

Essays in Systematic Theology 53:

The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption¹

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I have twice conducted a graduate seminar entitled ‘Lonergan, Girard, and Soteriology,’ once at Regis College in Toronto and once at Marquette University. I have also lectured on this material to undergraduate theology majors at Marquette. On all of these occasions, the principal question that I posed was, To what extent are the following two texts saying the same thing?

This is why the Son of God became man, suffered, died, and was raised again: because divine wisdom has ordained and divine goodness has willed, not to do away with the evils of the human race through power, but to convert those evils into a supreme good according to the just and mysterious Law of the Cross.²

If God allowed Satan to reign for a certain period over human kind, it is because God knew beforehand that at the right time Christ would overcome his adversary by dying on the Cross. God in his wisdom had foreseen since the beginning that the victim mechanism would be reversed like a glove, exposed, placed in the open, stripped naked, and dismantled in the Gospel Passion texts, and he knew that neither Satan nor the powers could prevent this revelation ... The divine wisdom knew that thanks to this death the victim mechanism would be neutralized.³

1 This essay appeared in *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 46-61. Some small revisions have been made.

2 Bernard Lonergan, Thesis 17, *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964) 552. The translation is by Charles Hefling.

3 René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 151-52.

I would like here to share the answer to this question that I have arrived at through these teaching experiences and with the help of the questions and insights of my students. My concern here is only with the respective contributions of Lonergan and Girard to soteriology. While I have pointed to certain differences between them on other issues, I have made no attempt to address their fundamental commitments on such questions as cognitive theory and epistemology, the theological significance of the notion of nature, and so on, where the differences may well be far more profound than the complementarity that I am here signaling might suggest.

1 Two Dimensions of Desire

The first step has to do with basic clarifications. In my view – and not mine alone – Lonergan and Girard are responsible for two of the most vital and far-reaching intellectual and cultural discoveries of the twentieth century. Each of these discoveries is an elucidation of the dynamics of human desire. Lonergan has articulated the structure of what he calls the transcendental intentions or notions of intelligibility, truth and being, and the good. Girard has elucidated the mimetic, indeed acquisitively mimetic and potentially violent, character of a great deal of human desire. Each is a contributor to what perhaps we may call a hermeneutics of desire. Each also is a committed Christian and Roman Catholic, and from that standpoint each articulates the role of divine grace in the purification, fulfilment, and sanctification of desire, or, in the words of T.S. Eliot, drawing on Julian of Norwich, in

... the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.⁴

⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971) 57.

Despite the importance of their respective contributions, however, relating them to each other has been a matter of some difficulty. The key, I believe, lies in grasping that they are speaking of two quite distinct but intimately related dimensions of desire. The clear distinction and the intimate relation of these two dimensions must both be grasped. The two dimensions may be called the spiritual and the psychic. The students of each thinker may easily be tempted to a one-sidedness that would shortchange the contributions of the other. I have long been convinced that many Lonergan students overlook the importance of the sensitive psychic and intersubjective dimension of human consciousness, the dimension in which by and large Girard is operating, but some Girardians would probably be inclined to an excessive suspicion of the transcendental dimensions of the human spirit that Lonergan has elucidated. The distinction of these two dimensions is reflected in the following deceptively simple text from Lonergan:

... we are conscious in two ways: in one way, through our sensibility, we undergo rather passively what we sense and imagine, our desires and fears, our delights and sorrows, our joys and sadness; in another way, through our intellectuality, we are more active when we consciously inquire in order to understand, understand in order to utter a word, weigh evidence in order to judge, deliberate in order to choose, and exercise our will in order to act.⁵

The first way of being conscious is sensitive or psychic; the second is intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, or to use the generic term, spiritual. Spirituality includes more than these operations, of course, but the intelligent, rational, and moral dimensions of the human subject are spiritual.

⁵ Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, vol. 12 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007) 139.

