizance of the culture; most peoples manifest the type of "ganging-together" behavior.[120] Kaplan identifies its prevalence today in department meetings and playgrounds: "Once we understand the pervasiveness of scapegoating, and see its function in matters large and small, we can intuit the utility of scapegoating for societies that needed it."[121] Myths later develop and conceal the original violence that occurred in the founding scapegoat murder. The victims' ability to pacify the community raises them to semi or fully divine status.[122] Myths across cultures evidence a primal sacrifice and the obscuration of scattered malice.

The seemingly-miraculous success of the scapegoat mechanism emboldens communities to preserve the resulting calm. Girard describes how communities in awe will live under the sign of that miraculous peace. Hence, they will endeavor to reproduce the "miraculous event that put an end to the crisis, to immolate new victims substituted for the original victim in circumstances as close as possible to the original experience. This is the imperative of ritual."[123] The mysterious peace becomes institutionalized through a seeming replication of the original sacrificial event. Further, some witnesses will correlate the provisional peace with new life, religious transcendence. The "sacred" is envisioned as that power that allows order and harmony to be restored.[124]

Girard conceives that religious systems display mimetic contagion and sacrificial resolution. "The community satisfies its rage against an arbitrary victim in the unshakeable

---

[120] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 190.
[121] Kaplan, 30.
[122] Ibidem, 37.
[123] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 28.
[124] Ibidem, 42-3.

conviction that it has found the one and only cause of its trouble. It then finds itself without adversaries, purged of all hostility." Three factors are evident in the mechanism: the mimetic crisis repeats perpetually in a cyclical way, the gathering together of all against one victim is a typical resolution, and the scapegoat mechanism becomes the *normative resolution* as it becomes institutionalized in the culture. The sacrifice and resulting miraculous peace, become a founding principle of societies.[125]

Girard conceptualizes the notion of scapegoat slightly different than the Leviticus-specified ritual. The term "scapegoat" emerges from the *caper emissaries* of the Vulgate, "one who wards off illnesses" or "destined to Azazel" in the Hebrew scriptures.[126] In chapter sixteen of Leviticus, the high priest symbolically sets the sins of the community on the back of a goat, cast into the desert to the demon Azazel.[127] Girard deduces that goats were susceptible to this ritual, due to their poor odor, constant sex drive, and common reputation.[128] This Leviticus ritual is a highly conscious and vivid demonstration. Girard's form of scapegoating happens at the subconscious level, slightly different than the above. Unlike the official, public ceremony of Judaism, women and men do not quite realize that they are transferring their sins onto the victim.[129] The Leviticus mode of scapegoat ritual is a unique, since it is such a distinct and blunt expression of the transfer of guilt. "Instinctive imitation of the collective transfer of violence upon a random victim led everywhere to analogous sacrificial rites."[130] Most of these practices

[125] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 27.
[126] Ibidem, 131.
[127] See Lev 16:10.
[128] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 155.
[129] Newell, 152.
[130] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 22.

occurred without the public shaming of the person.[131] Although the most renowned demonstration, the Leviticus-scapegoat model is but one form of a cross-cultural phenomenon.

In the book of Isaiah, the Suffering Servant[132] model embodies the collective-transfer of communal guilt on a human individual. Girard notes that the servant appears amidst a period of prophetic crisis as a resolution. Decisively, this individual is not a *form* of the repeated ritual, but a spontaneous event in itself since the Victim's innocence is evident and non-controversial. Girard comments, "the fact that he has no connection with violence and no affinity for it. A whole number of passages lay upon men the principal responsibility for his saving death." It is human beings, not God, that bring about his affliction and death, as in Jesus' situation. Girard notices elsewhere in the prophetic texts that violence is separated from God, compared to ferocious primeval gods. Still, the Old Testament never describes a Yahweh entirely distinct from violence. It is only the Gospel texts in which this is stated.[133] The Suffering Servant sets a paradigm for the innocent, scapegoat human figure.

In a prelude to the New Testament period, resentment had been building towards the Father. Schwager names this a "dark truth," only exposed by means of women and men's contact with the Son. This underpinning clarifies why human anger can easily vacillate between persons and objects; in truth, it is an enmity with God.[134] "Rampant resentment against God is what ultimately lies behind the tendency towards violence, and the fact that through all random scapegoats God is aimed at as the supposedly guilty party." Such resentment has materialized with the lingering threat of the Father, as perceived in the prophetic period of the eighth

[131] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 155.
[132] See Isaiah 53.
[133] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 157.
[134] I will discuss this is the third section of Chapter Two.

century.[135] These persecutors have thus fashioned a dark concept of God on these victims.[136] Underlying discontent with God thus spirals into the infliction of punishment on largely innocent parties.

A universal animosity against Jesus flourished, stimulated by his lofty self-claims.[137] Jesus' controversial choice to heal on the Sabbath had initially motivated violence against him, by the Pharisees. Even before his decision to perform these healings, Mark's gospel describes Jesus proclaiming himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.[138] "It was not an isolated or an occasional transgression of the letter of the Law by Jesus, but his *fundamental* claim to be lord of the Sabbath and thus to be above the Law, that aroused the relentless opposition of the Pharisees."[139] The Gospel of John evidences this same dynamic: Jesus' claims about his own authority with the Father, at the occasion of Sabbath healing.[140] At the trial before the Sanhedrin, Mark and Matthew relate how his accusers sought false witness, but could not find any. Jesus' acknowledgement that he was "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed" brought about the offense to the Sanhedrin and subsequent death sentence.[141] Schwager expounds how all of the Sanhedrin gathered and participated in this conviction,[142] as well as binding and conveying him unto Pontius Pilate.[143]

---

[135] I will discuss this in Chapter Two; Schwager cites Jeremiah, Hosea, and Ezekiel. See *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, p. 53-71.

[136] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 198-9.

[137] Dunn notes Jesus' assumption of forgiveness outside of the Jerusalem cult, as well as dismissal of purity laws, would have incited the chief priests, the principal agents in his trial and execution. See *Jesus Remembered*, p. 784-790.

[138] Mark 2:28.

[139] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 192-3.

[140] John 5:16-18.

[141] Mark 4:61.

[142] Mark 14:64.

[143] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 185, 198-9.

Jesus's curse against the Pharisees reveals a much broader accusation against the persecutors of history. Girard presents Matthew 23:34-36: the murders of Abel, Zechariah, and all the victims between them. It stretches outside the Jewish genealogy, since Cain's ancestry belongs to all people. Abel's death from murderous envy is a prototype for the escalation of conflictual desire. "We are dealing with a universal phenomenon whose consequences are going to fall not only upon the Pharisees but upon this *generation*, that is, upon all those who are contemporary with the Gospels and the time of their diffusion and who remain deaf." Luke's account expands the situation even wider; the blood of all the prophets, Abel, and Zechariah are stated, from the foundation of the world.[144] Girard clarifies that the Pharisees have no "hereditary transmission of guilt" but an "intellectual and spiritual solidarity." Unconsciously they have repeated the actions of the generations before them, maintaining the same mental attitude, and declining to admit their own violence.[145] Schwager simplifies their fault to a three-fold pattern: lies, satanic spirit, and inclination to murder.[146]

The persecutors wield such mimetic power that no fraternal support or innocence from indictments can preserve Jesus. Girard stresses, "The fact that even the disciples cannot resist the effect of the scapegoat reveals the power exerted by the persecutors' account over man." Just as in, a witch-hunt, the disciples are drawn into the mimetic fervor. The crowd becomes so potent that even the foreign administrator is swayed. Even the warning of Pilate's wife, dramatized in the Gospel of Matthew, cannot overcome the mimetic compulsion of the crowd.[147] Girard emphasizes that no figure would have more influence on the legate than his wife, yet the

---

[144] Luke 11:51.
[145] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 160.
[146] Raymond Schwager, "Christ's Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice," *Semeia*, vol. 33, 1985, 114.
[147] Matt 27:19.

scapegoat mechanism exerted by the crowd remains dominant.[148] The mimetic effect surpasses cultural barriers and marriage relationships.

In Girardian theory, the fault for the crucifixion lies at the feet of a sinful humanity under the power of mimetic contagion, not a plan of the Father. Girard here rejects those "medieval and modern theories of redemption" that list "God's honor, God's justice, even God's anger, must be satisfied. These theories don't seriously look in the direction where the answer must lie: sinful humanity, human relations, mimetic contagion, which is the same thing as Satan."[149] Schwager speculates then upon the plan of the Father: he sent the Son so that hatred might flow out of persecutors, and they might receive love. The resentment and cruel deeds against Jesus climaxed in the conviction and execution. Even though Jesus had received animosity and revenge, redeeming love flowed back to the people. The curse, hatred, and mimetic contagion were overcome.[150]

Girard specifies, however, that Jesus' death was a *decision of the crowds*. It was not a divine plan. Instead, it is correlated with all the sacrifices at the basis of ritual.

> Because it reproduces the founding event of all rituals, the Passion is connected with every ritual on the entire planet. There is not an incident in it that cannot be found in countless instances: the preliminary trial, the derisive crowd, the grotesque honours [sic] accorded to the victim, and the particular role place by chance, in the form of casting lots, which here affects not the choice of the victim but the way in which his clothing is disposed of. The final feature is the degrading punishment that takes place outside the holy city in order not to contaminate it.[151]

It was not perceived as an institutionalized ritual by the crowds, yet Jesus' death carried out the mechanisms of mimetic conflict. Schwager underscores that "The *whole* Council *in unison* condemns Jesus (Mark 15:1; Matt 17:11), and the *whole* people demands his crucifixion (Matt

---

[148] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 105, 106.
[149] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 150.
[150] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 214.
[151] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 167.

27:22, 25). John's gospel outlines a "great conspiracy into which all are drawn through contagion."[152] Though some Christians look to Caiaphas or Pontius Pilate for fault, Girard and Schwager are insistent on the communal dimension of the indictment.

IV. Satan

In conversation with an assortment of Biblical scenes, Girardian theory schematizes a sophisticated understanding of Satan. Satan or evil are not merely reduced to a person, nor merely the collective momentum for violence. A whole vocabulary of worldly powers against God, is present in the Biblical texts. Satan strives to seduce and deceive human beings, into violence and perverse imitation of the divine. In some ways, Satan is present in every kingdom. Girard carefully assesses the scenes from the Passion itself. Satan engenders disorder in the Biblical context, finally overcome by Jesus' crucifixion. Girard confidently sidesteps the traditional errors propounded on Satan in past centuries.

Satan has generated a host of earthly and celestial powers, distracting human beings with false transcendence and idolatry. Jesus pushes into a definitive conflict with these powers; he defeats them at the moment he announces them and perishes.[153] Girard lists "sovereignties," "thrones," "dominions," "princes of the kingdom of the air," "elements of the world," and "princes of this world." The New Testament authors can distinguish among these: "what they seek to clarify is the combination of material power and spiritual power that is the sovereign reality stemming from collective, founding murders." Girard reasons that the multiplicity of names arises from paradox, a duality that cannot be captured in human language. Contemporary

[152] Schwager, "Christ's Death," 115.
[153] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 191.

readers presume that the New Testament authors haphazardly perceive magic at work in the world, failing to grasp the complicated false transcendence spawned by such powers. This effect in itself is "diabolical," not the powers in themselves.[154] The language of the New Testament thus renders the host of powers unleashed by Satan upon the earth.

The Kingdom of Satan then denotes the cycle of violence and deceit present with the scapegoat mechanism in cultures. A process founded by that original model for all the sacrificial rites, the death of the scapegoat. "What is strange is that the founding principle and the principle of ultimate destruction are one and the same." Once the mechanism is exposed before all on the Cross by the death of an innocent victim, Jesus, the kingdom will be possible to be defeated.[155] Jesus will inaugurate a new model of life for communal relations and worship. The Cross reveals the accusation mechanism, takes the side of the victims, and surmounts all cultures rooted in the scapegoat mechanism.[156] In this way, the Cross is victorious over the potency of mimetic contagion in all cultures.

Newell clarifies that Girard's Satan propagates "bad contagion," a disruption and reconstitution of cultures. Satan's stimulus of collective violence disintegrates into culture, establishes a provisional peace through victim-sacrifice, and fosters a primitive unity. "As such, Satan is the father of all cultures as well as of the infectious disease which causes violence when the culture misinterprets the cause of its turmoil and resorts once again to the murder."[157] Hence a personal and communal infection of Satan always exists, from conflictual desire to collective disruption. Satan possesses the power to elevate conflictual desires to communal sacrifice.

---

[154] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 98-99.
[155] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 187.
[156] Palaver, 260.
[157] Newell, 143.

Palaver maintains that Girard's version of Satan avoids the problematic theories of anti-God and non-existence. It is far more nuanced than merely defining Satan as God's opponent or the end of life. Satan does not exist merely as an excuse for God or for human beings, in their misdeeds. In fact, Satan is always *someone*, either present in the desiring subject or the strong motivation of the violent mob. Satan embodies the false, perverse imitation of God. Secondly, Girard evades the misconception of the nonbelief in Satan. Palaver correlates that Girard more closely matches the narrative of William Golding, the author of *Lord of the Flies*. The lost children fall prey to the mechanism of collective violence, similar to the theory Girard espouses.[158] Although not perfectly known as a celestial or earthly being, in harmony with Scripture, Girard's Satan is a coherent theory that disregards errors of the past.

