

Bryce E. Rich

Professor Anne Thayer

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For yf when we were enemyes we were reconciled to God by the death of his sonne: moche more seinge we are reconciled we shal be preseruid by his lyfe. ¹¹ Not only so but we also ioye in God by the meanes of oure Lorde Jesus Christ by whom we have receayvd the attonment. Romans 5:10-11 (Tyndale New Testament, 1534)

In the 16th century William Tyndale produced his first English-language translation of the Bible. Where he felt the vernacular was not capable of expressing theological concepts or the realities of biblical authors, he coined new words. Among his neologisms was the word *atonement*, literally "at-one-ment" (Williams), used to describe the process by which God and humanity are reunited, overcoming the estrangement of sin.

Atonement is hot. In churches, in seminaries, and in the public forum where traditional religious ideas are discussed and critiqued, questions abound regarding the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection and the ways it might bear on humanity's relationship to God. Such questions are not new. From the earliest days of the Church, people have sought to understand just why Jesus died and what effect this may have had in the world. In this paper we will examine two voices in the conversation – Anselm of Canterbury and René Girard. While it is clear that Anselm's view of atonement ushered in a sea change in the way that Christians have understood atonement over the past thousand years, the jury is still out regarding Girard's contributions to the discussion.

As a monk and a scholar in medieval Europe, Anselm's worldview was shaped by rather harsh physical realities and a religious environment in which a heavy emphasis was placed on

the horror of sin and the near impossibility of entering into Heaven. The penitentials of the day suggested immense penance and alms as the only remedy for sin and people widely believed that the average person could never do everything required for forgiveness that would lead to everlasting life (Southern 215). Further, Anselm appears to have valued absolute obedience to the will of God as expressed through the abandonment of secular life. Living out his values, he chose the life of a monk under the Benedictine Rule (Southern 217). R. W. Southern recounts an allegory used by Anselm to illustrate this point: A feudal lord lives within a castle, surrounded by his holdings. In the countryside are those who live outside of the lord's protection who are easily picked off by the enemy. For Anselm, these are the Jews and the unredeemed. Surrounding the castle is a town inhabited by the faithful laity who perpetually live under the threat of marauding forces that might break in and destroy them, but also with the hope of escape. Within the castle are those who have devoted themselves to the lord, living within the confines of his immediate dominion. These are the monks who have sworn complete obedience to God and, as the allegory continues, do not stray beyond the castle walls. Though the enemy may assail the castle, the monks within are safe as long as they avoid windows where they may be struck with arrows. Finally, within the castle itself is the keep, whose inhabitants are completely safe and beyond any threat from stray arrows. These are the angels in heaven, who reside around the throne of God in complete obedience to God's will (Southern 223). Within this allegory we see not only Anselm's emphasis on obedience, but also a second influence in his thought – the medieval political structure of feudalism. Within this system, the inhabitants of a fiefdom must uphold their master's *honor*, which Southern defines as the entire estate he holds (lands, chattel and even people), as well as acknowledgement and respect of his position within the political hierarchy (225). It is these sensibilities which in part inform Anselm's formulation

of his now famous argument in *Cur Deus Homo* (hereafter *CDH*), or "Why God Became a Human Being."

Until the 11th century, the Church generally accepted some variation on the *Christus Victor* atonement model. In this narrative, humanity has fallen as a result of sin. Though humans were once the masters of the creation, the devil has taken control over the world and enslaved humanity as a consequence of the human choice to disobey God. Humanity had exchanged the freedom of choice for the dominion of the devil based on the interpretation of story found in Genesis of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God and subsequent expulsion from Paradise. As early as the Cappadocian fathers there were multiple explanations of just how Jesus had effected atonement. In one version, the fathers proposed that the power of God was hidden within the person of Jesus Christ, and the devil, like an unsuspecting fish, had swallowed this "bait" lowered to him on a hook, only to find himself with an explosion of the power of God erupting from his belly and ending his reign over humanity (Schmiechen 129). In another interpretation, Jesus and the devil simply fought it out, with Jesus proving himself the stronger and, rightly, the ruler of the world. Each of these metaphors begins from a point at which the devil appears to have some sort of legal "right" of lordship over humanity. Anselm met with a new variation on this theme through his pupil, Boso, who had studied in the new secular school at Laon. Coming to Anselm with many questions, Boso told of a new atonement theory which claimed that the devil, in his authority over humanity, had overreached by subjecting Jesus Christ to death. Since death was the penalty for sin and Jesus was sinless, the devil's rights over humanity were revoked and humanity was released from bondage to sin and death.

