

ISRAEL'S NARRATIVE OF ORIGINS IN GENESIS ONE AND TWO FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE OF RENÉ GIRARD'S MIMETIC THEORY

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# **Israel's Narrative of Origins in Genesis One and Two from the Perspective of René Girard's Mimetic Theory**

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Summary:

This thesis explores the implications of René Girard's mimetic theory on Genesis 1 and 2 in the Old Testament. It tests the extent to which Genesis 1 and 2 are structured sacrificially or mythically as outlined by Girard. René Girard's theory is summarized and clarified as to how the theory can be applied to biblical texts. In addition, Girard's theory is explained in the context of theory-making in late modernity, and critiques of Girard from biblical, anthropological, sociological, and theological perspectives are addressed. A sacrificial structure is explored in Genesis and Exodus that informs the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. The critical elements in Girard's scapegoat mechanism—acquisitive desire leading to rivalry, crisis, and ultimately to an expulsion—are examined in the expulsion of the Hebrews from Egypt (Exodus 1) and the expulsions of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis (Gen 12-21). A particular pattern takes shape that structures the narratives in the Pentateuch. An exegesis of Israel's narrative of origins in Genesis 1 and 2 follows, incorporating Girard's theoretical insights with higher critical methods conventionally employed to the Old Testament. The thesis discovers striking parallels with Israel's narrative of origins. They are indeed sacrificially structured, but they also interrogate that structure and describe an alternative sacrificial response. The sacrifice that Yahweh instigates dismantles the mythical structure even as it moves through the sequence. The thesis concludes with a validation of Girard's theory and explains how Girard's theory can be useful to the current exegetical tasks.

Key Terms: René Girard, mimetic theory, scapegoat mechanism, sacrifice, sacrificial crisis, mythical structure, violence, sacred, reciprocal violence, mimetic desire, Genesis 1, Genesis 2.

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## 1 CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Religion and Violence: a Heightened Contemporary Concern

Violence, conflict, and animosity are normative to the human experience. One could set before us an endless parade of examples, but that is unnecessary. Occasionally, as in America with the downing of the World Trade Towers or the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a society can be jolted into a reality check on how repugnant human violence is. What should be equally repugnant is our high tolerance for it in nearly all aspects of our personal and social being, but this is not the case. Instead, there is a variety of ingenious ways to isolate, camouflage, and deflect violence away from us. This is usually accompanied by an assuring confidence that we have it under control. So, on American television we are hypnotized by a steady flow of programs that dramatize the reprehensible villain whose violent actions are apprehended and the criminal taken care of. It is rarely questioned *why* people are violent. Even more so, a non-violent society is never envisioned because, well, it is not very interesting. The interest is only in our ability to best *take care* of it. We have police forces, armies, civil law, governments and some would add religion to keep human violence from breaking out into an orgy of death.

Yet, perhaps we are living in a time when our more conventional measures for controlling violence are being challenged like never before. Again the examples are too numerous to chronicle here. Our sophisticated arsenal of mass destructive weaponry is refined to a high-tuned efficiency from two world wars and the steady stream of genocides in the twentieth century. But one need not take the effort to probe our recent history. One only needs to go to the local newspaper. In Denver, gang-related violence is on the increase, this time threatening to ‘saturate’<sup>1</sup> the whole city with a more virulent and indiscriminant form of violence.

Nothing challenges our established procedures for controlling violence more than the suicide killer, the grossest attack on the value of human life imaginable. He makes a parody of human life, creating in himself both killer and victim and challenging our

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<sup>1</sup> Osher, 2007:1A

notion of fair combat. Probably most disturbing is how he leaves us with no immediate and clear way to retaliate. There is no clear enemy to attack, no criminal to execute. We are left with confounding feelings of anger and bewilderment. The suicide killer shuts down completely a fundamental mechanism humanity resorts to when coping with any kind of untimely and unnatural death—finding a cause. We always ask—why? The idea that one can secure a privileged place in the next life is a completely unsatisfying answer, especially in the West. After the Crusades, the Religious Wars, and two World Wars, Western societies are not too convinced about giving up one's life for God, the nation, or the current ideology.

But even more disturbing is the kind of suicide killer who consistently appears in America—going into a school or workplace and meticulously executing innocent people with sheer rage and revenge as the only reason. The execution style killing of several girls in an Amish schoolhouse was particularly shocking, especially since the Amish are known for their dedication to a life of non-violence. Of particular note for the discussion here is that it appeared to have been in imitation of another schoolhouse killing that occurred the week before in Colorado. It is now an established procedure nationwide to place schools on 'high alert' after an attack of this sort due to its imitative power. Why, oh why was it necessary to take out innocent and uninvolved children? All answers seem completely unsatisfactory. Even so, it only takes a matter of days before the ramifications are smothered by our daily routines.

Yet as always, the anthropological question turns into theological, or at least religious, questions. The question of God and evil come to the fore in situations like this.

Shortly after the attack on the World Trade Towers, Witney (2002:e) documented the challenge this tragedy created for many concerning the connection between violence/evil and faith/religion, for God appeared to be on the side of both malevolent and benevolent forces:

‘From the first moment I looked into that horror on Sept. 11, into that fireball, into that explosion of horror, I knew it,’ says Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete. ‘I recognized an old companion. I recognized religion.’

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield agrees. ‘Religion drove those planes into those buildings,’ he says. ‘It’s amazing how good religion is at mobilizing people to do awful, murderous things. There is a dark side to it, and anyone who loves religious experience, including me, better begin to [admit] that there is a serious shadow side to this thing.’

The documentary (Witney, 2002:e) acknowledged the powerful connection between violence and religion while at the same time chronicled an array of personal responses. For some, it strengthened their faith; for others, it destroyed it.

Some people, even those who lost loved ones in the attacks, say the tragedy only affirms their belief in a higher power. ‘At this stage, I have not questioned Him,’ says Bernie Heeran, a retired firefighter whose son Charlie was killed on Sept. 11. ‘He had nothing to do with this. There were a lot more people who could have been killed. He was fighting evil that day like He does every day.’ Others are neither so certain nor forgiving. ‘I can’t bring myself to speak to Him anymore because I feel so abandoned,’ says Marian Fontana, whose husband, David, was one of the 343 firefighters killed that day. ‘I guess deep down inside I know that He stills exists, and that I have to forgive and move on. But I’m not ready to do that yet.’

Tragic events of an accidental kind or by natural forces have always provoked deep questions of faith, but they take on an unparalleled intensity when people create and carryout monstrous acts of cruelty and violence on others. With the kind of retreat from God that has progressed over the past few centuries, the question of God may be taking a back seat to the question of humankind. We have an uncanny ability to go after the ones closest to us. Can we keep from destroying ourselves completely?

In his seminal works *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) and *Things Hidden from the Foundations of the World* (1978), René Girard has probed the connection between human violence and not only religion, but nearly all fundamental human social structures. His explorations have a resounding conclusion—human violence is solely our own. Girard (1972:255) places human violence at the forefront of our anthropological dilemma: ‘violence...permeates all human relationships.’ It is oft amazing to what extent people

*accept* violence—even the most virulent forms—as something unpleasant but necessary. It is also amazing to what extent we generally ignore it once things have settled down. Girard shares this amazement and believes he has a reasonable explanation for it. For Girard, the power of human violence goes beyond a connection with religion. The way humans deal with violence permeates every aspect of our individual and collective make up.

Unique, and to the consternation of his critics most daring, is Girard's assertion that he has identified the genesis of human culture in an original mob-style murder where, in a spontaneous act of convergence on a single victim, all the internal anxieties and tensions of individuals within the group find a *miraculous* resolve—a sacrificial victim. Thus Girard speaks of *generative violence, violent unanimity, or unanimity-minus-one*. Understanding the original victim as the focal point of social order assures Girard (1972:309): 'should be viewed as an absolute beginning, signifying the passage from nonhuman to human, as well as a relative beginning for the societies in question.'

Girard's theory of generative violence developed slowly and from what some might deem a suspicious direction. A critic of first French literature and then that of the great Russian novels and Greek tragedies, Girard observed the ever present theme of rivalry fueled by what he calls *mimetic or acquisitive desire*. The tragedians as well as the novelist, such as Proust and Dostoyevsky, seemed captivated by the endless variety of ways humans are attracted to what they see others desiring and how that attraction creates conflict. One of his earliest works, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (1961), jettisoned a literary pursuit into the arena having been pursued since the late nineteenth century by anthropology and ethnology—the nature of ritual, sacrifice, religion and social cohesion.

There are many, I suppose, who suggest that humanity's propensity towards violence is no more a problem now that it has ever been. It only appears worse simply because there are more people. But for many, the seemingly spiraling cycles of violence in our world compels us to examine more seriously the origins of our violence, how we deal with it, and where we are headed. It is time to deal straightaway with humanity's violence and

the symbiotic relationship with nearly every aspect of human interaction. As Girard (1978:6) states: ‘No single question has more of a future today than the question of man.’

## 1.2 Focus of Inquiry

Girard’s theory of violence and the sacred pivots on the role of the sacrificial victim, sacrifice, and the scapegoat mechanism. Girard (1972:306) explains:

The surrogate victim, as the founder of the rite, appears as the ideal educator of humanity, in the etymological sense of *e-ductio*, a leading out. The rite gradually leads men away from the sacred; it permits them to escape their own violence, removes them from violence, and bestows on them all the institutions and beliefs that define their humanity.

He (1972:306) further clarifies: ‘All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual. Such is the case, as we have seen, with political power, legal institutions, medicine, the theater, philosophy and anthropology.’ Girard (1972:305) adds: ‘concepts of sovereignty and, indeed, all forms of central power owe their existence to the surrogate victim.’ ‘...central authority essentially monarchal in character...tends to cluster around a single representative of the original victim...the tendency towards centralism exists.’

It has long been noted how common sacrifice is in almost all religious phenomenon. Yet the significance and meaning has eluded the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> A theory of sacrifice is not new with Girard, but his theory has penetrated the *reason* for it like few others. Several anthropologists have followed the lead of Levi-Strauss in assigning a role or function to sacrifice within a given cultural setting, but do not assign the *reason* why sacrifice, and *not something else*, performs that function.

The Old Testament is not unique in that it too engages sacrifice both positively and negatively. Indeed, one could readily connect Girard’s (1978:28) theory of sacrifice to Israel’s origins in stories such as the exodus: ‘...one must postulate a mimetic crisis of such duration and severity, that the sudden resolution, at the expense of a single victim has the effect of a miraculous deliverance. The experience of a [supreme being] whose appearance and disappearance are punctuated by collective murder, cannot fail to be

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<sup>2</sup> This will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

literally *gripping*.’ The strong anti-cultic current in Old Testament scholarship of the last century reflects a reluctance to place the oft-distasteful aspects of sacrifice as more prominent than the ethical demands of the prophets. There are many issues involved in the relationship between violence and religion. Girard offers a viable model or ‘matrix’ in which to approach such things.

Of central concern here is Girard’s notion of sacrifice. As Strenski (2002:10) points out, sacrifice has deep socio/political implications: ‘Thus, at least for our subject of sacrifice, the religious and political sectors of life are firmly bound together.’ There are theological implications as well, or shall we say apologetical implications. Oddly, as the human race remains steeped in violence, a resurgence of a Marcion-type view of God on a popular level can be detected. In the age of mistrust of religious institutions (of all institutions) and the steady emphasis on personal choice and individuation, there is often a steadfast refusal to view God in any kind of terms that would even remotely smack of anger, retribution, and wrath. Theological constructs of sacrifice, atonement, propitiation and a vengeful deity are serious stumbling blocks for many. Viewing God as one whose anger is appeased or recompensed by a bloody sacrifice seems repulsive and the very heart of the problem of human violence. Girard has reopened the discussion of atonement in the late modern world.

The inquiry here seeks to contribute to a reevaluation or reinterpretation of theological conceptions of sacrifice, atonement, the sacred and the wrath of God. A reinterpretation of things does not imply a new view of it or an abolition of it. Rather, Judaism and the Church have always been able to remember the past by incorporating and reshaping it in order to dialogue within the culture it finds itself in.

Of particular interest here are Israel’s stories of origins found in Genesis 1 and 2. Most do not read these with any clear understanding that the narrative is structured along sacrificial lines. If we are willing, however, to engage Girard’s ideas, the sacrificial elements in such narratives become more evident. The question to be examined is whether key ingredients of Girard’s *generative violence*—mimetic rivalry leading to a sacrificial crisis, its resolve in a sacrificial victim, and the establishment of prohibitions to

prevent rivalries and rituals to reenact the original sacrificial crisis and its resolve—can be detected.

From his critical work with the Oedipus myth, Girard has found what he believes to be a fundamental structure to myth in which the primary function is to *displace* the internal violence of the community away from the community. Thus he (1972:87) states: ‘The functioning of the surrogate victim explains the principle motifs of the Oedipus myth and illuminates the genesis and structure of these motifs. Moreover, I believe that this same process serves to explain a great many other myths; so many, in fact, that we cannot help wondering whether it might not be the *structural mold of all mythology*.’ For Girard the *displacement*, or *misinterpretation*, of the myth is the key characteristic of the mythical structure. It is how the scapegoat mechanism can work.

An array of biblical stories appears to easily fit aspects of Girard’s ‘mythical structure.’ As one follows the development of his theory, however, Girard alludes more and more to something askew in the biblical stories. Girard discovers in the Greek tragedies and then even more so in the Old Testament a partial revealing of the mythical structure. Working with the same themes as in myth, the tragedies in Girard’s analysis struggle to uncover the mechanism. For Girard, the Greek tragedies never quite see through the structure and in the end serve a sacrificial function. But Girard (1978:154ff) progressively views the biblical stories as challenging the mythical structure, perhaps to such a degree as to say that many of the biblical stories subvert the scapegoat mechanism. Girard arrives at the conclusion that in the story of Jesus Christ the operative mechanism found in the surrogate victim is dismantled. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the community is forced to see the face of the victim. The victim is ‘revealed’ to be innocent and human. This, says Girard (1978:174), completely neutralizes the effect of sacrifice—its ability to unify the community: ‘The Gospels make all forms of “mythologizing” impossible since, by revealing the founding mechanism, they stop it from functioning. That is why we have fewer and fewer myths all the time, in our universe dominated by the Gospels, and more and more texts bearing on persecution.’

In a similar fashion as Patristic interpretation, Girard views much of the Old Testament as foreshadowing the Gospel event but in that the biblical stories repeatedly sympathize and

empathize with the victim.<sup>3</sup> Of particular note is the resounding criticism of sacrifice by the prophets. With this in mind, the examination here has three main objectives. First, it seeks to verify the extent in which Genesis 1 and 2 can be viewed as ‘mythically or sacrificially structured’ as expounded by Girard. Second, it inquires into the extent to which the narratives of Israel’s primeval origins in Genesis 1 and 2 subverts or upholds a mythical structure as Girard believes. How far do these stories go beyond expressing ‘misapprehensions of the victimage principle?’ Although Genesis 1 and 2 grapple with the sacrificial crisis in sometimes strikingly similar ways as the Oedipus myth, does it ultimately and once again only conceal the ‘violent impulse’ that upholds the cohesion of a culture, as Girard (1978:158) seemingly concludes? Do Israel’s primeval narratives only adapt the standard view of sacrifice in the ancient world to its own generative story, or do they in some way critically address the issue of sacrifice and its origins in human violence and launch Israel into an ongoing struggle with it?

Last, the inquiry here seeks to clarify the implications that Girard’s theory has for current exegetical and theological work in the Old Testament.

### **1.3 Thesis**

René Girard devotes a good deal of his books to the explication, implication, and defense of his theory that all of culture finds its genesis in an original victim whose death first centralized all the malevolent forces of a community and then transformed those forces into the benevolent qualities for that community. He rarely speaks theologically. He does not comment much on the very nature of a God who might exist outside of the human endeavor. Girard does speak of gods or how, from a human point of view, the malevolent and benevolent aspects of violence transform to the sacred via the scapegoat mechanism. He (1978:436) is quite clear of one thing. Human violence is always generated from humans and is directed at humans. ‘This limitless violence appears for the first time as purely human rather than divine in origin.’

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<sup>3</sup> Milbank (1990:397) has especially identified Girard’s thinking with Augustine.



What is of interest here concerns Girard's solution to human violence—the sacrificial system must go. Even up until this very moment in history, 'The notion that the victimage process is a universal one remains hidden from view,' insists Girard (1978:440). For Girard, humanity's hope and future lies in our all out ownership of human violence along with a thorough repudiation of a violent God. He asserts, humanity must '...give up sacrifice by common agreement, simultaneously, and unanimately.'

For Girard (1978:436), a major step towards this is for Christianity to give up its 'sacrificial reading of the text.' Paradoxically, he (1978:440) understands the Gospel to have fully brought to light the 'mediating role of mimetic desire and the sacrificial impulse.' Elsewhere he (1978:429) states: 'The quintessential scandal is the fact that the founding victim has finally been revealed as such and that Christ has a role to play in this revelation.' He argues that as Christianity developed, it gradually cloaked itself with the language of sacrifice, conceding, with similar reasoning as does Paul in the New Testament in regards to the Law, that the sacrificial reading of the Gospel event was an 'inevitable first stage.' Referencing Moses Maimonides Girard argues (1978:444) that sacrifice was not 'an eternal institution that God genuinely wished to found, but as a temporary crutch made necessary by the weakness of humankind. Sacrifice is an imperfect means, which humanity must do without.' He (1978:443) insists that there is a 'dynamic, anti-sacrificial current running all through the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. We are able to detect a series of stages in the Bible that invariably point toward the attenuation and later elimination of the practice of sacrifice.'

The reading of Genesis sets up a considerable challenge to an 'anti-sacrificial current' in the Old Testament. At least from the perspective of some of the Pentateuch, such as what will be discussed in Genesis and Exodus as I proceed, there is no fundamental challenge to the necessity for sacrifice. The story is, however, subverting the mythical structure, exposing the mechanism, and twisting the sacrificial system to such a degree that Israel is set on a path of eking out a radical understanding of sacrifice and what it signifies against the backdrop of its sacralizing neighbors. Israel grows in its realization that the scapegoat mechanism is faulty. It is constantly breaking down, which leads to more

violence. The Old Testament offers a solution only *through* sacrifice, however, and not in denying, eliminating, or avoiding it.

The assertion is that Genesis 1 and 2 do indeed address the ‘structural mode of all **myth.**’ It does not, however, offer an anti-sacrificial or a-sacrificial solution as much as an alternative sacrificial view.

Girard mainly concerns himself with what he offers as the solution to human violence—a full and complete understanding of the role of ‘generative violence’ in all cultures will somehow be enough. But when one reads his elaboration of mimetic rivalry, Girard reiterates just what a powerful force it is. We seem hard-wired toward imitation. Girard over and over again speaks of it as an *irresistible force*. Is it enough to fundamentally grasp the mechanism? Or is mimetic desire so deep and strong a pull, as Girard makes it to be, that we cannot in and of ourselves simply correct it—stop doing it? The **biblical** perspective does not advocate an anti-sacrificial reading of human culture, but a supra-sacrificial one. It is the kind of sacrifice that ultimately exposes our abhorrent counterfeits. Texts such as Genesis 1 and 2 speak profoundly of human violence and sacrifice along the lines Girard has outlined, but only posthumously, only through sacrifice and on the other side of it. It is the *kind* of sacrifice offered and its implementation—Yahweh himself provides the victim and only under certain conditions—that the issue of sacrifice, and who in the end is requiring it, is fundamentally revealed. Perhaps it is better to speak of the Old Testament’s *trans-sacrificial* reading.<sup>4</sup>

Something will be gravely lost in the discussion of human violence if we seek to bypass or negate the language of sacrifice and an angry God. It is the task of Old Testament scholarship to continue to offer clarity and insight into our volatile existence. The Old Testament does not allow us the neatly packaged prescriptions of an all-loving God who is disinterested in our volatile existence nor of an all-vengeful God often referenced by the faithful. This inquiry seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding and yes appreciation of the more troubling depictions of God in the Old Testament.

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<sup>4</sup> Girard, I believe, significantly modifies his formulations of sacrifice described above in his book *The Scapegoat* (1982). Much of the discussion of Genesis 1 and 2 echoes and relies on this qualified position.

## 1.4 Approach

Shortly after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the World Trade Towers, it was declared that things would never be the same from this time on. In many ways, at least in America, this appears true. Ideological conflict has risen in intensity. The words ‘bipartisanship’ ring shallow. It has become more important than ever to not only defeat an ideological opponent, but to annihilate him. Indeed, one could readily connect the rising ideological fervor with a weakening epistemological base. Attacks on the predilections undergirding an ideology are often openly hostile. On a similar vein, steady now are the inquisitions into the very notions of authority and hierarchical/patriarchal structures that seem to go hand-in-hand with oppression, injustice, and violence.<sup>5</sup>

Approaching issues of violence, institution, religion, political ideologies, etc. from an anthropological perspective appears to offer a viable avenue in which to breakthrough seemingly dead ends. For Frank (2006), focusing on the common belief that human beings are intrinsically valuable provides a fertile field for dialogue and growth amidst seemingly intransigent positions of all kinds.

Theological and biblical studies are certainly engaged in the evaluation and reformulation of epistemological and methodological directions. Brueggemann concludes (1997:20): ‘Thus there is no easy choice about interpretive assumption. Through the present century, an endless adjudication of this issue has taken place.’ Towards the end of the Twentieth Century Brueggemann perceives that Old Testament interpretive enterprise has lead to an ‘unsettled dualism’ and a ‘confusion of methods’ due in part to ‘higher criticism’s vigilance against authority.’ An interesting choice of labels from the perspective of what Girard (1972:161) calls the *monstrous double*. Brueggemann (1997:40) summarizes various new attempts at moving forward and lays out his own argument which accepts that the plurality of approaches can only be worked out *ad judiciously*.

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<sup>5</sup> By way of example is the Journal of Biblical Literature’s Symposium Series (2004): *Ezekiel’s Hierarchal World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality* or Nancy Jay’s (1992) book: *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* which will be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

In keeping with Brueggemann's assessment as well as perhaps a growing sense that our understanding of humanity may offer a positive way forward. The topic of religion and its origins in violence as it relates to Old Testament texts will take on an anthropological criticism. This is not new nor, as we shall see, is the application of Girard's *anthropological criticism*<sup>6</sup> to biblical and literary texts. The approach here is in keeping with many who find enough validity and insight in Girard's proposal to warrant serious consideration. Girard (1972:309) calls for a testing out of it himself, especially with biblical texts. He (1978:141) is aware that his ideas present a hypothesis to be tested, but expresses confidence that inquiries such as the one pursued in the following pages 'will supply us new proofs, and increasingly striking ones.' Hence the thesis here seeks to apply an existing model to evaluate how effective it is, to what extent the theory can be applied, and what the implications may be.

Although there will be an evaluation of Girard's proposal, it is not necessary to provide a thorough analysis of varying aspects of it. Girard has catalogued an impressive bibliography and has provided ample response to major objections to his theory.<sup>7</sup> The presentation here accepts the basic contours of his insights as a qualified starting point. This is in keeping with the practice of many. Miller (2002:2), for instance, applied a particular anthropological theory of sacrifice to his literary criticism of *topoi* dealing with the sacrifice of children. Of note, Miller did not even entertain conflicting theories of sacrifice nor does he offer his own critique of the approach. Dismissing Girard's theory in a footnote, Miller (2002:3ff) starts with the whole-hearted support for Jay's (1992) theory and proceeds to apply it towards literary criticism.

In Old Testament studies, Halperin (1993) employed a psychoanalytic model to the reading of Ezekiel. Unlike Miller, Halperin does address the problems of adapting an interpretive approach outside the more conventional bounds of higher criticism and integrates those methodologies into his commentary. Furthermore, he does address, albeit to a limited degree, the criticisms directed at psychoanalysis itself. While in the case of both Miller and Halperin, their conclusions are dictated by the approach, Halperin

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<sup>6</sup> A term coined by Nuechterlein (2006:e) applying Girard's theory to Biblical interpretation.

<sup>7</sup> Of interesting note here, Girard (1978:435) claims that he has not discovered anything new and in a sense it is not his theory as if he owned a copyright on the sacrificial mechanism.

at least concedes that his treatise does not address the broader dialogue and criticism around psychoanalysis. In keeping with Halperin's example, the overlay of Girard's theory as an approach to Old Testament exegesis will not close in on itself and therefore eliminate ongoing dialogue with what has been the more conventional Old Testament criticisms of the past century. Being dominated by particular presuppositions, of course, is a concern of all methodological applications, hence turning methodologies into ideologies.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the way one comes to a text, one must always be open to *letting the text speak for itself*. Thus, an attempt will be made to avoid cramming the text to fit the model.<sup>9</sup>

Conventional Old Testament approaches are viewed here as valid and important contributions. Girard's theory has, however, a peculiar twist to it when it comes to methodologies, for he claims that the text itself *participates* in the mythological structure, concealing the scapegoat mechanism. The text and the very ways we approach a text are still enveloped in the sacrificial system. A text, like the Greek tragedies, function the same as sacrifices and rituals do—to divert the violent contagion of the community away from it. For Girard, even theories and methodologies develop sacrificially. In a sense, an approach grounds itself by feeding on and deconstructing the 'corpse' of that which came before it.

Girard's (1978:310) model dictates to some degree the direction taken here. 'The comparative method is the only one possible.' Greek tragedies, and in particular the Oedipus myth, 'lead to the theory of the surrogate victim and violent unanimity through a much more direct [way]' Girard (1978:310) argues. In this sense then, applying Girard's theory harkens back to the 'myth and ritual' school of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Girard views the Oedipus myth in particular as seminal to understanding his theory, and he has devoted a considerable amount of effort in critiquing it. Thus, the inquiry here will also

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<sup>8</sup> Girard is fully aware of the accusation that his theory is more a 'sacrificial ideology' (Miller, 2002:2). In my mind, Girard's (1978:435ff) apologetic towards that is clear and accurate, albeit not satisfying to his critics especially since he uncovers the predilections often accompanying such objections.

<sup>9</sup> It is fitting to refer to it as a model in a scientific sense. Since the rise of extremely effective computers, scientific research is increasingly resorting to computer generated models to test what cannot be directly observed or repeated in a laboratory. Scientific debate now centers more and more on the extent one can make accurate scientific proposals based on a generated model. One objector (Erickson, 2007:15) in the global warming discussion has contested scientific models that are often 'over-stating the capacity of the models.'

look to the myths of Israel's neighbors with a keen eye toward 'the mythic structure.' Girard's analysis of the Oedipus myths in comparison to the Genesis narratives is worthy of special attention to see whether or not Israel's generative story diverges from this structure and to what extent.