Satan's primary mission focuses on the seduction of human beings into nefarious behavior. Satan escorts us into expecting that prohibitions provide neither wisdom nor danger; no repercussions shall occur from their violation. After leading a human being into a desire that contains conflict, an unanticipated obstacle surfaces and Satan is transformed into an adversary.[159] Schwager accentuates, "And so it must be his essential character to deceive humans not only about the kind and manner of his activity, but in *everything*. We must therefore reckon that Satan as undefeated and still able to deceive appears to men differently from the one who is already conquered."[160] Schwager continues, Satan then plays a primary role in the Passion narratives themselves. Satan has diminished the import of Mosaic Law, an organizing principle of the Jewish people.[161]

---

[158] Palaver, 260.
[159] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 32-3.
[160] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 147.
[161] The Oxford Dictionary of the Bible defines Satan as "the adversary'; and as such he appears in Job as one of the sons of God, delegated to inform God about human frailties. Later he becomes a malevolent being (1

Satan scatters belief into deceptions of his non-presence or omnipresence as history attests. Schwager points out, "In the witchcraft trials he seduced human beings into seeing him almost everywhere. The devil thus seems even more cunning than the language of Christian wisdom assumes." Astonishingly, the battle against evil can fortify and spread its power. A further paradox unfolded from these witch-trials: credence in the non-belief in Satan accelerated among Enlightenment thinkers. Schwager connects this trajectory to Rudolf Bultmann, who denied the existence of spirits, subsequent to the discovery of the laws of nature.[162] Both spontaneous human events and pervasive scientific-empiricism can affect the credibility of satanic presence.[163] Satan manipulates the battle against him, targeting human victims and confusing beliefs.

Although not present as a *figure* in the Passion scenes, Schwager posits the steady, crucial presence of the satanic in the Passion. Two central roles for Satan emerge in these scenes: the accusation of human beings before God and human beings' perverse desire to become God. The Sanhedrin, Jesus' accusers, charge him before God with what they envision to be sin. They construct an innocent one as scapegoat in a fresh manner. In the Gospel of John, the resistance of Satan is delineated in a different manner. Jesus performed many signs and preached, but many would not come to believe.[164] Schwager deduces that Jesus brought many of these individuals to initial belief, but they would not commit themselves to him. "By this

---

Chron. 21: 1), and the enemy of God over Jesus (Luke 22: 3). He thus becomes the Devil (*diabolos* in Greek), identified with Beelzebub (Matt. 12: 26). Satan is said to have a battalion of demons who may enter human beings (Luke 9: 42) and may tempt them to evil (Jas. 2: 19). In the gospel of John there are *no* lesser demons and Jesus works no exorcisms; the principals alone, Jesus and the Devil, engage in conflict (John 13: 2) but eventually according to Revelation Satan will perish in a lake of fire (Rev. 20: 10–15)."

[162] Rudolf Karl Bultmann separates the truths in the Gospel and the mythological prose in which they are located. If the inherent truths are to guide modern human beings, myths must be extricated from the New Testament.

[163] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 144-5.

[164] John 6:60-69, 12:37.

reciprocal search for honor and recognition humans balance themselves through one another and thus shield themselves in a self-sufficient way against God. A satanic tendency arises."[165] The satanic effect results in the process of accusation before God, as well as an unwillingness to publicly acknowledge belief in Jesus.

Jesus counters the effects of Satan by exposing the mechanisms that disrupt human relations and foster communal violence. Girard stresses that Jesus "almost every time he opens his mouth, reveals the secret of Satan's power, he becomes, in the eyes of Satan, a most intolerable source of disorder."[166] The eternal hiddenness of mimesis is brought to life, and its mechanistic cycle is confused by nonviolence. Jesus so adamantly challenges Satan, that he must be silenced. Hence, Jesus himself falls subject to the scapegoat mechanism, a previously efficacious means to eliminate the outsider. Satan's campaign is foiled, however, as the public display of Jesus' death exposes mimetic contagion once and for all. The Paraclete subsequently empowers the disciples, with a firm faith, to witness to Jesus' life and passion.[167] Jesus' ministry undoes the subtle deception and momentum to violence, boosted by the Satanic.

Although this victory over Satan is a fundamental, Schwager notes that the Passion narratives never stipulate this defeat. "The Adversary is mentioned as long as he is not overcome and still does his work. It is also clearly said that he is defeated by the crucifixion of Christ. But the Gospels never seem to recount how the defeat is accomplished."[168] Schwager opines that it would be odd for the Bible to strive for concealment. At Easter, the one accused and cast out is pronounced as the true Son. The denunciation against Jesus is turned against his

[165] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 148-9.
[166] Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 207.
[167] Ibidem.
[168] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 146.

accusers, expelling both the mechanism of Satan and false image of God. In this way, the defeat of Satan remains a primary feature of the doctrine of redemption.[169]

The actions and effects of Satan endure as pivotal in the theology of mimetic theory. The Gospel writers may seem to deploy equivocal vocabulary for Satan, but this indicates the abundant effects of his actions upon the earth. Girard fully associates Satan with the *skandalon*, as when he chastises Peter in Matthew 16:23.[170] Satan endeavors to seduce and deceive human beings, particularly into false imitation of the Father. He remains an essential presence in the Passion accounts, as momentum gathers for the accusations against Christ and his violent execution. Despite all this, the public spectacle of the cross unmasks Satan's mimetic contagion and the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples to overcome their guilt.

V. Dramatic Theology

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Raymund Schwager possess a distinctive approach to Biblical history in dramatic theology. These authors outline salvation history and the Incarnation in stages or a sequence. The purpose of such a model is to account for the seeming transformation from God's anger to mercy. Schwager admits the role of Yahweh as avenger and warrior in the Old Testament. To explain the transformation from anger to mercy, Schwager interprets Jesus' ministry as five acts. The concept of God's judgment is further clarified. Cowdell offers that this technique overcomes the usual distinctions of theology from above and below. In those models, the believer remains passive; Theo-Drama communicates God's revelation and grace working through the believers. Still more, dramatic theology corrects the

[169] Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 150-1.
[170] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 25.

shortcomings of the previously popular narrative theology of the 1980s.[171] Schwager appreciates its inclusion of human experience, but it can end inconclusively.[172] Although these two men correspond in several areas, Schwager's theology may be clearly distinguished from the more famous von Balthasar.

One of the initial, challenging tasks of theology arose to reconcile the paradoxical images of God's love and justice. Paradoxes are present throughout the human world; they cannot fully be eliminated or resolved. From early Christianity, a controversy continues about the irreconcilable images of God's judgment, anger, and mercy. Schwager posits that St. Paul broached the subject of varied sentiments, yet did not settle the dispute. The Christian Gnostic Marcion further muddled the situation by accentuating the difference between avenging Yahweh and gentle Jesus. None of the many philosophical systems have managed to simplify this confusion. Schwager advances the dilemma forward in the innovative approaches of Karl Barth and von Balthasar. Barth arranges the various attributes of the divine, from their scattered references found in scripture. Nonetheless, he fails to square the anger of the Father with the love of enemies, located in the message of Jesus. Schwager decries the fact that Jesus' ministry period has a "subordinate role" in prior dramatic theology.[173] His style of dramatic theology will grapple with the paradox, leaving Jesus' ministry as a centerpiece.

Schwager attests that the lens of drama is highly appropriate and supports a systematic viewpoint. An important distinction is that drama is not mere narrative, because it "is able to integrate a genuine line of reasoning." Drama does not proceed without a conclusion as in an

[171] I will discuss this in further detail on subsequent pages.

[172] Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018) 125-6.

[173] Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation*, 1-2, 9, 11.

epic, but it proceeds itself through conflicts and their resolutions. The conflict that leads to the Cross and its climactic resolution overwhelms most forms of reasoning.[174] Schwager attempts to survey the *total picture* of Jesus' campaign through his dramatic approach. He explains,

> In order to take the historical-critical exegesis of individual texts really seriously from the systematic viewpoint, the mediation of a dramatic exegesis is needed, which gathers together larger groups of texts under key words and coordinates them on the model of conflictual action[175]

The great conflicts of theology thus stay constantly present, and the theologian conducts a circumspect analysis of divine vengeance and anger.

The portrayal of Yahweh as divine avenger arose from the prophets, demanding that the unfortunate have equal protection under the Law of Moses. Based in the Covenant, the Israelites had come to expect that all had equal dignity and representation under the Mosaic Code. But the wealthy and religious elites gained advantage, which provoked the prophets to announce Yahweh's fierce judgment of those who oppressed the poor and widows. Schwager observes, "There were frequent prayers, therefore, begging for Yahweh's retributory and avenging intercession."[176] Ancient societies envisioned retribution as a communal act. If someone was exploited, the whole party would be obliged to wage retribution against the oppressor. Characteristic of all of antiquity, the pervasiveness of violence touched all cultures and economic groups. The fierce image of the latter in prophetic language persisted as a well-known archetype.

Dramatic theology widens the perception of the judgment of the Jewish people beyond society's failure to obey the law. Jesus stepped into this self-judgment that human beings had

---

[174] Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation*, 12-13.
[175] Ibidem, 16.
[176] Ibid., 20.

fallen prey to, permitting himself to be accused and judged by his opponents. Much later, the "verdict" of the Father at the Resurrection set forth forgiveness to his enemies. Paul presents this transition in a similar manner.

> There are people who have condemned Jesus in the name of the law and branded him as a curse (Gal. 3:13), as sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and even as a satanic being (John 19:7). People have ganged up against him (Acts 4:27), projected the evil in their hearts onto him, and thus made him the bearer of sins (1 Pet. 2:22-24) and scapegoat.[177]

The judges charged Jesus with an accusation which did not belong to him; they engaged in self-deception of the righteousness of their accusations. John envisages Satan's effects in their hardness of hearts. Ultimately, Schwager pronounces that retribution and goodness do not ascribe to the Father in an equal manner; a trust in prevailing goodness that would perennially forgive iniquities prevailed.

Interpreting Jesus' ministry in the scheme of performance remains essential. Performance predominated as ubiquitous from ancient tribes, high cultures, the young, and adults.[178] The actor or actress thrusts his/her own selfhood into the role. Jesus "himself stood entirely at the service of his mission, and in the course of his existence he lived out only the drama of his mission . . . This event embracing him from above was at the same time the innermost dimension of his own human life." He sets aside his own desire to survive, caught up in this drama of salvation.[179] Schwager associates Jesus' performance with *kenosis*, a total adoption of role and loss of self.

The version of Schwager's Theo-Drama takes place over five acts. The initial movement is the announcing of the Kingdom, an invitation to repent, reception of forgiveness, and the

[177] Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation*, 168-9.
[178] Ibidem, 222.
[179] Ibid., 218-219.

realization of God's new turn towards Israel. Kirwan notes that the conclusion to this act is not finalized, since the response of Jesus' listeners is unknown. The effects of the proclamation of the Resurrection only occur in the Acts of the Apostles. The Second Act involves the opposition and rejection of Jesus' message. Jesus responds with criticism of the lack of faith and judgment. The Parable of the Vineyard foreshadows the human response to Jesus' mission. In Act III, Jesus proclaims the message of the first act, but mimetic contagion has accelerated and Jesus is executed. God the Father decisively vindicates Jesus in Act IV, through the event of the Resurrection. The reconstitution of the Christian community occurs with the sending of the Holy Spirit in Act V. Kirwan expresses, this scheme is the full application of Girard to a Christological salvation history.[180]

Even though correspondences exist, Schwager's Theo-Drama may be contrasted with von Balthasar in terms of greater personalism and inclusion of the ministry period. Schwager notices crucial omissions, namely a lack of political theology, addressing the cycle of violence, and the problematic descent into hell. Von Balthasar includes little of the preaching of the Kingdom of God.[181] Barth and von Balthasar also speculate that the redeemed human being sets aside his/her own life and lives in Christ, led by the Spirit. Schwager anticipates that human freedom is perfected, so that "The life bestowed does not alienate people from their own life, but gives form to what is indeterminate in them and thus brings out their humanity all the more . . . In all this, the human person should not be understood as a fixed quantity, closed in on itself, which can be changed only from outside."[182] Schwager appropriately utilizes the Gospel episodes, held as central in Christian revelation, compared to the neglect of von Balthasar.

[180] Kirwan, 37-8.
[181] Ibidem, 37.
[182] Schwager, *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation,* 220.

Mimetic theory readily accounts for the precipitous wave of violence that rose up from human communities, to sacrifice Jesus as victim. Girard effectively locates the Old Testament and social science evidence, for the effects of conflictual desire. In first century Israel, Jesus confronts these unchecked desires and attitudes, unleashing malevolence as he witnesses nonviolence and the Father's love. Girard reiterates the significance of desire for religion, while discounting Jesus as a sacrifice in abeyance to the Father. The standpoints on sacrifice were pluriform, however, with no set Hebrew interpretation on the act. A strength of Girardianism is a stout account of the effects of Satan: Satan seduces and deceives human beings into false imitation of the father and disrupts human communities. Schwager's additional lens of dramatic theology regularizes the seeming judgment, wrath, and compassionate mercy of the Father. Crucial here is the acknowledgment of the lingering image of the vengeful Father from the prophets, contributing to this sense of rivalry. In this second chapter, I will turn to the spirituality of Jesus that overcomes this supposed demanding God, and the means by which he implants the image of the loving Father among his followers.

As we have seen, the combined anthropology and theology from these two scholars proffer an incisive read of human desires, communal relations, and the machinations of Satan. Its unique hermeneutical angle results in a worthwhile consideration of the Passion account and the Patriarchs. Girard effectively analyzes primeval myth and Judeo-Christian stories, while distinguishing the two. Meanwhile, he assesses the sweep of sacrifice across societies, its foundation for culture, and potent capacity to temporarily resolve communal discord. Sacrifice, of course, remains punitive and often violent towards the innocent, which is why its hidden perils must be exposed.

Chapter Two: Jesus' Novel Spirituality and Non-destructive Way of Life

Jesus' original spirituality of deep security and trust in the Father inspired his ministry, overcoming the threat of the Father perceived by many Jews of his era. Tenderness and love enveloped his perception of the divine presence. The gospels narratives of Jesus' baptism seem to confirm the validity of this mode of faith and his unique personhood. As his itinerant ministry among Galileans proceeded, the manner of prayer he popularized would be characterized by the *Abba experience*, inviting others to acquire this same childlike trust.[183] Jesus realized he must convey this relationship of the gentle Father to his contemporaries. Jesus' style of companionship to his disciples overcame their agitation and fears, ultimately removed at Pentecost. Prior to the defeat of Satan and mimetic contagion by means of the Crucifixion, Jesus' three years of ministry imprint a spirituality of loving security in the Father and nonviolent behavior. For Girard, the divinity of Jesus remained in his sole abilities to surmount the violent temporal mechanisms. Christ's divinity is the only means to account for the decisive exposure of cyclical violence and deconstruction of cultures.[184]

In this chapter, I will examine Raymund Schwager's formulation of the arc of Jesus' exceptional spiritual perspective and its impact among his followers. His everyday experiences attested to the kindly, rather than demanding Father. The depth of freedom and security in Jesus' prayer was propagated to others by means of his preaching and way of being. Jesus' Abba-Spirituality agrees most completely with human nature and it alone can guide persons to freedom and peace. Jesus offered his same relationship to the Father to those who listened to him, reaching beyond even the Jewish Messianic expectations. In his journeys with the disciples, he

[183] This will be described at length in the second section.