In homage to Boso, who both first introduced this argument to Anselm and subsequently assisted in writing *CDH*, Boso becomes the only interlocutor in Anselm's various theological

dialogues to actually be recorded by name (Southern 205). Anselm begins *CDH* with Boso first reciting and then refuting the argument from Laon (I.vii). In response to the idea that God was required to bargain with the devil by virtue of the devil's legal rights over humanity, Boso states:

"...I cannot see what force this argument has. If the devil or man belonged to himself or to anyone but God, or remained in some power other than God's, perhaps it would be a sound argument. But the devil and man belong to God alone, and neither one stands outside God's power..." (Anselm of Canterbury, *CDH* 108)

Boso continues by saying that both the devil and humanity are thieves, having acted together to take humanity away from its proper place in the scheme of God's creation. And though it may be just for humanity to be tormented for sin, it is not just for the devil to be the perpetrator (Anselm of Canterbury, *CDH* 108-109). At the root of Anselm's objection to the idea that the devil might have a right to dominion over humanity is his understanding of the full sovereignty of God and his revulsion at the thought of God's majesty being in some way lessened or diminished by the devil (Southern 209). In Anselm's thought, the only thing due the devil is punishment for rebellion against God.

Also at stake in *CDH* is the question of why God, as supreme ruler over the created order, could not simply remove the blight of sin by wishing it so. Or to put it another way, if God can do anything, why would it be necessary to enter the world, suffer, and die a most horrible death in order to restore order to the world? Critics of Anselm's theory, both ancient and modern, raise this question. Southern suggests that Anselm's answer to this particular charge begins to form in his earlier *Proslogion* (213). In Chapter VII, Anselm explains that although God is almighty, there are things that he [sic] cannot do. He reasons that in the perfectly rational order of the universe, God is incapable of being corrupted, of lying, or of making that which is true to be

false, as only the unjust are capable of such behavior. Therefore, by the very nature of God's justice, God cannot be swayed to act in these ways. For if God did act unjustly, then perversity would have power over God (Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 76-77). But because Anselm is first and foremost committed to the absolute agency of God, it cannot be that perversity would have reign over God. However, this reasoning leads to a further question: if God is just and punishment is the "just" penalty for sin, then how is it that God shows mercy to the wicked? Here again Anselm dedicates a chapter of the *Proslogion*, in typical scholastic fashion, to the harmonizing of two seemingly contradictory tenets. Starting from the position that God does indeed show mercy to sinners, Anselm asserts that this comes from God's supreme goodness. However, he also asserts that God is supremely good because God is also supremely just (for any hint of injustice would mean that God is not good). Finally, asserting a type of commutative logic, Anselm asserts that God is merciful because God is just:

God is Merciful → God is Good → God is Just

From this argument (Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 78-79) Anselm has built a case that mercy and justice are different aspects of the same activity (Southern 213). By framing his argument in this way, Anselm rejects the notion that mercy and justice stand in opposition to one another. Yet because of his insistence on God's inability to do that which is unjust (e.g., forgive all of humanity for disobedience, allowing sin to go unchallenged and the creation to remain marred), Anselm is still forced to deal with the question of how God and humanity are reconciled. Thus the stage is set for the main argument of *CDH*.

Anselm begins his treatise by suggesting that the purpose of humanity is to live in a state of blessed immortality (Anselm of Canterbury, *CDH* 100), in total obedience to God. This is what the created owes to the creator. However, humanity disobeyed God, thus marring the

perfection of the created order (an offense to *honor* as defined above in the example of feudalism). Within the framework of feudalism, satisfaction, or the restoration of a slighted ruler's honor, may be accomplished in one of two ways. A subject may make restitution through payment or a punishment may be extracted. But Anselm points out that only one of these methods of satisfaction works within his argument. Should God inflict punishment on humanity, the creation would remain in an imperfect state. Because punitive justice would not remediate the damage caused to the creation through humanity's disobedience, Anselm rules out punishment as a means of satisfaction. Thus, he reasons, restoration remains as the only avenue through which satisfaction may be achieved.