## 1.5 Outline

An introduction to the thesis is provided in *Chapter One* setting forth the thesis and setting the perimeters of it.

*Chapter Two* explains Girard's theory of generative violence and how it should be understood in methodological terms. Of particular interest is Girard's own understanding and exegesis of the Old Testament as well as his understanding of how the text functions within and as part of the *sacrificial mechanism*. No attempt will be made to systematize Girard's thought into hermeneutical principles; however, the conclusions drawn will serve as the perimeters for the kinds of concerns taken up in the proceeding chapters.

*Chapter Three* situates Girard's mimetic theory within the context of current discussions and applications of theory and methodology. The most common criticisms of Girard's theory are fielded especially from those coming from theological and biblical perspectives. The purpose here is not to offer a full-blown apologetic of Girard's theory. For one, that would go far beyond the scope of this work. Girard has addressed numerous criticisms coming from an array of academic domains during his prolific career. But even more so, the thesis here is an attempt to 'test' Girard's hypothesis, so the validity of Girard's theory will be examined as I proceed. Particular attention will be given to alternative Old Testament exegetical applications of 'social theory' (although it is inaccurate to label Girard's theory as such) and their interaction with Girard.

*Chapter Four* takes a central aspect of what Girard calls the 'mythical structure' or 'the scapegoat mechanism'—the expulsion of a victim—and examines to what extent the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch could be structured by it. The expulsion narratives of Abraham and of the Israelites from Egypt are used as case studies. The conclusions

drawn from this examination will be employed to guide the exegesis of Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

*Chapter Five* exegetes Genesis 1 employing Girard's mimetic theory as a starting point. Girard's 'structural mode of myth' is placed in dialogue with the more conventional Old Testament criticisms of the last century. The structural pattern examined in Chapter four is explored in more detail. The main question pursued is whether Genesis 1 could be understood as being sacrificially structured.

Building on the findings of the preceding chapters, *Chapter Six* examines Genesis 2 in similar fashion to evaluate the extent it upholds the same structure.

*Chapter Seven* synthesizes the inquiry. A summary of the findings will be applied to the main aspect of this thesis which is first an issue within the Girardian perspective. It clarifies to what extent Girard's view of sacrifice plays out in Israel's narratives of origins. Conclusions are also drawn as to the extent mimetic theory can or should be incorporated into current trends in Old Testament theology and exegesis.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

Many of Girard's concepts are multi-faceted and so are not always easily summarized. As others have noticed, as well as I, French thinkers tend to formulate straightforward maxims that are nonetheless heavily nuanced. Bottum (1996:e) points out: 'Following a tradition dating back to Descartes' 1648 Conversation with Burman, French intellectuals often use interviews to put on record major qualifications of their work.'

Labeling concepts peculiar to Girard is also precarious. Almost any advocate or critic of Girard tends to alter designations, often giving it his or her particular bent on the concept. With this in mind, every attempt is made to use Girard's terms consistent with and accurate to his use.

**1.6.1 *Mythical structure and sacrificial or scapegoat mechanism.*** Girard repeatedly speaks of the operative mechanism of sacrifice that has uniform contours yet infinite variation. ‘The structure of the sacrificial crisis and of generative violence,’ says Girard (1972:285), ‘permits us to understand the means by which violence is deflected and diffused in human society.’ ‘Sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence’ (1972:8). Elsewhere he (1972:83) reiterates: ‘...a surrogate victim constitutes a major means, perhaps the sole means, by which men expel from their consciousness the truth about their violent nature.’

The *sacrificial mechanism* is where the *bad violence* of the community is consolidated in a single victim and then, by means of his death (good violence) is transformed into benevolent effects for the community. This mechanism is nearly synonymous with Girard’s repeated mention of a *structure* that is *mythical*. The *mythical structure* is the infinite and ingenious ways all societies and cultures conceal, displace, or misinterpret the sacrificial operative mechanism. The mythical structure entails an ‘aura of misunderstanding’ (1972:22) where the malevolent and the benevolent aspects of ‘good violence’ and ‘bad violence’ remain in suspension (1972:36). Sacrifice can only work when the violence that has been redirected into its proper channel remains ‘mysterious.’ Concealment is the key element to effectual sacrifice, and things are structured or ordered in order to conceal, displace, or veil the sacrificial mechanism. Girard (1972:96) states: ‘In the scapegoat theme we should recognize the very real metamorphosis of reciprocal violence into restraining violence through the agency of unanimity. This unique mechanism structures all cultural values even as it conceals itself behind them.’

Girard (1972:82) further clarifies what is at stake in this camouflaging of the sacrificial operation: ‘Men cannot confront the naked truth of their own violence without the risk of abandoning themselves to it entirely. They have never had a very clear idea of this violence, and it is possible that the survival of all human societies of the past was dependent on this *fundamental lack of understanding*.’

**1.6.2 *Generative violence.*** This term is often used by Girard to refer back to the original scapegoat murder of a community that resulted in a sense of unity or cohesion



for the group. Says Girard (1972:256): ‘...the origin of any cultural order involves a human death and that the decisive death is that of a member of the community.’ ‘Death, contains the germ of life. There is no life on the communal level that does not originate in death’ (1972:253). Girard clarifies (1972:297): ‘...generative violence penetrates all forms of mythology and ritual...there can be nothing in the whole range of human culture that is not rooted in violent unanimity—nothing that does not find its source in the surrogate victim.’

**1.6.3 Sacrificial or surrogate victim.** Girard (1972:269) provides an important clarification to his use of sacrificial or surrogate victim:

All sacrificial rites are based on two substitutions. The first is provided by generative violence, which substitutes a single victim for all the members of the community. The second, the only strictly ritualistic substitution, is that of a victim for the surrogate victim. As we know it, it is essential that the victim be drawn from outside the community. The surrogate victim, by contrast, is a member of the community.

Every attempt is made in ritual to create an exact replica of the original scapegoat, but to limited success. The original surrogate victim best ‘becomes the receptacle of human passions’ (Girard, 1972:269).

**1.6.4 Mimetic desire** A fundamental aspect of Girard’s theory relies heavily on the notion that human desire is essentially imitative. We learn desires by what others close to us desire. Girard (1978:9): ‘If imitation does indeed play the fundamental role for man, as everything seems to indicate, there must certainly exist an acquisitive imitation, or, if one prefers, a possessive mimesis...’ Girard (1978:11) believes that this ‘acquisitive desire’ inevitably leads to ‘conflictual mimesis’ or ‘mimetic rivalry’ which in turn leads to internal conflict. Girard (1978:18) explains his particular choice of mimetic over imitation:

Then compared to earlier forms of religious thought, the modern use of the term imitation produces a corresponding but reversed and aggravated ignorance. Rather than the exhausted word imitation, then, I chose to employ the Greek word mimesis...The only advantage of the Greek

word is that it makes the conflictual aspect of mimesis conceivable, even if it never reveals its cause.

Because acquisitive mimesis is Girard's 'point of departure,' he as well as others often label his ideas as *mimetic theory*.

**1.6.5 Monstrous double.** The monster, for Girard (1972:252), is an incarnation of maleficent violence where there is a complete breakdown of difference or where all difference is on equal terms. It is where the conflict between two rivals grows to such an intensity that for all intensive purposes the two look the same. They become a single unmanageable monstrosity that threatens a whole community. The two seemingly radical oppositions become one monstrosity of chaos, indifference, and unchecked violence, a conglomeration of difference.

**1.6.6 Sacrificial Crisis.** The sacrificial crisis is signaled by the increased impotency of the sacrificial mechanism. Girard argues that the scapegoat mechanism is inherently weak; it only carries weight because of its virulent and awe-inspiring birth. As ritual sacrifice loses its efficacy, the differences—order—that ritual maintains begin to unravel. Hence: 'The sacrificial crisis can be defined...as a crisis of distinctions—that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order' (1972:49). A sacrificial crisis is a 'ritualistic crisis' (1972:55) where distinctions and differences necessary for social cohesion begin to disintegrate. Girard (1972:49) explains:

A single principle is at work in primitive religion and classical tragedy alike, a principle implicit but fundamental. Order, peace, and fecundity depend on cultural distinctions; it is not these distinctions but the **loss of them** that gives birth to fierce rivalries and sets members of the same family or social group at one another's throats.

A sacrificial crisis is where sacrifice turns against those it is designed to protect (1972:41ff) and good violence turns to bad violence. When this begins to occur, there is often an intensifying of sacrificial activity and a orgy-like proliferation of sacrifice which will ultimately lead to rivalry, 'a terrible equilibrium,' 'cyclical violence,' a 'violent effacement of difference' (1972:63).

## 1.7 Hebrew word studies.

Girard's theory challenges various aspects of conventional theories and methodologies of literary criticism developed during the modern period.<sup>10</sup> Lexicography does not escape the challenge of Girard. Lexicographers, as well as ethnographers, have failed to see the duality inherent in the ancient notion of the sacred. This failure has skewed the categorizing of denotations. With this in mind, it is necessary to explore the particular Hebrew words of a text to see if conventional word studies have perhaps missed an important correlation. The thesis here understands the precarious nature of making emphatic conclusion based on word studies *alone* and seeks to avoid that. The goal is more to simply explore the possibility that vestigial traces of the founding death are retained in the language of the sacred. Thus the investigation can be compared to ethnographers who study ritual or social behaviors or archeologists who comb through a site looking for clues for something that perhaps was missed by earlier investigators.

Hence, the elaboration of Hebrew word-meanings in this work is based on my own investigations. The primary source for the word studies is Brown, Driver, and Briggs' *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB) and Harris, Archer, and Waltke's *Theological Words of the Old Testament* (TWOT). The attempt is made to confirm my conclusions with other commentaries as much as possible. BDB is especially useful in categorizing the various denotations of a word and supplying key Hebrew texts to compare and reference. Sometimes extensive information and explanation of a word study is provided within the body of this work. At other times, an abbreviated explanation is found in a footnote. Since the nature of the thesis presented here cannot accommodate full explanations of every word studied, it is necessary at times to simply state the conclusion of my study and provide a short reference. The particular debates peculiar to lexicographic inquiry will challenge conclusions made here, but this is, of course, a part of the ongoing work of scholarship.

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<sup>10</sup> Girard (1972:262). This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5 (5.1.3) below.

## **1.8 Documentation notes**

Since the gap between an original work and its English translation can sometimes be extensive, this work cites the date of the original work, not the date of the English translation. This allows for a more accurate picture of the proper chronological sequence of the works.

Where Internet sources do not provide page numbers an 'e' will be used instead of a page number, such as (1990:e).

## 2 GIRARD’S THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Girard’s bibliography is enough to demonstrate his own attempt to explicate his theory. The full explanation of his theory will be left to him. As stated earlier, the focus of the inquiry is not a full-blown analysis of his theory. Even though the heated issues of theory itself will be addressed as well as the array of criticisms directed at Girard’s in particular, this work accepts it as worthy of consideration. Girard<sup>1</sup> has repeatedly appealed for the validity of the theory to be tested by application rather than dismissed on purely philosophical, predilective, or capricious grounds.

This chapter, then, seeks more to describe the *application* of his theory as it is explained and utilized by Girard and hence to describe a methodology. An attempt to categorize principles<sup>2</sup> for interpretation below is primarily based on Girard’s own commentary on biblical texts and is supplemented by adherents who have applied it to biblical texts.<sup>3</sup> There are several underlying patterns that Girard not only consistently applies, but also suggests when interpreting a text from the structural perspective of the scapegoat mechanism, and that is, after all, what a methodology is. At times, Girard is elusive about such systematizing, yet if the theory is ‘a new interpretive tool,’<sup>4</sup> then we should denominate various aspects of it. One must concede that there is a distinctive twist to his approach, for what applies to a text just as equally applies to criticisms and methodologies.

If we are to allow the author to speak for himself (and not psychologically or politically deconstruct him), then we should yield to the author’s own precautions and qualifications. Girard believes that the tendency for humans to turn on each other to spare themselves so powerfully grips us on an individual and corporate level that it moves far beyond our theories and methodologies. This tendency has its own force and operates *especially* when we are not aware of it and can limp along quite well even we

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<sup>1</sup> Williams 1991:vii

<sup>2</sup> The use of terms such as *category* and *principle* are apt to constrict and misdirect without a broader understanding of the theory. I hope to avoid an injustice to Girard, yet to date, not a lot of discussion has centered on an application of the theory to a biblical methodology. Most of what can be found about Girard concerns his theory. If one is to ‘test’ the theory, then summarizing and organizing concepts is inevitable.

<sup>3</sup> See Hamerton-Kelly (1994:129ff) and Williams (1991)

<sup>4</sup> Williams 1991:viii

are. In a sense, it isn’t a methodology, theory, ideology anymore than looking up at the stars at night is. As time goes on, it is only our perspective that has changed.

Ultimately, texts that reveal and dismantle this tendency should be allowed to read us, rather than us reading the text. We don’t come to the text as an objective outside observer, scientifically diagnosing, analyzing, and categorizing it until we have a hermetically sealed museum artifact. Girard’s (1985b:112) approach is profoundly anthropological because it radically addresses the core of who *we* are:

I do not believe, therefore, that the theory of mythology I have outlined here is new. I do not think that it is mine at all. I think that it is nothing more than a weak, scholarly translation and transposition of the anthropological content of the Bible. I also believe that the ability we have in the modern world not to be fooled by scapegoat persecutions of the type I have discussed, those in the Middle Ages, or the ones today in the totalitarian world—our ability not to be deceived by such collective persecution—comes from the Bible...It is not the fruit of unaided human reason as the philosophers of the eighteenth century and the humanists would like us to believe, but it is the influence of the Bible on us, an influence that is not perceived most of the time.

It needs mentioning before we proceed as to what to call Girard’s theory. Almost any label seems inadequate. As in the quote above, Girard would prefer that it not even be called ‘Girard’s theory.’ At times, he is comfortable with calling it a theory or even a ‘matrix,’ but even Girard casts doubt about such labels (Bottum, 1996:e). As the next chapter will address to a limited degree and as Strenski<sup>5</sup> postulates, for instance, we must question whether *any* theorizing can hold its sway in an academic milieu where as of right now, only difference can be affirmed and skepticism muddles claims of an advantaged perspective.

Nonetheless, Girard (Williams,1991:vii) concedes that labels must be given if one is to talk about it at all. Conventionally, names for theories come not from the originator but from those willing to engage it. It is a theory—a construct of ideas proposing to explain certain phenomena—, and it is a methodology—a particular approach to interpreting a text conceding to certain presuppositions which guide and dictate the direction of the inquiry and the conclusions thereof. As much as it is bothersome to juxtapose oneself

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<sup>5</sup> See Strenski’s (2003:1-6) first chapter of his book *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice*.

among the minefield of methodologies before anything can be said about a text, for most, it is still more dubious to claim not to have any method and then proceed with obvious assumptions. Nonetheless, Girard (Hamerton-Kelly 1994:xi) fairly warns of a peculiar twist to his ‘approach’:

Of most theories, such as psychoanalysis or structuralism, it is legitimate to say that they are “applied” to the Gospels. In the case of mimetic theory, the language of “application” falters. Whenever the theory is used as intelligently as it is in this book, it tends to disappear behind the text. It is so close to the text that, when the two are brought together, the text wins out. The theory dissolves into the text, and this annihilation is its greatest triumph.

Hamerton-Kelly (1994:129) has attempted an overarching label—‘The Generative Mimetic Scapegoating Mechanism’ (GMSM for short)—and attempts to concisely package it to a general audience. Although this may be helpful, I would agree with Bottum (1996:e) that this gives the impression of a ‘system’ which inevitably creates fodder for critics. Throughout this inquiry, various designations will be given depending on where the emphasis lays in a similar vein to what Girard seems to do. Where the scapegoating operation of collective violence is emphasized, terms like ‘scapegoat mechanism,’ ‘mythic structure,’ or ‘sacral violence’ is preferred. At times, the more foundational aspects of the theory require one to speak in terms of *mimetic theory*.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, I will direct the focus particularly on the Old Testament, but conceding that, unlike Old Testament theologies that attempt to interpret it in its own right, this cannot be done without comparison and contrast with a wide variety of texts, both ancient and modern. Since this chapter attempts to describe Girard’s theory and practice primarily as *he speaks of it and applies it*, most critical interaction is by way of introduction and is reserved for the next chapter.

## 2.1 From Theory to Methodology

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<sup>6</sup> Chilton (1993:28) is one of the few who questions Girard’s notion that mimesis is fundamentally a bad characteristic. Instead, he argues for its neutrality.

The focus here is on Girard’s theory and method as it specifically applies to biblical texts, especially the Old Testament. It is critical, however, in which this focus does not and indeed cannot be examined separately from the broader context that Girard places it. What applies to the Old Testament applies to all texts, mythological, religious, literary, and in ideological, political and ‘scientific’ texts of modern times. Indeed, it applies to human institutions of every kind.<sup>7</sup> Girard did not set out to be a biblical exegete, nor does he claim to be one. Applying his formal training as an historian, the insipient formulation of a theory began with the medieval literature, then novels of Proust, Dostoyevsky, Stendahl, also Shakespeare, and with Greek tragedies to which his original notoriety as a gifted literary critic came in the 1960s. His early critics oddly criticized him as an anti-religionist or a religionist simultaneously (Bottum:1996:e). Girard’s focus on biblical texts, and his developing preference for them, comes as a result or application of his theory rather than the cause. Because the Old Testament and above all the Gospels reveal the scapegoat mechanism more extensively than other texts, Girard gives priority to them.

Girard’s study of great novels propelled him into an increasing awareness of the role that desire plays in creating tensions and rivalry. This concern, he concludes, in fact dominates the novel, and it seemed that imitative desire profoundly affected the author’s construct. It became clear to Girard that the main cause of rivalry, conflict, and violence in novels had its genesis in human desire that is looking for an object. It is here where he solidified the idea that human desire is imitative and hence the label ‘mimetic.’<sup>8</sup> This interest propelled him to explore ‘mimetic desire’ beyond literature and into the social sciences, particularly psychology, sociology, and anthropology.<sup>9</sup> This pursuit was the impetus for his seminal theoretical works—*Violence and the Sacred* (1972), delving into the field of ethnology and anthropology, and *Things Hidden From the Foundations of the World* (1978), interacting more with psychology where he calls for the ‘testing’ out of his ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> The Colloquium on Violence and Religion (<http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/>) is an organization established by Girard and others precisely to explore the ramifications of Girard’s theory to an array of contemporary issues.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to Chapter 1 (1.6.4) for Girard’s preference for ‘mimetic’ over ‘imitative.’

<sup>9</sup> Mack (1987:17) suggests that it was Girard’s analysis of the Bacchae myth that solidified the connection between desire for a shared object and religious notions of the sacred.



In *Violence and the Sacred*, there are only casual biblical references, mainly to the Old Testament, especially the prophets and Genesis, and usually in comparison to the Greek tragedies, like *Oedipus Rex* and *Bacchae*. By the second book, one can sense that the implications drawn from *Violence and the Sacred* were being pressed in on Girard where he devotes a more direct application to Biblical texts, mostly with the Gospels and the more ‘sacrificial texts’ in the New Testament, primarily the book of Hebrews. Even here, however, Girard only opens the door for more inquiry. He does proceed to apply his theory directly to an Old Testament book, one that interestingly enough is oft neglected in Old Testament theologies—*Job: the Victim of his People* (1985). One must say that this delving into biblical texts was left considerably wide-open. Girard (Williams 1991:ix) admits as such, and invites those qualified in the field to explore ahead.

It is after this period that most criticisms of Girard emerge. The next chapter will examine an array of these criticisms most of which are on the theoretical level. The affects of criticism is apparent in *The Scapegoat* (1982) and *Job* (1985) both of which are clear attempts to clarify and defend aspects of his theory. At times, there are direct responses to criticism. His book, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (1999), is considered to be his most theological of works. In it, Girard primarily limits his discussion to the ramifications of his thinking on the New Testament.

Along with the varied responses to Girard’s theory is found a positive reaction among various Christian perspectives. Raymund Schwager (1978) and James Williams (1991) initially applied Girard’s theory in a more concentrated fashion to biblical texts. Both apply the theory in broad strokes, addressing Old Testament and New Testament themes and theologies. Robert G Hamerton-Kelly (1994) applies the theory to the Gospel of Mark and also makes a more direct and systematized attempt at clarifying the theory as an approach. Bottum (1996) views the latter negatively: ‘...over-extending his thought and yet simultaneously narrowing it into a “Girardian System.” Bottum prefers ‘insight’ over method and reports that Girard renounces a system. At times, Girard prefers his theory supplement interpretive endeavors. At other times, however, he calls it a model or matrix for interpretation. There is, then, a certain tension between theory and method within the Girardian school. Implementation is not evenly applied. Of importance at the

moment, however, is to take note of the immediate and enduring appeal the theory has had among Christian theologians and scholars.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Girard (Golsan, 2002:130) attests to a conversion to the Catholic faith, and it does appear that the swell of criticism against Girard is proportionate to his preference for biblical texts. A phenomenon that has not escaped his notice (Golsan, 2002:129).

As we move from theory to application, it is important to remind that Girard has produced a general theory of culture that can go many directions. This flexibility is due to his emphasis on a structure or mechanism over and against theme. In this regard, he does not start with a different set of premises for biblical texts than any other. The distinction of and preference for biblical texts emerges for Girard only in the *degree* to which the scapegoat mechanism is revealed. More of this will be discussed below.

Before I begin, it is important to recognize a couple of underlying assumptions that consistently operate with Girard’s approach. For one, Girard views sacrifice as resoundingly negative. Above all, sacrifice originates in a founding ‘collective murder,’ and that murder has everything to do with directing the violence of the community away from itself. In conjunction with this is another assumption that underpins much of Girard’s work. Fundamentally, sacrifice—or more accurately our sacrificial violence towards one another—profoundly disturbs us, and it always has. These assumptions have been readily pointed out by more than one critic and have led to labeling Girard a ‘moralist.’<sup>11</sup> This will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

## 2.2 A Theory-laden Approach to Biblical Text

We have discovered, at the heart of every religion, the same single central event that generates its mythical significance and its ritual acts: the action of a crowd as it turns on someone it adored

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<sup>10</sup> Already mentioned are Raymund Schwager (1978), James Williams (1991), Robert Hamerton-Kelly (1991). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, John Milbank (1990), William Schweiker (1991), and Urs von Balthasar (1988) have taken note of Girard’s contribution to theology and hermeneutics.

<sup>11</sup> This is a basic criticism of Strenski (2003:3). The charge of moralism is one Girard (1982:143) is aware of.

yesterday, and may adore again tomorrow, and transforms him into a scapegoat in order to secure by his death a period of peace for the community (Girard, 1985a:160).

We have in a nutshell above a grid for approaching a text, especially of a mythic or religious nature. A generative communal killing of a prominent member is embedded in the narrative, albeit at various stages of disappearance. The rising of dangerous rivalries within the community find an outlet as it turns at the moment of accusation. The community ‘miraculously’ discovers a unanimity as it presses upon a victim. In a decisive and violent act, the victim is expelled from the community. The victim, who a moment earlier was the lightning rod of the community’s malevolence, has now restored the community to peace and security and is revered. The community then arranges through ritual a way to safely revisit the founding event and recapture its benevolent effects.

**2.2.1 Mimetic or acquisitive desire.** The pulse of Girard’s approach is always *mimetic desire*.<sup>12</sup> It is, as Girard (1985a:50) says, ‘the essential dimension.’ Mimetic desire is the irresistible tendency in humans to borrow or acquire desire from a ‘model’ to which a ‘disciple’ begins to imitate. Critical to the operation of mimetic desire is the understanding that the powerful draw for the disciple is not in the ‘object’; rather, it is the apparent power of the ‘model’ to possess ‘it.’ Initially for the model, the emulation of a disciple is welcomed and encouraged, mostly because the model has been elevated to a privileged status. What the model enjoys is not that the disciple desires the object as he/she does, but that the disciple desires him/her.<sup>13</sup> In essence, the model has become ‘it.’ The object quickly disappears, and really from the outset, was of little importance.

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<sup>12</sup> Girard (1978) addresses mimetic desire in considerable detail in his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundations of the World*. Of particular note are: Chapter 1 of Book I, ‘The Victimhood Mechanism as the Basis of Religion,’ Chapter 1 and 2 of Book III, ‘Mimetic Desire’ and ‘Desire without Object.’

<sup>13</sup> A recent discipline of psychology called ‘social cognition’ is researching this triangular dimension in human development. Interestingly, the same dimension which creates violence among humans may also be the mechanism which spawned the uniquely human abilities to reason and to teach others. Rebecca Saxe (2006,16:235), a leading researcher at MIT states: ‘This second unique component of human social cognition requires representing triadic relations: You, and Me, collaboratively looking at, working on or talking about This.’

As soon as this desire is immolated, however, an inevitable rivalry has begun, for if the disciple continues in his/her pursuit for ‘it,’ the model will perceive an inevitable loss of ‘it’ to the disciple. An irreversible competition ensues where both model and disciple are obstacles to each other. Rivalry begins to escalate to a dangerous and violent pitch at the point where both the model and the disciple reach an equilibrium—both are on level ground for displacing the other for possession of ‘it.’ There is no essential *difference* between them, and the ‘object’ has disappeared completely. The two become one ‘monstrous double’ whose violence threatens to engulf the whole community. Imitative rivalry is contagious.

This equilibrium of reciprocal rivalry is what Girard calls *symmetry* and to which he sees consistently structuring not only mythological and religious texts, but ritual as well. The amount of interplay between this symmetry and its breakdown, *dissymmetry*, is an indispensable key for interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Girard never loses sight of this when discussing the text.

This ‘terrible paradox’ of desire thrusts the entire community into a ‘sacrificial crisis.’ Sensing the threat of all, the *all* desperately seek an outlet to divert the impending destruction of the community—a scapegoat. Girard’s explanations of the scapegoat mechanism are numerous. For now, this summary will suffice:

The diffusion of mimeticism at the height of its intensity guarantees the absence of any real object for the desire. Beyond a certain threshold hate exists without cause. It no longer has need of cause or pretext; there remain only intertwined desires, buttressed against one another. If these desires are divided and set in opposition as they focus on an object, they wish to preserve—alive, in order to monopolize it,..—then by becoming purely destructive these same desires may be reconciled. This is the terrible paradox of human desires. They can never be reconciled in the preservation of their object but only through its destruction; they can only find agreement at the expense of a victim (Girard, 1982:146).