[184] Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 205, 209.

continued beside them in their doubts and longing for the Kingdom. His designation of them as *friends* prevailed over any rivalries they might hold, with him or the Father.

I. The Gospels as Credible Testimony for a Life of Christ

Any critical rendering of the life of Christ depends upon a multi-document corpus known as the Gospels. The four gospels do not have a uniform narrative, nor can these four accounts be wholly harmonized. Written largely during the second generation of Christians, each expresses a certain theology and targets presumably different audiences. Theologians attribute them to a certain named author, with a corresponding Christian community. With this background, some scholars are reluctant to attempt exposition of the life of Christ, other than *entirely within the lens of an evangelist*. Modern Biblical scholarship undermined the appreciation of gospel texts as reliable, first-hand accounts. Richard Bauckham of the University of St. Andrews has reestablished the authenticity of the Gospels as eyewitness testimony and memory, based on extensive witnesses to the events of Jesus' ministry.

Rather than mere hearsay, *testimony* is a well-regarded historical category for the reporting of public events. Bauckham acknowledges that there can be valid excuses for trusting or distrusting a person. But trusting a person's account is still a rational decision. "Gospels understood as testimony are the entirely appropriate means of access to the historical reality of Jesus . . . it is a rather neglected fact that all history, like all knowledge, relies on testimony."[185] Testimony is a reputable, suitable method to appropriate the historical picture of Jesus and the

[185] Richard A. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 5.

revelation of God. Bauckham admits that these observations will be intricately linked with meaning-making.

Mark, Luke, and John exemplify texts in which a single voice or writer has carried an account through all the events of Jesus' life.[186] Bauckham cites the historiographic principle, "that the most authoritative eyewitness is one who was present at the events narrated from their beginning to their end and can therefore vouch for the overall shape of the story as well as for specific key events." The above texts incorporate a literary device named an *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony. Lucan and Porphyry, subsequent Greek biographies employ *inclusio* in a reliable manner. Hence it is verified as a reliable biographical tool of antiquity. Mark designates Peter as the most significant witness, while Luke follows Mark's precedent. Luke stipulates in the preface, his own contact to eyewitnesses from the origins of Jesus' ministry. John highlights Peter's particular importance, as well as the statements from the Beloved Disciple.[187]

The regularly named apostles and wider audience of disciples, rules out any anonymous invention of Jesus' biography. Bauckham emphasizes that at no place in the gospel tradition, do communities generate stories of Jesus themselves; they merely *receive* from prior eyewitnesses. A large portion of the Jerusalem church is specified in Acts as eyewitnesses:

> Peter (chs. 1-15), James (12:2) and John (3:1-4:31; 8:14-25) the sons of Zebedee, and the rest of the original Twelve (1:13), Matthias (1:23-26), James the Lord's brother (12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18-25) and the other brothers (1:14: not named), Barnabas (4:36-37; 9:27; 11:22-26, 30; 12:25-15:39), Joseph Barsabbas (1:23), Mary the mother of Jesus (1:14), Mnason (21:16), and Silas (15:22-18:5; = Silvanus in Paul).[188]

[186] Bauckham also discusses the intent of the authors. See Luke on p. 116-7, Mark on p. 171, John on p. 358-368.

[187] Bauckham, 146-7.

[188] Ibidem, 297.

St. Paul's epistles themselves list Peter, John son of Zebedee, James brother of Jesus, Barnabas, Andronicus and Junia, Silvanus, and the remaining ten apostles.[189] The community received testimony from well-identified, contemporary witnesses to Jesus' saving works. Further, the three previously mentioned gospels were not designed to be anonymous; they installed a title and many attributed works of the Greco-Roman world deployed the same practice.[190]

Recollective memory is extremely consistent when it exhibits five factors. A "unique or unusual event," one that stands out from regular occurrences or is unanticipated, leads to better memory. An important event that has a crucial impact on one's life, is easily held in the memory. Thirdly, the same can be said of an occurrence in which the subject is passionately involved. Such events tend to be important occurrences as well. The most accurate memories include vivid imagery and irrelevant detail. Bauckham aligns a great many of the episodes of Jesus' life with these key factors. The gospel accounts, derived from disciple-witnesses, exhibit those contemporary markers of credible memories.[191]

Testimony remains in the Biblical tradition as irreducible and participative recollections. Contemporary readers are unable to return to the recollected events, to verify for themselves. The memories come mixed with interpretation. Bauckham summarizes that "Reading the Gospels as eyewitness testimony differs therefore from attempts at historical reconstruction behind the texts. It takes the Gospels seriously as they are . . . it honors the form of historiography they are." Bauckham declares that a "radical suspicion of testimony is a kind of epistemological suicide," not unlike disregarding all testimony in twenty-first century life. The alternative approach of individual verification of facts, leads only to a collection of disparate

[189] Bauckham, 298.
[190] Ibidem, 300.
[191] Ibid., 330-2, 341-3.

facts with no coherence or meaning. Especially with momentous events, the testimony of participating eyewitnesses is very credible.[192]

II. Jesus Experiences the Father as a Tender Presence and Deep Security

Raymund Schwager's *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life* attempts to construct the distinctive spirituality of Jesus, from the origins of his youthful self-understanding. The text imagines the mystical maturation of Jesus, with constant references to formative texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. Schwager visualizes a freedom in Jesus among the people of his time. He possesses a wordless trust and security in God, and only knew Him as a good father. Power and abundant love flowed through him at a young age. Nurtured in the steadfastness and goodness of the Father, these early experiences and perspectives express themselves throughout the teachings of Jesus' ministry period.

Even though no explicit texts defining Jesus' spiritual evolution exist, Schwager speculates an extensive arc of spiritual ripening likely occurred. The only specific data happens in Luke 2:52: Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. It is rather unlikely that Jesus only became self-aware of his vocation at his baptism. Schwager cites H. Schurmann, that Jesus' parables indicate collected memories, not impromptu compositions on Jewish life. Once the public ministry began, Jesus withdrew regularly for private prayer and sometimes fasting.[193] It is a natural deduction that Jesus prepared himself beforehand in the Nazareth years. "Here he may have experienced the nearness of God as a reality coming upon him in such a way that he began his public ministry not according to his own plans, but because

[192] Bauckham, 505-7.
[193] Schwager cites Luke 3:21, Mark 1:35, 6:46.

he felt himself to be 'destined' or 'sent.'"[194] A young Jewish boy would have a collection of synagogue experiences, scripture, and agrarian images, in addition to his own subjective spiritual awakenings.

Observing his spirituality in the ministry period, a fundamental trust in the divine likely arose in childhood. Even prior to understanding good and evil, Schwager sets forth that Jesus

> Often felt himself strangely supported and held. He felt deeply the sense of security when he was taken into his mother's arms or spent time near her, and already at that age the sacred songs of Isaiah gripped him. Yet the more he matured, the stronger the power of the peace from the depths of his own heart radiated out to him[195]

An unthematic spiritual trust seemed to have grounded Jesus, even before embarking on any mission or prior to his own self-understanding. Schwager conjures that Jeremiah 1:5 loitered as his earliest memory, being consecrated in his mother's womb for a special task. This childlike trust[196] carried Jesus through the temptations in the wilderness "that his Abba would lead him further when the moment was right."[197] Amidst all the turmoil that would erupt during Jesus' ministry, an underpinning trust in God had resided with him since his earliest consciousness.

According to Schwager, the gospels describe that Jesus had always experienced God as a gentle presence, interspersed with powerful love. While his companions became enchanted with the young women of Nazareth, Jesus felt the love of God as a passion: "Whatever drew him to his God, he experienced it as powerful flames and embers of fire."[198] His enchantment of a life wholly devoted to God overwhelmed inclinations to romantic love. He envisioned Lady Wisdom calling out to the people of Israel (8:2), with the same potency of love as in the Song of

---

[194] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 27.

[195] Raymund Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*, trans. James G. Williams, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 14.

[196] Schwager cites 1 Sam 16:3

[197] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 43.

[198] Ibidem, 25, 84.

Songs (8:6). Love, both passionate and gentle, existed as the primary emotion for Jesus surrounding the divine. This is in utter contrast with some of his contemporaries' fears of vengeance and resentment.

Jesus' self-reference to the Messiah as well as the Son of Man, indicated a sense of the Messiah beyond nationalist aspirations. Schwager denies that Jesus could have appropriated all the content that is associated with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. He demonstrated little of the imagery of the apocalypticists, but he did express their notion of *coming judgment*. "Whereas the judgment according to the visions of the apocalypticists takes place in the struggle against the enemies of God, Jesus proclaimed his Father as a God of love for one's enemies and interpreted the judgment as a self-condemnation of those who shut themselves away from this love."[199] Jesus' Abba-spirituality transformed the prophecies he had received from the Book of Daniel.

The possessed and outsiders name Jesus as Messiah, and he embraces the title only before the Sanhedrin. Until the final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus ordered the possessed (Mark 1:23-26) and Peter (Mark 8:27-30) to refrain from publicizing him as the Messiah. This intent is conspicuous in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus did recognize this title before the Jewish council (Mark 14:61-64). For Schwager, this particular title allows Jesus' to expand and cultivate the message of the Kingdom of God, built upon the salvation history of the Jewish people.[200]

Schwager's mentor René Girard settles on Jesus as the *final prophet*, as he summarizes and completes their revelatory effect of his prophetic forebears. A subtle shift occurs in the prophecy of Jesus, breaking with the Hebrew Scriptures. "This is the complete elimination of the sacrificial for the first time—the end of the divine violence and the explicit revelation of all

[199] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 73.
[200] Ibidem, 44-5.

that has gone before. It calls for a complete change of emphasis and spiritual metamorphosis without precedent in the whole history of mankind."[201] Girard also envisions Jesus' teachings as eliminating the antagonism among doubles, mimetic rivals prone to escalating violence. For this anthropologist and literary theorist, the exposure of mimetic violence remains paramount in the Jesus-event.

Schwager interprets the Baptism at the Jordan as the moment in which Jesus' identification as the Son of Man crystallized. The voice from Heaven named Jesus as Son, in whom the Father is well-pleased.[202] As the words appear directed to the Son of Man figure, the gospel writers portray Jesus having the epiphany that the Son of Man is *himself*. "To a depth which remained a mystery to him he merged with the form even as he felt it beside him. Even though his consciousness still seemed to melt into infinity, yet everything happening was gathered together in the certainty that he himself was the beloved son."[203] For Schwager, not only did Jesus conclusively hear his relationship and the love of the Father, but he grasped his own status as the Son of Man.

The symbols of the dove and bride further shaped Jesus' sense of relationship to the Father. Schwager interjects the imagery of Song of Songs (2:14). "Jesus felt himself like a dove, like a bride whose heart awoke under the breath of the bridegroom, and he became aware of how God was inclined fully towards him."[204] He was immersed in the beating wings of the dove, perceiving that he was being led by a stealthy force. Schwager elaborates Jesus' new relationship with the Father, along the lines of the spousal language of Isaiah 62. God rejoiced

---

[201] Rene Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 200.

[202] Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22.

[203] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 35.

[204] Ibidem, 35.

over the person of Jesus, as a husband over a new bride. These words and images stirred in the person of Jesus, fostering a profound peace, and solidify Jesus' concept of the loving Father. "The words that the little children in Galilee used so confidently when they called to their fathers came involuntarily to his lips: *Abba*. He had to give thanks, and he gave thanks for a steadfast love which endures forever (Ps. 136:26)." For Schwager, the baptism episode solidifies Jesus' knowledge of the loving Father, the Abba.

In the course of the sojourn in the Wilderness, Schwager suggests a key text from the Wisdom of Solomon informed Jesus' comprehension of the dilemma of his times. Jesus' was mesmerized by a certain passage from his youth, Wisdom 18:14-17. In a moment of epiphany, Jesus comprehended that the image of the fierce warrior no longer applied to the Father. "Such delusional phantoms must have risen in the hearts of the Egyptians as they had become troubled and alarmed on Passover night with the exodus of the chosen people (Wisdom 17:13-15)."[205] According to Schwager, the tempter had distorted the word; a *veil* had been laid over the treasured Word of God. This Word had come to dwell with Jesus and would flow out from him. The discernment in the Wilderness enabled Jesus to conceive of the imagined threat from the Father, stemming from his militant reprisals against the Egyptians; the Jews' image of God had been clouded after these events.

Following several months of ministry, Jesus embarked in a period of prayer with his closest disciples to discover how to speak to a hardhearted people. Schwager says that Jesus had become disappointed that women and men had been disinterested in his message of forgiveness.[206] He himself did not want to prophesy with the expectancy of Isaiah, because

[205] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 41.
[206] See Matt 13:10-15, 13:54-58, Luke 11:29.

Isaiah had been rejected by his contemporaries. The Swiss theologian writes, "Yet how could this miracle come about after the word of forgiveness had rebounded off a wall of indifference and rigidity? Was there a way to gain access to people who were caught in the spell of the dark power and whose hearts remained imprisoned?"[207] Puzzled by the callousness of the people, Jesus elected to separate himself from the crowds, most followers, and listen closely to the silence and voice of his Father.

The Baptism experience thus solidified Jesus' understanding of a loving God, the Son of Man, and perseverance in ministry and persecution in Schwager's recitation. Jesus had undergone a slow maturation in his consciousness of mission, perceiving through the Wisdom of Solomon, the gripping dilemma of his era. The voice from Heaven confirmed Jesus as the Beloved Son; Jesus realized his own role as the mysterious Son of Man from Daniel 7. The prophecy of the Messiah allowed Jesus to elaborate on the meaning of the campaign of the Kingdom of God. Symbols assisted Jesus' growth in comprehension in this process: he felt himself aflutter as a dove, and cherished as a young man adored by his new bride. The conception of God as Abba thus adopts a more prominent role in the preaching and ministry of Jesus.