Both ways of being conscious are also ways of desiring. The first entails a preponderance of ‘undergoing,’ while the second, though it surely involves passivity, is marked as well by the self-governed and self-possessed unfolding of operations that is indicated by the repetition of the phrase ‘in order to ...’: in order to understand, in order to utter a word, in order to judge, in order to choose, in order to act. The first way appears more spontaneous, though if the ‘undergoing’ is what Girard calls interdividual and mimetic – and for him most of it is – this appearance of spontaneity may be an illusion. The second way shows greater autonomy, but Girard would acknowledge such autonomy as genuine only if it manifests a subject who has transcended the influence of the negative mimetic, however precariously. And for Girard grace is required for that kind of self-transcendence to be habitual.

It is the relation of the two ways of being conscious that is significant for my present purposes. They interact, and the relative autonomy of the second may be compromised by the gradual and unnoticed infiltration of acquisitive mimetic desire into the very performance of operations of understanding, judging, and deciding. The emergence of our words from our insights, the emanation of our judgments from reflective grasp of evidence, the procession of our decisions from insights and judgments, may all have already been derailed by an earlier distortion that reaches into the organic intersubjectivity from which autonomous self-possession emerges. This earlier distortion leads to a deviation in the words that one speaks, in the judgments that one makes, and in the decisions that one enacts. And the deviation need not be deliberate. Thus Max Scheler will speak not only of deliberate falsification of our words but also of organic mendacity, and it is in the latter dimension that Girard is working. Scheler emphasized in his book *Ressentiment* that there is such a thing as organic mendacity, that there are people who are mendacious from the preconscious roots of their intersubjectivity. Such people, Scheler says, have no need to ‘lie,’ that is, to deceive *deliberately*. Let me quote Scheler:

Beyond all conscious lying and falsifying, there is a deeper ‘organic mendacity.’ Here the falsification is not formed in consciousness but at the same stage of the mental process as the impressions and value feelings themselves: *on the road of experience into consciousness*. There is ‘organic mendacity’ whenever a man’s mind admits only those impressions and feelings which serve his ‘interest’ or his instinctive attitude. Already in the process of mental reproduction and recollection, the contents of his experience are modified in this direction. He who is ‘mendacious’ has no need to lie! In his case, the automatic process of forming recollections, impressions, and feelings is involuntarily slanted, so that conscious falsification becomes unnecessary.⁶

Then the words one utters, the judgments one makes, and the decisions one enacts are already negatively influenced by organic mendacity. The profundity of Girard’s work lies in the dynamics that he exposes of such living in untruth, as it were from the ground up. In contrast to this organic mendacity, Sebastian Moore once said in a lecture at Boston College, ‘If you are telling a lie and you blush, be thankful that your body is still on the side of the angels.’

2 Two Contributions to Soteriology

The interaction that I have just mentioned of two dimensions of consciousness is indicative of the problem that both Lonergan and Girard are addressing, namely, the problem of evil, the depths of its roots, the complexity of sorting out the sources of its various manifestations, and the nature of the redemption from evil that is articulated in the dimension of systematic theology called soteriology.

⁶ Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961) 77-78.

Lonergan's position on the Law of the Cross has been acknowledged as one of his most profound theological achievements. But it is in the realm of soteriology that Girard also will make his greatest contribution to theology. Girard's contribution is an explicit correction of what he regards as an aberration in much traditional soteriology, an aberration that appeals to a darkly sacrificial notion of God that corresponds not to the biblical revelation but to the deviated and violent transcendence that Girard finds in many religious phenomena. Lonergan's *modus operandi* in soteriology is somewhat different. He is in general much more devoted to advancing the legitimate concerns even in texts that he finds problematic than in reversing the explicit errors to be found there. His way of reading other authors is generous. It shows a confidence that as he advances their legitimate concerns the aberrations will simply drop away. This is particularly true if the author he is interpreting is a respected figure in the Catholic tradition: for example, a saint and Doctor of the Church such as Anselm of Canterbury. The presence of Anselm is clear in the very beginning of Lonergan's thesis on the Law of the Cross: 'This is why the Son of God became man' is meant to call to our minds Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. The answer that Lonergan gives to that question goes far beyond Anselm's response and is very different from that response, but Lonergan never voices a strong criticism of Anselm.⁷ Girard, on the contrary, believes, probably rightly so, that explicit attention has to be drawn to the problematic nature of the Anselmian and related theological attempts to understand the doctrine of atonement.