This sacrificial crisis is precisely the stuff of the sacred, that realm where the *symmetry of reciprocity* spirals ever more tightly into a paroxysm where ‘opposition is most radical and difference non-existence’ (1972:40). As Girard (1972:39) understands myth, this

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<sup>14</sup> See Girard (1968) ‘Symmetry and Dissymmetry in the Myth of Oedipus.’

symmetry of reciprocal violence is always reversing what it first undoes. Thus reciprocity spins tighter towards a ‘reduction,’ ‘condensation,’ ‘abbreviation,’ or ‘foreshortening’ of reciprocity (1968:80). This centrifugal ‘simplification’ of reciprocity brings to light the scapegoat with an impeccable internal logic. This is what Girard has variously labeled the *coherence of myth* or the *mythical structure*. It is ‘the unanimous polarization of hostility [toward a single victim] that produces the reconciliation’ (1972:287). The sacrificial crisis is the ‘derisory’ or ‘savage’ realm of *man’s* sacredness. That sacred realm is the place of ‘dazzling ambiguity’ and an ‘anarchy of value’. The ‘evanescent difference,’ the ‘circularity of myth,’ the ‘duality of myth,’ the realm of ‘perpetual reversals’ is the sacredness of myth and the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>15</sup> Only in this realm does the scapegoat come to light. It is here where the expulsion of the one will relieve the crisis.

The brief description is inadequate in comparison to Girard’s full-blown explanations; nevertheless, mimetic desire and its irresistible movement toward rivalry, communal crisis, and resolve in the scapegoat are the resolute underpinnings of all to be discussed below.

**2.2.2 Within deconstruction perimeters.** Deconstruction is admittedly an elusive term, yet Girard’s thought reveals affinities with the general contours of the movement.<sup>16</sup> Girard’s scholarly interest of history and literature in post-war France assures proximity to its influence. Certainly, his reluctance to evade the label of ‘theory’ or ‘method’ echoes that of Derrida.<sup>17</sup> Girard (Williams 1991:viii) admits as such in his insistence that the ubiquitous simplicity of the scapegoat as the foundation of religion and social cohesion perpetually eludes us. He insists, however, that his affinities with deconstructionism decisively break from it in that the ‘new scapegoat theory’s effectiveness ‘with religious texts undermines the epistemological nihilism to which other forms of “deconstruction” invariably lead.’ It is one thing to *deconstruct* a text and yet

<sup>15</sup> Girard has compiled an extensive glossary of terms referring to violence, the sacred, sacrifice, and the sacrificial crisis. See Girard (1972:250-273) and (1978:29-47, 58-87)

<sup>16</sup> Wallace 1989:322

<sup>17</sup> ‘For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be a danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible practices. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible.... Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all; it does not settle for methodological procedures’ (Derrida, 1984:e).

another to *reconstruct* it.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Girard speaks often of *demythologizing*, *deciphering*, *decoding*, *decomposing*, and *demystifying* the text, but equally of interpreting or translating one. Furthermore, he, like the deconstructionists, does not limit the enterprise to text, but extends their ‘approach’ to almost every aspect of life and thought. We must deconstruct every aspect of reality in order to get at the truth of things.

A critical juncture in this regard concerns who or what controls the text. For Girard, mimetic desire and the scapegoat structure hold a powerful sway over the author’s pen. We cannot underestimate the power and scope of mimetic rivalry operating within a group. The text functions in a similar way as ritual. The writer, therefore, is an intermediary like a priest or shaman would be. There can be a considerable amount of imagination or creativity on the part of the author or redactors, but this is always dictated by and in the service of the mechanism. Speaking of the Greek tragedies, Girard (1985a:43) says: ‘Whether pure invention or the closest imitation, the result is always in strict conformity with the great models bequeathed by the tragedies closest to the sacrificial origin.’

Current strands of Old Testament theology<sup>19</sup>, especially with rhetorical approaches, have made much of the imagination of the author, but Girard would argue that for the most part, *imitation* is more at play than imagination. Old Testament scholarship has proffered a variety of interpretive grids explaining the borrowing of theme, structure, and genre from other texts<sup>20</sup>, but this is relatively inconsequential.<sup>21</sup> There is a powerful religious and social utility at play, especially with ancient texts that overrides any individual artistic, historic, or religious concern. As Girard sees it, there is an interplay between the intentions of the author and the unintentional, between awareness and the unawares. The

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<sup>18</sup> Golson, 2002:138-140

<sup>19</sup> See for example: *David’s Truth: In Israel’s Imagination and Memory* by Brueggemann (1985) and *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* by Brodie, Thomas L. 2001. Both give interpretive license to the literary ‘imagination’ of the author(s).

<sup>20</sup> One can recall Gunkel’s (1901) classic work on Genesis inspired by the discovery of mythological texts.

<sup>21</sup> Girard (1985a:43) downplays the significance ancient writer’s borrowed from other sources, for the author ‘demonstrates the same control in dealing with violence and the sacred.’ This approach has caused some, like Levine (1985:26), to criticize Girard for his ‘disdainful attitude toward the role of languages in the interpretation of ancient classics.’

scapegoat mechanism is such a powerful undertow behind our social experience that in a significant way, the authors ‘know not what they do.’<sup>22</sup>

As will be discussed in more detail below, Girard sees varying degrees to which the author perceives the operative structure of his narrative. Mythological texts<sup>23</sup> can work in two directions. The ones close to the original murder have an awareness of the mechanism and more openly strive to uphold it. Oddly, texts or rituals that are more removed from the founding murder may actually reveal an author or redactor who is less aware of the structure or one who is only aware of the beneficent utility of the mechanism all the while being blind to the operation of the scapegoat. These typically have less overt violence in them and a scapegoat victim is less obvious. It is like the majority of people who drive automobiles; we know how to operate them all the while knowing next to nothing as to how they work. To another degree, there are mythical texts where ‘cracks’ appear. These texts or rituals show evidence of questioning the mechanism. There is a second-guessing of the victim’s absolute guilt. There is a rote, dubious rereading of the myth as in the Greek tragedies.

We can take this one step further where the author is aware of the mechanism to some degree and is attempting to get at it himself. Even here, there may be: ‘...a keen awareness in the author that he is articulating things never heard before’ (Girard, 1985a:139). We may even find the author’s perspective embedded in one of the characters (Girard, 1985a:43).<sup>24</sup> Of all ancient texts before the Gospels, the Greek

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<sup>22</sup> Saying of Job’s friends: ‘As the Gospels will say later of a similar affair, the three friends ‘know not what they do’ on the moral and religious plane. They know very well, on the other hand, what they should and should not do to someone whose punishment is a sacred task, to be accomplished with art. The meaning of this art may escape us, but it can always be recovered’ (Girard, 1985a:28).

<sup>23</sup> Definitions of ‘myth’ are so varied that one could wonder what any of us mean when we use the word. A full explanation of what Girard means by myth can be found in the chapter ‘The Science of Myth’ in *The Scapegoat* (1982). For now, this concise definition will do: ‘...all myth is—an absolute faith in the victim’s total power of evil that liberates the persecutors from reciprocal recriminations and, therefore, is identical with an absolute faith in the total power of good’ (1985a:34).

<sup>24</sup> Goodhart (2007:69) takes this further than Girard. He postulates that the author may originally have intended to deconstruct the mechanism, but is sucked into the limited perspective of one of the characters who is disillusioned. Saying of Genesis 3: ‘It is as if the text itself has taken over the perspective of the characters within the text, of *ishah* and the *iysh* after their eating of the fruit, and as if the text itself is now being written from within that perspective... The text itself, in other words, has now become a distortion,

tragedies and the Old Testament are demythologizing, attempting to dismantle the truth or at least peek behind the mask. For Girard (1985a:120), there is the sense that the authors are on the cusp of a great discovery: ‘It is no accident that the texts most capable of enlightening us on what is happening are the great texts that belong to the tragic and prophetic universe, the works most inspired by the sacrificial decadence of the ancient world.’ Of the two, Girard (1985a:39) believes the Greek tragedies ‘retreat back into the mechanism’ while the Old Testament ‘crosses the threshold.’ Girard understands some texts, including theories in the social sciences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as regressive, coming close to understanding the mechanism, but then retreating.

Every text or ritual indicates the state of flux a community is in regarding their proximity to its generative act and/or the ritual maintenance of it. A mythological text intentionally or unintentionally upholds or hides its generative structure. A demythological text is at various stages of exposing the mechanism, again consciously or unconsciously. And there are texts that appear to be doing both, the Old Testament appears unique for Girard in this regard. Ultimately, there are two forces that are outside the author and to which the author can interact with, but is not in control of. It is either the scapegoat structure *or* a force working to dismantle the mechanism—God.

The interplay between intention and imagination or conscious and unconscious equally applies to redactors and to interpreters of the text. Again, we must understand the reading of the text in a similar way as participating in a festival or ritual. There are certain things that are operational that we may or may not be aware of, but those who preside over this process may be ‘mystified’ by the actual workings of the process even more than those closer to the original crisis.

Thus redactors may, in fact, do more to confuse our vision of the text than to clarify it. Girard certainly would not hold to a ‘univocal’ reading of the Bible. If it doesn’t fit ‘the model’ then it is discounted and even denounced, usually as a misshapen distortion of the text. Certainly, in Girard’s most in-depth exploration of the Old Testament, he has no

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and as a result the task of reading has become infinitely more complicated... what we are reading now is what may itself be termed a “text of transgression.”



problem delineating between sections of the text that go against his thesis. The case in point is the introductory and concluding sections of Job where Girard (1985a:58) believes a redactor retreated from the profound implications of Job’s speeches. Thus he points to parts of the Old Testament that are, ‘not the highest tradition of biblical inspiration’ precisely because ‘the voice of the victim is not heard.’

Even though a god of the persecutors is evident in parts of the Bible, Girard (1985a:9) believes that in the Bible, the perspective of the victim is ‘always and everywhere’ prominent. Girard (1999:170-181) provides an important qualifier here. If, he argues, we are only given the perspective of the victim then we only create, in fact, just another rivalry to replace the old one. We succumb to Nietzsche’s ‘slave morality for that of the master.’ It is critical that we be *confronted with both perspectives*—that of both victim of the crowd and the crowd. This is a significant interpretive component. If we do not include the perspective of the scapegoat mechanism, we will confuse the religion, and god, of the crowd with that of the true god.

Girard (1985a:126-127) calls for a reliance on a ‘global interpretation’<sup>25</sup> in discerning not only the extent of redaction, but in which direction it is going. As in the case of Job, Girard admits to several texts that blur the distinction between the god of vengeance and the god of the victim, reducing a text to inevitable enigmatic interpretations. Thus any adoption of the ‘language of the persecutors’ makes it ‘more difficult to recognize him in his role as victim.’ Girard (Job 1985a:71-72) speaks of the scapegoat rubric *translating the text*.

Girard does not stray far from what has long been a staple of Old Testament theology—there are varying and oft competing views of God and traditions in the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup> It has gotten a hold of something that it cannot wield nor discard. Certainly, this can be no more evident in the Deuteronomist’s framing of Israel’s story almost exclusively in terms of a struggle against idolatry. Certainly, one cannot walk away with even a casual reading of the Old Testament without a gnawing sense of an unresolved tension emerging from the text.

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<sup>25</sup> It seems he is referring to the ubiquitous nature of the scapegoat mechanism. It is infinitely repeatable.

<sup>26</sup> Hanson (1986) provides an example of this as well as Terrien (1983) and Brueggemann (1997:61-114).

The deconstructive task operates to the degree that we understand the mythical structure. Again, we are at a vantage point today, not because we are brighter than past generations (or that Girard is more insightful than other scholars) but because of the 2,000 year effect of the Gospel on Western civilization (Girard, 1999:182-193). Girard (1985a:167) employs the Gospel stories of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the prodigal son, and the Ethiopian eunuch as analogous to the process of anyone ‘decoding’ the meaning of the Jesus event. More accurately, it is the process that the Jesus event has of decoding those who encounter it. At first contact, there is curiosity and superficial sympathy. Then, disenchantment and disaffection set in. There is a necessary ‘collapse of hope’ and a ‘skeptical and suspicious discouragement’ (a deconstruction) prior to the revelatory moment where by the light of Jesus’ resurrection, the meaning of ‘Moses and the Prophets’ is revealed (Luke 24:25).

A reader, informed especially by the Gospel, holds an interpretive advantage even over the author and previous interpreters of the text. The Gospel itself is deconstructing the mythical structure, and it is our task as readers to see that. There is another critical departure with 20th century deconstructionism. Ultimately, it is the *Gospel that is deconstructing culture* and not we who are deconstructing the author, usually along psychological, philosophical, and historical assumptions. ‘The violence of our cultural order is revealed...and the cultural order cannot survive such revelation. Once the basic mechanism is revealed, the scapegoat, that expulsion of violence by violence, is rendered useless by the revelation’ (Girard, 1982:188-89).

Girard (1982:5, 118) insists that we ‘interpret the text’ beyond what the author knows, understands, or intends. There is a scapegoat *in* the text and *for* it.<sup>27</sup>

From our several centuries’ distance we know better than he and can correct what he has written. We even believe that we have discovered a truth not seen by the author and, with still greater audacity, do not hesitate to state that he provides us with this truth even though he does not perceive it himself.

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<sup>27</sup> One critic (Wetzel, 2006:e) would say that Girard neglects to go one step further and see the scapegoat *behind* the text.

**2.2.3 A Hermeneutic of Absence.** It doesn’t take long before a reader of Girard notices the ease to which Girard finds the scapegoat mechanism in narratives even and *especially* when it is not apparent. Indeed this seems a readymade criticism that Girard is ‘fantasizing.’<sup>28</sup> This is where many could find fault with Girard’s interpretive method. Arguing from what is *not* in the text has always been precarious. Girard (1985a:31) answers his critics saying the absence of an overt scapegoat reveals all the more that it was founded by it: ‘the very fact that they are [structured by the scapegoat] implies that the mechanism is nowhere present.’ His argument is based on several considerations.

It is one thing to argue from the absence of a noticeable scapegoat in the text, but Girard makes his argument on what is *characteristically* and *persistently* absent and juxtaposed to what is characteristically present. Girard<sup>29</sup> develops this position most fully in his discussion of myth and ‘texts of persecution.’<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Girard (1985a:31) divides texts into one of two fundamental categories—myth, ‘for which there is no direct proof that they are structured by the scapegoat mechanism’ and texts in which the mechanism is being revealed and dismantled to various degrees: ‘They are no longer there to reveal for us the structuring effect that the process exercises on their language, their vision and their behavior.’ There is a bottom line reason why there is no overt scapegoat in myth: ‘As with all those who create scapegoats, they consider their victim to be guilty. Therefore, for them, there is no scapegoat.’

There are varying degrees to which a text (or ritual) has distanced itself from its generative murder, and one of the tell-tale signs is the loss of the original symmetry where the benevolent and malevolent forces polarized around the victim are held in

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<sup>28</sup> Girard, 1982:93. Wallace (1985:322) states: ‘The demand that this hypothesis be accepted in its totality, with no pick-and-choose such as Girard shows toward Freud and Lévi-Strauss, is made especially taxing by the *unawareness* essential to his victimary mechanism, in virtue of which whatever fits fits, and whatever does not fit, fits the “built-in unawareness.”

<sup>29</sup> Girard, 1982:12-91,

<sup>30</sup> Girard (1982:6-7) builds much of his case on texts, such as *The Judgment of the king of Navarre* by the 14<sup>th</sup> Century French poet, Guillaume de Machaut, where the persecution from a religious minority is obvious and equally obvious are the distorted accusations. By comparing an obvious persecution text—from our historically removed position—with the less obvious myth, one can more readily see the same operation.

tension. Another indicator is how vivid the description of the crime and how violent the punishment. Myths approximating the real situation tend to view the ‘criminal’ as guilty of gross crimes—classic mythological crimes such as plague, draught, loss in war, incest—and the punishment reflects the actual sacrifice of the scapegoat.<sup>31</sup> Girard (1985a:31) admits the difficulty of detecting the mechanism at work in a text, yet most of all, there is inevitably one clear indicator—the collective murder. ‘Collective murder may certainly disappear from mythology. It does in fact nothing else; but once gone, it cannot reappear...’ (Girard 1982:73).

Girard (1985a:31) believes the book of Job is a prime example where ‘the two visions’—myth and texts that reveal the mechanism—are presented in counterpart.<sup>32</sup> For Girard, only when the voice of the victim comes through will you have a revelation of the mechanism. This again is important in that we are dealing with *assonance and dissonance* in text. When there is contradiction, disarray, dissymmetry, or ‘competing traditions,’ we have an indication of how developed the text is, how removed it is from the generative event.

Here Girard addresses something which has been a staple of OT interpretation over the last century—the awareness of competing traditions within the OT which are put side by side. The ‘object’ of such a juxtaposition is for Girard (1985a:32) ‘not catharsis but the disappearance of all catharsis.’ Speaking of the book of Job, Girard says: ‘The difference in perspective on the same act of collective violence is the true subject of the Dialogues. The sacred lie of the friends is contrasted with the true realism of Job.’

Here we have a *text in travail*. A text in which it isn’t sure what to make of a vision of God that is similar to that of Israel’s neighbors—a god of vengeance, exacting retribution, one who both rewards and punishes. It is a text not willing to disregard tradition, but also seeing a problem with it. Perhaps the strategy of putting both perspectives together is in order for the community to see through to a different kind of

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<sup>31</sup> Girard, 1982:31

<sup>32</sup> Girard’s view of the book of Job may well reflect his understanding of the Old Testament. The interpretive task then is to distinguish the two and the interplay between them.

god.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, Girard views the Old Testament as a text struggling to uncover a great mystery. The text itself is in a sacrificial crisis of sorts.

Refuting Frazer’s earlier ideas of scapegoat rituals, Girard (1982:120) repeatedly emphasizes that it is the *absence* of a scapegoat *theme* that *assures* a scapegoat *structure*. Most cultures are too steeped in its structure to be capable of standing outside its influence.

This is precisely what many critics find most problematic to Girard’s theory.<sup>34</sup> How can one observe something in which he participates? This alone would tend to lead us away from talking about a *scientific* theory. Girard agrees that one cannot directly observe the phenomenon; one can, however, look at the effects. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard (1972:309) compares his theory to that of evolution. Evolution cannot be directly observed, yet when examining the countless traces—effects—the theory of evolution gives a cohesive and plausible explanation for a plethora of diversity. Williams (1991:13) prefers to say it is ‘supported by a social scientific model of explanation,’ which has ‘analytic power.’ Admitting that in the positivistic sense of the scientific method, the theory cannot be falsified, he affirms: ‘it certainly can be ranged against other theories and compared for adequacy in clarifying the data in question.’

Girard (Williams, 1991: viii) argues on a similar base: ‘Thematic and structural traces are everywhere, and their pattern is so consistent throughout the world that, in my view, they make skepticism more untenable than direct evidence would if it were available.’ Furthermore, Girard argues that even today we are very aware of the scapegoats of others, but still not of our own. What continues to elude us is the *invisible* scapegoat. ‘This paradoxical dimension of scapegoating, even (and especially) in a world literally obsessed with this evil, is the true reason why the new scapegoat theory remains elusive in its simplicity, why it cannot fail to be widely misunderstood.’

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<sup>33</sup> The historical ramifications of Girard’s theory are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>34</sup> Bottum (1996) Reineke (2009:11) lists the inability to observe the scapegoat mechanism in any documented rituals of sacrifice as one of several ‘standard-issue criticisms’ of Girard’s theory.

Based on the characteristic absence of the scapegoat and the communal rivalry leading up to it, Girard (1982:75-82) asserts that we can trace the evolution or history of a myth, the basis being the community’s underlying propensity to shirk its own violence. Myth and ritual are rarely stagnant. They are always in a process of eliminating traces of the collective murder.<sup>35</sup> A first stage is when the collective murder is replaced by individual violence. The community has successfully receded to the background.<sup>36</sup>

The process continues until eventually all traces of violence are gone. Myths that appear benign probably reflect a considerable distancing from its origins. This stage reflects a kind of moral philosophizing which is uncomfortable with all forms of violence in the myth. Girard would view much of the Old Testament and the Greek tragedies and philosophical works in this way.<sup>37</sup> There is an attempt to clean up the myth and transform it into a tradition or civic religion. A kind of ‘moral dualism’ results which eliminates the connection between a god as ruthless persecutor (representing the mob) or as the victim. A god now retains only the beneficiary characteristics and the malevolent qualities are relegated to demons. Violent content may be retained here, but is now transformed to an idyllic, imaginary past.<sup>38</sup> Critical to Girard’s approach is an understanding that it is the very nature of myth to conceal the mechanism while simultaneously gleaning the benefits of it. *The absence of the scapegoat is what makes it myth.* The absence of the collective murder is infinitely repeatable and predictable. It is the characteristic of a myth moving away from its genesis precisely because the original collective murder is as repulsive to the ‘primitives’ as it is for us.

The characteristic absence of the scapegoat and the violence associated with it is the primary historical referent for Girard. Girard believes the author of myth—and we must

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<sup>35</sup> ‘The evolution of mythology is governed by the determination to eliminate any representation of violence’ (Girard, 1982:76). ‘...human culture is predisposed to the permanent concealment of its origins in collective violence. Such a definition of culture enables us to understand the successive stages of an entire culture as well as the transition from one stage to the next...’ (Girard, 1982:100).

<sup>36</sup> This dimension will be an important consideration when looking at the Genesis narrative where the dominant roles are individualized in Adam, Eve, and Yahweh Elohim.

<sup>37</sup> This becomes an important consideration in the examination of Genesis 1 where on the surface; the narrative does not appear to have anything to do with sacrifice and rivalry. The writing is considerably removed from its more violent origins.

<sup>38</sup> Van Seters (1992:26) notes that mythological accounts of origins in the Ancient Near East were attempts to give a society a universal and unifying depth to it.

be reminded that myth is any text that is mostly interested in upholding the scapegoat mechanism—is guided primarily by the structural element. *The bottom line is the preservation of the community from its own violence.* Elements of theme, historical detail, and story (with its oft supernatural elements) are in the service of this concern. The historical referents are on the generative level. As long as the structure is in place, there can be a great deal of ‘creativity’ on the part of an author. This may be an uncomfortable proposition for the more scientifically oriented interpreter, but for anyone trained in the art of jazz music, this makes perfect sense. It is strict adherence to the structure that allows for limitless ‘improvisation.’ Hence, Girard (1982:1) counters the deep skepticism that is now prevalent in the social sciences. There is a real event being referred to in a text, and the ‘false’ statements are just as informative, and maybe even more so, as to the true nature of that original event as the statements which appear more historically realistic. Distortion—the false accusation and bloated culpability of the victim—is fundamentally inherent to the real event—a collective, sacrificial act of violence.<sup>39</sup>

This is significant as far as methodologies go. Girard starts with the presupposition of all methodologies that one must determine what *kind* of text we are interpreting. Is it historical epic,<sup>40</sup> myth, liturgy, or a variety of other designations? Girard’s textual starting point is reductionistic. How should we interpret a text, psychoanalytically, socio-politically, literarily? Primarily it must be interpreted by the extent it is mythological or a text of persecution, and Girard conceives this on a scale of degrees based on what he calls ‘stereotypes of persecution.’ Suffice it to say, Girard (1982:29) offers an interesting direction to the issues of the historicity of an ancient text. ‘My hypothesis relies on nothing historical in the critic’s sense. It is purely “structural” as in our interpretation of historical representations of persecution...If we accept this thesis the obscurity of the text is immediately dispelled...Thus the interpretation does not rest on whether it is or is not set in a framework of historical detail.’ The presuppositions of past methodologies based

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<sup>39</sup> Girard, 1982:24, 30, 55, 89ff

<sup>40</sup> Brodie (2001:68) argues for a unified reading of much of the Old Testament under the Greek conception of historical epic.

on the historical and the imaginary or mythical breaks down: ‘The decision to define a text as historical or mythological is arbitrary.’<sup>41</sup>

There is then a discernible history in a mythic narrative. Unlike the documentary hypothesis in Old Testament scholarship, the diachronic evolution of the narrative is less tied to fixed histories and more dependent on a ‘structural’ analysis. Girard (1982:121) strains to clarify this central aspect to his thesis and yet is the target of persistent criticism. Blaming it partly on the logical positivism that dominated much of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship, he writes: ‘The concept of a structural principle that is absent from the text it structures would have seemed epistemologically incomprehensible...It is the same for most scholars, and I am not even sure that I can make myself understood despite my reference in the interpretation of Guillaume de Machaut...to a scapegoat *that cannot be found in the text.*’ Girard (1982:121) call’s the scapegoat structure a radical structure and clarifies the interpretive task:

...a successful interpretation would not be possible without taking into account either collective murder, whenever it is present, or the *uneasiness* caused by its disappearance: *all the images are arranged around its absence.* Unless we recognize this uneasiness, even those aspects relating strictly to the combination and transformation of the relationships among certain myths must remain hidden. (Emphasis mine)

This hermeneutic of absence does not necessarily put Girard in an antagonistic relationship with convention historical criticisms. He insists, however, that a major ‘key’ to the historical road map has been left out.

**2.2.4 Text as ritual, sacrificial participant.** Form Criticism had attempted to place certain texts within a liturgical setting. By determining the symbiotic connection between liturgy and text, the hope was to come to a clearer understanding of the text and the oral traditions that generated it. It was deemed important to move away from a reading that considered a text as having an objective reality apart from the worship expressions of the community.

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<sup>41</sup> Girard 1982:47



Girard takes the notion inherent in form criticism considerably further. Girard eradicates any sense in which the text has a separate, objective reality. *A text is not neutral.* Ritual seeks in a controlled way to imitate the generative sequence that produces social cohesion and reconciliation among the community. A text is only an extension of this function, sometimes in conjunction with ritual and sometimes replacing ritual.<sup>42</sup> Girard consistently insists that mythological *texts are performative.*<sup>43</sup>

Speaking of the exaggeration of violent language found in speeches of Job’s ‘friends,’ which Girard considers to be a clear presentation of the logic of communal sacrifice, Girard (1985a:26, 27) explains: ‘By equating all the acts of violence against Job with services rendered to God, these speeches justify past brutalities and incite new ones. They are more formidable than any spitting. Their *performative* value is obvious.’

Girard (1985a:27, 28) speaks of ‘linguistic sacrifice’ or sacred language that acts with the same violence towards its victim as a ritual.

Words, too, form a crowd; countless, they swirl about the head of the victim, gathering to deliver the *coup de grace*... Their hostile speeches are not merely an image of collective violence, they are a form of active participation in it. The ‘turbulence of the crowd’ is reflected in a swirl of discourses of accusation... they are ‘carried away by their own barbaric lyricism.’

As is ritual, so texts perform the double purpose of dealing with collective violence while simultaneously covering it up. The ‘justice’ of the crowd is, in this case, transferred to a sense of divine or absolute justice. Hence the recurring theme of fate, destiny, or chance always can be found, for the collective violence has been effectively transcended into supernatural forces.