However, humanity is incapable of making restitution through a payment. Should humanity subsequently return to obedience, there would still be no way to make up for the past indiscretions, as total obedience was already required from the beginning. As such, a mark remains on the perfection of the creation which humanity is helpless to clear, thus frustrating the perfect plan of God. However, Anselm reasons that since God is almighty, it is not possible to permanently frustrate God's plan. Therefore, a way to restore the original perfection of the created order must exist.

Continuing in his use of images from feudalism, Anselm asserts that in order to restore the *honor* of God, an offering of obedience must be made of equal or greater value to the disobedience already committed. However, as previously stated, no human being is capable of offering up more than what is already required of him or her. Thus Anselm reasons that since humanity is incapable of making an offering to repay the debt, God alone remains as the sole agent capable of doing so. While this is in consonance with the goodness and mercy of God, a payment made by God is insufficient in respect to the justice of God's character. To restate the

problem, humanity must repay what only God is capable of repaying. Thus Anselm comes to the conclusion that the God-Man, Jesus Christ, was essential to the restoration of humanity and the redemption of the whole creation. Because Jesus freely offered his life, humanity's debt was satisfied. At this point it would be prudent to slow down and carefully examine what Anselm has proposed, as this is an often misunderstood part of his argument which draws a great deal of passionate critique in current conversations around atonement.

In *CDH* I.ix, Boso asserts that Jesus was persecuted even unto death because "he constantly upheld truth and justice, in life and in word" (Anselm of Canterbury 112). However, such obedience is required of all humanity. Later, in II.xviii, Boso points to the many righteous people who lived before Christ who were put to death as a consequence of their obedience in holding up this same truth and justice. What then, Boso asks, makes Jesus' death different from theirs (Anselm of Canterbury 113, 177)? Anselm replies that God did not require Jesus' death, but rather his death was a natural consequence of his just life – a fallen world's response to Jesus' uncompromising life of justice. However, the difference between Jesus and other righteous humans who have died rather than be disobedient to God is found in Anselm's understanding of debt. Humanity, because of initial disobedience which has marred the perfect creation, is already condemned to death as a penalty for sin. However, the Incarnate Word, second person of the Trinity, is not subject to the penalty of death – viz., having never sinned, Jesus is not required to die. In Anselm's words in II.xviii:

"No man besides him ever gave to God, by dying, what he was not necessarily going to lose at some time, or paid what he did not owe. But this Man freely offered to the Father what he would never have lost by any necessity, and paid for sinners what he did not owe for himself. Therefore he gave us a more striking example, to the effect that

each man should not hesitate to surrender to God for himself, when reason demands it, what he is going to lose very soon. For although he did not need to do it for himself, and was not compelled to do it for others, since he owed them nothing but punishment, he gave up such a precious life—yes, nothing less than himself—surrendering so great a person with such willingness" (CDH 177).

Finally, it is because of Jesus' gift of infinite value, which was neither demanded nor required, that God the Father rewarded him with the power to redeem humanity who was otherwise condemned to death for disobedience. Anselm posits that Jesus' gift freely given should be rewarded. But because Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, already shares in common all that the Father has, there is nothing that the Father can give to his Son that he does not already possess. So the Father rewards the Son by allowing him to grant reconciliation to estranged humanity, canceling the debt and providing satisfaction that restores the honor of God and, by extension, the entire creation (Anselm of Canterbury, CDH 180-181).¹

Anselm's atonement theory is often classified as an "objective" model, meaning that it is the actions taken by God that bring forth reconciliation. For Anselm, humanity was helpless to bring about restitution for past sins and, therefore, completely dependent on God if atonement was ever to be achieved. However, as we shall see next in the thought of Girard, not all atonement theories depend solely on the work of God to bring reconciliation to the Creation.