It is clear from the two quotations with which I began that Lonergan's articulation of the intelligibility of the redemption is theoretic, systematic, rigorous, almost Scholastic in form, while Girard's language is symbolic, metaphorical, almost mythic, a reminder that any articulation of redemption must remain irretrievably elemental, aesthetic,

⁷ This is the case even in Lonergan's transformation of the notion of satisfaction. See Charles Hefling, 'A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's Satisfaction,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10 (1992) 51-76.

dramatic, ultimately narrative in form. And yet, despite this difference in style, Lonergan and Girard are speaking about the same reality. In my view what each of them says is true, and what each of them is saying is very close to what the other is saying, despite the difference in style, emphasis, and language. It is the purpose of the rest of this paper to articulate why I believe this is the case, and what precisely is the relation between the two statements.

3 The Thesis

My thesis is that Lonergan provides a heuristic structure for the systematic understanding of the doctrine of the redemption, while Girard contributes a great deal to filling in the details of that structure. The question then becomes, How thorough is Girard's filling in of the structure?

To understand what Lonergan means by a heuristic structure, we may turn to an image that he provides in *Insight*, namely, of intellectual development as a scissors action. There is an upper blade and a lower blade. The upper blade is the set of heuristic notions needed to arrive at the desired conclusion, while the lower blade provides the data that will be clarified by the meeting of the two blades.⁸ Thus, for example, in theoretical physics the upper blade includes the differential calculus that will enable the physicist to relate the constants and variables provided by the data made available in physical experimentation, and to express that relation in some correlation or function disclosed in a mathematical equation. In the present case, Lonergan's 'Law of the Cross' is an upper blade, while Girard's notions of acquisitive mimesis, mimetic rivalry and violence, and the victim mechanism provide at least some of the data that the upper blade

⁸ For instances of the scissors metaphor, see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992) index, under 'Heuristic method: scissors-action of.'

allows the theologian to organize into an understanding of this particular doctrine. How much of the data does Girard provide? Does he have the key to all the relevant data, or only to some of the relevant data? That is the question.

What, then, is the upper blade? Lonergan specifies the Law of the Cross in three steps, all revealed in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus: (1) from basic sin to moral evil, (2) loving absorption of the evil due to sin and the elevation of human response in grace to a level that transcends the cycle of violence even when that response takes the form of resistance, and (3) transformation of the evil into a greater, indeed a supreme, good. Girard's filling of that heuristic structure, again drawing on the scriptural revelation, can also be stated in three steps: (1) from human failure to reject mimetic rivalry to the consequent deterioration of relations and the ensuing violence leading to the focusing of the violence on one individual or group; (2) rejection of this mimetic cycle through loving absorption of the violence and refusal to return it; and (3) the resulting exposure and neutralization of the victim mechanism, making possible some approximation to the reign of God in human affairs. For both thinkers, the reign of God entails being merciful as Abba is merciful, love of enemies, offering no resistance to injury. For both, the intelligibility of the redemption is the victory of God over evil in history precisely through the absorption of evil and elevation of the plane of living that grace alone renders possible. It is the transformation of the world that arises when evil is transformed into good by a nonviolent response. Both thinkers liberally quote Matthew 5.44-45 precisely in the context of articulating their understanding of the solution to the problem of evil, their understanding of redemption in history: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.' The key to their relation for me lies in the relation between a heuristic structure and the concrete data, between the upper and the lower blades, and the question

is reduced to the matter of just how complete is Girard's specification of the relevant data.