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<sup>42</sup> In Watts’ (2007:202) rhetorical approach to ritual and text, he argues that texts on ritual practice and interpretation, such as Leviticus, appear when the ritual has ceased and/or is in the midst of considerable social conflict *over ritual*. These kinds of texts, then, are designed to lend credibility to the ritual and to those performing it. The authority of the text itself emerges only from ‘the authority of the temples ritual traditions’ (Watts, 2007:214). Although Watts’ approach agrees with Girard on the interaction between text and ritual, he distinguishes his approach from Girard in key areas. This will be addressed in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Thus Girard has affinities with one of his harshest critics from Old Testament scholarship, Janzen (2004). The radical divergence comes in understanding *what* is being performed.

Girard (1982:93) believes a prime example is the founding myth of Romulus: ‘It [collective murder] is in fact central to the myth and disappears gradually by a process of suffocation and strangulation, the true intellectual equivalent of what the patricians did to Romulus himself.’

The process of elimination of the traces of the scapegoat mechanism—the collective murder—has the same fundamental motivation as the original mob murder. It is functioning on the same logic as the victim itself—going from a collective act that is channeled into the one.

**2.2.5 Passion of Christ structural model of inversion.** Girard has no qualms admitting that his theory led him to the Gospels where he sees the scapegoat mechanism profoundly addressed as no other literature before or after has been able to do. The passion of Christ is for Girard, ‘the structural model.’ In a modified sense, Girard has returned to a basic hermeneutic of Christian tradition before the influence of the enlightenment—reading the whole Bible through the lens of the passion of Christ.

Thus, Girard stands in contrast to the historical criticisms that prevailed in Biblical scholarship since the 19<sup>th</sup> century seeking to break the text free of dogmatic limitations. Apart from the Gospels, Girard places the Greek tragedies and even more so the Old Testament as approaching the revelation of the mechanism most profoundly, yet neither one is quite able to break through to a profound reversal. Girard is comfortable with what has been resisted in much of the methodologies applied to the Old Testament over the past centuries. He fully allows for the passion story to ‘intervene’<sup>44</sup> in Old Testament texts which have been muddled because of a reluctance to relinquish the god of persecution, the punishing god.

Girard is in line with Old Testament approaches that view it in broad strokes, seeing the interconnectedness and cohesion.<sup>45</sup> Again, because Girard approaches a ‘story’ from a structural or foundational level, he does not bog himself down with too many ‘parasitic’ features primarily for embellishment. The structural perspective overrides ‘theme,’

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<sup>44</sup> Girard, 1982:162

<sup>45</sup> Von Rad (1962) *Old Testament Theology*; Brodie 2001 *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*.

‘tradition,’ or ‘history.’ Girard consistently points to the common and ‘stereotypical’ themes that have an amazing ubiquitous application. Girard (1982:141) argues that recurring themes are not dependent on ‘intertextuality’ in a narrow sense. He insists that some themes, like the exorbitant offer in the John the Baptist story, rival brothers, orphan sacrifice, or plague, are so common in myth that we must owe it to a structure common to all more than a conscience borrowing from or even allusion to other sources.

Girard’s approach to Scripture is parabolic. In this regard, a commonly held hermeneutical principle for parables is to focus on one central point for the story in which all the details are in service of.<sup>46</sup> Details can provide interesting twists, be entertaining or provocative, yet they are subordinate to the core force or impression which the story is leading.<sup>47</sup> In addition, it is held that the parables of Jesus have a fundamental structure with multiple variations.<sup>48</sup> Girard steers away from the kind of atomization of the text peculiar to some higher criticisms. He is not against attention to detail per se, but when it ignores the structure, it can be at best distracting and at worse misleading. We can, in fact, end up comprehending things the exact opposite of its goal or exactly as it intends to direct our attention away from the victim. As with ritual, peculiarities and details can be haphazard or coincidental. This will be discussed more in Chapter 3.

How Girard understands the parables of Jesus is paradigmatic to much of his interpretations of other texts and rituals. Speaking of Jesus’ discourse concerning his teaching the crowd in parables (Mark 4:10, 33), Girard explains the ‘parabolic distortion’ which is being aggressively undermined by Jesus’ parables. Fundamentally, a parable has always been used to bolster the sacrificial mechanism. It is a metaphor ‘thrown alongside’ as a part of the appeasement of the crowd in order to divert attention away

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<sup>46</sup> The subject of parables, as perhaps no other, follows the hotly debated methodological arenas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Blomberg’s analysis in *Interpreting the Parables* (1990) is careful and thoughtful. Synthesizing the legitimate gains from various approaches, Blomberg applies a structural model to the parables remarkably similar to Girard. Girard (1982:118) concedes that his approach is ‘structuralism at its best.’

<sup>47</sup> For instance, Jeremias’ (1954:115) statement of this idea, prominent among the form-critical method (Blomberg, 1990:72) finds an easy echo in Girard. ‘We shall find that many parables express one and the same idea by means of varying symbols. Differences which are commonplaces to us are now seen to be secondary. As a result, a few simple essential ideas stand out with increased importance. It becomes clear that Jesus was never tired of expressing the central ideas of his message in constantly changing images.’

<sup>48</sup> The structural make up of the parable is a foundational principle for interpreting the parables. Blomberg (1990:171) for instance, divides most into three, two, and one point parables. This is primarily based on key characters whose allegorical correspondence would be readily recognizable.

from potential scapegoat victims. It is a ‘concession to mythological representation.’<sup>49</sup> In this regard, metaphor is the language of the mob. It is a fundamental tool of the persecutor and ‘the language of expulsion.’ ‘Ultimately, there is no discourse that is not a parable. All human language, and other cultural institutions, in fact, originated in collective murder. After some of Jesus’ most hard hitting parables, the crowd often makes a movement of violence’ (Girard, 1982:193). Read too literally or with too much attention to superfluous detail, one is more likely to side with gods of vengeance and persecution than a god of love. Jesus warns the disciples, and Girard his listeners, that one must find the ‘key’ to understanding the story or else be ‘hearing but understanding, seeing but not perceiving.’

There are, Girard concedes<sup>50</sup>, overt reference to a scapegoating *theme* in the Gospels, but when it occurs, it is completely derogatory—*scandalous*. Jesus’ preferred language is of *skandalon*—transforming the language of the scapegoat (metaphor)—into the scandal of mimetic desire. It is within this context that Girard subordinates all other mythological and religious language. The parables of Jesus, far from having a calming effect, are a cause of stumbling. They are meant to trip up and derail the sacrificial mechanism. The parables are as it were, mini-bombs or tremors<sup>51</sup> wreaking havoc on the collective force of communal violence. Girard sees this evident within the very text of the Gospels were the narrative sections more accurately portray the disciple’s perpetual befuddlement than the sometimes enigmatic transcriptions of Jesus’ teaching. Even here, the authors struggle to tear themselves away from ‘literalness’ of sacrificial representations of the mechanism to the reality of the structure. Sometimes even the Gospels recoil back into comfortable ‘religious’ language.

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<sup>49</sup> In an interview discussing Eric Gans’ anthropoetic ideas about the origin of culture, Girard (Muller, 1996:e) makes his case that language, as one of many representations, could not precede the archetype of all representation—the sacrificial victim. Williams (1991:17) defends the primacy of action over word as does Hamerton-Kelly (1994:145). Watts (2007:180ff), who is not a Girard proponent, also argues that ritual precedes the word.

<sup>50</sup> Williams 1991:viii

<sup>51</sup> Some critical approaches to the parables have emphasized their intended shock value. The ‘new hermeneutic’ approach of Paul Ricoeur and others, suggests that the two things put in comparison have a ‘shocking juxtaposition’ (Blomberg, 1990:138).

Girard (1982:194-95) views the language of demons and Satan, although still religious language, as movement in the direction of scandal. It is an intermediary between mythic and scandal language especially because of its turn toward ‘conflictual mimesis.’<sup>52</sup>

Within this context, Girard (1982:195) provides the centrality he places on the Gospels:

A close correspondence exists between what the Gospels tell us of demons and the truth of mimetic relationships as defined by Jesus and as revealed in certain great literary works or in theoretical analysis. This is not true of most texts that reflect a belief in demons, but most contemporary commentators fail to recognize such a distinction and consider all such texts to be contaminated by the same superstition without ever really examining the content. The Gospels, in fact, are not only superior to all the texts placed in the category of magical thought but are also superior to all the modern interpretations of human relationships. The superiority lies both in the mimetic concept and in the combination of mimesis with demonology found in a text such as *Gerasa*.

Hence, the Gospels are ‘the model,’ ‘the counter force,’ and ‘the essential articulation’<sup>53</sup> for interpreting most texts. Girard certainly applies this to his reading of the Old Testament. In some respects, Girard is a return to the traditional typological reading of the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> Girard’s neo-allegoricalism has placed him alongside the hermeneutic of the Church Fathers, as Janzen (2004:3) has critically pointed out.<sup>55</sup>

Girard’s approach differs from the Patristic interpretation of the Old Testament. Whereas the Fathers focused more on archetypes in characters or themes, Girard (1985a:166) finds it in its deconstructing of the mechanism, in its structure and its peculiar portrayal of mimetic relationships: ‘The truth of prophecy in the Christian sense appears from the moment mimetic processes are emphasized rather than characters treated as Christ figures.’ Indeed, Girard’s approach finds a common perspective with the early Christian church. Both claimed to have ‘discovered’ a fundamental thread through the Old Testament. Eliciting that thread did not require exhausting the content of the Old

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<sup>52</sup> ‘...the disappearance of the contested objects in the midst of mimetic conflict.’ (Hamerton-Kelly 1994:135).

<sup>53</sup> Girard 1982:100, 1985a:162

<sup>54</sup> Lienhard (2001:xxiii) warns that the ‘literal’ verse ‘allegorical’ split is misleading. The Father’s reading of the Old Testament was much more nuanced and quite exegetical for the hermeneutical practices of the day. Most importantly, they saw the Old Testament as a puzzle that needed to be unlocked.

<sup>55</sup> This point is brought up in the refutation of universal theories of sacrifice. It makes sense that allegorical interpretations are connected to more unifying perspectives. Allegory is the way to compare seemingly different ‘contexts.’

Testament and lent itself to the selective emphasis of passages that best corresponded to Christ’s passion.

The Old Testament for the early Church prefigures the gospel, and for Girard (1982:103) it does so in that the persecutor’s account is constantly exposed, broken up, and abrogated: ‘The Old Testament provides an inexhaustible source of legitimated references to the extraordinary work of the Gospels, which is an account of persecution that has been...revoked.’ The Christ event profoundly exposes the crowd logic in the face of an innocent victim. Romans, Jews (who are at odds with each other), and Jesus’ own followers all strangely perform like clockwork to coalesce against a lonely insurrectionist even when they are aware of and resisting its force.<sup>56</sup> The Gospels, in fact, go through great pains accentuating the bowing of human will to that of the crowd in key figures such as Peter, Judas, Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas as well as their counterparts who remained with Jesus through his crucifixion—a small group of women, Roman soldiers, and mockers. The mechanism breaks down completely in the face of a profoundly innocent victim who refuses to keep silent about the truth of what is happening to him.<sup>57</sup>

The Psalms, a favorite source of reference for the New Testament, in particular ‘highlight the continuity between the Passion crowd and the persecution crowds already stigmatized in the Psalms. Neither the Gospels nor the Psalms accept the cruel illusions of these cruel crowds’ (Girard, 1982:103). Girard (1982:102) defends the oft belittled early Christian’s allegorical use of the Psalms and other relevant Old Testament passages on the basis that the structural similarity is so striking that contradictory detail pale in comparison. What is ‘at stake’ in the Passion—‘the control exercised by persecutors and their accounts of persecution over the whole of humanity’—is constantly pressing its case in the Psalms.<sup>58</sup> Raymond Schwager (1978:91ff), whom Girard references, views the Psalms as struggling to tear itself away from mythology. Schwager acknowledges that much of the Psalms

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<sup>56</sup> Girard, 1982:145

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Zepherelli’s film, *Jesus of Nazareth*, powerfully portrays this when a member of the Sanhedrin, viewing the crucifixion from a distance (as all participants in the mob murder do) confoundedly observes, ‘even now he quotes the Scriptures.’

<sup>58</sup> Brueggemann (1988:xi) correctly addresses the competing ‘worlds’ within the Psalms where the singular voice struggles not to be snuffed out by the ‘business as usual’ of ‘royal management.’

agree with basic tenants of Girard’s theory. The collective and ambivalent nature of the ‘enemy’ is by far one of the most common themes in the Psalms. Both Schwager and Girard make a strong case for this particular perspective struggling to emerge in Israel’s history. In Girard’s (1985a) most comprehensive delving into the Old Testament, he finds the book of Job most suitable in bringing to the fore the tension of ‘crowd theologies’ with an uncooperative, non-acquiescing victim.

This view addresses the kind of historical skepticism that has found some notoriety among Old Testament scholarship. Based on the seemingly minimal historical evidence for an ‘Israel’ that inhabited Palestine in the early iron age, Davies (1992:11) and Perdue (1994:1ff) have proposed that most of the Old Testament is a post-exilic work of imagination, serving to bolster a new and foreign aristocratic claim for the land. The voice of the victim, however, will not show up on the historical map. It is the very nature not to. ‘Particularly in the penitential Psalms we see the word shift from the persecutors to the victims, from *those who are making history to those who are subjected to it*’ (Girard, 1982:104). Indeed, it seems the Old Testament consistently gives witness to the perpetual breakdown of what is supposed to work. In this case, the failure of Israel to emerge as a significant historical presence may be due to their dubious interaction with the scapegoat system and, in fact, give witness to an authentic voice.<sup>59</sup> If the voice of the victim is then a hallmark of the Old Testament, it hardly seems possible that a ruling group seeking to legitimate their claims over the land would dare want the voice of the victim to be so prominent.

Girard (1985a:165) defends his allegorical reading of the Old Testament but insists that it is especially the structuring of human relationships along the lines of the persecuting crowd (my *enemies*) and the victim (penitent) and God (or a saving king). It is of particular note that Schwager (1978:94) points to this tripartite structure to many Psalms

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<sup>59</sup> Girard (1982:162-164) likens the working of scandal language on the Gospel text to ‘aligning’ misarranged pieces of a puzzle. The very fact that the gospel writers cannot fully grasp the profound implications of the Jesus event and thus often confuse or complicate the text ‘increases the credibility and power of the witness...the messenger’s ignorance guarantees the authenticity of the message.’ More of this will be discussed below.

as does Blomberg mentioned above.<sup>60</sup> To the extent this is valid, it would be no wonder why the early Christians saw how amazingly ‘predictive’ certain portions of the Old Testament seemed.

### 2.3 Applied Methodology – Towards a Hermeneutic

So far, we have examined the theoretical development and basis of an approach to ancient texts from a generative scapegoat mechanism perspective. What follows is again an attempt to flesh out more specifically how this effects and determines the interpretation of the text. In other words, accepting the contours of Girard’s theory, what are the key considerations, fixed points, or yes, principles that guide the interpretation. The focus is mainly on how Girard *proceeds* from his theory to interpretation. The priority here is given to Girard’s reading of Biblical passages, especially the Old Testament. He, of course, is not an Old Testament scholar, so we do not have a full treatise of any biblical work, although his book, *Job: the Victim of his People* (1985), is an attempt to apply his theory in a thorough way and would appear to be applicable to a broader view of the Old Testament. Mostly, his references to biblical texts are by way of examples within a broader context of discussion. How others have applied Girard’s theory to biblical texts will also be delineated as well to supplement Girard’s interpretations. Although the determinants discussed below are a kind of starting point for an interpreter, it bears repeating that they are for Girard an ending point. They have been arrived at through a process of thinking going back to the ever present and mutating power of mimesis.

**2.3.1 Biblical revelation – God of victims, not persecutors.** The most critical revelation of any text is that sacrifice is something demanded by the community in order to save itself from implosion. The sacred and its representations—deities, monsters, ancestors, heroes, and kings—are in the end attempts by the community to distance itself

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<sup>60</sup> As Blomberg (1990:166) synthesizes, the limited allegory employed in Jesus’ parables are directly related to the ‘triadic structure’ of most of them. Only the key referents have explicit allusions to another person. The characters are paradigmatic: ‘The main characters of a parable will probably be the most common candidates for allegorical interpretation, and the main points of the parable will most likely be associated with these characters.’



from its own collective violence. It is as Girard would put it, a ‘false transcendence.’ Violence with its demand for a scapegoat victim belongs to humanity along with its varied mythological expressions in ritual and narrative. A mythical theology defined by Girard (1985a:131) is ‘the transcendent expression of collective violence.’ It is a theology of the crowd directed toward a victim. In it is the reasoning of the persecutors.

Mythical theologies can only operate as the voice of the victim is silenced. It is the voice of the victim that creates fissures which break down the efficacy of ritual sacrifice. It is precisely the victim perspective that ekes its way to the surface throughout the collection of works called the Old Testament and along with it or behind it is a belief that the God of the Israelites is sympathetic to such a perspective. A perspective sympathetic to the victim is more in line with a people dwelling in Palestine in the early iron age, for despite the idyllic picture of Solomon’s reign, the sparse archeological evidence to date indicates the likelihood that Israel was more likely a subject to persecution than a persecutor.<sup>61</sup>

Similar to the kind of internal conflict evidenced in the Old Testament over the issue of idolatry and ‘high places,’ Girard views the God of victim theology as struggling to emerge amidst mythological formulations. Evidence of ‘cracks in the system’ where the victim’s absolute guilt is questioned is not exclusive to the Old Testament, so again comparison with other mythological narratives is not excluded. Girard finds in many myths a variety of ‘theological solutions’ were the sacrificial system is weakened. They are still mythical in that they are attempting to shore up the operation, yet they also demonstrate attempts to bolster a mechanism that has lost force. They, as Hamerton-Kelly (1994:125) says, ‘reveil’ rather than reveal.

Girard (1982:84ff) explains the kind of ‘theologies’ that emerge in mythology to reinforce the absolute responsibility of the victim, transformed by the murder into a deity, one who now watches over the community and preserves the very operation that caused its death. Mythical theologies reflect a development away from early versions of the myth where questioning of the myth did not occur. Thus mythical theologies are a move toward ‘religious belief,’ a mythological narrative seeking to take the rough edges out of

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<sup>61</sup> This will be addressed in detail in the ensuing chapters.

the original myth. It reflects certain repugnance toward the overt expressions of violence. These theologies must resolve the community’s contradiction of ‘the victim who it thinks is truly guilty becoming the means of reconciliation.’

According to Girard (1982:84ff) the ‘two great theologies’ developed to solve the problem are the ‘theology of divine caprice’ and the ‘theology of divine anger.’<sup>62</sup> Both of these have clear affinities with pictures of Israel’s god found in the Old Testament. Both indicate fissures in the mechanism and a community who is unsettled with its own resolution. They both see the inherent problem; nonetheless, they justify its continued operation.<sup>63</sup>

The first is the development of a ‘trickster’ god who enjoys doing evil and is amused by it. The god is a kind of capricious gamester, and the harshness of the sacrificial demand is inoculated by turning it into a game. In this regard, Girard (1972:311-315) makes the direct connection between ritual and games, especially games of chance. Games of chance are prominent in mythological ritual because they reinforce the arbitrary choice of the victim. The picture of a gamey type god comes into play in the first part of Job and with stories around Saul. Girard (1982:85) points to the Cadmus myth by way of example of a trickster god who creates a ruse. ‘Cadmus is seen here as a kind of trickster. In one sense, he causes the social crisis, the great disorder that ravages a group of men to the point of complete destruction.’ Girard argues that in a myth like Cadmus, you have one of the most precise pictures of violent reciprocity. The god uses mimetic rivalry as a means to destroy. ‘This reveals in a spectacular way how reciprocity...eliminates differences as it accelerates and takes over societies in crisis.’ It reveals the end result of unmitigated violence. The picture of a god who is simply toying with his constituents reveals an awareness of the workings of the mechanism while simultaneously seeks to maintain its operation. It becomes a veiled threat to the community that the god will simply ‘leave us to our own destruction,’ if controls are not in place. Something similar

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<sup>62</sup> In his book, *Peoples of an Almighty God*, Goldstein (2002:5) outlines similar theologies of Persia and Babylon where, for instance, the faithful rationalize the loss of a temple because of their own sin rather than the god’s impotence.

<sup>63</sup> The other solutions are: 1) gods who do evil unwittingly 2) gods who are forced irresistibly to do evil.

to this theology is evident in stories around Yahweh as ‘a warrior,’ such as the Reed Sea passage (Ex. 14-15), the Assyrians besieging Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s day, and Yahweh’s dealings with Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative.

The second theology is that of divine wrath. Obviously, this is much more prominent in the Old Testament and even to this day presents challenges to Jewish and Christian theological traditions. The wrathful god, Girard (1982:85) maintains, comes even closer to the truth—that violence is collective—because it forces the community to accept that they are at least partly responsible for ‘forcing’ the god to do something he/she doesn’t want to. ‘It begins to be guilty of its own disorders.’<sup>64</sup> This view of god, however, believes god’s wrath is proportionate to his love and is still not able to completely break free of the persecutor’s god mainly because it cannot envision a solution to the community’s fundamental dilemma.

For Girard (1985a:140), the attempt to hold divine wrath in balance with divine love creates, in essence, a bipolar god, a ‘double divinity’ where the god of the crowd no longer ‘monopolizes the idea of God’ and the voice of the victim finds an appeal. This symmetry between a wrathful god—punishing evildoers—and a loving god—hearing the cries of those unjustly treated—never stabilizes in the Old Testament. ‘They are incomparable and incompatible.’ Girard (1985a:140-141) believes it is constantly steering toward a god who sides with the victim. When this comes to light in the Dialogues of Job (Job 16:19-21, 19:25-27), it ‘constitutes the high point of the Dialogues.’ The Dialogues are symptomatic of the competing theologies reflective in the issue of high places and perhaps what scholars have recognized in the varying J, P, and D traditions.

Girard reasons that this duality within divinity gradually polarizes even more. We can delineate the devil and demons with idols of old simply by a progression of viewing certain aspects of the ‘sacred’ more negatively. It has isolated and made distinct the beneficent aspects of the sacred from the maleficent.

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<sup>64</sup> This plays out rather obviously in the Deuteronomic agenda in the Old Testament to be discussed at some length in the proceeding chapters. In a broader sense, Westermann (1974:47-56) has identified a ‘crime and punishment’ theme that is prominent among mythological cosmologies. He structures his own interpretation of Genesis 2-3 along these lines.

The ‘false transcendence’ of the maleficent aspects of the sacred<sup>65</sup> are contrasted to the true transcendence which only the Gospels reveal. ‘...the expulsion of violence by violence [clearly identified with Satan’s kingdom] is rendered useless by the revelation...*God is not violent, the true God has nothing to do with violence...*’ (Girard, 1982:189).

It should be reiterated here, that the principle of God’s non-violence and ‘true transcendence’ is not an underlying assumption guiding Girard, but the necessary conclusion, based mainly on the observations of mimetic rivalry, the most pessimistic of starting points. As Girard (1982:194) says, ‘There is only one transcendence in the Gospels, the transcendence of divine love that triumphs over all manifestations of violence and the sacred by revealing their nothingness.’<sup>66</sup>

**2.3.2 Revelation from inside out.** If Girard’s insights prove valid, one must ask to what extent a ‘solution’ is also foreseen. Herein lies what is perhaps one of the more difficult and objectionable aspects of the scapegoat theory, for Girard insists that it is only *from within* the scapegoat mechanism that a full revealing of it can take place. There is great irony or paradox here, but Girard would insist that it is inherent to our peculiar way of dealing with disorder. Simply put, human history has practiced a ‘solution’ since its inception. It is all encompassing, a closed system, so in what way is it possible to speak of fixing the solution? Certainly, the sacrificial system is flawed and civilizations run an ingenious course of bolstering and renewing it via ritual and law.<sup>67</sup> Humanity is too deeply engrained in the framework of the scapegoat for a completely foreign structure to simply overtake it. There is no neutral mitigating third party other than the scapegoat.<sup>68</sup> This would mean that the outside perspective function precisely as

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<sup>65</sup> Girard, 1982:166 ‘When the false transcendence is envisaged in its fundamental unity, the Gospels call it the devil or Satan, but when it is envisaged in its multiplicity then the mention is always of demons or demonic forces.’

<sup>66</sup> We might even venture to speak as does Olivier Clement (2000:49) of a ‘trans-descendence’ where ‘God transcends his own transcendence.’

<sup>67</sup> Law is a more refined sacrificial system and in many ways shores up the weakness of a more sacrificial social order; nonetheless, it is still based on violent reciprocity (Girard, 1972:17).

<sup>68</sup> Girard (1985a:157): ‘In that fundamental moment for human culture, there are only persecutors and a victim confronting them. There is no third position, no way out...’

the system dictates—a violent expulsion of the ‘old’ to bring in the new.<sup>69</sup> Even more so, it is the sacrificial mechanism that creates the ‘outside’ perspective via sacrificial violence. Girard (1985a:159) explains this ‘paradoxical logic’:

In a world of violence, divinity purified of every act of violence must be revealed by means of the event that already provides the sacrificial religion with its generative mechanism. The epiphany of the god of victims follows the same ‘ancient trail’ and goes through the exact same phases as all the epiphanies of the sacred of persecutors. As a result, from the perspective of violence, there is absolutely not distinction between the god of victims and the god of persecutors.

Here it is important that one follow Girard’s progression of thought, for in his first in-depth address of the sacrificial aspects of Christianity,<sup>70</sup> he believes that Christianity regressed and was not able to completely free itself of sacrificial elements. This initial formulation appears to have been modified in his later works, especially in *The Scapegoat*. Girard understands the *necessity* of a thorough revelation of the scapegoat mechanism via the structure itself. There must be a return to the generative event and a duplication of it in every fundamental aspect. ‘This same drama is also needed to present the perspective of a victim dedicated to the rejection of the illusions of the persecutors. Thus, the same drama is needed to give birth to the only text that can bring an end to all of mythology’ (Girard, 1982:101). The only effective way to bring down the structure is through a meticulous understanding and dismantling of it. By way of analogy, demolition experts are able to neatly collapse a large building by placing numerous small explosives at strategic points in the building’s structure. By weakening key structural elements and at strategic moments, the building is destroyed by its own force falling in on itself.<sup>71</sup>

It is not possible to reveal and dismantle the structure of myth other than by an *inversion*. In order to comprehend this, Girard turns to the Gospels as the primary interpretive model. Jesus’ encounters and discourse with the demonic critically demonstrate the inside-out breakthrough that is essential. As mentioned above, religious language developed as societies became uncomfortable with the overt references to violence within

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<sup>69</sup> Baile’s (1997:99-106) recounting of the myth of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca is but one of many examples Baile references to demonstrate how ‘outsiders’ only replace one sacrificial system with another.