III. The Appropriation and Reception of God as Father in Jesus' Ministry

Schwager postulates that Jesus' novel impression of the immanence and tender nature of God, spread from his personal prayer to communal life. For the Swiss theologian, these concepts evidence "a delicate but striking shift over against the religious experience of Israel." It blended

[207] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 98-9.

Jesus' new perception of his own role with a fresh image of the Father for first century Palestine. Schwager cites the baptism narratives[208] as testimony for this style of revelation.[209] *Jesus of Nazareth* articulates that a new "sovereignty" drove Jesus forward, into a mission to share this new insight of the Father to others.[210] Schwager highlights that the term Abba had not been utilized by Palestinian Jews for prayer, prior to Jesus' era. He theorizes that the term *Father* would be avoided, so as to evade mythological errors on divine/human birth. Jesus speaks of God as *his* Father 170 times in the Gospel texts. This element of Jesus' teaching was an obvious facet for his audiences to attend to and imitate in their spirituality.

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Schwager deliberates how Jesus recognized that his Jewish contemporaries initially perceived an intimidating God, in contrast to Jesus' own sense of the loving Father. Turning to Jeremiah (15:4), Joel (2:3), and Ezekiel (21:9-10), Jesus learned how the prophets had upbraided an unjust and unfaithful people during the monarchic period. Whereas the nationalism at the time obscured the ferocity of this critique, the criticism's latent vividness sprang powerfully anew in the post-exilic period. In contrast, Jesus himself was aware of God's love and embrace of Creation. "All things about him praised their Creator. The grimace of the idols and the images of anxieties and chains fell away from him, and the freedom and wisdom of God played for him on the entire earth (Prov. 8:31)."[211] Jesus had to impress those Hebrew passages of the loving Father against the more lingering prophetic diatribes.

Schwager's theology presupposes that the Jews recognized the power of God through gory and violent actions. It is usually associated with judgment in the prophetic tradition.

---

[208] Matt 11:25 and parallels.
[209] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 30.
[210] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 42.
[211] Ibidem, 91.

Ezekiel 21 imagines God's justice like a sword cutting through a human gathering; God appears to relish the destruction of the just and unjust.[212] Similar images occur in Isaiah 13 and 33. The Day of the Lord will unfold with great anger and no mercy, for Israel and Assyria. In the latter text, God threatens the godless with being "chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire."[213] Schwager asserts that this theme of a violent God recurs more frequently than even human violence in the Hebrew Scriptures. "He manifests his might and glory through warfare and holds court like a wrathful avenger."[214] Sometimes God's anger flares up spontaneously as an illogical consequence.[215]

Schwager's survey of the Old Testament detects several moments of the Father as *punisher of human misdeeds*. "However, Yahweh often seems to be a power who gets easily excited and can fall prey to an almost boundless annoyance and rage. In Yahweh's aroused state little room is left for human weakness and for limited, corrective punishment."[216] These punishments do not seem to correspond to law codes. Phrases such as "consuming fire," "sword," and "deadly revenge" regularly appear. Schwager believes that moderate attitudes for the Father appear only rarely; predominately God either shares life or deals death.[217]

In *Jesus of Nazareth*'s treatment of the New Testament, the experiences of daily life exhibited a kindhearted Father and the parables illustrated this image of God. Schwager admits there is no great, systematic treatise by Jesus on the topic of this new experience of God. "But

---

[212] See Ezek 21:3-4, 9-15.
[213] See Isa 33:10-12.
[214] Schwager, Raymund. *Must There Be Scapegoats?*: *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 57.
[215] See 2 Sam 6:6-7.
[216] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 57.
[217] See Ezek 21:31, Pss 44:11-12, Isa 19:2, Jer 51:20-22.

his parables, his behavior, and the demands he made on people indicate how his new perception of God is to be understood."[218] The Swiss theologian supposes that the parables expose new mental images of everyday life in which God is present, but that not everyone grasps the message. For example, Jesus justified love of one's enemy since God makes the sun shine and rain fall on both the good and the corrupt.[219] These examples from nature say something crucial about human beings. God's care for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field[220] demonstrated God's even deeper care for human beings. Finally, Jesus' examples of the mustard seed, the leaven, weeds among the wheat, and the net cast into the sea, illuminated how God interacts with humanity. From his inner spiritual core, Jesus presented these commonplace signs afresh to his contemporaries. Those unwilling to listen with openness to these parables clung bitterly to the fearful images of God and judge Jesus harshly.[221] In addition to mystical experiences, Schwager's Jesus gathered many insights about God through His governance of Creation.

Schwager locates several Jewish orations around God as Father, yet Jesus popularized the notion beyond first century practice. The "Fatherhood of God" centered on his adopted children of Israel or king. "The petition 'Our Father in heaven' was used in the synagogue, which was dominated by the Pharisees, and this is comparable to some occurrences in the Gospels, particularly in the 'Our Father' prayer (Matt. 6:9; see also Luke 11:2)."[222] For Schwager it is significant that the evangelist preserved the Aramaic *Abba*.[223] Some occasional instances existed, prior to Jesus' lifetime, where God was addressed as Father, out of mercy and love.[224]

---

[218] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 30.
[219] Matt 5:45.
[220] Matt 6:26, 28.
[221] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 66.
[222] Ibidem, 29.
[223] Mark 14:36.
[224] See Pss 103:13, Isa 63:16.

Jesus very publicly taught the "Our Father" as a prayer of the whole people, calling for the arrival of God's kingdom in its fullness. It was very much a prayer for the regathering of Israel unto its eschatological future.[225]

As Jesus became fluent in the dynamics of Galilean life, he also garnered a sense of how his people had come to loathe the threatening God. When Jesus progressively familiarized himself with the development of his own religious tradition and culture, he also collected the perception of a Father who threatened an unjust people. Since this period, Schwager attests that "in its depth the human heart harbors a grudge against God."[226] Psalm 44 expresses this resentment.[227] Schwager contends that in the depths of their personhood, human beings do not have affection for the father, nor even apathy. Their actual abhorrence surfaces as soon as Jesus, with his high claims, appears. Jesus received the full force of their violent detestation, as it seems impossible for human beings to strike directly at the Father. Thus Schwager's generally pessimistic anthropology espouses not just disinterest, but hatred toward the Father.

Schwager refers to Paul's argument that human beings who are immersed in the desires of the flesh, become hostile to God.[228] The Swiss theologian reiterates that an authentic hatred to the divine resides in human beings; this is not mere unconcern or indifference to the Father. "In the truest sense of the world, therefore, the desires of the flesh lead to death (Rom 8:6). The resentment against God gets unloaded on fellow human beings, and they are murdered."[229] Human beings refuse to acknowledge their own guilt, converting it into an antipathy for the Father. Paul himself voiced Psalm 44 as the psalmist bitterly protests, how he is struck all the

[225] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 39.
[226] Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 196.
[227] Schwager also cites Pss 69:8, Jer 15.15.
[228] Schwager cites Rom 8:7.
[229] Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 196.

day long, by the Father.[230] Hence the prophets' social critique and the desires of the flesh, have both contributed to the first century predicament.

The resentment towards the divine then distorted human relationships. For Schwager, this means that mimetic contagion and rivalry run rampant. One of the primary exemplars of this quandary happens in the Wisdom Literature, in the Book of Job. "The suffering individual can find no guilt in himself, which makes God seem to him to be a capricious ruler and a cruel torturer. He argues brazenly with God."[231] Uncertainty about the attitude of the Father stimulated human frustration, whether innocent or guilty. Job uncovered the resentment, usually unspoken, present in human hearts. The protagonist stirred in frustration as God cannot be addressed or found.[232] The viewpoint only alters once Job receives the universal-perspective of God's governance.[233] Schwager avers that the Father did not in turn begrudge human hostility; he allowed the Son to be victimized and scapegoated.[234] Present with the negative image of the Father, mimesis and rivalry surged through human communities.

An exegesis of the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat uncovers too the agency of Satan. The Kingdom of God message was being spread abundantly by Jesus. Nevertheless, weeds are being sown amidst the good seeds and plants.[235] In Schwager's words, Jesus explained, "The evil spirit sows false thoughts even in those who receive the word of the kingdom of God in their hearts. . . . Watch out, in case the evil enemy sows weeds also in you!"[236] Not only are human

[230] See Rom 8:36.
[231] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 197.
[232] Job 23.
[233] Job 28.
[234] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 197.
[235] Matt 13:24-29.
[236] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 76.

beings responding to Jesus with repressed anger meant for the Father, but also Satan disrupts the reception of his message. A veil has clouded God's Word and the evil one sowed false thoughts.

Jesus appreciated that at first his contemporaries did not apprehend the voice that leads him, and that he must bear the burdens of a misunderstanding people. Schwager associates Jesus' cognizance here with Moses' difficult role in the Wilderness, perhaps a burden too challenging for one person alone.[237] The Suffering Servant too symbolically carried the challenges facing the people.[238] As Jesus traveled into area around Dan,[239] he queried his disciples as to their own comprehension of his mission. These men admitted that crowds had envisioned him as John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the pre-Exilic prophets. They did not repeat to him the rejection of the Pharisees, to his supposed falsehoods.[240] Schwager describes, "In prayer he gave over all uncertainty to his Father and waited for the answering voice. Yet it soon became clear to him that he must remain with his people, although it was stubborn and had plugged ears and eyes glued together."[241] Even though Jesus has a vibrant mystical spirituality, it is met by an equally inert people.

Jesus endeavored to instruct his disciples and the crowds that God is no rival to their flourishing. This occurred notably during the Sabbath healings: there is no antagonism between human flourishing and devotion to God. The Pharisees' obstinate hardening of the law manufactured an either/or situation. Schwager highlights that Jesus' God is one of infinite good, who can be sought by many without fear of rivalry. Jesus turned to other loci of Scripture,

[237] Ex 16.
[238] Isa 53.
[239] One of the northernmost regions, of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel.
[240] Matt 16:14.
[241] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 77, 80.

demonstrating a generous Father that desires mercy instead of sacrifice.[242] Schwager writes, "If God demanded sacrifice of men and women, his wish would of necessity enter constantly into conflict with human striving for its own fulfillment. But he wants nothing but the true well-being" of human beings.[243] Christ's demand of reconciliation, prior to other religious devotion, exemplifies the priority on human well-being.[244] Jesus' behavior here is the utter opposite to the Serpent's seductive hints that God is jealous of human beings.

Jesus resisted the temptation to overwhelm the Pharisees with miraculous signs, instead conveying God's goodness. Schwager pictures the Pharisees envisaging Moses' contest with the Egyptian sorcerers, who failed to match the might of Yahweh.[245] The disciples likewise longed for such a potent sign. But in Schwager's text, Jesus responded with the story of Jonah in Nineveh: the preaching of the prophet should be sufficient for conversion. He further answered to the concerns of the disciples with the phrase: *By the measure with which one measures will it be measured out to you*[246] and the parable of the talents. The wariness that the third servant bore undermined his ability to serve.[247] Jesus "wondered how the goodness of his Father could reach those who had paralyzed and enclosed themselves in their own world."[248] The Son constantly attempted to overcome the dynamics of violent reciprocity, misgivings towards God, and showcase the gratuity of God's love.

According to Schwager, Jesus set a new mimetic standard for discipleship among his followers. Schwager agrees with Girard that no human being can set him or herself on a fully

[242] Schwager cites Matt 12:1-8, Luke 6:1-5.
[243] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 177.
[244] Matt 5:23-24.
[245] Ex 9:11.
[246] Matt 7:2.
[247] Matt 25:14-30.
[248] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 94-5.

autonomous track. Jesus refocused these people on the Kingdom of God, Abba-Father, and the renunciation of worldly desires.[249] He aligned his will with that of his Father.[250]

> Not only by his words but especially by his whole existence did Jesus call his disciples to follow him. Since his own desires and ambitions were focused on the will of the Father, he assigned the same goal to his disciples. When they saw him praying, they wanted to be able to pray like him (see Luke 11:1). If Jesus' goal had been a limited good of the senses, unconditional discipleship would necessarily have led to rivalries. But since he renounced immediate desire, he motivated his disciples to similar deeds.[251]

God has such abundant goodness and generosity, he may be sought by many without fear of rivalry.

Amidst prayer with his disciples, Jesus instilled gratitude and conducted this core group to the sweet inner voice of the Father. *Jesus of Nazareth* recounts how Jesus enticed the disciples into songs of praise and thanksgiving. "They immersed themselves in praise and thanks, by which they let their souls ride on the wings of the wind (Ps. 18:10)."[252] The vegetation and animals even appear to participate in this gladness. Jesus gently diminished anxiety through prayer, and connected his followers to those traditional words of praise. Schwager refers to Luke 11:1 noting how the disciples earnestly entreated to learn to pray like Jesus.[253] Subsequent to their return from the missions in towns, Jesus listened carefully to their experiences,[254] longing that they might hear the sweet inner voice of the Father (Song 2:14).[255] Jesus prayed Psalm 80 with the disciples, acknowledging God's cultivation and nourishment of their ministry.[256] He remained constantly attentive to their connection to the gentle Father.

---

[249] See Matt 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13.
[250] See John 4:34.
[251] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 176-7.
[252] Ibidem, 67.
[253] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 177.
[254] Matt 10:1-23.
[255] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 73.
[256] Ibidem, 79.

Jesus gently and persistently persuaded his disciples into general understandings of the Reign of God and the Father's gentle care for all creation. Schwager writes how the disciples "heard his words, but they didn't yet resound in their hearts. When would the reign of his Father fully break in?" Many first century Israelites carried through their days with a resignation and fatigue, entrapping themselves in nets with their desires. Jesus believed a good will and aura surrounded his disciples, but the Reign of his Father still had not bloomed in their hearts and minds.[257] Schwager highlights how Jesus tells the story of the Widow and the Judge; if even an *unjust* judge may be moved by earnest pleading, would not a gracious God through fervent prayers?[258] Elsewhere, placing a child before them, the Son encouraged his followers to relinquish their willingness to dominate[259] and his kingdom will come unto them.[260] Jesus steadily groomed the hearts and spirituality of his followers to receive the goodness, rather than the threat of the Father.