4 The Key Terms

The issue, then, reduces to the key terms in each of the statements that we are comparing. Aside from the mention of the Cross, which they share in common, Lonergan's key terms are 'the evils of the human race' and 'converting those evils into a supreme good,' while Girard's key terms are 'the victim mechanism' and 'reversing the victim mechanism.' In either case it is the Cross that effects the conversion or reversal. And so the question with which we began can be rephrased in the following fashion: To what extent does 'the victim mechanism' constitute 'the evils of the human race' from which we are redeemed by the Cross, and to what extent is 'reversing the victim mechanism' a satisfactory articulation of 'converting those evils into a supreme good?'

Let us begin with Girard's understanding of what he calls the victim mechanism.

5 The Victim Mechanism

The first point in unpacking the victim mechanism is the mimetic or triangular character of human acquisitive or appropriative desire. For Girard, 'If I desire a particular object, I do not covet it on its own merits but because I "mimic," or imitate, the desire of someone I have chosen as a model. That person – whether real or imaginary, legendary or historical – becomes the mediator of my desire, and the relationship in which I am involved is essentially "triangular."⁹ The triangular nature of such desire lies at the root of violence in human relations. Thus, in his discussion of the commandments given on Sinai, Girard emphasizes that the commandment that stipulates 'You shall not covet the

⁹ Richard Golsan, *René Girard and Myth* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002) 1.

house of your neighbor; you shall not covet the wife of your neighbor, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him' expresses the root problem that lies behind the preceding commandments, which prohibit the most serious acts of violence in the order of their seriousness: 'You shall not kill,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' and 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.'¹⁰ The root problem lies in coveting what another has. 'The commandment that prohibits desiring the goods of one's neighbor attempts to resolve the number one problem of every human community: internal violence.'¹¹

While a great deal of mimetic desire leads to violence, this is not always the case. It is especially acquisitive or appropriative mimetic desires – for example, a desire for another person whom someone else also desires, or the desires reflected in professional and political ambition – that easily lead to destruction, victimage, and violence, especially if the intersubjectivity entailed is between people who abide on a relatively equal social plane. It is under these circumstances that such distortions as those mentioned by Scheler in his description of organic mendacity originate, and it is from these distortions that deviations occur in the words that people speak, the judgments that they make, the decisions that they enact, and the social structures that they build. Mimetic desire at the psychic level leads to distortions in the unfolding of the transcendental intentions. Lonergan's first 'way of being conscious' causes deviations in the second way.

A second point stresses that acquisitive mimesis, which still has to do with an object, becomes conflictual mimesis when the object for all practical purposes nearly drops out of sight, and the subject becomes concerned only or primarily with the model or mediator, at times to the point of obsession. Girard speaks of the ultimate absence of

¹⁰ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 9

any object proper to the conflict, the final nullity of human conflict in some instances, when possessive mimesis turns into open conflict.¹²

A third point is that, through what Girard conceives and describes as ‘interindividual’ contagion, conflictual mimesis can come to affect an entire group and can head in the direction of mass violence and destruction, the war of all against all. Girard writes:

Acquisitive mimesis is contagious, and if the number of individuals polarized around a single object increases, other members of the community, as yet not implicated, will tend to follow the example of those who are; conflictual mimesis necessarily follows the same course because the same force is involved. Once the object has disappeared and the mimetic frenzy has reached a high degree of intensity, one can expect conflictual mimesis to take over and snowball in its effects.¹³

But fourth, the destruction can be warded off if and when the reciprocal violence of all against all becomes unified against a single victim or group and becomes violence of all against one, against a scapegoat whose immolation or exclusion or marginalization restores peace for a time. This is the victim mechanism. ‘Since the power of mimetic attraction multiplies with the number of those polarized,’ Girard writes, ‘it is inevitable that at one moment the entire community will find itself unified against a single individual. Conflictual mimesis therefore creates a *de facto* allegiance against a common enemy, such that the conclusion of the crisis is nothing other than the reconciliation of the community.’¹⁴ It is clear from the Girard quotation with which I began that he finds this

12 See René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) 26. This point is emphasized even more strongly in the recently published book of interviews with Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2007); see for instance pp. 65-66.