<sup>70</sup> See Girard (1978:224-262): ‘The Sacrificial Reading and Historical Christianity.’

<sup>71</sup> Girard (1982:101) also speaks of the inversion of the Gospel as mythology collapsing in on itself.

their myths. The founding myth is moralized by a separating of the benevolent aspects of the deity—the sacralized victim—and the malevolent aspects. Hence, there is a good god or realm and an evil realm. The language of Satan, demons and a good god in heaven is valuable because it brings the mimetic power of relationships to the fore.

Girard (1982:186) resorts to a common ‘hermeneutic’ of accommodation. Jesus accommodates religious language because it is the only language his listeners know, but he does so only to transcend it. Jesus employs the language of the sacred only to *scandalize* the sacrificial mechanism. ‘Jesus uses the resources of the system in such a way as to warn people of what awaits them in the only language they understand. By doing this he reveals both the impending end of the system and the incoherence and internal contradiction of the discourse.’

The drive toward the mechanism is not haphazard or unfortunate but absolutely necessary. The Gospels make Jesus’ Jerusalem destiny and the necessity of his crucifixion obvious. Again, it is not on the part of God but because of humanity’s need for a scapegoat. This is a critical point which will influence the reading of Genesis 1 and 2, both of which deal with a problematic idea of a God who ‘creates chaos’ in order to bring something forth. This is further played out in the story of Exodus and in the Gospels, God leads his ‘chosen’ speedily into the eye of generative disorder, also to generate. But it is done in such a way, that reveals the mechanism at its goes. In mythology, the narrative drives relentlessly toward its resolve—the victim; likewise, an inverted narrative marches toward the demise of the mechanism, the dissolution of a resolution in a victim.

The inversion of the mechanism happens when in the process of the scapegoat mechanism, the victim’s guilt is shown to be unconvincing. The victim does not need to be proven completely innocent, only that the guilt the community has placed on him fails to attract convincing unanimous consensus. Also, the mechanism breaks down if the victim fails to become a sacred object, a god. The sacralization of the victim fails to happen. Ultimately, the victim does not create a regenerating unity for the community, and in fact, exacerbates the communal tension even further.

Girard (1982:200) has argued against the more conservative Christian trend to always contrast divine revelation from myth. No, there is nothing unique about the Biblical literature when it comes to its language, symbolism, themes, and *structure*. It is, however, only within this commonality that ‘the absolute specificity’ of the Gospel *can* be revealed. Thus, the Gospels appear to be based on the same sacrificial mechanism as anything else, yet it discovers from its very inception that it can no longer operate sacrificially. It discovers that the generative sacrifice, rather than being imitated and perpetuated in ritual, continues to function only to deny sacrifice its power. It was a sacrifice to end all sacrifice.<sup>72</sup>

Girard appears to have modified his earlier critique of sacrificial Christianity.<sup>73</sup> He (1982:200) concedes that Christianity did not shed its ‘sacrificial’ veneer, but there is no other way for the sacrificial mechanism to be scandalized from without. Girard (1982:200) insists that the mechanism that has such a tight grip on humanity can only be undone via this ‘indirect path.’

It is especially the discourse over expulsion of demons that radically falters when confronted by Jesus. Expulsion is *the* decisive moment for the community, the crux of myth, the moment where all the powers of disorder generate the ‘perverse affect’—social order.<sup>74</sup> Expulsion is the language of persecutors and of the crowd. The issue of casting out demons and Satan becomes the crux of the matter, and it is here where Girard navigates through the difficult proposition that only through an expulsion can the violent mechanism of community and the non-violent God be fully revealed at the same time. It is the *kind* and *nature* of the expulsion where the distinction is drawn in the Gospels, Girard argues.

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<sup>72</sup> This notion will play itself out in the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 to follow.

<sup>73</sup> In his chapter *A Non-Sacrificial Reading of the Gospel Text*, Girard (1978:180) begins: ‘There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we may give for that sacrifice. At no point in the Gospels is the death of Jesus defined as a sacrifice. The passages that are invoked to justify a sacrificial conception of the Passion both can and should be interpreted with no reference to sacrifice in any of the accepted meanings.’ Apparently, a sacrificial reading of the Christ event entails an ‘irrational requirement of sacrifice that absolve them [humankind] of responsibility’ (1978:213). The ‘non-sacrificial reading’ is a rejection that God demands a sacrifice, and an embracing of Christ’s ‘absolute devotion’ to his disciples and humankind (1978:243).

<sup>74</sup> Girard, 1982:184 ‘The central subject, then, is an expulsion, the expulsion that will rid the universe forever of its demons and the demonic.’ If the Bible is to address this, then it must use the language of expulsion

In the story of the demon(s) of Geresas, Girard (1982:171,191) points to a ‘double expulsion.’ First, there is a ‘mitigating’ expulsion. The picture of the madman among the tombs, expelled from the town and perpetually inflicting on himself the guilt of the community demonstrates the convenient way that communities process their own violence. It is a symmetrical relationship, ‘an example of reciprocal relationship of mimetic rivalry.’ ‘This is a sort of conspiracy between the victim and his torturers to keep the balance of the game because it is obviously necessary to keep the balance of the Gerasene community...The possessed imitates these Gerasenes who stone their victims, but the Gerasenes in return imitate the possessed.’ As long as the victim acquiesces to the crowd, all is well.

Jesus, unfortunately for the unhappy Gerasenes, introduces another expulsion, a ‘final expulsion.’ By expelling the demons from the community’s self-serving victim, Jesus has brought the true crisis to the fore. This second expulsion becomes truly a frightening prospect to the community because it means the community must once again deal with its own violence, which may in fact mean self-destruction. The Gerasenes understand completely that the herd of pigs hurtling into the lake is a picture of them without an operative mechanism, and they are not at all ready for such a radical innovation. Hence, they beg him to leave. Herein, Girard proposes something of what a final break with the mechanism would entail—the expulsion of the crowd and the saving of the victim. Girard takes as significant the negotiation of ‘legion’ with Jesus, for it is the many who speak as one. It can be no other way. The mechanism is completely inverted.

In Jesus’ critical discourse on the meaning of his own practice of casting out demons, the ‘double expulsion’ is further explained, for here, Jesus must explain what is the substantial difference between his casting out of demons and that of others (Mt. 12:24ff). For Girard, Jesus affirms a fundamental truth of humankind’s sacrificial system that Satan has always cast out Satan. Satan’s realm is the ambiguous realm of sacrificial violence where its effectiveness relies on a steady stream of *mitigating* expulsions. This is the theology of the crowd coming from the mouth of Job’s friends—there must be expulsions and it is God (the god of the mob) who requires it. In the first part of Jesus’ response, Jesus tells the truth of humankind who perpetually ‘casts out demons.’ Expulsion



addresses internal division, so in a very real sense, the sacrificial system is divided against itself. Rather than all against all, the community opts for all against one. It is this mitigating expulsion that is Satan’s kingdom. Humanity has always maintained its order by violent expulsion and ingenious deception. It works quite well as one strong man comes in and robs the other. Here Girard<sup>75</sup> believes you have essential sociology or anthropology.

Paradoxically, Jesus’ exorcisms are substantially and essentially different in that they reveal the truth of humanity—‘what is in man’s heart.’ Superficially, Jesus’ response appears the same as his critics. Everyone is casting out demons, and Jesus is just one more rival to expel and be expelled. The superiority of Jesus’ expulsions—ultimately expressed in his own crucifixion—is not that he proves to be the stronger man, but in the complete absence of deception. It is an expulsion that reveals the fundamental truth of who we are and how we corporately behave.

This same drama is also needed to present the perspective of a victim dedicated to the rejection of the illusions of the persecutors. Thus the same drama is needed to give birth to the only text that can bring an end to all of mythology...The essential factor...is that the persecutor’s perception of their persecution is finally defeated (Girard, 1982:101).

Yes, Jesus’ expulsion looks like all others. It is in complete conformity with the way humankind has always resolved conflict—one should die for the many. Jesus’ death, on the contrary, exacerbates the system, for Jesus steadfastly refuses, although it is his most profound temptation, to expel by force. Like Oedipus, he allows himself to be the victim, but unlike any other, Jesus reveals every step of the way what is really going on, and in so doing, dismantles the system, one step at a time.<sup>76</sup> It is most profoundly revealed in the Gospels in the innocence of Jesus. The claim of Jesus’ innocence is hotly debated, but the Gospels give witness to a fundamental reality—Jesus died at the hands *of all*, and his innocence, although never defended by Jesus himself, was blatantly obvious *to all*.

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<sup>75</sup> Girard (1982:188) notices the emphasis on ‘every’ in Jesus’ explanation ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for ruin, and every city or house, divided against itself.’ He comments: ‘All human communities without exception are based on the one principle, both constructive and destructive... Thus the first two sentences are richer than they seem: an entire sociology or basic anthropology is summarized in them.’

<sup>76</sup> We should take note that Oedipus inflicts his own expulsion, thereby acquiescing to the mechanism. Jesus, on the contrary, steadfastly refuses such an option, requiring all to acquiesce to his execution.

Girard maintains an important distinction here, one in which if confused, leads to dramatically contradictory conclusions. He is emphatic that the God of victims must be revealed through the mechanism even though *this god is not the author of the mechanism*.<sup>77</sup> It is not a proposition of fighting fire with fire or violence to end violence. ‘The defender of victims must have as adversary the prince of this world, but does not oppose him with violence’ (1985a:158). Girard is insistent; humankind is the originator and perpetuator of lethal force. The true God, the god of victims, is not violent and cannot be coercive. He did not invent it, nor does He use it. Here Girard (1985a:155) resorts to a common theological proposition concerning human freedom. ‘...a God of victims cannot impose his will on men without ceasing to exist. He would have to resort to a violence more violent than that of the wicked.’

Both the religion of persecutors and of victims believes they are defending the innocent, and both concede to the necessity of sacrificial victims. But one always drives toward its continued operation, wittingly and unwittingly. The other drives toward its failure in order to ‘convert it into a startling victory.’ The one sacrifices to avoid or deflect a sacrificial crisis. The other *drives toward a communal crisis in order to ruin the utility of sacrifice*.<sup>78</sup>

The final crisis that determines the final revelation both is and is not specific. In principle it is the same as the disintegration of all sacrificial systems that are based on the “satanic” expulsion of violence by violence. For better or worse, the Gospel revelation makes the crisis inevitable (Girard, 1982:190).

What God demands is not a sacrifice of his Son, not a perfect scapegoat, but the unconditional refusal of scapegoating, even if the price must be death, even if this very refusal, in a world such as ours, inevitability entails that we must be scapegoated (Williams, 1991:viii).

Girard attempts to explicate the seemingly self-contradictory proposition that God is emphatically non-violent, yet it is only through our violence that God can stop it. Perhaps the distinction, whether it works or not, is that Girard always maintains that violence belongs to humankind, especially collectively, and that the true God never is

<sup>77</sup> This reasoning plays a crucial role in the exegesis to follow where, for instance in Gen 1:1-2, an intense debate has ensued over the extent that God created the situation of verse 2 or simply came upon it.

<sup>78</sup> This is the conclusion reached in the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 to follow.

violent nor employs violence. This seems at times untenable. The exodus story, however, does maintain such a distinction. Yahweh does not expel Israel; it must be Pharaoh who does.

**2.3.3 Real event behind the fantastical elements.** A significant feature of Girard’s approach is in the unique perspective towards the fantastical, miraculous, or supernatural features in a narrative. Whereas modern criticism increasingly concludes historical content of the Old Testament to be dubious on such accounts, Girard rejects the proposition that the story and its content are pure imagination. There is a real event portrayed in the story, albeit the historical context is only secondary. The pursuit of Biblical scholarship has looked to connect the content to historical situations as key to interpretation. Girard does not.

Whereas higher criticisms find it necessary to explain *away* the fantastical features in a text, Girard understands the relationship between the likely and probable and the unlikely supernatural elements to yield critical insight. The confluence of the two is precisely the point of the mechanism’s uneasy contradiction. It is in the *stereotypical* miraculous features where the truth is found. Imagination is not in the service of creative expression, but it is to satiate a craving for violence.<sup>79</sup> Mythological texts are stories from the persecutor’s perspective. They are inevitably ‘fantastic,’ imagining a host of social maladies emanating from the victim. Much of the story may seem ‘unbelievable’ from an outside perspective, but assuredly, Girard reminds, there is a *real act of persecution* being recounted here. The act must be recounted if it is to serve the good of the group, but only to support the justification for the victim’s demise at the hands of the group. Hence Girard speaks of the ‘golden rule of texts of persecution’—the illusory elements assure the truth of the event precisely because illusion is the critical element in its operative force. There is no mob murder without the persecutors duping themselves.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Campbell and O’Brian’s (2005:6) emphasize the performative nature of the text. Since storytellers are the main ‘users’ of the text, they ‘adjust, abbreviate, extend, delete,’ and even place contradictory detail in parallel for effect. Problematic to Campbell and O’Brians approach is that they just never get around to saying *why* a storyteller would do it.

<sup>80</sup> This element, also, will play in heavily come the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1-11 are designated as ‘primeval’ precisely because it is taken out of a historical setting and given a universal

Girard (1982:105) has categorized the ‘stereotypes of persecution’ believing them to be ubiquitous distortions found in myth. The heart of the ‘distortion’ lay in the nature of the accusation leveled against the victim. The accusation is patently false, but this all the more assures that such a persecution happened. Typical of mythological accusations are that they are:

- 1) Leveled at people whom it is most criminal to attack, either in the absolute sense or in reference to the individual committing the act: a king, a father, the symbol of supreme authority, and in biblical and modern societies the weakest and most defenseless, especially children.
- 2) Sexual crimes: rape, incest, bestiality. The ones most frequently invoked transgress the taboos that are considered the strictest in the society in question.
- 3) Religious crimes, such as profanation of the host. Here, too, it is the strictest taboos that are transgressed.

A ‘mythological crystallization’ of the accusation occurs in a narrative when the listener loses herself in the story and disregards what is behind it. The ancient recipient, contrary to much modern assumption, recognizes and accepts the ‘imaginative’ features as part of a good story.<sup>81</sup> In the end, the persecutors ‘version’ is embraced and all move comfortably on in the order of the community.<sup>82</sup>

The critical link between the real and the imagined is the victim. The scapegoat is the primary symbol who is characteristically attributed with both monstrous and then divine features. That the victim/turned god is often portrayed as a monstrous cacophony of animal and human reflects the confusion around the victim, not only of the paradoxical

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perspective. The universal ‘mythological’ perspective more accurately reflects a community’s origins in an event.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell and O’Brian (2005:6) postulate a ‘user’ centered theory of Pentateuch origins where a storyteller used a grab bag of details to a fixed structured story for different situations. ‘Texts were written for users [not readers] as a base for operations and allowed for variants and a role for the storytellers.’

<sup>82</sup> Girard (1985a:38) understands modern perspectives, such as the rhetorical approach which places emphasis on the imaginative features of the text for purposes of persuasion, as equally pulling the reader into a blind acceptance of it. The myth crystallizes for the reader, ancient and modern, when one no longer concerns himself with what is behind the myth. ‘The idea that myth is totally fictional makes it as impenetrable as its opposite, religion, which accepts it as truth.’

mixture of the benevolent and malevolent effects of the slaughter, but also the dangerously conflictive desires of the community (Girard, 1982:48).

The victim *incarnates* mimetic desire. It is the lightning rod for it. There is a paradox here which cannot be overlooked. Mimetic desire is ‘disincarnate’ by nature, which is precisely what we humans can’t stand. Our desires elude us. They never seem to ‘become a reality,’ and if they do, suddenly the desire is gone. Thus the victim ‘appears’ to incarnate this illusion of desire (Girard, 1982:134). The significant miracle of mythological narrative is then, when conflicting passions of the community miraculously find a repository in a single insignificant person. By deifying this repository, the community is able to retain the benefits of the victim into perpetuity and simultaneously distance itself from its own violence.

Girard is in keeping with biblical criticisms that manage textual incongruities. Girard believes that in such cases the author sticks to a ‘literal’ understanding precisely because he does not comprehend the logic of mimesis. The interplay of the miraculous or supernatural elements with mimetic elements (or shall we just say with ‘historical,’ meaning discernible in the common actions in the world) goes a different direction depending on whether the text is mythological—helping the scapegoat mechanism to function all the while covering its tracks—or whether to some degree it is seeing through the mechanism.

Girard (1982:159-163) locates this interplay between the fantastic and real features, incarnate and disincarnate desire, and malevolent and benevolent forces in the victim within the author/redactors themselves. Because the author does not fully comprehend the role of mimetic desire, some things are given a miraculous correspondence. The miraculous or supernatural are often ‘imposed’ in the story precisely because the writers don’t comprehend the inner workings of mimetic scapegoating. They are able to perceive it, but not identify it. So for Girard, inaccuracies or incongruities in a text do not necessarily lead to a fragmentation of the text. In fact, it could lead to its cohesion and indicates its *close proximity to the event*. It is the literal juxtaposition of the partially

coherent and the incoherent that enables us (who truly do understand scapegoating more than in the past) to see the function of both.<sup>83</sup>

Elements of a story may in fact be misaligned due to the author or redactor’s lack of full comprehension of the mechanism. Girard, (1982:162) like our higher critics in Old Testament, believes that the text provides pieces of a puzzle that are not necessarily in the correct order. An exegete must ‘rearrange’ certain parts of the story.

We are therefore dealing with an extraordinarily coherent unity that was never perceived by the exegetes because its components are muddled, and sometimes a little deformed, due to the author’s lack of control...They have all the details in their hands, but these are disorganized and contaminated with miracles because the authors have only partial control over them.

For Girard (1982:163), revelation of who we are and how we behave in a group towards one another is the greatest miracle. Miraculous elements in a revealing text have a characteristically awkward quality because the ‘ambiguity of myth is becoming transparent.’ This is no different than the attempts to give ‘natural’ explanations to what was in the past considered ‘supernatural.’ Girard insists that we have a profound propensity to perceive everything around us, both natural and human phenomenon, in terms of mimesis.

In Girard’s (1982:161) interpretation of Peter’s denial, we are presented with a narrative that is uncovering something that ‘they know not what they are doing.’ In this case, because miracles and supernatural events of myth are connecting to the miracle located in the victim, a writer may sense a compulsion to include them in a text that is inverting the mechanism, simply to help legitimize it. The miraculous elements work differently in mythological stories. There the supernatural elements direct the community away from the collective murder, usually by divinizing the victim. On the other hand, it is the incongruities between what we consider a reasonable human event and the ‘supernatural’ occurrences in a narrative where the mimeticism is exposed and an unwieldy truth is

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<sup>83</sup> Since this thesis will give way to mimetic assumptions beforehand, the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 presume a coherence and unity. The trend within the Old Testament interpretive community, however, has also moved in this direction, especially those working with a rhetorical interpretive grid, Brodie (2001) for example.

more evident. We may pick up what Girard identifies as ‘mimetic exacerbation’—a relapse into divinizing the victim especially when the writer is ‘too close to his model.’

The incongruities in the story, especially clouded by fantastic elements, can in fact lend itself to the reliability of the story. ‘Their insufficiency becomes a positive quality. It increases the credibility and power of the witness.’ Girard states (1982:161). It is the combination of a desire to be as accurate as possible with the lack of understanding of what they are dealing with that makes the story accurate—leading more toward the revealing of the mechanism rather than covering it up. It lends itself to an immediacy to the event *without intermediaries or redaction*. This counters the trend of higher criticism which tends to see inconsistencies as problematic resulting in ever widening distance between the ‘origin’ and its telling. Even more so, it reverses the assumption that the stories are sheer imagination and ultimately have no direct connection with real events.

In those passages that suddenly become clear, the Gospel text is somewhat like a password communicated by go-betweens who are not included in the secret. Those of us who receive the password are all the more grateful because the messenger’s ignorance guarantees the authenticity of the message (Girard, 1982:164).

A similar interplay occurs between natural phenomenon and the crisis in the community.

One of the big challenges to be worked through because of our scientific perspective is the congealing of natural forces with cosmological and theological paradigms. It is clear enough for a reader of Biblical texts that the interchange between natural and supernatural forces was, at times, almost indistinguishable, although certainly to a lesser degree than more ‘mythological’ sources. Debates over the ‘anthropomorphic’ views of God have been a preoccupation for centuries. From our modern perspective, we can reason how natural it would have been in pre-scientific times to project the behavior of nature onto social structures. From the pattern of planting and harvest come notions of dying and rebirth of kings and kingdoms.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Anderson (1967:11-40) provides an eloquent formation of this kind of thinking brought on by the discovery of the library of Ashurbanipal and Herman Gunkel’s seminal works with it.

Girard, however, insists that the reverse is true.<sup>85</sup> From the earliest of times, humanity has projected and infused one of its fundamental notions of communal existence onto the cosmological world. Humanity’s unique mechanism for dealing with its own escalation of rival desires leading to an escalation of violence and a resolve through the scapegoat is seen as functioning on every level of the natural world. Thus the turbulent crisis brought on by a draught, plague, flood, or storm is viewed as acting under the same ‘rules’ as a communal crisis does—sacrificially. In Sophocles, Girard (1982:25) reminds ‘we establish that to lack difference is to be *plague-stricken*.’

Girard carries the correspondence between real events and fantastical elements in the massive topic of representation and linguistics. The victim is the original signifier, and even if one argues that language development preceded sacrifice (or more accurately, sacrificial ritual), Girard would still insist that it did not develop independently of the scapegoat mechanism. Here again, analogies, metaphors, and symbols are symbiotically related to real-to-life events.

This interplay, Girard (1985a:106) reasons, is demonstrated in ritual sacrifice where the surrogate victim is a metaphor or symbol of the original victim, while at the same time, it functions the same as the original victim, only to a diminished degree.<sup>86</sup> Both original victim and ritual victim *function* as scapegoats. Girard (1982:55) maintains a close connection between ritual and myth especially in the symbolic ‘transfiguration’ of the victim.<sup>87</sup> The magical moment when the terrible ills of the community convert into wonderful benefits is the model for representation. In myth (Girard, 1982:55), it serves as the model for commemorating religious epiphany, and in ritual, it provides a pattern for reenacting (reproducing) the benevolent results of the victim’s expulsion. It also functions, however, as a *countermodel* for prohibition—‘by virtue of the principle that one must never repeat the same actions of the victim, insofar as they are harmful.’ The victim as counter model, Girard (1982:55) insists, is what many who have discussed the

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<sup>85</sup> Girard 1972: 31ff, 96ff, 182, 255, 282ff

<sup>86</sup> Girard (1972:235): ‘The origin of symbolic thought lies in the mechanism of the surrogate victim.’

<sup>87</sup> We should take note at this point that the connection between ritual and myth is an important issue with a wide array of perspectives, often predetermined by the methodology peculiar to the academic discipline.



relationship of ritual to myth have failed to see—the counter model is but a *reflection* of the model.<sup>88</sup>

More pertinent to the discussion here is that for Girard, myth (narrative about the original murder) is more apt to distort, than ritual (reenactment of the original murder).<sup>89</sup> We can more readily recognize the discrepancy in ritual where a third party observer can view an obvious reenactment of a mob murder, all the while having the ritual explained in terms of a god saving the people. In myth, there is much more opportunity and license to embellish the representations of the victim, now turned god. Myths ‘are more difficult to decode because they contain greater distortions’ (Girard, 1982:55). ‘Words,’ Girard (1982:56) insists, ‘are more deceptive than actions,’ and paradoxically appear very different from ritual precisely at the point of ‘greatest resemblance’—the sequence leading to the expulsion of the victim.

Mimetic desire always drives toward representation. It seeks an incarnation of what is by nature disincarnate. Representation provides an illusion of possession of the elusory object. Most representations of the victim function to veil the mechanism; thus they are false. They belong to the logic of the persecutors and the crowd.<sup>90</sup> Girard (1982:101) speaks of the Gospel destroying the representations of myth ‘with an even greater force of a true representation.’ Both myth and Gospel have representation, the one being representation of the persecuting crowd and the logic of the scapegoat, the other being of the vocal victim who at every step of the process understands and reveals what is happening. The one is nurtured by imagination because it doesn’t understand the mechanism; the other is strictly structured by its understanding of it. Girard (1982:35) also believes that representations of myth, false representation, are more prominent since ‘We always rely on the imagination in order to avoid reality.’

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<sup>88</sup> It is on this point where Girard (1982:55) diverges from the ‘binary’ view of the structuralists. Prohibition is not independent of ritual and myth, but is subordinate to them.

<sup>89</sup> Baile (1997:33) aptly reminds that myth comes from the Greek *muthos* meaning to close or keep secret, hence the word mute. At its core, myth is a mutation or mutilated recollection, a selective and discrete ‘remembrance.’

<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, Watts (2007:182-184) argues away from Girard and others who interpret ritual based on narrative explanations of the ritual. He points to a disjunction between a ritual and its interpretation. Girard (1982:56), however, argues the similar point. What the community says is the meaning of the ritual does not match an objective observation of it.

Girard (1982:35-36) believes ‘...it becomes clear that we are dealing with a single principle of distorted presentation, though in mythology the mechanism operates in a higher register than in history. It is undeniably and universally true that the less rational the persecutors’ conviction the more formidable that conviction becomes.’

The more fantastic the crime or monstrous the scapegoat is represented, the more mythical it is. Girard (1982:37) insists that the more we move from ‘monster’ to ‘human’ the less ‘distorted’ the victim appears, the more we are moving from myth to texts of persecution. Knowing this gives us a way to ‘decode’ myth. All through Girard’s discussion in *The Scapegoat*, he reiterates that our hermeneutics must work backwards. From what we knew of the ‘logic’ of persecution and victimization, we must interject that into these ancient stories.

**2.3.4 The Role of the Crowd.** Girard’s approach explores the interplay between the author(s) and the community’s generative event, fueled by mimesis. To varying degrees, we may perceive the extent to which the author manages the content and outcome. Whether the text appears to uphold the scapegoat mechanism or is deconstructing it, the composer of the text has varying degrees of control over the composition. We may pursue as in traditional criticisms the author’s intent and historical setting, the historical settings of the recipients, or the impact the text is intended or has had on the audience, but Girard would hold that these are not of primary importance. It is not what the author controls or constructs that is critical; it is what controls the author and the narrative or ritual. It is the unmanageability of reciprocal violence fueled by mimetic desires that engines a communal drive toward a resolution that can relieve the community. In a very strong and real sense, it is the crowd, the collective that yields an immense influence over the text.