Girard was born in Avignon on Christmas Day, 1923, into a France that had experienced a violent revolution a little over a century before. His context included an antipathy toward the Catholic Church and the lingering effects of the Cult of Reason. The effects of democratization

¹ While some of the language used here might suggest an opening for universal salvation, it is clear from Anselm's many writings that this is not an option in his thought. R. W. Southern points out that for Anselm, humanity (or "Man" as the text is literally translated) refers to the species rather than to all individuals. Thus, if even only some people are saved, God's intention is still fulfilled (Southern 214).

and the dismantling of hierarchical models would also play a role in the theory he would later develop. His father, an anticlerical radical socialist, was the city archivist and curator of the Museum of Avignon and the Castle of the Popes, while his mother was a devout Roman Catholic (Girard, *Evolution* 17-18). Politically and intellectually the younger Girard was a thinker of the left, with little concern for Christianity until the age of 36, when he experienced conversion on Easter Sunday 1959 in response to his work in mimetic theory and his understanding of the Christianity's clear critique of what he came to call the hidden scapegoat mechanism (Kirwan 10-11). In his formative years he also witnessed the Second World War, during which he lived in occupied France and worked with the French Resistance, where he noted that it was his friends among the Young Christian Workers who were most able to resist the contagious attractions of fascism and communism. (Kirwan 11). In addition to this, Girard notes as an influence on his own thought the suicide of his brother and its subsequent effects on his family as they attempted to reconcile to their loss without assigning blame (Kirwan 12).

Girard's career brought together work in literature, philology, and cultural anthropology. He finally came to the formulation of his mimetic theory as he applied insights gained through his multidisciplinary research to the study of biblical texts. Girard's work was first informed by the works of authors several European authors of the 16-19th centuries. Turning to anthropology he examined the myths and religions of various cultures, finally turning his attention to the Bible. Girard claims that in the texts of the Bible he found something new, beginning in the Old Testament and culminating in the Gospels, that differed greatly from the stories told in other cultures. Following the pattern of systematic theology, Girard's work can be seen to describe first a problem, then a solution, and subsequently a resulting atonement. However, Girard's atonement model differs from much of what precedes it in that it brackets off all metaphysical

discussion as being outside the realm of the observable. Towards the latter part of his career, he does introduce the influence of the Holy Spirit into his writings, though his first works were written in an academic context often hostile to overtly religious ideas. But before we can examine the work of atonement within Girard's thought, it is necessary to offer an overview of the mimetic theory.

Girard begins his mimetic theory by asserting that all desire is mediated. By this he means that there is no such thing as a desire² that spontaneously arises within a person. Rather a human being perceives an object as wanted by another and then imitates this desire with the intention of acquiring the desired object for herself. Girard uses the word *mimesis* to capture not only the sense of imitation, but also to reveal the conflictual aspect of the action. For his purposes, *imitation* cannot fully embody this action because of the word's use in the social sciences as a descriptor for acceptable forms of cultural transmission, devoid of conflict (Girard, *Things Hidden* 17-18). The classic example used to illustrate *mimesis* presents two children playing in a room full of toys. A toy (the object) may sit undisturbed until it appears that one child is reaching for it. Perceiving a desire for the object, the second child will immediately begin to show interest in the toy as well. The perceived desire of the second child encourages the first to desire the toy all the more. Playing with the toy is not necessarily the goal, but rather the acquisition of the desired object. The process that unfolds is known as *mimetic rivalry*. When the object of desire is a limited resource (e.g., the only toy of its kind) then this rivalry, left unchecked, will quickly escalate to violence. Among children this may be as simple as a tussle and some crying. However, in more complex instances of mimetic rivalry the stakes are much higher.

² Here there is a distinction between desires as opposed to appetites or needs, such as hunger or the urge to reproduce, which are biologically preconditioned.

With the introduction of more individuals and an object deemed of greater value (as determined by the intensity of desire perceived within the group and the relative scarcity of the object), a frenzy may ensue in which social order breaks down as the level of desire increases. As rivals become locked in this mimetic conflict, each person's desire is further focused and shaped by the mediating desire of his opponents. From the outside, it becomes less and less possible to perceive any difference between the rivals – a phenomenon referred to by Girard as a *crisis of doubles*, in which any differentiation between the parties disappears as they spiral into a total mimicry of one another's desires and actions. As adults with greater strength and the potential for the use of weapons, it is possible that one party within the struggle may end up either driven away or, in the most extreme case, dead. Based on this outcome, Girard develops what is perhaps the most controversial element of his mimetic theory: the *originary murder*. Girard postulates that at some point in the prehistory of humanity, a mimetic crisis rose to a pitch in which finally a member of a social group was killed, resulting in a moment at which all hostility ceased. By means of a process which Girard refers to as *double transference*, those involved in the act of collective violence attribute the preceding crisis, as well as its resolution, to the victim (J. G. Williams 293). In the collective experience of the group, the victim is then divinized, symbolizing both the very real possibility of the destruction of the group and also the agent which brought peace in the midst of conflict. Girard postulates that as a result of the originary murder three "Pillars of Culture" developed: *prohibition, ritual and myth*.