13 Girard, *Things Hidden* 26.

14 Ibid.

mechanism at work in the events that led to the crucifixion of Jesus. His depiction of these events corresponds in a number of ways to the exegesis of N.T. Wright in the chapter of his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* devoted to ‘the reasons for Jesus’ crucifixion.’¹⁵ In addition, Raymund Schwager, probably the principal theologian with whom Girard established contact, wrote a book entitled *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, in which a very serious reconstruction of the events of Jesus’ public life, passion, death, and resurrection is detailed with exegetical skill and theological acumen, precisely from the standpoint of Girard’s mimetic theory.¹⁶ Thus a connection has been made between mimetic contagion and the victim mechanism, on the one hand, and the crucifixion of Jesus, on the other: by Girard, by Schwager working exegetically within a Girardian perspective, and by Wright working independently of any explicit reference to Girardian mimetic theory.

Fifth, myth and religion are born from mimetic violence and the victim mechanism. The violence of all against one and the peace that ensues when the victim is immolated constitute for Girard the meaning of ‘the sacred.’ This is particularly the point of Girard’s book *Violence and the Sacred*. The sacred occurs in the immolation of the scapegoat and in the peace that follows such violence. But Girard discovered that in the scriptures of Israel and Christianity the mechanism itself is disclosed, revealed, and progressively rendered impotent. This discovery was responsible for his conversion back to the Church in which he had been baptized as an infant. He had expected to find in the scriptures of Israel and Christianity the same cover stories for violence that he had found elsewhere in religious behavior. But instead, and to his surprise, he found just the opposite. In the scriptures, the authors and the God they portray take the side of the

15 N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 in *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 540-611.

16 Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

victims of violence, not the side of its perpetrators. In the scriptures, the victims, not the victimizers, are the special recipients of God's predilection. The height of the revelation occurs in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, where the mechanism itself is indisputably revealed for what it is and, through this revelation, is neutralized. The revelation then spreads through Christian witness and ministry and becomes more and more a part of human consciousness with the passing of time, as Isaiah envisioned in the servant songs that reveal the revelation to Israel of the same mechanism: 'I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth' (Isaiah 49.6). For Girard, our age, despite its immense violence, is more concerned than any previous age, even at a secular level, with the victims of evil in the world. This for Girard is a direct result of the overcoming of the victim mechanism in the scriptural revelation and of the ever so gradual appropriation on the part of the church and secular society of the meaning of that revelation. We now know when scapegoats are being falsely, mendaciously set up, and so the mechanism is easier to expose, precisely because of the biblical revelation.

To the question, then, of just how complete is Girard's filling in of the heuristic notion of 'the evils of the human race,' Girard and his students would respond by pointing directly to the dynamics of the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus and would ask, Is this perhaps sufficient evidence?

6 The Supreme Good

Let us turn to another of our key terms, and in doing so to Lonergan and to a few moments of explicitly systematic theological thinking. What for Lonergan is the supreme good into which the evils of the human race are transformed through the Law of the Cross?