The role of the crowd occupies considerable attention for Girard. But here, we return to what is characteristically absent from scapegoat narratives. The crowd is never at the fore front, and indeed, if the narrative or ritual has masked the generative murder well, it is not there at all. Characteristically present in narratives are central characters who are

usually in a triangular relationship.<sup>91</sup> Yet the crowd yields tremendous force, especially once it has polarized around a single victim. ‘No one decides, no one can really control the mechanism...the crowd always seems to be responsible for unleashing the fatal process.’ Girard (1985a:82) says.

Within a mythological text, there is an apparent manageability of the mechanism on the part of characters. But unlike, the kind of popular conspiracy speculation of our day that sees leaders as power brokers, leading characters can be keen to the operation of the mechanism and steer it toward a victim even though they themselves don’t understand the operation. They, ‘...do not know why this mechanism has such a beneficial effect on their mutual relationships and the entire community, but they are aware of its operation and are very receptive to it...they are fulfilling a social and religious function. They are there to watch over the successful operation of the scapegoat mechanism’ (Girard, 1985a:76).

Leading characters in narrative function similarly to priests in ritual; they are a policing operation, a crowd control.<sup>92</sup> The director of ritual who is able to ‘collect’ the scandalized desires toward a central figure must be careful lest he/she become the victim. Leaders understand this. Even though the community may despise leaders for doing this, the community is always the driving force of it. Once mimetic desire has reached a ‘crisis’ pitch, it drives with an automated self-determination toward a resolution in the victim. Within the text, we can see the dynamic between the author and characters in which the author is himself swept along by the mimetic force of the crowd.

One narrative where Girard (1982:140) explores the dynamic between a leader and the crowd is the story of John the Baptist’s execution. There, the crowd seems to play a passive, acquiescent role, and the story is controlled by dominant characters. But we should not be overly occupied with the idiosyncrasies of characters, especially leading figures, for they inevitably end up servicing a utilitarian function for the group. Herod is

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<sup>91</sup> Noticing the triangular relationship of characters, Williams (1994:131-133) reminds, was the starting point for Girard’s theory. Girard reconnects what Platonism had separated—mimesis and desire. Society can equally be a source of desire as an individual. A representative character, then, can readily be exchanged for a collective mimesis. ‘The configuration of desire is therefore triangular. It runs from subject through the mediator to the object.

<sup>92</sup> Girard (1982:135)

an intermediary. We must not be overly distracted by nuances of his personality (or apparent historical inaccuracies) over against his management, or lack thereof, of collective mimesis. Herod, in this case, understands that he could easily become the target for the collective drive toward a repository of reciprocal violence.

The role of the crowd is always present. In Oedipus, it is the chorus, but Teiresias and Creon repeatedly speak the ‘theology’ of the collective as do Job’s counselors. The power of crowd is present, for Girard (1982:141), in Herod’s exaggerated offer of ‘half the kingdom’ to Solome. It is obviously unrealistic, even in the text, but it plays a role (ritually) for the group to which the reader is actually a part of. ‘The exorbitant offer is the fascinated spectator’s response.’ In this case it is meant to draw the participants (the reader) into the original mimesis. At the end of the story, at the height of mimesis, the guests, Solome, and Herod all act as one:

The guests all react identically. At the supreme stage of mimetic crisis they provide the type of crowd that alone can intervene decisively. When the crowd is unanimously murderous the decision always rests with it. Subjected to such formidable pressure Herod can only ratify *volens volens* the decision of the crowd, just as Pilate does a little later. By yielding to this pressure he loses himself in the crowd; he is no more than the least of its members (Girard, 1982:145).

In the case of the Gospel story, we are already privy to understanding the mechanism because it is written and read from the perspective of the innocent victim. Thus the author and the reader are not infatuated with the mimetic force. In more mythological texts, both author and recipient are themselves participants in the mimetic force of the all against one.<sup>93</sup>

What ultimately rules is the unanimous mimeticism of the scapegoat. It controls the text, even for the gospels that demystify it, and for Girard (1985a:59), it is a critical component for interpretation. ‘By recognizing the role played by the hysterical crowd in

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<sup>93</sup> Goodhart (2007:73) thus states: ‘For there are now always two different perspectives that must be considered: what we are told is taking place in the narrative, and the extent to which the narrative itself is imitating what is taking place within it.’ This two-fold task—later the author presents a four-tiered ‘hermeneutic’ to which a discerning reader must go from the ‘plain sense of the reading’ to a ‘scene of instruction’—becomes much more challenging in the Old Testament where the lines between a mythologically tinged text and a demythological text are much less distinct.

religions of violence we can separate the wheat from the tares and make use of the reality of what is hidden by the language of the sacred, without any fear of becoming its dupe.’ Girard (1985a:43) insists: ‘...it is always a matter, above all else, of collective murder.’

This eye for the crowd will be essential to our approach to Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 2, for instance, ‘the adam’ has a strong corporate feel to it. A mimetic interpreter must be vigilant to the ever present undertow of the community.

For Girard, the tell-tale indicator of the crowd’s presence in the narrative is its unanimous double-mindedness, a *double mimesis*. In forms of myth closer to the original event, the ‘amazing sequence’ is more readily detected. The veneration of victim is perfectly symmetrical to the community’s hatred of it. We love you (as model of desire), we hate you (victim of contagious violence), we love you (as sacred being, reconciling the community).

The symmetry in the original myth, however, inevitably breaks down, and if we are aware of the imbalance, then it is an interpretive tool for deciphering the oft contradictory details in a text. Girard (1985a:101) calls this the ‘principle of incoherence’—the attempt to stay true to the genesis of the community while avoiding, oft unconsciously, any implications of the group’s association with the violence against the victim. Depending on the evolution of ritual, one aspect of this symmetry fades to the background and may eventually be absent altogether. Girard (1985a:95) attributes this tendency toward a deep-seated aversion to the *conjunction* of the symmetry. This is characteristically reflected in either an over emphasis on one aspect of the mechanism—the idol or the victim—or in overly complex or contradictory detail.

Another key interpretive principle concerns *how the crowd is represented* in ritual or mythological narrative. Simply put, the crowd is constantly distancing itself from its visible involvement in the victim’s death. The more the crowd is absent from a narrative, the further it is from its origins. The collective representation is always moving towards disappearance. ‘As culture evolves, these traces are always expelled and eliminated’

(1982:91).<sup>94</sup> Even so, Girard (1985a:98) insists that no matter how buried the symmetry has been by ritual, it still leaves traces of the original crisis—one of the key traces is the ‘double relationship of the crowd.’ We may also notice, that in narratives, such as the Gospels, that are dismantling the mechanism, the crowd is exposed for what it is and is given ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus. Ironically, the expelled one becomes beloved and the crowd is expelled.

Here as well, Girard sees a characteristic pattern. First, representation of the crowd transfers to individual characters and then disappears altogether. But because the crowd is always controlled by mimesis, it is always given to extremes, most often reflected in the introduction of fantastical elements, exaggeration or imagination. There is an absence of moderation. There is either extreme excess or depravity (Girard, 1985a:62).

Again, the key to recognizing the crowd is to look for the *double mimesis*—we love you (excess, lavishness, flood), or we hate you (depravity, lack, drought). States Girard (1985a:62): ‘This absence of moderation, the perpetual combination of lack and excess, characterizes a universe that has surrendered to mimeticism.’ This bi-polar wavering is for Girard an indispensable tool for ferreting out the mob from underneath its representations.

Ultimately, deities are representations of the collective, especially the ‘insane community of mimesis.’ This shows up clearly in representations of supernatural justice. There are for one, celestial armies. The violent unanimity of the collective toward a single victim is transcended, along with the victim, to a supernatural realm, and hence removed from the community. It is no longer the community who demands the death of a victim, but the host of heaven. Again, we have the interplay between the real and the fantastic. ‘...these armies are in no way celestial and *therefore all the more real*...‘celestial warriors are in fact everyone involved’ (Girard, 1985a:27).

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<sup>94</sup> Watts (2007:182) offers a valuable insight that sacrificial rituals must be understood as distinct from narratives about sacrifice. Indeed, explanations of sacrifice enter in precisely because the ritual has become considerably distanced from the community. This indicates a couple of things: one, the community has so successfully distanced itself from its own genesis myth that the ritual has become ‘dead’ or ritual for ritual sake; second, the reintroduction of a ritual (which Watts believes is what is going on in Leviticus) would already be prone to placing the crowd in the background or to leaving it out all together.

Representations of supernatural justice are further extended to angels of death or celestial avengers (1985a:29-30). These are extensions of an angry god. Even though the notion of an angry god moves the community toward some sense of corporate responsibility, it reflects a kind of ‘collective bad faith’ where a sense that the responsibility for a draught or plague is not being equally shared (Girard, 1982:3). In this case, the angry god—the crowds drive towards a justice that can exonerate them—is a protector, always looking out for the good of all.

Any narrative moving away from mythological representations of the crowd will bring the crowd down to earth and make it readily apparent. In the Gospels, for instance, the crowd is exposed for what it is and is given ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus. The extent to which a text reveals the responsibility of the group for its own violence, both corporately and individually, is the extent it is demythologized. A demythologized text drives with equal veracity toward expulsion only toward a reverse affect. In the one, the crowd is spared at the expense of the victim, and in the other, the victim is spared at the expense of the crowd.<sup>95</sup>

The accusation of the crowd towards its victim is one more aspect that can reveal the crowd’s presence. ‘The real concept of myth,’ says Girard (1985a:45) is in the assumption behind the accusation ‘that the plague of Thebes was actually caused by parricide and incest.’ In the case of Oedipus, Sophocles knows that the accusation was ridiculous, but not the sacrificial system. In a sense, Oedipus deserves what he got by messing with the system. Ultimately the accusation of the crowd serves to relocate the cause of an internal crisis *outside* of the community. Hence the accusation is a first sign of the mechanism revving up.

There is potential for confusion on this. The scapegoat does not have to be proven entirely innocent. He may in fact have a serious charge against him. But in order for the criminal to function sacrificially, he must become absolutely guilty of one or more of the

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<sup>95</sup> The exegesis of Genesis 2 to follow concludes this very thing in the relationship of the woman to ‘the adam.’

*stereotypical crimes* against him. ‘The fact that some of the details are imagined does not persuade us to consider the whole text imaginary. On the contrary, the more incredible accusations strengthen rather than diminish the credibility of the other facts’ (Girard, 1982:105). Here is but one more example of the interplay between imagination and reality.

One final trace of the collective that is associated with accusation and is often the critical stepping stone for an accusation to take hold is the *rumor*. Rumor is often the undercurrent of a narrative. It easily evades our convenient assessment of truth and falsehood, and thus can generate accusatory force unabated. The rumor places in motion the deification of the victim and his ‘magical powers’ over the community long before his inevitable death (Girard 1982:90ff). Rumor has its partner in divine decree. In the case of Oedipus, the oracle of Laos—the son will murder the father or in other words, the community kills its own in order to spare itself—is ‘the truth of myth’ that everyone scrambles to flee from in a ‘delirium of exclusion and expulsion’ (Girard 1965:51). The oracle undergirds the subtle turning of accusation toward Oedipus with such force that Oedipus finally succumbs.

## 2.4 Conclusion

What is important here is simply to lay out the considerations that will dominate the inquiry into the Genesis 1 and 2. They are starting points which dictate to some degree the limitations and direction. Of primary concern will be:

- The triangular interplay of mimetic desire. This is especially pertinent to the Adam’s placement in the garden and the placement of the trees.
- The sacrificial victim(s).
- The presence, or lack thereof, of the community converging on a victim—the symmetry or dissymmetry of the crowd.
- Identifying key structural features over thematic.
- Distinguishing between mythological features—‘reveiling’ the sacrificial mechanism—and demythological features—‘revealing’ it.



This is not at the exclusion of methodologies that have been employed in the last century.

The next chapter will place Girard’s ideology and methodology within the current discourse in Old Testament theology and the broader discussions of theory and ideology in the post-modern current.



### 3 GIRARD WITHIN LATE MODERNITY'S CHALLENGE AND PROSPECT OF THEORY AND METHODOLOGIES

I had intended at first to limit the fielding of criticisms of Girard to a minimum. As mentioned in the introduction, it is not out of the ordinary for scholars to apply a particular theoretical approach with little to no critical evaluation of the theory itself. It is still the overall goal to test the validity of the Girard's ideas as an insightful tool for contributing to biblical interpretation and theology. Why, then, should a more thorough fielding of criticisms be important?

For one, Girard, in my view, has fueled a particularly heated backlash, and this alone should be explored.<sup>1</sup> Girard is fully aware of the accusation that his theory is a 'sacrificial ideology.'<sup>2</sup> Girard's (1978:435ff) apologetic towards this kind of critique is clear and accurate, albeit not satisfying to his critics, especially since he uncovers the predilections often accompanying such objections. As will become evident in what follows, the sacrificial mechanism can apply equally to theory-making and modern critique as it can to mythological texts and ritual.

Mainly, however, any serious inquiry into the topic of sacrifice jettisons one into an unavoidable byzantine vortex. Jay (1992:1) states it well: 'A survey of social-scientific interpretations of other people's ritual action (especially rituals of so-called primitive religions) looks like a free-for-all of apparently unlimited combinations of speculation, wild projective fantasy, and careful scholarship.' To talk of sacrifice is to include ritual. From ritual, we embark on discussions of myth, religion, culture, magic, theology, theory, paradigm, ideology, post-modern, methodology, epistemology, politics, psychology, and the list goes on. Strenski concludes (2003:1) 'Sacrifice and its attendant

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<sup>1</sup> Mack (1985:137) speaks of Girard's 'explosive reading of the text' and an 'invasion' into the field of biblical scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Jay (1992:131); Miller (2002:2)

rhetoric have fallen on hard times.’ Currently, there is no abatement to the intensity and variety of disagreement to the point where some call for giving up altogether.<sup>3</sup>

The topic itself then, really does not allow one to blithely evaluate in a corner. As I shall discuss, the main objection of Girard is a ‘contextual’ one, and in the spirit of our times, I wish to place Girard within the ‘context’ of our times. Our topic is too complex to do otherwise. Girard’s thinking has affinities with an array of categories, academic disciplines, theories and methodologies, yet mimetic theory cannot be easily categorized without distorting it. This can go one of two ways. It can mean that his thinking is insufficient and too simplistic to seriously engage the more well-established academic disciplines, or it means that there is a synthetic quality in his thinking. The fact that one can find engagement with Girard in theology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literary and cultural criticisms, and the like should readily point us to the latter.<sup>4</sup>

There are a few preliminary observations to make about Girard’s ‘theory’ and those who have critically engaged it. For one, many critiques tend to be limited to Girard’s seminal works that engage sociological perspectives, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) and psychological perspectives, *Things Hidden From the Foundations of the World* (1978) and short circuit the progressive nature of Girard’s thinking.<sup>5</sup> Some demonstrate little knowledge or awareness of the mimetic underpinnings in his work. Even worse, some appear to rely on secondary sources for their understanding of Girard. Girard, as Strenski (2003:18) states, has offered a ‘full-blown’ theory of sacrifice, but even here, one must realize that Girard is not primarily concerned with sacrifice as much as the playing out of mimetic desire in human interaction. Some summaries of Girard’s work are limited to truncated explanations of sacrifice, less about religion, and even less about culture. Girard addresses, of course, all of these things, but they are an out-growth of his growing conviction about human nature and interaction—humans acquire desire.

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<sup>3</sup> Following the lead of the structuralist thinking of Levi-Strauss, Detienne and Vernant (1989:20) state: ‘...it seems important to say that the notion of sacrifice is indeed a category of the thought of yesterday, conceived as arbitrary as totemism...’

<sup>4</sup> In the recent issue of *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, Culture*. 2008/2009 Volume 15/16, contributing articles come from scholars in the fields of: theology, English literature, history, culture, political philosophy, philosophy, classics, political science, computer science and mathematics.

<sup>5</sup> Levine (1985:127), for instance, builds a case against Girard based on the scapegoat rituals such as found in Leviticus 16. This is despite the fact of Girard’s (1972:28-30) emphatic and repeated appeals that his notion of the scapegoat has almost nothing to do with the scapegoat rituals categorized by Frazer.

Finally, locating Girard's thinking within the current context of 'post-modern' thinking<sup>6</sup> will enable us to readily make the transition from theory to currents in Old Testament studies and theology.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the first part of this chapter will address a rejection of Girard's theory within the anthropological and sociological fields embraced by some Old Testament scholarship. The conclusion of this section will comment on some important points of departure for entertaining theory in a 'post-modern' context. The second part addresses a sampling of objections within the field of theology.

Although there have been a variety of objections to Girard, most can be predictably placed within a general negative sentiment towards its ubiquitous scope.<sup>8</sup> There have been numerous theories of sacrifice going all the way back to the Middle Ages, and none have been able to take hold as a dominant rubric.

There is a 'post-modern' sentiment that disdains 'grand narratives' that have at times run roughshod over peculiar cultural sensitivities and bolstered ideological and ethnocentric agendas, sometimes oppressively so.<sup>9</sup> Kogler (2007:333) asserts at the heart of late modern theory is the contesting and rejection of modern theories. Of particular interest is the 'rejection of trans-contextual notions of truth and truth claims, moralities that speak in the name of all, and grand theories, so-called 'meta-narratives' that construct historical and social developments imposed on and alien to the cultures discussed.'

It is when Girard is placed within this broader concern that we find ourselves in a daunting whirl of intersecting concerns and positions to which one could not thoroughly address in a book, let alone a chapter.

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<sup>6</sup> Wallace (1989:322)

<sup>7</sup> As will become more apparent as I proceed, 'post modernity' is a disputed designation. I agree with those (discussed below) who would argue that we can't really say we have left modernity. We are more accurately in a 'late modern' period. I will use throughout this work both terms, but prefer 'late modernity.'

<sup>8</sup> Reineke (2009:11) speaks of the 'standard-issue criticisms' such as: no correspondence to any documented examples of ritual sacrifice; its favorable outlook toward Christianity; reducing sacrifice to aggression, ignoring positive expressions of sacrifice such as communal festivals. Perhaps more accurately, McKenna (1985:4) asserts that Girard's insistence on origins and foundations inevitably provokes conflict with other theories. See North (1985:26). J. Z. Smith (1987:192, 195) vigorously objects to the whole pursuit of an origin to ritual or religion as fruitless speculation.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'grand narratives' is one coined by Terry Eagleton's in his insightful book *After Theory* (2003:23-24). The idiomatic phrase aptly reflects a general negative connotation in current thinking, 'a heinous thought crime,' as Eagleton puts it. In his book, Eagleton mainly refers to the 'grand narratives' that held a powerful sway in modernity: Marxism and capitalism.

Accordingly, I have limited my engagement with the topic to an interaction with a work by David Janzen entitled *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible* for several reasons. First, Janzen (2004:4) deals directly with Girard and uses his theory as a model argument counter to his approach. He is openly aggressive in opposition to Girard. Second, Janzen aptly reflects most of what I believe to be the pivotal objections to Girard at this point, and these objections can be addressed within the discussion of Old Testament exegesis and theology on sacrifice. Third, Janzen (2004:57) engages a wide variety of recent scholarship on the subject and claims to represent or to be congruent with current anthropological and social scientific approaches, where the rejection of Girard is decided and alternative approaches are being explored. From here, we will be able to examine the weakness of the ‘contextual’ argument, explore the validity of scientific theory verses just theory, and expand the discussion beyond sociological frameworks. Finally, Janzen’s work is relatively recent and should reflect the full progression of Girard’s work as well as a settling of criticisms from the flurry at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.1 Theory-making in Modernity and Late Modernity

Janzen’s starting point and indeed the driving force behind his approach can be placed within the current sentiment of what can be and is oft labeled ‘post-modern,’ mentioned above. There is an exhaustion over ‘universal theories.’<sup>10</sup> This has all the appearance of objective concerns and an offer for a reasonable way forward. It postulates a basic logic. For one, ‘universal theory,’ such as Marxism, has lent itself to totalizing applications, eliminating competing ideologies and imposing massive conformity at the cost of millions of lives. And because there have been so many different and conflicting theories of sacrifice, none of which has held the day, all of which have definitive and direct influences from the socio-political culture they arose in, it is best to give up on ‘universal

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<sup>10</sup> As to be discussed below, the distinction between a ‘theory’ and a ‘universal theory’ is fallacious. A theory is universal by its very nature. Janzen consistently uses ‘theory’ positively but ‘universal theory’ pejoratively. Even though it might seem redundant, I have chosen to put ‘universal theory’ in quotes to consistently remind of this dubious distinction.

theories,’ stick to ‘scientific’ observation, and restrict our conclusions to the ‘context’ the ritual is found in. It is an avoidance of ‘grand narratives’ and ‘trans-contextualization’ all together.

This disposition opposing universals, ‘grand narratives,’ or ‘trans-contextualization’ is identified with the elusive term ‘post-modern.’ A term which is often loosely tossed about to fit whatever one wants it to mean. Connotations run deep. But post-modernism is mainly a closing period. Its most distinguishing feature is simply signaling the end of a period of immense and intense theory-constructing. All we are doing is as Eagleton (2003:2) says, ‘trading on the past.’ Post-modernity is just borrowing on modernity. It carries with it a certain negative disposition which is legitimate, but overblown. Repeatedly, there is a resistance to ‘imposing’ ideas or agendas—ideology. It is a sentiment that rejects anything that smacks of a forced and funneled agenda, of ‘unilateral’ formulations or coercive uniformity. Hence, there is a bit of irony or edge to Girard’s ideas because they get at the heart of the ‘use of force.’

With that in mind, one must clarify what went on in the modern period.

**3.1.1 Theory-making in the Modern period.** In a span of about one hundred years, from the late nineteenth century to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, an unparalleled flurry of theory-making emerged in the academic centers of Europe and America. Indeed, the ‘social sciences’ such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, ethnology, political science, history and the like were solely fueled by the emergence of dominant and oft contentious theories. Theory-making equally dominated fields of economics, sciences, the arts, education, biblical and religious studies. In the twentieth century, one did not proceed to application without a theoretical basis.

Ivan Strenski has chronicled the history of religious theory-making in the twentieth century in a series of works.<sup>11</sup> Strenski has demonstrated several pertinent observations. For one, theory was emerging as the replacement for theology as the basis for public discourse. Theory-making, then, begins with an antagonistic sentiment towards theology

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<sup>11</sup> 2002 *Contesting Sacrifice: Religion, Nationalism, and Social Thought in France*; 2003 *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice*; 2006 *Thinking About Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion*.

which runs all the way to today. It is fueled by a sense of exhaustion over the kind of confessional wars spurred by recalcitrant theological positions and the control of clerics who defended them. Theory was viewed as the way forward, especially in the development of national identities. It shunned metaphysical explanations for what seemed a more solid foundation for building society provided by the then emerging evolutionary model. Science, reason, and nature could put an end to speculative thinking which only served to provoke contentious and ruthless exchange. By the turn of the century, the sense that human society was evolving into more complicated and refined forms was prevalent. Human potential would only progress to greater heights once the superstition of a bygone time could be put away. As I proceed, then, the concern for what constitutes ‘public exchange’ will be a recurrent one, taking many interesting twists and turns.

The question of the moral and social cohesion for a society became pressing since theology and the Church were deemed inadequate and even worse, counter-productive to human progress. This was further exacerbated by the gauntlet laid down by Nietzsche that borrowing the ethic of Christianity while rejected its core was disingenuous and worse, outright hypocrisy.<sup>12</sup> As much as modernity rejected theology, however, it still solidly shared one thing in common with it—the conviction that human societies must have a unifying factor to them. Modernity, and most of its flurry of theory-making, confidently embarked on that endeavor to find that core, center, germ, or cohesive force that *naturally* holds humans together. Though theology and evolution are often viewed as being at odds with each other, both share a foundational conviction that there is a unifying model that can explain the great diversity of life. Theory-making assumed such a conviction in its search for the common thread. It is dominated by the comparison method, the belief that one could find, mainly through scientific inquiry and method, characteristics common to all humanity.<sup>13</sup> What drives theory-making was its conviction that diversity is best explained from the starting point of commonality. This thinking, for

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<sup>12</sup> Walsh (1990:20-31) and Milbank (1990:280-295)

<sup>13</sup> Walsh (1990:12) speaks of the ‘original’ branch of ideology—science: ‘It was coincided to describe the application of the methods of natural sciences to the study of individual and society; the intention was to reduce all human behavior to a single causal system that could be fitted within the comprehensive science of zoology.’



instance, fueled the comparative religious movement of Gunkel and others in Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> The compulsion to have a ‘grid’ to explain complex and diverse phenomena is fundamental to scientific inquiry.

As Strenski (2003:232) reminds, at fundamental concern behind theory-making was what could replace theology as the common ground by which a diverse society could operate: ‘Thus, all along, for the Durkheimians and for me, the critical perennial issue in this rivalry has been the question of whether theological discourse...can qualify as public discourse—especially in the domain of religion...The Durkheimians represent the view that it cannot.’

For this reason, Strenski examines the political, historical development of Emile Durkheim in France. What went on there, in Strenski’s view, epitomizes much of what we can deduce of theory-making in ‘post-modernity’ and lays down important foundations for fielding criticisms of Girard. For one, theory-making is emphatically not devoid of politics. As Strenski 2003:230 says, ‘...we need to recognize that theories are often worked out within the context of the politics of certain social institutions, and that these politics are as real as in any other domain of life in the ‘real world.’ On the contrary, it has everything to do with gaining and then wielding political power.<sup>15</sup>

In his book *Thinking About Religion* (2006), Strenski effectively chronicles the development of religious theories and demonstrates the malaise that theory-making fell into during modernity. Essentially, theory-making simply reproduced a different version of what it set out to correct in theology—an exhaustion and skepticism over the contentious and dangerous entrenchment of warring theoretical perspectives, now identified as ideologies.<sup>16</sup>

There are several pointed observations made by Strenski about theories of religion in modernity. Theorists quickly encountered the dilemma of attempting to be an outside

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<sup>14</sup> Gunkel’s work 1895 *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* was especially spurred by the discovery of ancient Babylonian works.

<sup>15</sup> Watts’ (2007:67) premise to his study of Leviticus is that ritual was as politically charged in the ancient world as it is today. Aaron (2002) also deals with competing meanings around image in the ancient world.

<sup>16</sup> See Walsh (1990:10-12)

observer to something that one is deeply involved in. How can one objectively observe society while being in society oneself. Upon review of theories and theorists, it becomes abundantly clear how the social, political, and psychological situations of the theorist and his time—the *context* of the theorist—powerfully determined the shaping and outcome of the theory. All the more true when there is the high stakes of controlling influential academic institutions and determining public policy as in the case of France at the turn of the twentieth century. One can find the theorist in the theory, his (and yes, it is telling that theory-making is a male-dominated activity) own experiences, political adversaries, bias, and crisis effectively shaped the theory. I would conclude with Stenski (2006:339) that knowing this does not in and of itself invalidate the contribution made, but it does reveal the kind of trouble that ‘post-modernists’ have with theories. They seem to explain as much about the theorist and his times than anything useful for society.