If led successfully unto an experience of Abba, women and men could be freed from their plight akin to the exorcised. Schwager envisages this spirituality as a *deep communicative process* in which Jesus strove to render a connection to Abba. "Was this communicative healing event able to reach even their innermost soul and their freedom? This was the question which decided whether Jesus' proclamation actually led to a perceivable dawning of the kingdom of God."[261] If people permitted themselves to be touched in their inner beings, they could be overcome with the love of the Father. The Swiss theologian names it an *intensive, interpersonal event*, "in which the pure belief of Jesus touched the innermost hearts of his hearers and was

[257] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 134.
[258] Luke 18:1-6.
[259] Luke 18:15-17.
[260] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 107.
[261] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 43.

affected by them in reciprocation." The healings existed as manifestations of this communication.[262] Schwager declares out that Jesus must move his listeners so completely, that this new experience of God overwhelms their worldly desires. If the old desires remain the deepest, these affinities block God and neighbor.[263]

During his immersion in Galilean life, Jesus accumulated the false contemporary assessment of the intimidating, punitive Father. Jesus knew in the depth of his being that the gracious Father was no rival, according to Schwager. The Sabbath healings particularly confirmed that God enabled, not hindered human flourishing. Through his preaching and visible examples, Jesus popularized the spirituality of Abba. He modeled a renunciation of conflictual desire, adopting the Will of the Father. Jesus strove to indoctrinate a gratitude in his disciples, as well as an openness to the inner voice of the Father, in their own interior.

IV. The Call to Action and Discipleship in the Kingdom

Jesus missioned his disciples to spread the message to those feeling under the threat of God, multiplying the effects of the Galilean ministry. Girard conceptualizes the Reign as an opportunity/obligation: to elect to extract oneself from cyclical mechanisms of violence.[264] For Schwager, Jesus pondered for some time if he must bear the burden of his ministry and the Israelites alone. After calling his disciples, these men develop new emotions about the message and their God. Jesus senses their development and disperses them among the towns, bearing his message of the loving Father. For Schwager, Mary Magdalene particularly evidenced this

[262] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 41.
[263] Ibidem, 43.
[264] Cowdell, 36.

receptivity and transformation. Although misunderstanding Jesus' destiny, these disciples disseminated the word of the benevolent Father in contrast to the view of God as threat. Jesus' announcement and embrace of his disciples as *friends* would spell the conclusive end of rivalry with God.

Earlier than the call of the disciples, Jesus discerned the impetus and manner in which he must bear the image of the gracious Father to others. He became aware of a veil over the eyes and hearts of the Israelites.

> Jesus revisualized within himself how the all-powerful word descended from heaven in the dark of night, filled everything, and lowered itself into him, until it was one with him. He saw suddenly the image of a thornbush before him out of which a jet of flame blazed up without consuming the bush (Exod. 3:2). He felt like the thornbush. The all-powerful word came from above and rose simultaneously out of his own heart.[265]

Schwager writes that Jesus detected that the message must be imparted to others, as belief in his message and authority drives him onward. Subsequent to days in ministry in Capernaum, uncertainties arise within Jesus that he expresses to his Abba. Jesus mused that he must summon followers to establish the norms of a new life, then witnessed before the crowds.[266]

The Kingdom of God was a joyful message of the overcoming of evil, an announcement of present reality. Schwager brings full attention on Jesus' inauguration of his ministry at the synagogue in Nazareth[267] with the pronouncement of Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus responded to the questions of John the Baptist's disciples, by reiterating these joyful miracles.[268] He illustrates this period as that of a wedding feast.[269] Schwager underscores that evil is being toppled by Jesus' ministry. He freed the possessed and drove out demons. Ultimately, this was occurring in

---

[265] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 42.
[266] Ibidem, 49.
[267] Luke 4:16-21.
[268] Luke 7:22.
[269] Mark 2:19.

the *present*, and not as a prophecy of the future. When Jesus promulgated his message, changes in the social fabric and well-being of his listeners took place. His message in itself became a potent liberating force.[270]

Schwager establishes for his readers that the Gospel of Mark particularly focuses on the revelatory momentousness of healings and exorcisms. Women and men had believed, by the afflictions of their physical bodies, that they were under the spell of evil powers. Jesus' healings stretches beyond the immediate miracle, to signify God will liberate.[271] Schwager turns to Girard, to discharge the significance of exorcisms: "In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard explicitly discusses this phenomenon. He shows how everywhere the expansion of violence provokes monstrous illusions and how these hallucinations lead to disastrous effects." The possessed person manifests how he/she is bound in such a way. Jesus frees these people from destructive desires.[272]

Jesus publicly turned towards sinners, offering forgiveness and reintegrating them into communities. Schwager points out that Jesus here, assumed the functions of the temple cult. He did not require the law, before extending forgiveness. "In his basileia message, salvation and penance seem to have exchanged places."[273] Human beings are invited to forgive because God forgives[274] and embrace the Father's perfection.[275] Jesus shared the story of the ten thousand talents, to emphasize these obligation.[276] This aspect of Jesus' ministry included the drive to

[270] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 32.
[271] See Mark 1:23-27, 3:11, 5:1-20, 7:24-30, 9:14-27.
[272] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 169-70.
[273] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 38.
[274] Matt 6:14.
[275] Matt 5:48.
[276] Matt 18:23-5.

regather a new community of Israel. "He did not want to renew a 'holy remnant,' but the whole of Israel, even if he only invited a portion to immediate discipleship."[277]

Jesus made evident his complete solidarity with sinners who are victims on the Cross. Here he described himself as victim, along with other victims. Schwager refers to increasing examples of this throughout the New Testament texts. In the parable of the malicious vineyard tenants,[278] the son follows the servants prior to the attack on him. Saul's conversion and encounter on the road described Jesus as a persecuted one.[279] At the judgment scene of Matthew's gospel,[280] what has happened to the least, has impacted upon him. The Pauline letters included the assertion: "One has died for all; therefore all have died."[281] For Schwager, these passages "show [that] the reality of the cross is adequately represented only if one speaks in a differentiated manner of Christ's identification with sinners, insofar as they are *victims*" not merely sinners.[282]

The preservation of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 reflects the destruction of mimesis, through care of sinners. The scene of the accused woman is a good example of scapegoat tension that seeks to eliminate or expel this guilty woman. Robinette describes, "This all-against-one dynamic has served to generate social cohesion from time immemorial, and its work of projecting upon some expelled "other" is about to play out once again in stereotypical fashion." Jesus was brought into the gathering. Instead of participating in the punishment, he wrote in the sand. It is climactic that Jesus refused to cast the *first stone*, as he denies the group

[277] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 37-9.
[278] Matt 21:33-46.
[279] Acts 9:1-5.
[280] Matt 25:31-46.
[281] 2 Cor 5:14.
[282] Raymund Schwager, "Christ's Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice." *Semeia* 33 (1985): 118-9.

the model for imitation. "By calling attention [to] the self-implication of guilt on the part of the mob's mentors, which in itself is an enlightenment of the highest order, Jesus subtly reverses the direction of the mob's accusatory momentum and diffuses its dangerous animus." Jesus looked to the ground and avoids their gaze, in order not to provoke further anger, but provide a moment of reflection. Not only did Jesus approach sinners unsolicited, but he preserves them from the dangerous mimetic contagion.[283]

The Sermon on the Mount outlined proper human behavior in response to the call of the Kingdom, breaking the mimetic cycle. Jesus invoked the love of the Father, invited them unto trust, and strove to fashion a new community. His interruption of the pattern of an "eye for an eye" was vital.[284] Rather than a symmetry of human avenging behavior, his audience was to trust in the preceding mercy of God and act accordingly to other human beings. All people are in need of a continuing cycle of forgiveness and reconciliation.[285] "The regulations of the Sermon on the Mount consequently do not contain random demands of God; they only show what sort of conversion and what kind of new behavior are objectively necessary if people who come from a world of desire, rivalry, and the sacred vengeance system are to be really reconciled to one another in obedience to the will of God and to form a new community."[286]

Girard concurs that only the Sermon on the Mount's *universal renunciation of violence* can defuse the violent cycle of mimesis. The Kingdom of God requires the eradication of all means of vengeance in human relationships. Girard determines that human beings disregard Jesus' detailed, forceful exhortation to repent from violence. "Jesus invites all men to devote

[283] Brian Robinette, "Contemplative Practice and the Therapy of Mimetic Desire." *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 24 (2017): 92-3.
[284] Matt 5:38-42.
[285] Matt 5:23-26.
[286] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 42-3.

themselves to the project of getting rid of violence, a project conceived with reference to the true nature of violence, taking into account the illusions it fosters, the methods by which it gains ground." Girard conceives of this violence as a "pervasive lie," a "closed kingdom" in which human beings can only escape by entering into the Kingdom of love, Jesus' campaign.[287]

Schwager's *Jesus of Nazareth* narrates the turmoil and conversion of the disciples, as they discerned this message. When gathered around Jesus at meals, they interrogated Jesus as to the Reign's status, mode, and time of arrival. It is clear that they longed for its advent. He responded by designating them as the light of the world that will shine before others.[288] Even though these followers often descended into doubt, a peace lingered within them. Jesus mulled over, "Would the trust involved in sharing his task with them open their hearts without reservation, which were still partially divided? Would they then help set the land afire, something he so fervently awaited?"[289] Schwager depicts Jesus permitting the disciples an incubation or transitory period, for the message to be absorbed. He repeated actions and restated key principles, until they were determinedly fixed on the minds of his disciples.[290]

The message of the Kingdom of God frustrated the scapegoat mechanism, since it exposed the deep-seated destructive desires. Schwager notes, "It was at this point that Jesus began his teaching. He preached true peace not as a human work, but as the kingdom of God. With the help of the parables, especially the stories of the self-growing seed (Mark 4:26-29), the mustard seed (Mark 4:30ff), and the leaven (Matt 13:33), he taught that this kingdom is coming without human help."[291] The healings had an immediate connection and reinforce this message.

---

[287] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 197.
[288] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 57.
[289] Ibidem, 71.
[290] Ibid., 64.
[291] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*, 167.

When Jesus met his adversaries, he expounded how humans possessed a malicious violence and desires to kill. Jesus' healing of the infirm illuminated how God frees people from these harsh powers. Those women and men, who had been confined, were freed for new human actions; he called these people to faith.[292]

Jesus of Nazareth depicts how Jesus commissioned the disciples after an evening in prayer on Mount Tabor. Jesus entrusted his concern for the Kingdom completely to the Father. As Jesus charged them to promulgate the message of the Kingdom, they are shocked and filled with anxiety. Jesus' confidence in them propelled them forward. Remaining behind during their mission, Jesus prayed for them. Schwager stresses that Jesus remained in profound solidarity with them. Once the disciples return, he noticed the total transformation had not yet occurred in them.[293] The disciples recognized the powerful effects of their ministry and the change in those they encountered, but, according to Schwager's interpretation, the depth of the Abba experience needed more instillation. After meeting the widow of Zarapheth, Jesus spoke aloud the blessing unto Abraham.[294] He construes to them, that with great faith, the reign of God will range throughout the world.[295]

One particular disciple, Mary Magdalene, exhibited an open, heartfelt listening to Jesus' message of the Kingdom and generous God. Schwager recounts how Mary rarely spoke but remained close to Jesus, during his teaching and mystical experiences. "She drank in thoroughly the words of the one who had healed her . . . her readiness to hear and her undivided love touched him deeply." She listens carefully to Jesus discuss the various ways human beings

[292] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*?, 169.
[293] See Luke 9:10.
[294] Gen 22:7.
[295] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 81.

become lost, and the Parable of the Widow and the Judge.[296] Many months later, after the events of Jerusalem, Jesus would appear to Mary at the Tomb, giving her great joy and new life. Unlike her male peers, Mary does not manifest a guardedness or suspicion of Jesus' message.

For his somewhat combative disciples, Jesus had to reinforce his message of forgiveness and the transformation of enemies. Jesus' appealed for the love of enemies, founded in the idea that God lets the rain and sun fall on the just and unjust alike (Mt 5:43-47).[297] Akin to the fierceness of God inherited from the prophets, the disciples wondered if the Kingdom of God would obliterate all their enemies. Jesus' rejoinder was the Parable of the Ninety-Nine sheep.[298] The disciples were to consider the wayward as main targets of their mission and message. What's more, the Sermon on the Mount outlined love of enemies and forgiveness as a fundamental attitude. For Schwager, it manages to overcome the disasters of mimesis. "Only forgiveness can overcome this evil at its core. Therefore Jesus exhorts his disciples to forgive; indeed he demands that they forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven times (Matt 18:22)."[299] Jesus consciously rewrote their violent impulses and inclinations, into love of enemies and forgiveness. The love of enemies is an undisputed, central claim of the New Testament. Most importantly, it does not feature merely as an inner disposition; Christians must adopt new conduct. Even mistreatment and enmity must be met with graciousness and love.[300]

Jesus proposed the *limitless* command to forgive in order to surmount reciprocal violence. Schwager illustrates, "Externally, forgiveness must never capitulate before the

[296] Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 88-9, 91, 105.
[297] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 36.
[298] Matt 18:12.
[299] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 174.
[300] Ibidem, 172.

immoderation of the vengeful violence of others; internally, it has God's perfection for its norm."[301] Evil's wrath and effects can also be fathomless. This order from Jesus is not a suggestion, but the only means to counter the endless cycle of mimetic contagion. "They go to do away with this negative infinity so that the boundlessness of God will shine out."[302] In each case where a counter-blow or response is administered, mimetic violence remains rampant. Jesus' forceful and all-encompassing demand met the hazards of mimesis.