In order to mitigate mimetic desire and avoid the attendant violence, *prohibitions* arise, forbidding either the object of desire or the desire itself (taboo). In a primitive culture, prohibitions cover objects "which the community is incapable of dividing peacefully: women, food, weapons, the best dwelling sites, etc." (Girard, *Things Hidden* 19). As an example we

might apply Girard's insight to the Ten Commandments, which prohibit adultery (the acquisition of another man's wife), theft (taking another's property), and murder (the ultimate step in eliminating a mimetic rival). All of these are specific actions, but the tenth and final commandment prohibits not an action, but desire itself. In its proscriptions against coveting one's neighbor's wife, or servant, or chattel or any other property, it is not describing an inordinate, sin-hardened action, but rather the simple act of "desire" which lies behind the Hebrew word *chamad* (Girard, *Satan* 7-8). Prohibitions and taboos develop early within a cultural context for reasons which may not be readily visible outside the group or even understood by later generations; however, Girard's assertion is that at their origination these powerfully ingrained taboos define the lines of identity and hold violence at bay. As such prohibition plays the role of the first pillar of culture, helping to regulate group dynamics and stem conflict. However, prohibition alone is not powerful enough to ensure that a mimetic crisis will not erupt again with the group. Here the next pillar of culture comes into play.

Girard defines *ritual* as an act designed to reproduce a previous mimetic crisis in an effort to discharge a current conflict. In recreating the previous conditions, participants within the ritual intentionally violate prohibitions developed in response to earlier crises. This may include reciprocal parody, insults and mockery, organized battle, or sexual acts with people who are normally off limits (Girard, *Things Hidden* 19-20). The community is brought to a place of reenactment of an earlier crisis, which was previously resolved by the immolation of the original victim. Within primitive cultures, the threat of a new eruption of violence is quite real if the ritual reenactment becomes too pitched. And in the earliest cultures, a new victim is often selected for immolation during the reenactment of the previous crisis which resulted in peace and a cessation of violence within the group. Over long periods of time, violent elements within

ritual are removed in stages until only a harmonious rite remains. For example, human sacrifice may first be replaced by animal sacrifice, only later to be replaced by some other action that requires only a symbolic object in lieu of an actual victim.

Girard characterizes *myth* as the third pillar of culture. In his appropriation of this word, he defines myth as a story told by a social group of a past event in which a mimetic crisis erupted and was successfully contained. Within the myth a person (or persons) brings about a mimetic crisis within a community by transgressing one or more of the community's prohibitions. As a result, the person is killed or otherwise expelled from the community for what within the group appear to be justifiable reasons. Myths are invariably told from the viewpoint of the group, showing the justification for their actions. As myths are retold over time, they are gradually stripped of more violent elements. They may euphemistically tell of gods who leap from cliffs to fly away or of people who fall asleep or are simply swept away to another place. Girard asserts that each of these retellings masks the death of an original victim. Myths, therefore, are lies which hide innocent victims who are cast as guilty boundary transgressors that deserve the punishments that they receive. In *The Scapegoat*, Girard offers up the example of *Oedipus Rex* to illustrate this principle. The story opens with a crisis: a plague has ravaged Thebes. Oedipus, having killed his father and married his mother (two prohibited actions – parricide and incest), is responsible for the calamity. In order to end the plague, Oedipus must be banished from the land (Girard, *Scapegoat* 25). In a stereotypical way associated with myths, Oedipus bears the signs of the outsider. As an infant he had been left out to die. He has a limp. He returns to Thebes as an unknown foreigner. Within mythical structures, all of these characteristics are indicators that he is not a member of the group and is, therefore, to be considered an object of suspicion (Girard, *Scapegoat* 26). But most important, within the myth Oedipus deserves the punishment that he

receives because of his boundary transgressions. Myth portrays those who are killed or expelled as duly punished. But in reality, myth provides cover for a process which Girard refers to as the *scapegoat mechanism*, by which communities embroiled in mimetic crisis are able to discharge their violence and restore harmony within the community.