Lonergan is attempting to provide a hypothetical response to the question, Why this particular set of events? The key for him is the supreme good into which human evils are transformed in accord with the Law of the Cross. That supreme good he specifies as ‘the whole Christ, Head and members, in this life as well as in the life to come, in all their concrete determinations and relations.’ These concrete determinations and relations include (1) the communication of God’s own self to us in the incarnation, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the beatific vision, (2) a good of order in the quasi-organic unity of Christ and the church, and (3) particular goods for Christ – the resurrection and glorification – and for his members. Thus, through what Lonergan calls ‘the just and mysterious Law of the Cross,’ which is a matter of returning good for evil, the ‘evils of the human race’ are progressively transformed into ‘the whole Christ, Head and members, in this life as well as in the life to come,’ in all the concrete determinations and relations of that community, that communion of saints.

Again, in Scholastic terminology, this ‘supreme good’ that is ‘the whole Christ, Head and members’ is called the ‘form’ of the economy of salvation, a form that divine wisdom ordained would be introduced into the ‘matter’ that is the human race ‘infected with original sin, burdened with actual sins, entangled in the penalties of sin, alienated from God, and divided within itself both individually and socially.’ That form, which makes sense out of the human race through the transformation of evil into good, consists in the threefold communication of God to us (in the hypostatic union, in the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the beatific vision) and in an order of persons that comes about through the communication of the divine nature as this communication enables us to apprehend wisely and to choose in charity the self-transcendent patterns that will offset and overturn the effects of evil in the world.

The ‘state’ of grace, then, as contrasted with the individual ‘habit’ of grace, is for Lonergan a social, intersubjective situation. To borrow from Girard, it is a transformed ‘interdividuation’ grounded in the three divine subjects of the one consciousness of God

as they communicate themselves to us through the incarnation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the vision of God in eternal life, thus bringing about transformed relations between persons through the communication of a share in the divine relations. At one point in Lonergan's Trinitarian systematics, this divine self-communication is explicitly referred to as effecting an *imitation* of the divine relations,¹⁷ which in dialogue with Girard we could see as a mimesis that is counter to the infected mimesis that constitutes or at least affects the evils of the human race from which we are set free by, and only by, the Law of the Cross. Thus Vern Redekop, a theologian at St Paul's University in Ottawa with whom I have been in correspondence concerning these matters, speaks of mimetic structures of blessing that are established over against the mimetic structures of rivalry and conflict.¹⁸ We may legitimately claim, then, that such mimetic structures of blessing are a dimension of that supreme good into which the evils of the human race are transformed in accord with the Law of the Cross.

The supreme good, then, into which the evils of the human race are transformed by the Law of the Cross is a new community, a set of transformed relations grounded in the communication of trinitarian divine life itself. The transformation of relations occurs through the Law of the Cross, which is a precept of utmost generality that enjoins not overcoming these evils by power but absorbing them in a loving surrender that returns good for evil done by shifting the entire plane on which human relations unfold, elevating it to a higher level, a level beyond the natural capacities of human beings, a level that can justly be called 'supernatural' in the original theological meaning of that much-abused term: 'supernatural' because in such operations God as God is in God's own self is reached by us precisely because God has communicated to us a participation in the divine nature that enables operations of charity to occur.

17 Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, vol. 12 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 470-73.

18 Email correspondence 9 July 2008.

7 The Evils of the Human Race

If this is the case, it seems reasonable to suppose that the ‘evils of the human race’ would be for Lonergan all defects of the good in the concrete determinations and relations of human life. In other words, if the supreme good into which the evils are transformed is a new community in all the concrete determinations and relations among the members of that community (among whom, remember, are the three divine subjects), then it is reasonable to suppose that the evils that are transformed into the community are the distortions of relations of human beings with one another and with God that hinder genuine community from being realized.