**3.1.2 Skepticism of theory post-modern.** Tellingly, by the end of the twentieth century, theories of religion and ‘studies of religion’ are ill-defined. To repeat Stenski (2003:1): ‘Sacrifice and its attendant rhetoric have fallen on hard times.’ There was anything but a consensus and the assumption of a common foundation seemed hopeless and wrong-headed. This was not only true for religious studies but all of the ‘humanities’ and indeed, science is increasingly understanding this.<sup>17</sup> The dilemma is glaringly the same—the observer is part of the thing being observed. There is no privileged perspective, no outside vantage point to observe objectively.

Post-modernism is simply a signaled end to modernity. It is best characterized by a rejection of much of it. Kogler (2007:333) defines post-modernism as simply ‘conceptual and methodological positions that contest modernist positions.’ Once more, we take note of an antagonistic disposition underlying the current general paradigm. One’s ideas, apparently, are still built on a rejection of what came before. The question still remains as to whether this rejection of modernist positions is significantly the end of modernity or just a flip side of it. Have we really left modernity behind?

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<sup>17</sup> Hauerwas (2007:129), Barrow (2007:246)

To many, especially with a Christian perspective, this abandonment of universal truth claims can only lead to a nihilistic outlook<sup>18</sup> or a new religion based on social theory.<sup>19</sup> Kogler (2007:334), on the other hand, believes a hopeful way lies not in a nihilistic rejection of all reason, but in ‘a reformulation of the scope and nature of truth claims and normative commitments...’ He identifies ‘postmodern’ themes which one would need to embrace for such a ‘reformulation’ to be fruitful:

- 1) ‘context-dependency’ of theoretically articulated truth positions
- 2) ‘sensitivity to the cultural embeddedness of moral attitudes and rules’
- 3) carefully integrating ‘conceptual frames and empirical-hermeneutic processes’<sup>20</sup>

Strenski (2003:236,238) concludes something quite similar to Kogler, especially addressing the issue of relativism. Strenski believes that history—as something that can be objectively assessed—can determine the relative importance and legitimacy of a theory. Theories, Strenski asserts, shouldn’t be expected to have a permanent shelf-life. The validity or power of a theory is in passing the ‘so what?’ test. In other words, does or did the theory make a significant contribution for the time it was written, and if so, what is or should be its impact on current thinking. Along with this, Strenski explores why the theorist thought he was right. What kind of social/political/psychological conditions compelled the theorist to such deep convictions?

Milbank (1990:1-3) has taken the current ‘skeptical relativism’ to bring theological perspectives back into the mainstream of current intellectual thought. He, like Strenski, examines the ‘genesis’ of secular reasoning contributing to social theory and concludes something similar to Strenski—theories of humans are made up of, well, theorizing humans. They have their flaws. Milbank grants that social theory has enabled a certain bridge between theology and ‘secular’ thinking. This has been some of the excitement around Girard in this regard. Milbank (1990:3) believes that mimetic theory was a way

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<sup>18</sup> Walsh 1990:17-37

<sup>19</sup> Milbank 1990:2

<sup>20</sup> In his critique of Girard’s reading of Job, Levine (1989:125ff) reiterates the higher critical concerns developed during modernity and advocates a ‘contextual’ approach similar to Kogler in opposition to Girard.

to find a common basis for which theological and ‘secular’ thinking could engage, and he upbraids theologians ‘to acknowledge theoretical developments which they have woefully ignored.’ Nonetheless, Milbank (1990:2) challenges the underlying premise of social theory which seeks to engulf ‘religion’ within its explanatory grids, arguing that sociology is only a disguised theology and that the Christian theological heritage still passes muster as a ‘metanarrative’, especially in our current skeptical impasse.

Strenski (2003:240), however, rejects such reasoning based on what he believes is a generally understood truth—‘Except in rare circumstances, we are not generally nihilistic.’ Most societies make value judgments from sheer practicality. The utilitarian element determines to a large degree the ‘decisions about the givens of knowledge about the world.’<sup>21</sup> He explains his epistemological view point of a kind of ‘(relative) absolute *within a given world*—context—which is for the most part determined by a kind of common sense about survival:

Now these practical considerations about getting on with life are of the highest importance to the existence of civilized life. They are to be found in the epistemological principles undergirding our judicial and legal systems, that is the priority of sense perception and empirical knowledge.

For Strenski (2003:241), drawing the line at the empirical, as we do in our legal and judicial systems, is our practical way of getting on with having a civilized society:

...our so called secular political systems in the West in a way rest on the wager that civilized society stands a better chance of success if we remove religion, or better yet, any single religion, from a foundational role in our society.

Needless to say, there is no easy resolve at this point. There are a myriad of issues in which all need consider. Both of Milbank and Strenski, however, surprisingly coincide in that they call for a fundamental and pragmatic understanding of our social reality as humans. More of this will be addressed as I proceed.

### **3.2 A ‘Contextual’ Approach to Sacrifice and Ritual in the Old Testament.**

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Strenski underestimates the Christian influence of the last two millennia on such propensities away from nihilism.

I have chosen to engage David Janzen's approach to sacrifice in the Old Testament as a paradigmatic way to field the core criticisms to Girard. I will proceed first to describe and summarize the basic contours of a 'contextual' approach. Janzen, in typical 'post-modern' fashion builds much of his case on the foundational rejection of 'universal theories.' He exemplifies the approach laid out by Kogler mentioned above. From there, I will first address the inconsistencies of the anthropological alternative 'contextual' approach, at least as Janzen presents it. This will lead us into a discussion of the broader issues involved.

By proceeding in this manner, several objectives can be demonstrated. For one, the 'contextual' approach is fraught with difficulties. It reveals its own unanswerable predilections. In a similar vein as Milbank, then, social theory is shown to be as much a problem as it is a solution. It is not offering a way forward, and in many ways it is a regress. Contra to Milbank, however, Girard's theory does not neatly fit into the 'social theory' category. Second, Janzen provides, seemingly unawares, a 'universal theory' that has remarkable affinities with Girard, thus demonstrating a fundamental lack of understanding of both Girard and theory. Finally, I seek to identify the context or framework of this complex issue—and after all, that is what theory-making is—and to demonstrate that Girard's insights, far from being dismissed, offers a lively and fruitful engagement for ever more pertinent issues of the nature of man, religion, sacrifice, culture, and violence.

By way of preliminary ground work, it is needful here to mention the general theoretical views of sacrifice and ritual and of ritual and religion, for Janzen consistently holds to a particular starting point.

There are generally three theoretical outlooks on sacrifice in relationship to other rituals. For Durkheim,<sup>22</sup> sacrifice is the topic *par excellence* of religion, the sacred, and ritual – to grasp this is to grasp the essence, mainly because of its extensive practice, its universal appeal. For others, the central place given to sacrifice is an ethnocentric carry-over from Christianity, especially Catholicism's centrality of the Eucharist. It is rather only one of

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<sup>22</sup> Strenski (2003:22)

many different kinds of rituals and does not hold a central place among ritual.<sup>23</sup> Janzen (2004:9) holds this view and claims it for the general anthropological approach.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Levi-Strauss and the structuralists would take this second proposition one step further; there is nothing even religious about sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> It is strictly a social function. Ritual and sacrifice are the same. Furthermore, it is argued that sacrifice is a construct of theologians and theorists and is essentially meaningless, and the whole pursuit for a ‘meaning’ in it is folly.<sup>26</sup>

Also of interest here is the debate over whether ritual is different than other socially coordinated behavior, from other ‘social acts.’ Some hold to a distinction between religious and non-religious social behavior. Janzen (2004:9), again claiming this for anthropologists in general, embraces the view that all socially coordinating behavior is ritual, or at least ritualistic, and thus is religious. There is no essential distinction.

**3.2.1 The anthropological, contextual approach of Janzen.** Janzen, then, starts from the premise that ‘universal theories’ of ritual, sacrifice being just one kind of ritual, in no way clarifies anything and in fact, only distorts our understanding of the ‘meaning(s)’ of sacrifice. A clearer understanding of sacrifice can only be gained by limiting the inquiry to the social context that the particular ritual is being performed in. Simply put, Janzen (2004:3) purports: ‘...sacrifice can have very different meanings for different biblical authors.’ Janzen (2004:4) explains:

The field of anthropology, however, has abandoned universal theories like Girard’s, in large part because these amount to attempts to impose a theory on all sacrifices enacted in all societies with no regard to their cultural or historical contexts. Anthropologists who study rituals in various cultures point consistently to the contexts in which the rituals are performed and argue convincingly that if we are to interpret their *social meanings* we need to understand as much as possible about these contexts.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Wallace (1989:322) views Girard’s singular focus on sacrifice as ‘eurocentric’ and ‘myopic.’

<sup>24</sup> Thus, for most of this chapter the terms ‘ritual’ and ‘sacrifice’ will be used interchangeably.

<sup>25</sup> See Detienne and Vernant 1989:1-20)

<sup>26</sup> See J. Z. Smith (1987:191ff)

<sup>27</sup> This is a bit overstated here. No theory, including Girard’s, completely disregards contexts. Theory can only be generated by a context. The issue is really how big the context we want to consider.

Although Janzen's attack on 'universal theory' is rigorous, it must be pointed out that both he, social scientists, and 'universal theorists' are after the same question—what does this particular social act mean? The distinction, which Janzen holds to be significant, is simply in avoiding a reductionist answer. There can be, and indeed *only* be, multiple meanings, depending on the immediate and particular context. Each particular ritual has its own meaning.

Janzen (2004:4) quickly moves from the 'meaning' of sacrifice to the 'social meaning' of sacrifice. Without question, he places himself within the long line of modernists, best exemplified by Durkheim, who believed that sacrifice, ritual, and indeed religion must be understood as a social phenomenon. Ritual after all is the most observable aspect of religion and is definitively a social act. Janzen's (2004:14) attempt to distance himself from Durkheimian theory is unconvincing, for he simply offers a variation on a theme. There are immediate differences depending on context and worldview, but overall, ritual still performs an essential task of social cohesion for the group.

Ritual is then the starting point to which we embark on the question of its meaning for the social group enacting it.<sup>28</sup> It is a vehicle or media that communicates a meaning for that group. A ritual effectively re-presents and reinforces the worldview of the social group. Janzen uses interchangeably terms such as: worldview, social goods, social desiderata (desires), or ideology. Contrary to the sour connotation that 'ideology' has now, Janzen (2004:35) defines it as positively normal for any social group.<sup>29</sup> Ritual is an accurate reflection of a community's ideology, its most *deeply rooted* values and moral codes. Every socially functioning community has an *engrained* understanding of how they understand themselves and their relation to the world around them.

It is here where a careful distinction of terms must be clarified. The social meaning of a ritual is a *reflection* of the community's worldview, its ideology. It is not to be equated with the 'social goods' of the community, but is a rhetorical communication of it. The

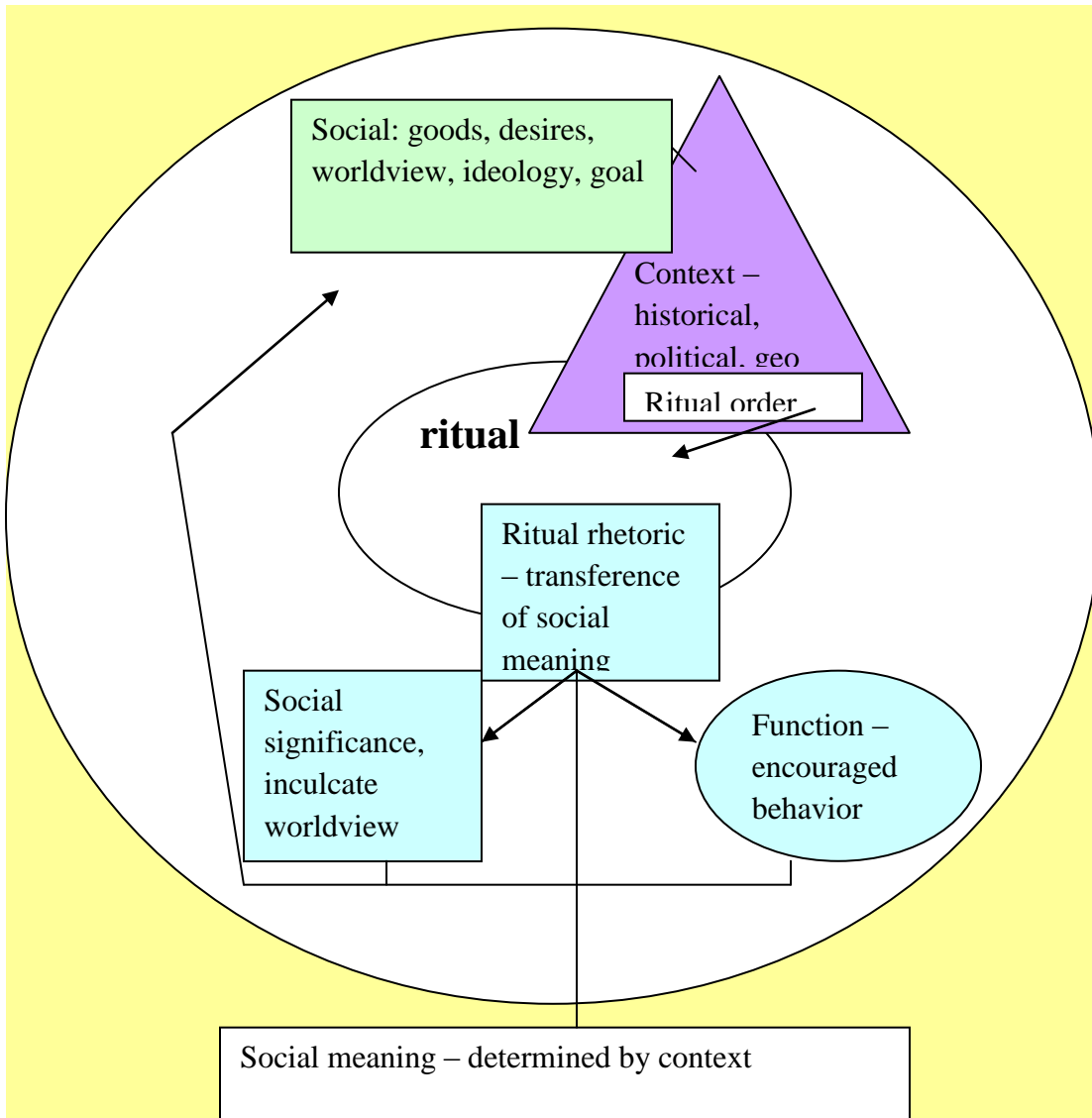
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<sup>28</sup> Janzen's use of terms and concepts are sophisticated and intertwined. Figure 1 below is an attempt to sort these out according to the distinctions Janzen makes. As to be discussed, I do not think Janzen nor others who use such terms successfully delineate his concepts. In my chart, one can notice that every distinct concept overlaps the others. I think this is an honest demonstration of Janzen's presentation.

<sup>29</sup> This positive view of ideology as 'world-making' is shared by other Old Testament scholars such as Watts (2007:16) and Brueggemann (1988:xi).

deeply rooted intrinsic desiderata of the community exists apart from its expression, i.e. the ritual.

**Figure 1**





For Janzen, the social meaning of a ritual is the product of the ritual. The ritual *serves* to express a bifurcated ‘meaning’ to the participants. It inculcates the *significance* and the *function* of the ritual. By significance, Janzen means the communicated or represented ideology of the group. Thus, social significance is synonymous with worldview. Janzen (2004:9), however, distinguishes *significance* in two ways: it is the *communicated* social desires or worldview of the community, and it may only reflect part of the total worldview. The other part of the social meaning of ritual is its *function*. The ritual serves to inform and persuade the members to act in certain ways. It communicates the social morality of the group. Hence, Janzen (2004:10) sums up: ‘The social significance of ritual and sacrifice is to alert members of a community to the being and ordering of the world, and the ritual ties this to the ways in which the members of the community should act.’ Social meaning, therefore, as the product of ritual is a binding force, linking social significance with function. Janzen (2004:43) states: ‘Ritual rhetoric links its social significance to its social function and thus communicates a social meaning.’

This bifurcated *social meaning* of a ritual to its participants consequently serves not only to *reinforce* the worldview or ideology of the community but also to *establish* it. There is a circularity to ritual. A community’s worldview compels ritual, and through ritual that worldview is expressed along with the behaviors congruent with it. All of this together, then, informs the group of ‘the way things are’ and urges their allegiance to it; consequently, the community’s ideology is maintained and fortified.

**3.2.2 The nature of ritual.** Venturing a near consensus among anthropologists, Janzen (2004:23) identifies the key features to ritual’s rhetorical power and its distinction from the everyday behaviors of the community—its ‘extreme formality’ and repetition. These intrinsic characteristics effectively communicate several things. Ritual’s extreme formality cuts off completely any kind of dialogue. ‘Ritual communicates, but it never dialogues,’ Janzen (2004:23) affirms. The addition of repetition insures ‘adherence to a set pattern.’

The ritual act in and of itself serves the community in critical ways. Primarily, it is an act of self-preservation. It reiterates to the community the precarious nature of the community’s survival. ‘Societies need to reproduce themselves, to make certain that they

do not die out and that they continue from one generation to the next,' Janzen (2004:17) says.<sup>30</sup> It places the perpetuation of the group above all individuals. Ritual's ability to cut off dialogue reinforces the priority of the group by alleviating conflict, especially from competing 'world views' whether in or outside the group. As Janzen (2004:34) reiterates: 'Ritual is a powerful social tool, and it is a powerful tool precisely because it is able to communicate without serious resistance.'

**3.2.3 Social context.** The social meaning of a particular ritual can only be discerned through 'context.' 'Context,' asserts Janzen (2004:73), 'is of utmost importance if we are to understand the meaning of a ritual.' Since the ritual act intends to communicate a social reality to the participants, the ritual must in some way reflect the worldview of the social group promoting it. The intended outcome of a ritual determines much of the way it is situated in the social behavioral patterns.

There are several 'contextual variables' one must discern in order to get at the meaning of the ritual. The most critical factor has to do with understanding the particulars of the ritual itself: when is it performed?; who are the participants?; what is the order?; and what is its order and relationship with other rituals? Because Janzen is mainly dealing with sacrifice in the Old Testament, he must also consider the literary context that the rituals are placed in. Janzen (2004:18) discusses the problem of ancient contexts where there can be no direct third party observation. Here he falls back on the conventional historical critical methods to extricate the necessary insight into the ritual. Discerning 'authorial intent' is also central since the worldview of the author has a direct effect on the 'context' of the rituals described.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the political, historical, and geographical variables are also part of context; however, Janzen does not give these variables as much weight in determining the significance of a ritual as the ritual particulars.

It is, then, that the worldview of the social group determines the placement and enactment of the ritual within a social context. Furthermore, the ritual, communicates a social

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<sup>30</sup> In such an explanation is an example of Janzen's variation on the Durkheim theme of social cohesion.

<sup>31</sup> Watts (2007:31) is critical of Janzen precisely on this point. 'There is no *a priori* reason to think that a ritual's persuasive purpose would match the rhetorical intentions of authors who write about ritual.'

significance and morality—a social meaning—to the group which corresponds to *both* what the community *perceives* to be true about the world they live in and to their *actual* everyday life. Hence the social meaning reinforces and enforces the worldview of the community. There is a natural circularity to this operation (see figure 1), as Janzen (2004:40) states: ‘Ritual and social behavior exist in this circular relationship, each justifying the other.’ Thus Janzen (2004:39) aligns his thinking with those who would say that all social coordinated behavior is ritualistic. Ritual is a fundamental and integral element to socialization precisely because of its mimetic power. ‘Our experiences are continually harmonized and reinforced by the actions of those around us and their expressions of their experiences,’ says Janzen (2004:39).<sup>32</sup>

### 3.3 Problems with a Contextual Approach.

There are several internal inconsistencies and broad assumptions that create difficulties in Janzen’s framework that need be addressed.

**3.3.1 Distinction between ritual as medium and ritual as message.** Janzen makes a decisive distinction in his presentation of a contextual approach where, in my assessment, he appears unaware of making and even more so, unaware of the implications this distinction has on his own argument against ‘universal theories.’

Janzen (2004:19) speaks of a meaning (function) communicated *through* the ritual act. The media (ritual) conveys the message. This message is what Janzen addresses as the *immediate* social goods of the community. There are countless varieties, depending on the immediate context and particular worldview of the community. Ritual communicates a social reality that is as anthropologists insist content and context dependent. It is also participant dependent; that is, what the participants *say* the ritual is communicating takes a prominent place.

In this sense, there is no disagreement with anthropologists, nor Girard. Any given social group can have its own take on the significance of a ritual act. There is no single

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<sup>32</sup> Here Janzen echoes the findings of ‘social cognition’ scientists.

meaning of a ritual as far as what it is *immediately* communicating to the participants. And we must be reminded that even here, the meanings can change from person to person and over time. There are a variety of meanings given to a similar kind of ritual in different social groups, and there are even a variety of meanings given to the same ritual act within one social group.

In the effort to explain the power of ritual as a rhetorical device, however, Janzen speaks of the message the ritual itself communicates.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the medium has its own message. Janzen explains the message of ritual itself in his discussion of the *nature* or fundamental *characteristics* of ritual. Janzen, speaking for anthropologists, can apparently speak at length of ‘the characteristics of’ or the ‘features’ of ritual and avoid being an imposing universalist by exchanging ‘meaning’ terms for ‘nature’ or ‘characteristic’ terms. Janzen (2004:22) confidently speaks of the ubiquitous characteristics of ritual. Ritual communicates this regardless of variables. The media is the message. It is universal, and has ‘canonical’ qualities (Janzen 2004:22). Here Janzen’s and anthropologists’ deductions sound remarkably like Durkheim and Girard.

The most fundamental message of ritual is the preservation of the social group. ‘Societies need to reproduce themselves, to make certain that they do not die out and that they continue from one generation to the next’ (Janzen, 2004:17). That ritual communicates the priority of the community over its members is essentially Durkheim, whether we call it social unity, cohesion, preservation, survival or the like. Whereas Durkheim called it a ‘reaffirmation’ of the social group, Janzen’s ‘adherence’ to a social worldview is hardly and substantially different. They are essentially synonymous.

A second ‘characteristic’ of ritual explains how it is that ritual has such a cohesive force; it alleviates conflict. Janzen (2004: 25) further assures us that:

Ritual is a kind of rhetoric. It acts [solely on its own, regardless of particulars and players] to persuade members of a social group to accept the society’s worldview and moral code, but it is in competition for its member’s loyalties. As a result, one of the many rhetorical strategies rituals

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<sup>33</sup> Here, it is important to reiterate a critical feature that Girard pursues while most others avoid—*Why* does ritual, or sacrifice, and not something else serves such a function?

can employ is to drive a wedge between the loyalty of the members of its social group and other societies.

In other words, ritual eliminates rivalries. It is a monologue not a dialogue. Regardless of the particular meanings a given ritual may communicate, the ritual ultimately communicates the social good above all else.

The message that the survival or perpetuation of the collective unit supersedes all else, is built in—it is *structural*. This ‘adherence to a pattern,’ Janzen (2004:22-23) assures, is ‘canonical’ and ‘characteristic of all rituals.’ It is universal. It is in the pattern and repetition of ritual that conveys the basic message of order, continuity, and predictability. Ritual communicates the will of the community to survive at all costs and against threatening rivalries. Janzen (2004:57) provides a universal *function* to ritual: ‘What is at stake... is the need to reproduce the social group, and thus to *ensure its survival* in the face of other groups that would steal the loyalty of those involved.’

To reiterate, Janzen speaks of ‘meanings’ to ritual which are communicated through the ritual and are peculiar to different social groups depending on ‘context’ and of *a* universal communication of ritual itself because of its function by nature. This distinction is not problematic, unless one argues against ‘universal theories’ on the bases of the former while simultaneously advocating a universal ‘character’ for the later. It becomes a contradiction especially when one fails to see the distinction one is making.

There is an apparent contradiction in what Janzen proposes. At one point Janzen (2004:31) assures us that ‘there is no universal structure’ to initiation rites ‘because they are not trying to [*immediately*] do the same thing,’ yet he confidently tells us that ritual is ultimately after the same end. On the same page, Janzen (2004:33) speaks of the ubiquitous structure, goal, or function of ritual and then proceeds to tell us that there is no universal structure, goal or function:

We have already seen that rituals are generally formal in structure, a construction that allows ritual rhetoric to proceed with assent from its participants... There is a real sense to this strict structuring, for it enforces subjugation to the social order and in fact enacts it.’

Because rituals do not all do the same thing, they do not all have these same goals nor the same structure nor the same order nor the same context. The structures and symbols rituals imply depend on the social message that they are trying to convey. All of these things affect the social meaning. If anything can be said to be a near-universal feature of ritual, it is formality and repetition, for these greatly reduce the chance that an argument will be made against ritual rhetoric.

Janzen is unaware of such an inconsistency because he has relegated the power of ritual to the *characteristic* or *nature* of ritual which is common to nearly all regardless of ‘context.’ The nature of ritual communicates something powerful to the social group, but apparently this communication is not in the realm of ‘meaning.’

Janzen (2004:24) reiterates the consensus of anthropologists that this characteristic is proved out especially when the members of the community don’t agree on the ‘contextual’ meaning of their own rituals. In other words, when the context—clarity of worldview, morality, ideology, etc.—has lost all correspondence to everyday life of the participants, the community cleaves to ritual itself to convey order, preservation, and survival.<sup>34</sup> Janzen 2004:24 ‘As members of the social group receive the same message about social worldview and morality over and over, they find their social and moral places in a body that appears never to change or die.’ And now we have arrived full-circle to Durkheim’s godlike status of the society itself or as Girard would call it ‘crowd theology.’ The structural characteristics of ritual take on a god-like quality to it, a sacred quality, especially when there are competing ‘desiderata,’ competing desires.

Here one must strain to find some monumental difference with what Girard is saying. Girard simply explores where others are not willing to venture, *how and why* ritual is able to *function* this way. We can go a step further in wondering whether anthropology even avoids the question. *How* is it that in every circumstance ritual accomplishes what it does—immediately enforcing and reinforcing the worldview and morality, and ultimately, preserving social cohesion.

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<sup>34</sup> Watts (2007:31, 34) convincingly argues that *only* when a ritual is in disrepair or dispute is there any interest in its meaning. This I agree with.