In order to be effective, the scapegoat mechanism must remain concealed from the people who act it out. To quote Girard, "Persecutors believe they choose their victims because of the crimes they attribute to them, which make them in their eyes responsible for the disasters to which they react by persecution" (Scapegoat 27). A type of mob mentality appears among the people as they carry out "justice" against the one singled out as the cause of the current crisis. To be effective, the persecutors must feel justified in their accusations and subsequent punishment of the scapegoat. If a member of the group stands in solidarity with the scapegoat, she may find herself on the receiving end of violence as well, becoming suddenly alien in her betrayal of the social order to stand with the villain. However, if a significant number of dissenters appear within the group, the necessary unity for the formation of a lynch mob will not materialize.

Of course, the term *scapegoat*, used apart from its ritual function as part of the rites of the Jewish Day of Atonement found in Leviticus 16, has come in European and American cultures to connote an innocent victim who is blamed for the problems that exist within a community. As Girard points out, it is significant that this particular meaning of the word is present in cultures that have been influenced by the spread of Christianity (Things Hidden 131-132). It is thus to the texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition that we will now turn. For within these texts, Girard maintains, is the basis for the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism and the freeing of humanity from the endless cycle of mimetic violence.

After the release of *Violence and the Sacred*, in which Girard formulated the scapegoat mechanism, it was several years before he was ready to apply what he had formulated regarding myth and ritual to the Bible in the same way that he had applied it to a wide range of mythical texts (Kirwan 63). He had expected to find the same principles at work within his own religion; however, instead he discovered something different. Although there were parts of the Bible that fit his definition of myth, shrouding violence against innocent victims as a necessary punishment or the wrath of God, he discovered two other types of texts previously unobserved in his survey of other writings. The first of these, which Girard would call *Hebrew texts*, begins very early on in Genesis and continues throughout the Bible. Unlike myths which are told in the voice of the persecutor, Hebrew texts include the voice of the innocent victim who protests the violence perpetrated against him. The first biblical example of this phenomenon is found in Genesis 4 where God tells Cain that the blood of his brother Abel cries out from the ground. Rather than deserving the death that has befallen him, Abel is portrayed as a man whose offering to God was found pleasing. In many accounts throughout the Old Testament, the voice of the innocent victim is heard, protesting his innocence. But also characteristic of the Hebrew texts is a demand for revenge against those who have persecuted the victim. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance. And again and again the psalmists cry out to God to both deliver them from their enemies, but also to inflict violence upon their persecutors. Job, rather than quietly accepting his fate as does Oedipus in the Greek myth, proclaims his innocence and demands a council with God in order to correct what has befallen him. Nowhere outside of the Bible had Girard encountered texts in which the voice of the undeserving victim displaced the ubiquitous voice of the unconscious persecutors whose myths explain the crisis wrought by the interloper and the justifications for expulsion or death.

Girard also found what he came to call *gospel texts*. These texts also appeared first in Genesis, but appeared more clearly in the accounts of the life of Jesus from which they take their name. Like Hebrew texts, they too speak from the point of view of the innocent victim. However, rather than calling for revenge, gospel texts offer forgiveness to the persecutors, thus ending the cycle of retributive violence. The Joseph cycle ends on such a gospel text. Joseph, sold by his brothers into slavery, chooses to forgive and embrace them when the family is reunited later in Egypt during a great famine: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear..." (Genesis 50:19-20, NRSV). The Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah also follow this pattern as they describe the one who "was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed... he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:5, 12, NRSV). In these passages Girard found the scapegoat mechanism laid bare, an announcement of the innocence of the suffering servant whose persecution was the vehicle used for bringing peace to a community caught up in mimetic crisis.

But, according to Girard, the ultimate revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is found in the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and the graphic descriptions of his Passion and Crucifixion. Rather than deserving any punishment, the gospel texts are clear that Jesus, the Son of God, was without sin. Yet in spite of this he became the focus of violence as Roman officials, Sadducees of the Temple, Pharisees and an unruly crowd of Passover pilgrims in Jerusalem unanimously called for his death, accusing him of sedition and blasphemy. His disciples either betrayed him, as in the case of Peter, or fled in the face of the angry mob. But rather than telling

a myth from the viewpoint of the persecutors, the Evangelists speak for the victim, recording every detail of the unjust punishment. John records the words of Caiaphas, who claimed that it would be better for one man to die than for the entire nation of Israel to be destroyed (11:50) – a direct summation of the normally hidden scapegoat mechanism. And Luke records the peace secured between Pilate and Herod as a result of coming together over Jesus' death (23:12). It is the Lucan account that further tells us that, unlike the psalmist who cries out for vengeance, Jesus' response to his unjust treatment was, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (23:24, KJV). Girard asserts that,

"the gospel revelation is the definitive formulation of a truth already partially disclosed in the Old Testament. But in order to come to completion, it requires the good news that God himself [sic] accepts the role of the victim of the crowd so that he [sic] can save us all. This God who becomes a victim is not another mythic god but the one God, infinitely good, of the Old Testament" (Girard, *Satan* 130).