Jesus' high claims aroused not only the violence of the Sanhedrin, but also rivalry among his followers. Jesus clearly located their movement's goal in the Father, but simultaneously he possessed an exceptional closeness to this God. Schwager explicates, "His unique closeness to the Father could thus become once again an object of perfidious, underlying rivalry for the disciples. Human ambition is measureless. As the story of the first sin makes especially clear, its ultimate aim is to be like God (Gen 3:5)."[303] For Schwager, human beings simply do not have the power to control their ambitions and desires; this longing to be like God can grow in secret and became rampant. The rivalry with Jesus thus naturally follows, from high status and this latent desire to be like God.

Jesus' offer of utter friendship, found in John 15, decisively overpowered the rivalry with God. Jesus offered the fullness of his life and knowledge; he asked that all believers be accepted alongside him. Jesus shared divine live and does not guard his status. Rather than servants, Jesus has elevated his companions to the level of friends. "What Jesus through his unique intimacy has received from the Father he passes on to his disciples. As bread from heaven he is

[301] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 175.
[302] Ibidem, 176.
[303] Ibid., 178.

totally food for others (John 6:35.48.51)."[304] The unprecedented generosity and fraternity of Jesus, the power of this love, shattered the drive for ambition. In the final chapter, I will turn to those critics of René Girard and Raymund Schwager addressing their evaluation of the *Abba* spirituality, non-sacrificial death of Christ, and mimetic theory.

[304] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 178.

CHAPTER THREE: SCHWAGER, HIS CRITICS, AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

René Girard and Raymund Schwager's innovative Christology tackle those longstanding dilemmas on the seeming emotional transformation of the Father, from vengeful to loving, and spiraling human violence in the Bible. Girard and Schwager are mainly criticized on two points: their proposal of a change in God from autocratic tyrant in the Old Testament to kind and merciful Abba in the New, and their view of spiraling violence. This chapter will examine those critiques and offer a response for Gerard and Schwager. Critics allege that Girard's concept of mimesis reconstructs another *Cur Deus Homo* and implies that human beings take the initiative in the redemption process. Jesus' nonviolence is not fully explained or exemplified for the practice of others. Dramatic theology improperly collapses the infinite into a drama before the gaze of human beings; the distinction between good and evil becomes illusory. The Abba experience as a way of describing Jesus's experience of the Father has recently been undermined by the scholarship of Mary Rose D'Angelo and Geza Vermes.[305] Any reader of Girard and Schwager might hesitate before their exhibition of Old Testament sacrifice, and its centrality in institutions to the contemporary era.

In this chapter, I will address Girard and Schwager's interlocutors and schematize a response these criticisms. Girard takes a strong stance on the *non-sacrificial* death of Christ, that raises the ire of some systematic theologians. Robert J. Daly, for example, demonstrates that sacrifice meant the whole will and choices offered over to God. Girard's vision of sacrifice is admittedly a narrow temporal mechanism, but Schwager contextualizes Old Testament sacrifice

[305] See D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q: Abba and 'Father' in Context" and Vermes "The Jewish Jesus Movement."

and Jesus' self-offering. Whereas Girard's portrayal of Jesus' pacifism is brief, Schwager's works elaborate on Jesus' inculcation of nonviolence. For Schwager, the Abba experience expresses the novel spirituality of Jesus, overcoming the threat of the Father. Jesus may not have introduced a precedent in prayer, but the residual effects of his ministry convey the spirituality of a loving Father. Though necessarily through an anthropocentric lens, dramatic soteriology expresses forth the picture of the Father through the arc of Scripture in a readily comprehensible manner.

I. The Non-Sacrificial Death of Christ

Girard and Schwager advance the thesis that Jesus' death did not occur to offer God a human atonement that may satisfy for their sins. It was escalating violent rivalry, inspired by Jesus' self-claims and pacifism, that propelled the action forward from the criticism of the Pharisees to trial and execution. This chronicle of Jesus' passion draws the negative scrutiny of John Milbank and Hans Urs von Balthasar. For the latter, mimetic theory hints that human beings are the agents to take the initiative in the redemption process. How is it then possible that the Christian church offers the sacrifice of the Cross, if God did not want it? The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 indicates that God either wills to burden the Servant, or allows it? Mimesis does not seem to express adequately the relationship between God's love and justice. Lastly, Milbank alleges that Girard simply fabricates another *Cur Deus Homo* situation, where the resolution of conflictual violence must occur. In other words, Girard himself is designing the conditions for a human predicament and then also himself proposing the divine solution to that predicament.

Hart asserts that Girard does not allow for the varying modes of sacrifice, improperly simplifying a complex ritual. Girard perceives simplistic binary shifts in the sacrifices of ancient Israel: a choice between the cult of sacrifice and prophetic critique. According to Hart, Girard fails to notice "the manifold meanings inherent in Israel's many sacrificial practices." Covenant is directly associated with sacrifice; Israel's legacy of sacrifice is a rich and complex portrait.[306] "There are indeed practices of violence and exclusion, but also practices of sanctification and reconciliation, thanksgiving and adoration. Before all else, though, sacrifice is a *qurban* [sic], a drawing nigh, an approach in love to the God who graciously approaches his people in love."[307] Girardian theory reduces the range of postures towards God, formed by a people in covenant with God.

Even though the intent and actions of sacrifice can vary, I answer Hart that movement of mimetic contagion unto sacrifice still entails a predominant social mechanism, but not a primary means of relating to the Father. Hart does not acknowledge that sacrifice is related to other primary duties, several times in scriptures. Liturgist Robert J. Daly defines a general religious sacrifice as "giving something valuable to God, often in a ceremony that symbolizes an internal offering of commitment or surrender to God."[308] Sacrifice occurs too in obedience to the law, as per God's will. But these forms stand apart from violent, sacrificial observances. Human beings still maintain these assorted forms of devotion, meanwhile the sacrificial mechanism functions for conflictual desire. Girard explains, "Bloody sacrifices are attempts to repress or moderate the internal conflicts of primitive or archaic communities, and they do this by reproducing as exactly

[306] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 348.

[307] Ibidem.

[308] Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 54-5.

as possible, at the expense of the victims substituted for the original victim."[309] Schwager stresses that the sacrificial cult in itself is not a pathway to God. "How little belief in Yahweh depended on sacrifices is shown by the fact that it could survive undamaged the cultless periods after the first and second destructions of Jerusalem."[310] Heeding God's voice, practicing justice, and love of God remained the primary obligations.[311] The sacrificial cult reenergizes mimetic contagion, provisional peace, and its hidden destructive mechanism.

Von Balthasar challenges Girard's line of argument that the human-initiated death of Jesus seemingly only facilitates the psychological unburdening of human beings. He states, "the Church regards the Eucharistic celebration as a representation of the 'sacrifice of the Cross' in which Christ has effectively offered himself for mankind; how then can she present and offer Christ's self-surrender" if the Father neither ordered or desired it?"[312] Girard speaks of desire, rivalry, hostility, and violence, yet rarely explicitly broaches the topic of sin. How then can Christ carry the world's sin? Von Balthasar alleges that Girard's Jesus only expedites a psychological unburdening of sin, as would be common in all ritual sacrifices. Von Balthasar lumps Girard and Schwager with Pannenberg and other theologians who, in his view, manufacture a human-originated salvation, "while God, whose part it is always to love and forgive (K. Rahner), simply looked on, failing to measure up to the divine action of self-giving."[313] The event of the Incarnation loses its power and luster.

---

[309] Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 78.

[310] Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*: *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 83-5.

[311] Schwager cites Pss 40, Hos 6:6, Amos 5:21-25, Jer 7:21-22.

[312] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. Vol. IV. Trans. Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994

[313] Von Balthasar, 317.

Girard's protégé Schwager develops the account of sin and the Incarnation-event in the vocabulary of dramatic soteriology. From my point of view, I would grant that Girard's thesis stretches across literary examples into scriptural motifs. But the theologian Schwager remains firmly grounded in salvation history and the human dilemma, not literary archetypes or theory. The first act of *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* is the Incarnation-event. He authors three pages on the significance of sin, and the way by which Jesus addresses it in his parables.[314] Human beings are prone to confine themselves into a narrow world and engage in judgment, with arbitrary norms. Jesus encourages us to forgive and step out of the entrapment of judgment.[315] Von Balthasar improperly paraphrases Schwager's system, as the burden of sin is far from dismissed.

For von Balthasar, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 manifests God's attitude towards the death of Christ. In his mind, Girard's framework captures only the human outlook towards the Crucified as if God had no position. Von Balthasar continues, "If we juxtapose the two possible interpretations of Isaiah 53:6, we cannot fail to discern a relationship between the Father and his Servant; either he *wills* to burden him with sins, or he *allows* it."[316] The stated exaltation of the Suffering Servant, later realized in the Resurrection of Jesus, demonstrates that God is indeed a part of this salvation-event. Girard and Schwager err in making a distinction between the forgiveness of God and the Cross. Further, they disastrously dissociate God's justice and love from the Cross-event. No longer is the Crucifixion a divine plan of the Father's sacrifice of his Son for humanity, out of love and to justify humanity. Divergent interpretations of Isaiah 53 result in opposed understandings of Jesus' absorption of human sin. Schwager exegetes that the

---

[314] Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 63-7.

[315] Schwager cites Mark 4:10-12, Luke 6:36-8, Matt 18:34.

[316] Von Balthasar, 312.

"freedom from violence inspired by God is consequently the decisive new element displayed by the suffering servant," exposing and overturning the ancien regime of vengeance.[317]

Milbank confronts Girard by asserting that mimetic theory fashions a contemporary form of *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm's structured argument outlined why God must intervene to deliver human beings from the predicament they had created through sin. Only God, free from the taint and distortion of sin, could make a proper offering to the Father and cancel the debt, and only a human being could present humanity. "Girard argues that only God, outside the system of cultural violence, whose inescapable codes blind us to other possibilities, can really and truly refuse such violence."[318] Milbank finds fault with both Anselm and Girard's respective syntheses, because they "internalize" Jesus' abilities to preach and save. Salvation is *contained* in the trajectory of Jesus' existence unto death. Jesus' perfection must be a *way* or "exemplary practice" by which Christians can form communities, defining themselves as the "body of Christ."[319] The potency of the Kingdom of God is not shared aside from the person of Jesus, a mustard seed without bud.

In answer to these points, Milbank merely passes over the exposition of Schwager on the Kingdom of God.[320] Jesus gathers Israel, inculcates nonviolence, and removes the dangerous rivalry to the Father that has fostered alienation. He announces an imminent time of salvation. Cowdell replies that a Girardian Christology has an efficacy "in the transformation of lives rather than in a cosmic transaction remote from the practice of discipleship," as found in satisfaction

---

[317] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 24.

[318] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 396.

[319] Ibidem, 396.

[320] See *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 29-52.

theory.[321] Schwager's account of Jesus includes a spirituality and novel manner of social behavior. Jesus is forming a new community of believers in word and deed, a wholly new paradigm of nonviolence. Though the events of the Cross must be the internal decisions of Jesus, the three-year ministry period has readily shared his renewal of ethics and faith. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* concentrates on the Sermon on the Mount[322] in its lengthy instruction on nonviolence and repudiation of vengeance-culture.[323] Finally, Schwager distinguishes himself from the Anselmian project, in that "we treat questions raised by the Bible at its own level, and initially only consider contemporary problems as background, whereas Anselm mainly chose the opposite way."[324] Anselm is taking the contemporary issue of feudal communal relations, applying it to a doctrine of God.[325]

Hart contends that Girard's Jesus actually espouses a style of Marcionism, rather than a final revelation of a salvation history. Jesus' ministry seems to insinuate a break with the God of the Old Testament, the vengeful God of the prophets. Human beings must be freed from the oppression of the Old Testament God. Hart writes, "the effect of his account of salvation is that Christ comes to look almost like a Marcionite savior, who does not so much inaugurate the liberating history of God with us as describe a path of flight from time."[326] Girard's Christology has a savior dissociated with the Old Testament, in the mind of Hart. Disastrously, this theology would lend itself to supersessionism.

---

[321] Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 222.
[322] Matt 5:38-42.
[323] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 42-3.
[324] Ibidem, 15.
[325] Cowdell, 223.
[326] Hart, 349.

Hart's position might stand against René Girard, but *Must There Be Scapegoats?* directly solves the seeming problem of Marcionism. Schwager elucidates the unfitting image of Yahweh as avenger, from the eighth-century prophets.[327] Jesus represents the Father as "infinite good is rich enough for all human kind. Jesus also showed that the heavenly Father is no rival to his creature."[328] In essence, Jesus is correcting the *false notion of the God of judgment*, carried down over the centuries from the eighth-century prophets. In the five stage act of *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, the true nature of the Father is revealed through Jesus. God's greatness, care for the suffering, and the Trinity are revealed. Rather than a mere correction of the Old Testament picture, Schwager is débuting a dramatic framework of God's person and saving acts throughout history.

Again, according to Bentley Hart, Girard fails to appreciate the *giftedness* of sacrifice, an overflowing of abundance and love outpoured from God to humanity. Girard's soteriology seems to suggest a simple stabilization of a society, by the cessation of mimetic contagion. This is a low bar for the Incarnation-event. Bentley Hart underscores, "it underwrites not the stabilizing regime of prudential violence, but the destabilizing extravagance of giving and giving again, or declaring love and delight in the exchange of signs of peace, outside every calculation of debt or power."[329] Jesus is a perfection of gift; this God of Israel demands nothing and fashions out of the abundance of his love, according to Bentley Hart. Nothing is "owed" by Israel to God, but the overabundance of God's bestowal elicits a response of thankfulness and love. Hart accentuates that no calculation or economy can account for what God continues to bestow and forgive. The crucifixion strives to cancel the divine gift, but the overabundance is

[327] See *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 53-71.
[328] *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 177.
[329] Hart, 350.

poured out beyond these human machinations. The fullness of God's joy and love is demonstrated in the sacrifice of the Cross, not a mere solution to cyclical violence.

Girard, Schwager, and Hart come from far different vantage points on sacrifice, and how the generosity of God is manifested aside from the Father's sacrifice of his Son. All three theologians concur on a perilous human predicament on the eve of the Incarnation event, and on the significance of the God-Man's appearance on the earth. But Girard and Schwager underscore the immensity of Jesus' reformation of spirituality into paternal intimacy and nonviolent human behavior. The Son does reveal the fullness of God's love and joy, and its overabundance is stressed by Jesus' willingness to receive the perils of mimetic contagion.