These defects of the good (*privationes boni*) are understood by Lonergan in terms of the two categories of basic sin and moral evil. Basic sin, more precisely, is the *privatio boni*, while moral evil is its consequence. Basic sin is a failure of free human beings to choose a morally obligatory course of action, or their failure to reject a morally reprehensible course of action. Moral evil is the consequence of such failure. Moral evil includes the deterioration of human relations, the systematizing of injustice, the elevation of various forms of bias to the determining principles of human affairs, and the summation of all these other evils in violence.¹⁹

One further point that must be made is that all these evils of the human race, basic sin and the moral evils that are its consequence – bias, the deterioration of relations, systemic injustice, and so on – stem from what Christian doctrine calls ‘original sin.’ Traditional Scholastic theology distinguished *peccatum originale originans* and *peccatum originale originatum*, originating original sin and originated original sin. That distinction perhaps corresponds at a primordial level to Lonergan’s distinction of basic sin and moral evil. Originating original sin would be the primordial basic sin, and originated original sin the primordial moral evil, the so-called ‘sin of the world’ that characterizes the

¹⁹ On the distinction of basic sin and moral evil, see Lonergan, *Insight* 689.

situation into which every human being is born. At this point I admit I am going out on a speculative limb, but such risks sometimes may contribute to a genuinely new understanding of Christian doctrine. If that is not the result of this speculation, then it should be ignored.

8 Back to the Question

In dialogue with Girard, then, we may ask a first set of questions regarding original sin. To what extent is *peccatum originale originans*, the primordial basic sin, an original failure to reject acquisitive or appropriative mimesis precisely as such mimesis starts insinuating itself into consciousness from an organic base. Girardians would respond by insisting that the original temptation recorded in the Book of Genesis is the mimetic temptation issuing from the serpent: ‘You shall be like God’ (Genesis 3.5).

Again, to what extent is *peccatum originale originatum*, the sin of the world, the mechanism unleashed by that original failure to reject acquisitive mimesis? Girardians would insist that the first murder recorded in the Book of Genesis is a matter of mimetic rivalry between Cain and Abel.

A second set of questions regards basic sin. To what extent is failing to reject acquisitive or appropriative mimesis precisely the ‘contraction of consciousness,’ the failure, that constitutes basic sin? Is that failure one instance of basic sin – surely it is at least that – or is it more than that, perhaps the core of the basic root of irrationality in human rational consciousness?

A third set of questions regards moral evils. To what extent are the deterioration of human relations, the systematizing of injustice, the elevation of various forms of bias to the determining principles of human affairs, and the summation of all these in violence, the consequence of failing to reject the mimetic cycle? That is, (1) to what extent is the Satanic sequence of events that follows when human beings collectively fail

to reject the mimetic cycle – the war of all against all that turns into the focusing of the violence on an innocent scapegoat – coincident with the ‘consequences of basic sin’ that constitute moral evil? And (2) to what extent do the biases that are structural elements in these consequences predispose us to further failures to reject acquisitive or appropriative mimesis, and so to further basic sin?

A final set of questions regards the supreme good into which these evils are transformed. To what extent is the supreme good, the new community, the new set of concrete determinations and relations, the state of grace, identical with ‘reversing or neutralizing the victim mechanism’ that follows upon mimetic contagion, reversing it through the textual revelation that occurs in the Passion narratives?

9 A Qualified Answer

It might seem that I have begun with one question and multiplied it a hundredfold. It is time to provide something of a response. Let me repeat, first, the answer that I gave earlier. Girard fills in a heuristic structure provided by Lonergan. In doing so he helps us specify what the evils are that are transformed by participation in the nonviolence of the Cross, and he helps us specify just what the transformed relations would be that constitute the new community. But I now have to offer two qualifications to this response. The first has to do with the distinction between texts and events, and the second with the complications introduced into our understanding of the problem of evil by my earlier mention of the two ways of being conscious and the two consequent modalities of human desire.