Girard further claims that, within the anthropological reading of the gospels, "Satan," the name given to the scapegoat mechanism *par excellence* which draws human beings into mimetic rivalry, causes an escalation of violence, and then ultimately dispels the crisis through the scapegoating of an innocent victim (Girard, *Things Hidden* 418-419). Satan is first seen in this role in the Gospels as the tempter in the desert who tries to convince Jesus to enter into mimetic rivalry with God, much as Adam and Eve had done in Eden when the serpent promised that the forbidden fruit would make them like God. The identification of Satan with mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism is key to Girard's understanding of the patristic teachings regarding tricking the devil into crucifying Jesus – a point to which we will return below.

However, this is not the end of the gospel story. There is still the matter of the Resurrection with which to contend. Anselm makes no mention of the Resurrection. However, within the Girardian framework, Resurrection bears several meanings. First, Girard sees the Resurrection as the Father's acknowledgement of Jesus' proper conduct, refusing to enter into the mimetic rivalry with temporal authorities or to participate in the scapegoat mechanism. Using an anthropological reading, this resurrection did not take place immediately after Jesus' death, as a phoenix rises from its own ashes, but rather is disconnected from the scene of the Crucifixion by a period of three days, thereby separating the world of the life to come from the new life that springs forth from violence in mythical stories (Girard, *Things Hidden* 231-232). When the resurrected Christ appears to his disciples, he speaks words of peace to them. Although Hebrew texts would have decried Jesus' unjust treatment and demanded revenge against those who had betrayed him through either joining the mob or abandoning him in his suffering, the resurrected Christ instead speaks words that defuse the cycle of retributive violence. Finally the Resurrection also serves one other function within Girard's thought. Matthew reports that after Jesus' death there was an earthquake during which tombs were opened and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised, later to appear to many after the Resurrection of Jesus (27:52-53). Girard's anthropological reading of this passage indicates that the lynching of Jesus resulted not only in the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism through his own death, but also revealed the innocence of many victims who went before him (Girard, *Things Hidden* 234-235). The light of the gospel shines not only on the scapegoat mechanism at work in the Crucifixion of Jesus, but also shines on those who have died as sacrifices to quell mimetic violence throughout the ages, bringing those who will see it into a deeper understanding of the pervasive nature of the victimage mechanism. None of this is to say that Girard does not believe in a literal

Resurrection. However, he limits his mimetic anthropology to the field of inquiry which can be satisfied within this world. The afterlife is strictly off limits.

In his earlier works, Girard was hesitant to speak openly of the role of the Holy Spirit in the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. Instead he preferred to speak of the movement of history towards a gradual unmasking of the structures of violence that form and sustain human cultures. But by the time he wrote *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard had moved to a more overt position, stating that the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity, is the power that overcomes mimetic violence (189). He further points out that the Paraclete, in Greek *parakletos*, is the advocate that comes to the aid of the accused. *Ha-satan*, literally "the accuser," made his first appearance in the book of Job as the agent who brings unjust accusations against Job which are echoed again and again in the questions of Job's friends as they search for an explanation to justify what they perceive as divine punishment for hidden transgressions. It would appear that it is not by coincidence then that John's gospel uses "The Advocate" as a term for the Holy Spirit, who helps humanity stand against the power of the hidden victimage mechanism. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which opens Peter's eyes to his complicity in mob mentality when he betrayed Jesus and cursed his name. It is also the Holy Spirit that opens Saul's eyes to his role as persecutor of the first Christians as he blindly maintained the *status quo* within the established cultural order (Girard, *Satan* 190-191).