II. Jesus' Non-violence

Milbank critiques Girard's portrayal of Jesus as undeveloped, especially in terms of exemplifying Christian behavior. In the latter's system, Jesus alone reveals mimetic contagion and publicly exposes its threat on the cross. Milbank criticizes upholding Jesus merely as exceptional, because the Savior must model behavior for Christians to imitate. Jesus must be a pathway for many others. Moreover, narratives of nonviolence and goodness should illustrate this comportment for others. Truth necessarily should be associated with this spiritual disposition and practice. Milbank finds Girardian Christology lacking, since it does not espouse a holistic ethics for the disciple. Jesus ascertains and tackles the human dilemma, but does not foster a discipleship.

Milbank questions whether Girardian Christology results in either a form of the Kingdom of God or Christian pacifism. He credits Girard for the proper accent on Christ's nonviolence,

but asserts that Girard fails to lay out the mode of these practices. Since Girard correlates culture with conflictual desire, it is incumbent upon the French scholar to account for Christ's contrast-society. For Milbank, it seems nothing other than the refusal of all sorts of desire, pure renunciation to the Father's will. "Girard does not, in fact, really present us with a theology of two cities, but instead with a story of one city, and its final rejection by a unique individual."[330] Ultimately, Girard's metanarrative has a sharp cultural critique, but it is far "too undiscriminating" as every culture seems to evidence triangular desire. No Christian alternative practices are mentioned.

For Milbank, Girard generally fails to outline *idioms* or stories of nonviolent behavior for Christians to model. Milbank posits that violence can be witnessed *everywhere*, if any force or persuasion is deemed as violent, as Girard attests. Christianity identifies the True and the Good, located in Christ, as that which we believe. Therefore, Christians require these stories of nonviolence as a fundamental norm for non-mimetic behavior. "We need the stories of Jesus for salvation, rather than just a speculative notion of the good, because only the attraction exercised by a particular set of words and images causes us to acknowledge the good and to have an idea of the ultimate *telos*." Milbank proposes that human beings require *persuasion*, else we would have no means to differentiate peace and truth from their contraries.[331] Girard's Jesus is merely a contrarian that does not instill preferable behavior in others.

Schwager details the nonviolence of Jesus throughout *Jesus of Nazareth* and in a key section of *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*. As detailed in my Chapter Two, Jesus' interaction with his disciples regularly calmed their anxieties and instills harmony among them. The

[330] Milbank, 395.
[331] Ibidem, 398.

revelation of healings and of a new gathering of Israel, implied new forms of behavior.[332] Jesus' greatest demonstration of nonviolence occurred at the Last Supper. He offers his own life as the Kingdom of God faces its enemies. "The body which was given up to death makes clear that the gift of God's kingdom in the situation of rejection was only possible thanks to a love of one's enemies which answered the violent rejection with a still greater offering up."[333] As all women and men are infected with agonistic desires, Jesus alone preached a holistic nonviolence and exemplifies it in his handing himself over unto death.

III. Mimetic Theory

Some scholars quarrel with the argument framework of mimetic theory, what they believe is conflations, sharp antitheses, and shallow understanding of religion. As they see it, in Girardian theory, religion is regarded as a social science; all cultures are uniformly bad. Girard equates the sacrifices of victims in a community, which leads to expulsions. Von Balthasar, for example, decries how Girard posits stark antitheses in his case. The procedures of human societies seem to show that the Incarnation is necessary for humanity; nevertheless, those same mechanisms make the lack of acceptance of Jesus' message possible. According to some scholars, mimesis assumes a superficial read of human society, without the complexity that is demonstrated by the history of religion and social sciences.[334] Opponents of Girard cast mimetic theory as poorly rendered calculation of human relations.

---

[332] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 41-3.

[333] Ibidem, 113.

[334] See Hayden White, "Ethnological 'Lie' and Mythical 'Truth'", *Diacritics* 8 (1978): 2-9, Jean Greisch "Une anthropologie fondamentale du rite: René Girard." in *Le rite. Philosophie* Institut catholique de Paris, présentation de Jean Greisch. Paris, Beauchesne, 1981.

John Milbank

Milbank takes issue with the basic framework of Girard's mimesis, because it rules out degree or variations within desire and cannot balance desire/imitation. The person who imitates never has a determined set of actions to arrive or select the item of the first person's desire. He/she must interpret and form their own set of practices. Milbank points out that sometimes individuals desire items out of enjoying what others exhibit, while other times individuals seek to appropriate the social standing or capacities of others. "Girard's reduction of all instances of the latter to instances of the former seems somewhat high-handed."[335] Secondarily, Girard passes over the space or subtleties within desire. If a person has a long-standing desire, different stages of desire and possession may exist or harmonize. Desire potentially can exist without fruition, or be postponed. Milbank postulates, "The 'room' within *mimesis* and desire may, therefore, be taken more optimistically, to allow for the possibility, predicated on the prior actuality, of a harmonious differentiation."[336] One might shift their sense of want to the fulfillment offered in the Creator-God, who will ultimately fill one's incomplete self. To fulfill the theory, Girard has to invent some sort of wholly completed subject that remains prone to displacement and rivalry.

Along with other contemporary interpreters of Girard such as James Alison, I, for my part, would grant that some "room" may exist among desire and mimesis, but Milbank errs in conceiving that it prevents mimetic contagion and animosity. Jesus' strict renunciation of worldly desire and the abiding authority of the Tenth Commandment, denote desire's danger on the most minimal levels. Milbank does not allow for the *hierarchy of desires*, in which some minor inclinations are subdued over objects that become passionate wants. Some desire remains

[335] John Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice," *Modern Theology*, vol. 12, no. 1, (January 1996): 43.
[336] Milbank, 46.

nonrivalistic or *pacific*, if the model is distant in age or geography.[337] Only an unusually contemplative person could maintain the self-awareness to balance and restrain all desires. I would assent that occasionally social standing is the object of mimesis, for which rivalry ensues as explained.

Milbank places Girard within a problematic stream of the positivist tradition that views religion as an unimportant component of society. He explains, "It is religion that first of all secures 'society'; feelings of social solidarity are linked with arbitrary sacrifice; religion can be 'explained' in social terms." Akin to Claude Levi-Strauss, in Milbank's mind Girard analyzes these societies of antiquity in modern terms. Expulsions and sacrifices take place not as critical moments, but rather as perennial renewals of communal harmony. Desire is appreciated and developed between *equals*; however, the hierarchical societies of antiquity do not consist of equals. More likely, the usual evaluation of objects and roles in a culture, would present certain items as more desirable and worthy. Rivalry would be less of an issue than the actual targets of such desire. Milbank further opposes a negative slant on religious institutions, as they protect society from utter chaos. Instead, early societies incorporated legal force against the perception of chaos and itinerancy.[338] Too often, according to Milbank, Girard casts cultures as inevitably sacrificial and perverse.

In his book, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*, Scott Cowdell responds to Milbank, that the social sciences have allowed Girard the tools to explain Jesus' mission in his culture. Cowdell disputes Milbank's assessment that Girard uses social science approaches alone; the latter exhibits a general intolerance to social science. "The social sciences have helped Girard to

[337] James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 13.

[338] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 394-5.

theorize scripture's exposure of a religio-cultural complex founded on the sacred victim. So, there need be no conflict here between science and faith." Cowdell agrees with James Alison that revelation and mimetic theory are similar for Girard.[339]

Whereas Girard focuses on the social mechanism of scapegoating, he neglects the social stratification, or hierarchical differentiation deployed for similar purposes. Milbank charges that scapegoating is not nearly as prevalent as Girard indicates. Sometimes scapegoating surfaces to displace impurities located in a social context; Milbank disputes that these examples arise from hidden, violent envy.[340] Milbank highlights that hierarchical differentiation more amply accomplishes the intended effects of scapegoating; the latter likely augments differentiation. The Cambridge scholar disputes Girard's stance that the original violence arose from mimesis. More likely, "claimed identity and difference" compelled the first viciousness.[341]

For Milbank, Girard collapses a range of sacrificial intentions into the scapegoat effect. He outright rejects Girard's notion of the ubiquity of the scapegoat mechanism. Greek worship exhibits this range of sacrificial objectives. Human beings might wish for "psychic and eternal beneficence" or "to share in the same food as the gods." Oftentimes sacrifices introduced public civic occasions; sometimes sacrifices repaired an individual's fault or error in the society. Milbank argues, "To link sacrifice exclusively with intra-human violence tends to ignore its aspect as a kind of existential game with death. Not just in the case of sacrifice, indeed, but also in the case of initiation, a kind of attempt is made to die in advance."[342] Indeed, sacrifice allows

[339] Cowdell, 119.
[340] Milbank gives examples of sins as impurities, see p. 47.
[341] Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice," 47.
[342] Ibidem, 48, 50.

that human beings might invest this death with some sort of meaning. Girardian theory condenses this span of purposes for sacrifice, into the scapegoat mechanism alone.

Milbank finds it unlikely that the mythical power of the scapegoat emerged through a sacrificed royal figure. Girard speculates that the sacrifice of a monarch in primitive societies, fashioned a provisional peace. This royal figure may have been revered as a deity, or at least a mysteriously powerful figure. Milbank disputes this account, positing it more likely that the sovereign arranges for a hierarchy of differentiation. This figure increasingly exercises his power over institutions and legal frameworks. Therefore, the occasional scapegoat-figure happens more commonly in secularized conditions without the religious language that Girard implies.[343]

The effects of mimesis on ancient Israel imply the necessity of the divine intervention and further that Jesus' ministry will be ultimately rejected. Milbank posits that Girard and Schwager paint the dominance of mimesis mechanisms as so potent, that a "'supernatural', extra-social intervention necessary, in the shape of 'incarnation.'" This is erroneous, because Jesus' Passion injects *yet another* social mechanism into our current society. For Milbank, Jesus' redemption from the less socialized, nonmimetic notion of original sin, sets the Incarnation aside from competing forms of social behavior. Milbank alleges that rivalry can be eliminated without the supernatural, Christ-event. Importantly, sin has a blindness and Christ's ministry establishes a wholly new pattern of behavior. Christ's role stands above any social patterns of behavior, advancing an "infinite generosity," "a series in no continuity with sin and its own self-

[343] Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice, 49-50.

antidotes."[344] Girardian Christology restricts Jesus' beneficence and sets rivalry illegitimately as unsurmountable.

In my view, Milbank's arguments against Girard do not sufficiently account for the prevalence of violence in human history, as Girard's research has proven. Not only in primitive society, but also the depicting of violence is rampant throughout Scripture. Six hundred passages of the Bible mention violence,[345] sometimes unrestrained.[346] Schwager delineates the prevalence and cycles of vengeance in ancient societies, in *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*.[347] Milbank may turn toward hierarchical differentiation as his chosen social mechanism for rivalry and desire, but this does not fully explain the ubiquity of violence nor of provisional peace. Schwager appropriately features Jesus' movement as a social mechanism and divine plan, which uphold nonviolence and a loving relationship with the Father. Milbank and Girard would agree about the depth of Jesus' generosity and firm break with sin.

Von Balthasar

Von Balthasar finds fault with Girard's interpretation of the cross and his further view, that Christ reverses meanings hidden in cultures from the origin stories. The Christ-event certainly brings about fulfillment, by means of the profound about-turn of meanings. "This becomes clear in the opposition between the two 'logos'-principles of Heraclitus and John: the former is the logos of harmony through violence; the latter is the logos that renounces violence,

[344] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 397.
[345] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 47.
[346] Schwager cites Josh 10:40, 1 Kings 11:16.
[347] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 18-9.

which the world 'cannot understand.'"[348] Girard insists that the mimetic cycle repeats in a concealed, mysterious manner. This primal event recurs in a host of rites, sacrifices, and institutions. Von Balthasar claims that Girard strives to eliminate and replace psychoanalysis, Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, and Heidegger. It is inappropriate for theology to uncover concealed mechanisms and to manipulate human history.

In my view, Von Balthasar ignores the major feature of the Incarnation event, Jesus' *revelation* of human life and the relationship to the Father. Von Balthasar complains about the hiddenness of mimetic behavior, but much of the nature of humanity is hidden until the Incarnation! Sin has shaped human behavior since the Fall, and in an equivalent manner to the discussion of triangular desire. Our efforts and impulses to restrain sin have resulted in similar mechanisms to the repetitive surfacing of sacrifice across cultures. Schwager charts how the parables "attempt to open up a new vision of those everyday things which are in themselves recognizable by everyone, but which not all see. Jesus made his new teaching clear from everyday experience also in other connections."[349] Von Balthasar criticizes Girard's view of mimesis for its hiddenness, yet our knowledge of human sin remained incomplete until the Incarnation event.

IV. Dramatic Theology

Arising only in the twentieth century, dramatic theology tackles the supposed incongruence in the images of God found in the Old and New Testaments. As mentioned in the introduction, dramatic theology aims to form a total picture of the Jesus-event, along with

[348] Von Balthasar, 298.
[349] Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 65.

universal history of God-human relations. Schwager reassesses this sweep of salvation history as a unitive whole, best understood in the manner of dramatic acts. Dramatic acts are a framework utilized in the earliest cultures to explicate reality. Accepting Schwager's understanding of dramatic theology, Milbank and von Balthasar pick apart its metanarrative and collapse of crucial distinctions. The English theologian resists the project entirely. Although a proponent of dramatic theology himself, von Balthasar deems Schwager's construct as ill-fitting to Christian history.

Milbank accepts a narrative account of Jesus' saving works, but one cannot collapse the grand scale of salvation history into a narratological form. He proposes that dramatic theology "attempts to conceive the relationship of time to what is beyond time." Schwager's model fails because it supposes the salvation of the cross as a *contingent event*, since human beings repulsed the ministry of Jesus. Sin occurs on a far more universal level, antecedent to the reception of Jesus' message. For Milbank, if Schwager connects the salvation of the Cross only with first century Israel's rejection of Jesus, he misses the prevalence of sin from the earliest generations.[350] Dramatic theology strips away the timeless beneficence in the plan of the Father.