First, then, there is the distinction between texts and events.²⁰ For Girard the reversal occurs through the Gospel passion texts. For Lonergan those texts narrate a

²⁰ Here I rely on Charles Hefling, ‘About What Might a “Girard-Lonergan ‘Conversation’” Be?’ *Lonergan Workshop* 17, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 2002) 95-123.

reversal that occurred in historical events. Revelation, Lonergan says elsewhere, is the entrance of God's meaning into the human meanings that constitute the world in which we live.²¹ But that divine meaning, like other meanings, has not only a cognitive function present in the scriptural texts and in doctrine and dogma, but also effective, constitutive, and communicative functions that operate at a more elemental level. The Law of the Cross is a preceptive determinant of *events*, and it is in the transformation that takes place in events through nonviolent response that redemption takes place in history. This qualification is relatively minor, I believe, but I think it needs to be made.

The second qualification is a bit more serious. In the sixth and seventh chapters of *Insight*, Lonergan discusses four types of bias, which he calls dramatic bias, individual bias, group bias, and the general bias of common sense. In *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, I suggested that as one moves from dramatic bias through group bias to the individual bias of the egoist and the general bias of common sense against theoretical pursuits, ultimate questions, and long-range solutions to human problems, the center of the bias's gravity, as it were, moves more and more from being psychic to being spiritual, to being rooted in the abuse of human freedom.²² Girard has done more than any other author I have read – more than Freud and Jung, who both influenced my original work in speaking of psychic conversion – to clarify the dynamics of both dramatic and group bias, both of which are predominantly psychic in origin and tone. But, as Eric Voegelin would put it, besides psychopathology there is also pneumopathology, a sickness not of the psyche but of the spirit.²³ The bias of the egoist and the bias of common sense against

21 See, e.g., Bernard Lonergan, 'The Analogy of Meaning,' in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, vol. 6 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 206.

22 See Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990, 2001) 233-35.

23 See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) 186.

theoretical pursuits, ultimate questions, and long-range solutions are spiritual in origin and tone, with psychic resonances but not psychic origination. *Peccatum originale originans* and ‘basic sin,’ if they are really sin in the originating sense, have to be rooted in spiritual rather than psychic distortion, in a failure of freedom and not simply in twisted molecules giving rise to imaginal and affective deviations. And so Girard’s penetrating analysis of the psychic distortions that lead to so much violence has to be complemented by and rooted in the kind of thoroughgoing analysis of the authenticity of the human spirit raising and answering questions for intelligence, for reflection, and for deliberation that Lonergan has provided. In the last analysis, I would have to say that Girard has given us perhaps the most profound depiction yet offered of *one* set of data to be subjected to the upper blade of the Law of the Cross, but only of one set, namely, of the psychic mechanism of mimetic violence. Not only are there other sets of data at the same psychic level,²⁴ but there is another set of data more closely connected to the second way of being conscious, that way in which ‘we inquire in order to understand, understand in order to utter a word, weigh evidence in order to judge, deliberate in order to choose, and exercise our will in order to act.’ Scriptural data may indeed support the view that the roots of evil lie where Girard places them, but then sin consists radically not in the psychic mechanism itself but in the failure of free human beings to resist the temptation to yield to the mechanism. In and through the Law of the Cross we are redeemed from the evils that flow from human failures to be intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, including (probably in a principal manner) failures freely to reject mimetic violence, as well as those evils that follow from the primal psychic distortions of affect and imagination, the primal mechanism, that Girard has so brilliantly illuminated. That

24 Girard himself acknowledges this. ‘The more cruel and wild a society is, the more violence is rooted in pure need. One must never exclude the possibility of violence that has nothing to do with mimetic desire but simply with scarcity.’ Girard, *Evolution and Conversion* 74. A question remains, of course, whether the ultimate root lies precisely in free yielding to the temptation to mimetic rivalry.

mechanism, for Christian theology, is a dimension of the moral evil that is a consequence of basic sin. The basic sin itself, precisely as sin, is a failure of human freedom, and so of the human spirit, not of the human sensitive psyche. As each dimension of consciousness requires the other in order to function authentically, so each thinker's analysis can profit from the other's in the elucidation of the evils of the human race and in the clarification of the supreme good into which these are transformed in accord with the Law of the Cross.