Coming back around to the patristic writings which claimed that the devil was deceived into crucifying Jesus, we remember that Anselm rejected such a notion outright because of his absolute conviction that Satan could hold no legal authority over any part of God's creation. However, as Girard applies his mimetic anthropology to the text, he asserts is that:

"Medieval and modern theories of redemption all look in the direction of God for the causes of the Crucifixion: God's honor, God's justice, even God's anger, must be satisfied. These theories don't succeed because they 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" (Satan 150).

With this understanding, Girard asserts there is no violence or dishonesty on God's part within the patristic *Christus Victor* model that traps Satan.

"It is rather the inability of the prince of this world to understand the divine love. If Satan [the scapegoat mechanism] does not see God, it is because he *is* violent contagion itself... Satan himself transforms his own mechanism into a trap, and he falls into it headlong. God does not act treacherously, even toward Satan, but allows himself [sic] to be crucified for the salvation of humankind, something beyond Satan's conception. The prince of this world depended too heavily on the extraordinary power of concealment of the victim mechanism" (Girard, Satan 152-153).

As previously stated, Anselm's satisfaction view of atonement is considered objective because it depends on the actions of God to bring about reconciliation with humanity. However, Girard's atonement view not only requires action on the part of God through Jesus Christ, but also elicits a response from humanity that witnesses God's act of self-giving and responds, ending the cycle of retributive violence and the pervasive power of the scapegoat mechanism. Because Jesus' actions require a response from humanity, Girard's model is classified as a subjective view of the atonement. For Girard, the reconciliation comes when humans understand their own complicity with the scapegoat mechanism and renounce violence against their fellow human beings. However, unlike other subjective models which came before it, Girard's model

requires both the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit to reveal the scapegoat mechanism to those who are trapped within its cycle of retributive violence, and the ongoing grace of the Holy Spirit to engage in a positive, non-acquisitive mimesis which chooses the imitation of Christ as the mediator of desire. When our desires are mediated by another human being, the result is often a mimetic crisis resulting from the need to acquire that which another also wants. But the desires of Jesus, as presented in the Gospels, are all based on the will of the Father. Thus, to model our own desires upon these brings us also into alignment with the will of the Father. Rather than producing a conflict over limited resources, this positive mimesis instead produces harmony, restoring the original peace of God as we cease to participate in the victimage mechanism.

Both Anselm and Girard have provided interesting ideas regarding the atoning nature of the incarnation and the role of Jesus Christ in God's plan for reconciliation with fallen humanity. Though the conditions that shaped their worldviews are quite different from one another, each adds his own contribution to the ongoing conversation. Both men regard sin seriously and acknowledge its effects within the world. Further, each rejects earlier narratives, often still repeated in certain quarters of the Church even today, which depicted Satan as ruler over the fallen creation. For Anselm, the idea of the devil enjoying "rights" over creation is an unthinkable affront to the sovereignty of the God against whom the devil has rebelled. Girard goes a step further, in refusing the idea of the devil as a metaphysical being responsible for evil in the world. Rather his humanistic milieu brings him to locate the problem of evil within the heart of humanity – a humanity that has turned in on itself in mimetic rivalry instead of fulfilling the role of imitators of Christ. While modern understandings of hierarchy precondition us to hear Anselm's feudalistic images with suspicion, we may still find great value in his idea of a supremely good, merciful and just God whose plan for the creation cannot be thwarted by sin.

Anselm assures us that God remains faithful to the created design, bringing that which has begun into the full realization of its blessedness. Further, in denying the rights of the devil, Anselm corrects views which attribute too much power to evil, bordering on Manichean heresy. Through his own anthropological reading of the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, Girard uncovers the lie of the satanic mechanism by which we justify violence against our fellow humans as evil-doers deserving punishment for violating cultural prohibitions that we have characterized as divinely sanctioned. By maintaining a non-metaphysical model, Girard speaks to a modern world that reacts skeptically to talk of angels and demons. By focusing on the human role in the scapegoat mechanism, he provides a convincing model that acknowledges the fallen state of humanity, laying responsibility directly at the feet of sinners. However, by introducing the prevenient and ongoing grace of the Holy Spirit, Girard avoids the pitfalls of the Pelagian controversy, fully acknowledging the role of divine agency in the reconciliation of humanity. It remains to be seen how these new contributions to the atonement discussion will be received within the Church. But as we enter the third millennium of Christianity, perhaps a new sea change stands on the horizon.

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