Von Balthasar makes several criticisms of Girard that his notion of salvation history *overstretches* a tension between humanity and God. Unlike von Balthasar's own theory, Girard's formula simply cannot contain this tension. "This is clear from the fact that the self-concealing 'mechanism' eliminates all freedom on man's part. Girard maintains a complete hiatus between naturalism and theology; they are not even linked by an ethics." For von Balthasar, Girard fails to construct an appropriate link between anthropological turmoil and

[350] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 396-7.

foundational theology. This spawns a host of troubles in theology. Von Balthasar declares that the difference between good and evil is difficult to envision; usually Girard writes of rivalry, and hostility, not sin. In the Girardian system, human beings somehow heap their sins upon Jesus.[351] Mimetic theory absorbs too much of Girard's attention and his exposition of human sin, aside from the Tenth Commandment, is lacking.

Schwager's form of dramatic theology avoids some of the problems that von Balthasar sees in Girard. It neither conceives of the Cross as contingent, nor overdramatizes the tension between humanity and God. Much like the Fall, the presence of rivalry and mimesis from the first generation calls for revelation and divine intervention. It is classic theology from Augustine, to explicate the Incarnation event as an address to the situation of the Fall. Human beings are predisposed towards violence. "There exists therefore a hidden fundamental situation that can be described as a war of all against all . . . the message of Jesus must unmask the same *hidden* fundamental situation."[352] Schwager presents Jesus as the one who shares the fullness of God's love, calling his disciples friends. In Part One of *Jesus and the Drama of Salvation*, Schwager outlines the perception of the hostile father and resulting rivalry of God. The account of sin remains constant throughout the text, as well as the discrepancy between good and evil.[353]

V. Abba Experience

Joachim Jeremias introduced a new idea in Christology through the exposition of the Abba experience in the 1960s. Many theologians, such as Schwager and liberationists, espouse

[351] Von Balthasar, 309.
[352] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 146.
[353] See *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 53-81.

this component of Jesus' ministry period.[354] Nonetheless, Mary Rose D'Angelo, emeritus professor at the University of Notre Dame, has contextualized Abba as a Jewish prayer and categorized three modes of prayer to God as Father. D'Angelo closely analyzes Q, Mark, and the Qumran scrolls for the phrases of God described as Father. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the language of the early church evinces a matching style of prayer. Geza Vermes also recognizes a multiplicity of Father-language in Jewish prayer, flowing quite simply into Christian prayer language. In their minds, Jeremias and Schwager have unduly emphasized Jesus' Abba style of address.

In D'Angelo's analysis, Jeremias erred in limiting his perusal of Jewish tracts to prayers and corporate texts. Neither texts in Greek nor texts stating "my father" were surveyed.[355] Jeremias left out texts that employed "Father" for God in prayers but did not have an immediate address.[356] Not only did Jeremias conduct a rather limited search, but new Qumran texts have become available. A more extensive search reveals that Jesus utilized Abba-language *with* previously existing Jewish forms of piety. For D'Angelo, '"father' as an address to God cannot be shown to originate with Jesus, or to be particularly important to his teaching, or even to have been used by him."[357] In Luke's crucifixion scene, D'Angelo attributes Jesus' address of the Father directly to Luke's redaction. The New Testament evidences an endorsement of Abba-language and its frequent employment by early Christian communities. Even so, Matthew, Luke, and John retain Father-language in much greater frequency than Mark and Q.[358]

---

[354] See Edward Schillebeeckx *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*; Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*; Jose Pagola, *Jesus: A Historical Approximation*.

[355] Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q: *Abba* and 'Father' in Context," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 83, no. 2 (1992): 151.

[356] Mary Rose D'Angelo, "*Abba* and 'Father': Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 111, no. 4, (1992), 619.

[357] D'Angelo, "Abba and Father," 630.

[358] Ibidem, 618.

The Book of Wisdom discloses Father-language in the Hellenistic period. In the second chapter, God sides with the righteous or just, against the taunts of cruel unbelievers. D'Angelo admits that Stoicism reflects this same alignment of the paternal relationship towards the good. In Wis 2:16, the just one "boasts that God is his father." Wis 11:10 juxtaposes the stances of God as father or monarch, "characterizing God as having corrected and tested Israel like a father, but having scrutinized their (Egyptian) enemies like a severe avenging king." D'Angelo reminds readers that the figure of Wisdom even presents God as Father.[359] Finally, human beings speak of God as Father in an analogous manner to Jesus. The righteous man[360] and the righteous Solomon[361] pray in such a mode.

D'Angelo repeats to her readers that Jeremias claimed no Jewish texts reflected the language of God as Father. This situation changed with the discovery of the Qumran texts. Eileen Schuller published a tract that she designates the "Psalm of Joseph" (4Q372 1). Dated to the late Hasmonean or early Herodian period, the figure of Joseph speaks to God as "my father and my God." The text does not appear to be the work of any fringe group or the Essenes. Schuller even identifies a separate prayer text, 4Q460, that depicts a matching discourse towards the divine. Contradicting the Jeremias thesis, the text shows paternal language was used prior to Jesus' era.[362]

These prayers particularly called upon God as Father, to protect his children from persecution. D'Angelo notices this in the apocryphal literature of 3 Maccabees. The elderly priest Eliezer addresses God as father to preserve the Jews of Egypt from disastrous oppression.

[359] Wis 10:16, 12:14, 18:10.
[360] Wis 2:16.
[361] Wis 11:10, 14:3.
[362] D'Angelo, "Abba and Father," 618.

She summarizes, "God, the almighty king whose providence governs all, is revealed as the father who rescues the threatened Jews from Ptolemy, the oppressive and tyrannical earthly king."[363] Rather than a family intimacy, it is this same plea for protection that occurs in Jesus' renowned prayers in Mark's crucifixion account. For the evangelist, "father" calls upon the refuge, mercy, and authority of the enthroned God. "Abba" indicates the presence of the spirit and spiritual power.[364] Jewish prayers to the Father acknowledge the power that governs the world, often soliciting forgiveness. Sirach 23 speaks to the divine as the father and ruler of his life. 1 Chronicles 29:10 mentions "Thou God of our father Israel." Tobit's prayer of gratitude shouts, "he is our God and Lord, he is our father forever" (Tobit 13:4).[365]

Rather than having Jesus set a new precedent, the evangelists drew upon *contemporary Jewish language* for prayer, according to D'Angelo. D'Angelo ascribes Jesus' invocations of "Father," in the Gospel of Mark to the uses found in the Wisdom literature.[366] Nor does this title function within the redaction methodology of the evangelist. In two instances, the appearance of "father" is associated with Jesus' relationship as Son of God (8:38). Later the relationship is extended in some form to the believer: "When you stand praying, forgive if you have something against someone, and your father in the heavens will forgive you."[367] For D'Angelo, this language is the "traditional connotations of forgiveness and mercy toward the sinful," not a new precedent in language or relationship.[368]

[363] D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q," 153.
[364] Ibidem, 174.
[365] D'Angelo, "Abba and Father," 621.
[366] See Mark 8:38, 13:32, 11:25.
[367] Mark 11:25.
[368] D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q," 157-8.

The intimate outcry of Jesus to his Father at Gethsemane, largely functions as a theatrical aside, rather than demonstration of language for Christians. First and foremost, no disciples appear in the scene; it only is depicted for Jesus and the reader. It features an internal struggle. Mark 14:36 resembles the Prayer of Joseph from the Qumran scrolls: Father is addressed, Jesus meditates on the power of God, and asks not to be abandoned. D'Angelo characterizes the Gethsemane scene as a classic Jewish martyr-prayer; this is a common motif in the Book of Wisdom and 3 Maccabees. The archetype of intimate filial prayers is not a Christian invention, but a previously existing model from Jewish history.[369]

The occurrences of paternal-language in Jesus' prayers confronts the Imperial discourse of Rome. The reign of the Father is presented in opposition to, that of Satan and the Roman Emperor. In first century Israel, father denoted the Roman Emperor as father and the empire as his family or clients.[370] "Thus in Mark, the word 'father' evokes the imperial (or anti-imperial) context, as well as the traditional uses of father for God as the refuge of the persecuted and the giver of forgiveness."[371] The linguistic-portrayal of the Father in the heavenly court is offered against the Roman *patria potestas*, by designating such power to the Judeo-Christian God alone.[372] The Abba-language of the evangelist enters into a previously-existing Roman milieu, in which Imperial discourse assumed its leader as patriarch.

Geza Vermes acknowledges Jesus' conception of the loving Father, but explains that Jesus only reiterates a language repeated from the patriarchs to the rabbinic period. The regularity of the intimate-Father address in the epistles and gospels indicate the high frequency

[369] D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q," 158-9.
[370] D'Angelo, "Abba and Father," 622-3.
[371] D'Angelo, "Theology in Mark and Q," 161.
[372] Ibidem, 162.

of such prayers rather than any precedent that Jesus outlines.[373] Vermes concludes, "The personal names in the Bible such as Abi-el ("God is my Father") or Abi-jah ("My Father is Yah[the Lord]") witness a familiarity with the notion of divine paternity, and from the mid-sixth century B.C.E. onward the idea is positively formulated (Isaiah 63:16, 64:8; Psalm 89:26; 1 Chronicles 29:10)." Even though the public prayers of the Temple typically called upon God as "Lord," "our God," or "King of the Universe," Vermes stipulates that "our Father, our King" and "our Father who are in heaven" had evolved into regular rabbinic language by the second century. Vermes firmly rebuts Jeremias' Abba-thesis and bemoans the fact that it is current in contemporary theology, though less so now.[374]

While D'Angelo and Vermes may remove the precedent of Jesus' prayer-language, their scholarship does not remove the *residual effect* of Jesus' love bestowed as a revelation of the Father. The prevalence of Abba-language in the New Testament epistles demonstrate that momentum grew for such prayer language, following the Jesus-event. He may well have spoken "Abba" as did the Wisdom literature, Qumran scrolls, and rabbis of the second century. Nonetheless, the Jesus-movement popularized a novel way of perceiving God that cannot be contained merely in language. Whereas first century Mediterranean society did not value children as persons, Jesus called them unto himself and praised their attitude towards God.[375] He spoke of God's loving governance of plants and animals, surpassed by his profound care for human beings.[376] Moved with pity for the hungry, he performed a massive public miracle to feed

[373] Geza Vermes, "The Jewish Jesus Movement," *Partings: How Judaism and Christianity became Two*, ed. Hershel Shanks, (Washington, DC: Biblical Archeology Society, 2013), [no page # on pdf].
[374] Ibidem.
[375] Matt 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16.
[376] Matt 6:34-44, Luke 12:26-28.

them.[377] Jesus' acts of mercy, compassion, and willing sacrifice model this God, alongside the language of the loving Father.

René Girard and Raymund Schwager noticed exegetical challenges present in the Bible, as well as centuries of violence spread across cultures. Dramatic theology and mimetic theory respectively, reckon with these problems and theorize new solutions through the book of Revelation in the Gospels. These two men shared nearly twenty years of correspondence across continents. Not originally a Christian thinker, Girard would convert to Catholicism at age 38. His brilliant psychoanalysis of literary works would later affect interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. While he appreciated Jesus' revelation of the hidden violent mechanism of mimesis, it would be Schwager who would properly integrate mimesis into salvation history. Schwager's theological sense of the problem of sin and violence of the Old Testament, the Suffering Servant, and the breadth of the Kingdom of God would more suitably flush out a Girardian Christology. He would add his own concern--the growing rivalry with God from the denunciations of the eighth century prophets. Beyond the accomplishments of narrative Christology, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* places the Christ-event as a sequence in universal history as God redeems human beings.

[377] Mark 6:34-44, Luke 9:12-17, Matt 14:13-21, John 6:1-15.

Bibliography

Alison, James. *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes.* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.

Alison, James. *Knowing Jesus.* Springfield, Ill.: Templegate Publishers, 1994.

Alison, James. *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In.* New York: Continuum, 2006.

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017.

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's*

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. Vol. IV. Trans. Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994.

Cowdell, Scott. *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018.

Daly, Robert J. *Sacrifice in Pagan & Christian Antiquity*. New York: T&T Clark, 2019.

Galvin, John P. "Jesus as Scapegoat." *The Way* 36 (1): 61–68.

Galvin, John P. "Jesus as Scapegoat; Violence and the Sacred in the Theology of Raymund Schwager." *The Thomist* 46 (April): 173–94.

Galvin, John P. "The Marvelous Exchange: Raymund Schwager's Interpretation of the History of Soteriology." *The Thomist* 53 (4): 675–91.

Girard, René. *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*. New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Girard, René. "Generative Scapegoating." In *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, 73–105.

Girard, René. *The Girard Reader*. Ed. James G. Williams. New York: Crossroad, 1996.

Girard, René. *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*. New York: Orbis Books, 2001.

Girard, René and Raymund Schwager. *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence 1974-1991.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Girard, René. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Girard, René. *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michael Treguer.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014.

Kaplan, Grant. *René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.

King, "Girard Reclaimed: Finding Common Ground between Sarah Coakley and René Girard on Sacrifice," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 23, (2016): 63-73.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Mongrain, Kevin. "Theologians of Spiritual Transformation: A Proposal for Reading René Girard through the Lenses of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Cassian." *Modern Theology* 28 (1): 81–111.

Newell, William Lloyd. *Desire in René Girard and Jesus*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012.

René Girard and Creative Reconciliation. Eds. Vern Neufeld Redekop and Thomas Ryba. New York: Lexington Books, 2014.

Robinette, Brian D. "Contemplative Practice and the Therapy of Mimetic Desire." *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 24 (2017): 73-100.

Schwager, Raymund. *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*. Leominster, U.K.: Gracewing, 2006.

Schwager, Raymund. "Christ's Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice." *Semeia* 33 (1985): 109–23.

Schwager, Raymund. *Glaube: Der Die Welt Verwandelt*. Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, 1976.

Schwager, Raymund. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.

Schwager, Raymund. *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.

Schwager, Raymund. *Must There Be Scapegoats?*: *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Williams, James G. *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.