To remind, to speak of theory is to speak of the commonality to all, not regardless of multiple variables, but because of them. Janzen does as all theorists do and should not object to Girard *in this regard*. The contention is over *what* is characteristic to all ritual, not *that* there can be no common ground between rituals. Janzen provides no compelling argument as to why anthropologists have the best perspective on this, especially since they are doing precisely what Girard is doing—interpreting data from outside the phenomena and boldly ascertaining conclusions. Janzen (2004:76) reluctantly admits that most discussion of sacrifice, ritual, and religion is coming from outside the fields of social science. This is because the search for meaning is much more pressing than mere description. The immediate ‘meaning’ of a ritual is determined by the particular context the ritual is found in, but investigation does not stop there, especially when compared with other rituals in other contexts. What if ‘characteristic’ features become apparent? Then what?

In Janzen’s (2004:19) discussion as to the effectiveness of ritual as a media he states: ‘...ritual’s extremely formal character show it to be a kind of communication that actively discourages dialogue not in agreement with the social goods it advances.’ Also Janzen makes clear that one overall effect of ritual is to solicit allegiance to the social goods being promoted.

Once again, this points to precisely what Girard is saying. There are competing ‘desiderata’ in any social group, and it is sacrifice—among other rituals—that actively seeks to deal with potentially dangerous rivalries. Thus rituals (leaving the question of how and why it is ritual and not something else that does this, and whether this is accomplished by design or haphazardly) come about in the hot house of rivalry just as theories do and as theology has always done.

Janzen 2004:21 opts for anthropological theory as the bases for his inquiry and methodology—ritual means what ritual does. It is defined by its function. This vein of anthropology is well within the Durkheimian school, which views ritual, the sacred, and religion within the realm of social phenomena and as servicing *the* social good above all else—the preservation of the group. Janzen merely varies in explanation on this general presumption. Whereas Durkheim would say that the overall function of ritual/sacrifice is

to promote the unity of the community, Janzen (2004:21) agrees with cultural anthropologists that ritual not only communicates and clarifies social reality, it establishes it. It means what it does, regardless of the particulars within the ritual. Girard, who could accurately be grouped with the Durkheimian school, also merely varies from Durkheim, Hubert and Maus, and Janzen over the precise nature of the function. This is well within the confines of conventional theory engagement, applying the same theory with varying and oft contradictory conclusions.

**3.3.2 The problem of identifying context.** Let us return to a founding premise of anthropologists according to Janzen (2004:4): ‘Anthropologists who study rituals in various cultures point consistently to the contexts in which the rituals are performed and argue convincingly that if we are to interpret their *social meanings* we need to understand as much as possible about these contexts.’ Here, we must notice a cascade of disconcerting problems.

One difficulty to a ‘contextual’ approach in understanding the meaning of a ritual is a clarity as to what is meant by context. Here, I suggest, ‘the context’ becomes more elusive than ‘meaning.’ ‘Context’ is so congealed with terms, like *goal, point, significance, function, meaning, social desires* and *ritual* of the community that one is hard pressed to determine a clear distinction between these and what is determining what. And what is most significant and least noticed in Janzen’s approach is that it is always the outside observer, the interpreter, who is the ultimate determiner of each, but especially of meaning.

Conventionally in Old Testament higher criticism, a social context refers to the historical/political/geographical setting, and to some extent this is how Janzen (2004:4,14) refers to context. Hence, the over-all social setting is distinct from ritual and affects ritual. The social setting determines the ritual.

For the most part, however, it is the *ritual itself*, the particulars of the enactment, that is mostly being referred to by ‘context.’ The above distinction—context is the overall social setting—is blurred when context is nearly equated with the ritual itself. Janzen (2004:14)



in this sense, speaks of ‘ritual context’: ‘...it is worth emphasizing that rituals are always conducted within the context of activities that precede and follow it, and we can only enhance our understanding of its significance and function when we can place it inside this context.’ The most important contextual variable in examining the ritual is to determine the *goal* of the ritual. It is in realizing the different goals of rituals that one can definitively lay to rest a ‘universal meaning’ to all ritual. The goal of the ritual is best determined by examining the ‘structure,’ ‘sequential order,’ and ‘function’ of the ritual.<sup>35</sup> This again is the task of the outside observer.

Janzen’s (2004:14) examples provided to back up this notion are problematic, for it is the significance of the ritual, determined by the anthropologist, that one can discern the context.<sup>36</sup> Here, not only is significance nearly equated with context, the role is reversed. Once one has interpreted the significance of the ritual, we can then discern the context, then the goal of the ritual, and finally the worldview being reinforced. J. Z. Smith (1987:192) sees problems with this type of endeavor. It is more likely to clarify why the anthropologist designates a social action as ritual than anything about the social gesture itself.

Finally, at times Janzen (2004:73) nearly equates the social worldview with context. ‘To grasp social meaning, we are going to have to know something about the worldview of the writings in which *we encounter* sacrifice, and we’re going to want know how various sacrifices fit together. This is *part of the context* that we can glean from a study of P to help us determine the social meaning.’ For Janzen (2004:74), worldview determines the context and context determines the ‘meaning’ of the ritual. But then, here is the key. Only by knowing the particulars of the ritual—how it was done and already understanding the symbolism in the gestures can we understand worldview. Furthermore, the goal of the ritual must already be determined. The particulars of the ritual (contextual information), which is what we’re trying to decipher the meaning of, are how we will determine what they mean. And to emphasize once again, it is the anthropologist who determines all of this.

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<sup>35</sup> Janzen (2004:33)

<sup>36</sup> J. Z. Smith (1987:192)

To summarize, in order to get at the particular ‘meaning’ of a ritual, one must examine the ritual itself and take note of all the particulars within it.<sup>37</sup> Since ritual is a mirrored image of the social group’s worldview and of their everyday life, we can discern reflections of both within the ritual. This then, helps us determine what the goal of the ritual is. We can understand the goal of the ritual by looking at its effects, the interaction between the significance and function of the ritual within the community. The significance of the ritual and its function is what the ritual means for the community, and this meaning is what informs the interpreter of ritual as to what social good or desire is being reinforced by the ritual.

This then is the contextual approach. It is entirely circular, each aspect dependent on the other for clarity. Janzen (2004:37) admits as such and sees the task, again of the outside observer, to sort through these interdependent variables to arrive at the particular ‘meaning.’ Janzen’s development of his method reveals something telling about quite a bit of inquiry into ritual and sacrifice in particular—the target of the inquiry is ill-defined, confusing the question with the answer, the affect and effect.

**3.3.3 Key assumptions problematic.** There are several key assumptions in the contextual approach that are highly problematic self-defeating and confusing.

For one, the focus on the particulars of the ritual as the key to unlocking meaning assumes that the message of the ritual is direct and clear. If this were the case, one wonders what all the bother over uncovering the meaning of sacrifice is all about. If on the other hand, the message of a given ritual is implicit, which Janzen (2004:44) believes, then the details of the ritual would be the least important and helpful in getting at the over-all message. In fact, the details of the ritual can be misleading if we take them at face value and not all together.

This is even more problematic since Janzen (2004:32) admits that particular gestures in a ritual are ‘polysemy’—changing over time or not signifying anything. This being the case, we must remind ourselves that social gestures are like sponges—they can *absorb* or

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<sup>37</sup> J. Z. Smith (1987:194-195) sees that the only possibility for a ‘general theory of ritual’ is its infinite and infinitesimal elaboration.’

*mutate into* all kinds of significance, even if certain gestures were haphazard to start with.<sup>38</sup> This formidable ability for social gestures to readily take on representation is the thesis of Detienne and Vernant's (1989:20) contention that sacrifice is an artificial term made up by 'historians and sociologists' still under the sway of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> Girard, as well, is emphatic that sacrifice has an unceasing drive towards representation. Once again, we must ask who is determining such significance. Even more so, we must take note of the mimetic characteristic of social behavior. Any socially coordinated behavior is preprogrammed to take on symbol, representation, and 'meaning.'

A focus on the particulars of the ritual also assumes that the 'context' is relatively fixed and closed. In other words, that the situation of the group is constant. This makes sense when an ethnographer goes into a social group that is insulated and isolated from outside influence. The assumption is workable the more isolated or secluded the group is, but as soon as a greater, more encompassing 'context' intrudes, like the arrival of an ethnographer, all kinds of other variables come into play. The more porous the communal boundaries are, the more elusive all the 'contextual variables' become.

This leads into another problematic assumption that there is an *intentional* design to ritual. Janzen (2004:4) speaks consistently of the goal of the ritual, and at times even speaks of intentional design by someone within the social group itself. Janzen leaves ambiguous any distinction between the intention or design of a ritual and the unintentional. Overall, we are left with the impression that somehow the social group itself is designing the rituals in a similar way as advertisers design commercials. It presumes some kind of clear grasp by the social group of its own world view and its own control of the ritual. Since the world view ultimately is about desiderata—desire—of the community, we should not presume that any social group, let alone an individual, has such a systematic cognizance of its own desires.

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<sup>38</sup> Watts (2007:9) speaks of ritual's 'ambiguity' and 'multivaliance.' In other words, ritual is highly addictive—we are naturally prone to corporate habits and patterns—and highly adaptive—taking on meanings to address immediate social 'goods.'

<sup>39</sup> In an even more telling statement, Detienne and Vernant (1989:13) assert that his contextual approach is designed for the very reason to debunk the more 'universalizing' theories of Hubert and Mauss. Their approach is specifically designed to undo another approach.

Certainly, rituals funnel the desires of the community toward the overall message of social survival. Both Girard and anthropologists agree on this. Rituals are most certainly about control of the social group as discussed above. Of issue, then, is who or what is controlling the ritual? Janzen (2004:14, 18, 48) provides numerous instances of designed ritual meant to overtake competing social desiderata already in place. It fails because it is forced. It does not correspond to ‘quotidian existence.’ It was too removed from the values instilled in community. We must certainly affirm, then, that intentional design alone is not the determining factor.

Janzen fails to explore ritual, however, as having a mind of its own, and operating apart from any of its participants, precisely because the community *en mass* controls it. The question as to the origin of ritual before interpretations of it leads us to one of the more fundamental objections to Girard. Janzen (2004:79) directs us towards anthropologist’s root criticism of Girard which is the supposed death knell to any real consideration of him. Here again, context is everything. For it is ‘culture’ that creates ritual and not ritual that creates culture.

It is here where the contextual argument falters on its own in addition to demonstrating a profound misread of Girard. We have every reason to believe that ritual has its origins in spontaneous or serendipitous behavior of a group. There are two examples from my own experience which can illustrate my point.<sup>40</sup>

Having started my Christian experience in a Pentecostal church, I once heard a preacher mention a discussion he had with a Catholic priest. The Pentecostal preacher offered a negative critique of the Catholic Church’s ritual. The response of the priest was that the Catholic Church has *ritual* but the Pentecostal church has *rutual*. The preacher conceded to this truth. If any original intention there was in the Pentecostal movement it was that there should be no human control of the gathering. Yet, the historical movement very quickly developed its own internal patterns that were quite inflexible. In my local

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<sup>40</sup> The choice of personal experience is deliberate and defensible. It does not falsely assume that some uninvolved third party observer’s assessment is more valid than those involved in the social behavior itself. The insight is even more clear because I understand the ‘meaning’ as a participant and as an observer removed. As is to be discussed more in this chapter, the detached viewpoint comes with its own set of problems. For one, it inevitably brings with it its own set of biases and ‘blind’ spots, as Janzen (2004:58) so aptly describes.

church, the encouraged spontaneous behavior was predictable. It followed a pattern assumed by all yet never articulated. Manipulation by preachers certainly occurred but only by borrowing from what already existed from collective serendipitous behavior.

Another example from an opposite point of view is when I joined an intentional Christian community for ten years. This community had its origins in a small group who thoroughly thought out what it meant for Christians to be together and who intentionally sought to design community in a way to avoid many of the pitfalls that had ruined other intentional Christian communities. For one, as is well known among the plethora of Christians in the 70s and 80s who attempted intentional community, the failure rate is nearly 100 percent. Ours certainly failed. Two pertinent observations can be made. One reason for its failure in my view is that the intentional but alternative quotidian life designed by the community succumbed to the greater day-to-day life of the society we lived in. Society's values formed around jobs, family, politics, money, etc. constantly pressed in on the alternative values of the community. The community could not hold its own amidst a greater social context. In addition, the community internally and spontaneously developed a whole array of socially coordinated behaviors that not even the founding members could point to its origins and even less so to intentional design. When I first became a part of the community, I would frequently ask why we do this or that? What was the design or intention? Often the answer came as a shrug and a chuckle. It was done just because it was done, but God forbid that we should stop doing it. Even in such an intentional environment, the group developed powerful social patterns to which no single person or subgroup designed or controlled. In fact, part of the demise of the community was when a certain subgroup attempted to seize control of such elements.

There are two important points. For one, not even one's involvement in the ritual, especially in its developing stages can explain how certain behavior developed, why it developed in a certain order, what it means (if anything). There are countless gestures in a highly ritualized event that may have the most benign of reasons for them, but they take on significance later. Once a communal gesture has been established, it is easy for a

meaning, significance, or goal to latch on to it.<sup>41</sup> It is equally hard for established gestures to be eliminated even when their importance is dubious. We should take note here of the *highly imitative quality* of social behavior.

We have good reason to believe that rituals—by their very nature formal and repetitive—derive from spontaneous, repetitive collective behavior out of which emerges players who realize its powerful effects and manipulate it in certain directions.

Janzen (2004:24) attests to rituals which function with precise formality and repetition even when the community cannot agree on any of its symbolic gestures. In fact, the social group was in the process of splintering into many groups each with its own set of meanings to the ritual. As mentioned in the last chapter, Watts (2007:31) attests more to this. Ritual interpretation becomes more sophisticated as a result of the practice coming into disrepair, when the ‘social goods’ are sorely in question.

Understanding then that rituals originate in spontaneous collective behavior<sup>42</sup> that synergistically gathers its structural shape and is not intentionally designed but only manipulated undermines much of the basis for this foundational argument against Girard. Janzen (2004:79) refers to the resounding critique by Valerio Valeri (1985:67-70) and Catherine Bell (1992:174-175) as negating Girard’s theory completely. Oddly, it is a ‘theoretical’ objection:

Sacrifice...presupposes cultural order. It does not exist outside of human culture because it is culture that gives meaning to human acts, bestowing a system of signification. Girard and Burkert, however, presuppose a meaning for sacrifice that exists before culture does.

Such theories [Girard] simply do not work...because they assume the existence of human meaning, intention, and significance before the social apparatus that supplies such things existed.

Humans have simply never existed without culture, and so it cannot be the case that we created it by means of any sort of ritual. Culture created humanity, and rituals do not exist outside of culture, for there could be no way for humans to give them meaning in such a situation.

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<sup>41</sup> Watts (2007:7) affirms such a view.

<sup>42</sup> Watts 2007:34 again reinforces that the crowd ultimately trumps all disputes over ritual.

The theoretical foundation is, of course, a contextual one. So then, it is not a question of theory verses no theory, or ‘universal theory’ verses contextual theory; it is a question of rival theories of the origins of ‘culture.’ Ritual, it is argued by anthropologists, is fostered by culture. Culture is the context; it comes first. Here, the critique is problematic because it is not consistent with its own thinking, but also because it grossly misreads Girard.

The assumption is two-fold here. One, culture comes first and somehow develops independently from socially coordinated behavior. The very act of gathering, however, is foundational to ritual. To say that humans gathered together, developed all kinds of socially coordinated behaviors for survival and then started developing ritual goes against anthropologist’s own reasoning that all socially coordinated behavior is ritualistic. It is more reasonable to assume, as does Girard, that ritual develops simultaneously and serendipitously as a foundational aspect of culture and the symbols or representations that become associated with it progress, regress, or transgress as the socio/historical/geographical/ or political context changes. Second, and most telling here, is the assumption that the *meaning* of ritual is inflective rather than reflective. This again, goes against Janzen’s own fundamental premise that ritual is a mirrored image of a community’s worldview. We must take note of the statements above: ‘it is culture *that gives meaning* to human acts.’ This is very true, but do participants in ritual require a grasp of meaning *before* they participate in it? Again, what is assumed here is a community’s intentional design to communal acts. Janzen never entertains such a distinction let alone attempts to explain it.

There is then, great irony to this wholesale rejection of Girard. Anthropologists falsely presume of Girard that a well-established ritual of sacrifice existed along with the thoroughly understood meaning by the participants that it quells internal violence *before* humans gathered together. This truly would be an absurd proposition *if Girard were making this!* Which he is not. More accurately, Girard<sup>43</sup> envisions that among

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<sup>43</sup> In Muller’s (1996:e) interview, Girard states: ‘To me there must be more than one originary scene. It is the originary scapegoating which prolongs itself in a process which can be infinitely long in moving from, how should I say, from instinctive ritualization, instinctive prohibition, instinctive separation of the antagonists, which you already find to a certain extent in animals, towards representation. How this process

prehistoric human gatherings (again, gathering is ritualistic) internal violence and communal tension naturally arose *with it*. The mob like killing of one of its members behaves just as all rituals do—it is *ritual* before ritual. There is a constant interplay between the intentional and the spontaneous because *social behavior and human desire are highly imitative*. As the social cognition scientists are discovering, humans' particular imitative quality greatly contributed to our brain development and hence our heightened abilities to communicate and think.<sup>44</sup> A socially coordinated behavior is not directly intended or designed by anyone within the community; it requires no interpretation before, during, or after the performance, and the 'bestowing of a system of signification,' the meaning attributed to such an act, develops slowly afterwards and especially when the prospect of internal violence again rears its ugly head. The irony comes in the assumption of anthropologists that Girard is as vague as they are when it comes to speaking of the intention or design of ritual and the meaning of it. One can detect the frustrated tone of Girard<sup>45</sup> when seeking to make his case that the foundational structure of ritual—what Janzen repeatedly calls the *nature or characteristic* of ritual—is wholesale collective. It only arises and 'works' collectively, and the systems of interpretive meanings and representations, develop concurrently, but always as a product of ritual and especially in the face of recurrent potential internal violence. Girard is in agreement with Janzen that there is a multiplicity of 'meanings' given to ritual acts, depending on the 'cultural context.' The more *immediate* meaning of a ritual is closely aligned with the immediate context. He is in stark contrast to Janzen in that these multiple meanings only partially tell the truth, and this applies especially to the truth of the power of ritual, what is the 'canonical' characteristic of rituals—social preservation is above all else. This even

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of representation actually occurs, I do not know; I cannot define it... But what I would like to see is a more genetic engine of representation rather than a scene which to me is too philosophical, too conceptual to start with'

<sup>44</sup> Saxe (2006:e): 'Why are many researchers looking at how apes and humans imitate actions? Well, when you compare humans to other animals, the thing that's most striking is what we humans can build and create as communities—the skills we can pass down from one person to another and from one group to another. If one individual figures out a new skill, and the next individual starts where that first person left off, then you can really speed up the process of building a culture. A lot of things are involved in humans being able to do that, but one little part of it, and one part that we can study in both humans and apes, is *the process of imitation*.'

<sup>45</sup> Muller, 1996:e



Janzen admits is communicated by the ritual act itself regardless of the ‘context’ or the ‘worldview’ of the particular community.

This complex debate centers on human culture and signification. Central to a definition of human ‘culture’ is that the development of representation or signification began. From here, there is a wide range of views as to what constitutes the earliest form of representation. Here Girard<sup>46</sup> is clear that ‘unconscious scapegoating,’ the real and truly effective scapegoating *precedes* its representation. This is one reason why it takes on a sacred quality. There is an invisible quality to the way the whole community acts in such unity (minus the one of course). As will be pursued further below, representation is what we are addressing when we discuss ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’ of ritual. It is about *the interpretation* of something in progress. Any discussion of the meaning of something necessarily presumes some kind of distance from the thing observed, and it *proceeds* from the phenomena itself. This is a fundamental presumption of scientific inquiry. It is here where those who wish to understand Girard must be clear—it is the victim who provides the first objective outside perspective on the group.

**3.3.4 The meaning of meaning.** This will lead us to a final and telling critique of the ‘contextual’ approach. Put simply, what do anthropologists and Janzen (2004:3) mean by meaning? In every way, they mean the *interpretation* of the ritual by *someone removed from its context*. For the most part, it is the anthropologist who is looking for ‘the meaning’ of a socially coordinated act and who determines the ‘meaning.’ And for what reason is the anthropologist engaged in such an activity? It is to place this ‘meaning’ within a *greater context* of inquiry concerning human social interaction. Furthermore, it is *only the outside perspective* that can *best* decide what it means. This is the presumption throughout the contextual argument. As Janzen (2004:3) states: ‘Anthropologists who study rituals in various cultures point consistently to the contexts in which the rituals are performed and argue convincingly that if *we* are to interpret the

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<sup>46</sup> Muller’s (1996:e) interview in *Anthropoetics II* extensively deals with the issue of representation and the origins of culture. Particular to this interview is the disagreement as to whether language or ritual development most contributes to the emergence of human culture. It is also significant that Girard admits to the lack of a full development of this in his seminal works. Thus, if criticisms of Girard that stop at the seminal works or rely on critiques of only those works are bound to miscomprehend the theory at critical points. Bartlett (2009) provides an extensive critique of this ongoing debate within Girardian thinkers.

social meanings *we* need to understand as much as possible about these contexts’ (emphasis mine). Ritual, however, precedes an interpretation of it. It does not require any participant to interpret it nor understand its structure beforehand. In fact in many ways, ritual resists interpretation. It drives towards representation (meaning) while simultaneously seeking to shut down rival interpretations. Furthermore, Girard<sup>47</sup> argues that no ethnologist has ever witnessed a ritual in its more intensive generative stage. Rituals are in a degenerative stage by the time an observation is made.

Janzen points clearly to what is the task of the social scientist—to interpret the meaning of the ritual—an ethnocentric task to begin with. Honestly, it is not the context that leads to the ‘meaning’ of ritual, but the interpreter. Janzen (2004:68) catalogues the variety of attempts within Old Testament studies to get at ‘the meaning’ of sacrifice. What is missing from Janzen’s discussion is the whole question of why scholars would pursue such an inquiry. Any search for meaning, I suggest, whether it be sacrifice or an unfamiliar word in a text, presumes a greater context and a removed perspective. And this is precisely the stuff of theory-making—to make sense of the data around us. Janzen (2004:4) equates ‘meaning’ with ‘relevance’ and here we are to assume this applies primarily to the people who perform it? Or the scholar who interprets it? Relevance assumes a relating of one thing to another, an application, and the transference or translation of signification in one context to the meaning in another context. So, we are back to comparative methodology.

Janzen (2004:3) appeals to a fundamental illogic of ‘universal theorists’ by way of a contextual analogy in language. It is ‘patently ridiculous,’ he asserts, to determine the same meaning of a word used in different textual settings ‘because we know that to interpret what is said in any language we will have to understand the contexts...’ This is very true. After all, it is the use of the word that came before the dictionary. But once again, it must be asked. Who is after the meaning in the first place and why? It is not those who use the word in their everyday affairs, for they know it implicitly. It is either when one is unfamiliar with it and is separate from the context that wants to ‘define’ its meaning *or* when there is an internal dispute over its meaning. And for what purpose? It

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<sup>47</sup> Muller (1996:e)

is to transfer its meaning to another context, a context in fact, that is greater in scope than the original context. Hence a dictionary logs all the various meanings of a word and places them together in order to see the full scope of its meanings and to place all of those within an even greater interconnection of meanings. Furthermore, a lexicographer understands that even a word in context does not come out of the air. It has its own history prior to it being found in a particular context, hence the study of etymology. Apparently, the lexicographer, like ‘universal theorists’ have this illogical ‘universal urge.’

It is then that the quest for ‘a’ or ‘the’ meaning of sacrifice, ritual, or religion, whether limited to a particular context or not, is an interpretative task. It is a hermeneutical concern. Certainly there are varying ways and degrees of interpretation. Scientists attempt to interpret immediate and unmitigated data. Cultural critics of art, literature, music, popular movements, etc. as well as philosophers interpret stimulus differently because they are essentially interpreting the product of another human’s interpretation; in other words, they interpret removed and mitigated data. The social sciences are uncomfortably somewhere in between. Janzen (2004:77) laments that most of the current and dynamic discussions about sacrifice come from literary and cultural critics as well as theologians than by sociologists or anthropologists, and he is obviously driven by concern to put interpretation on more sure footing. Structuralists as well, such as Detienne and Vernant (1989:20) echo such concerns to avoid the ‘arbitrary’ nature of interpretation.<sup>48</sup>

These concerns are legitimate, but increasing even scientific theory understands that there are no pristine privileged positions. The observer is part of the thing observed. This is no more telling than in the rigorous attempt to come up with a ‘natural’ explanation of religion embarked upon in the early modern period as chronicled by Stenski.

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<sup>48</sup> In his discussion of the current state ‘mass of ferment’ over the exegetical task, Middleton (2005:37) concedes: ‘This aspiration [to have a perspective removed from subjectivity] though now widely recognized as unattainable (and illegitimate) still exercises a profoundly unsettling influence over the sense of epistemic security among many scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines in the contemporary academy.’

The current dynamics of the interpretive task will be elaborated on more in the conclusion of this section. I need only point here that Janzen in particular and social sciences in general are reticent to admit that they too are engaged in that less than certain exercise of interpretation. As Hauerwas (2007:56) has pointed out, this may have more to do with the crisis within the social sciences trying to justify their existence within the economic challenges facing the modern university.

**3.3.5 Meaning and crisis.** Finally we must note another powerful compulsion to seek out ‘meaning’—when an *internal conflict* arises over it. It is a communal crisis or competition over worldviews that the search for meaning comes to the fore.

The whole basis of Janzen’s (2004:4, 27) argument that ritual is a kind of rhetoric is based on the principle that social goods (again, this means social desires) are in conflict with one another. There are ‘competing interpretations of reality and morality.’ That is to say there are competing desires in a community. Ritual is rhetoric precisely because there are rivalries, and the goal of ritual is to either cut off, ‘drive a wedge’ (Janzen 2004:25, 11) through the power, control, and influence of rival ‘desiderata’ in the community or to ‘mask conflict.’

The attestation to the shaping of ritual interpretation in conflict is, dare I say, universal. And even more telling, theory-making about ritual, religion, and sacrifice is highly contentious. It is, in fact, difficult to find a theorist on the subject who does not come around to this aspect. The whole premise of Strenski’s (2003:229) book, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice*, is to explore the complex relationship. ‘This book has tried to give an account of how the “first theory” of sacrifice came into being within the *context of an intellectual, institutional and religious rivalry.*’ Strenski (2003:13-14) finds much of his impetus from Eagleton’s (1990:27) notion of theory-making signaling ‘something amiss.’

Rivalry appears to be the most important contextual variable to consider, and it is in this regard that an objective ‘outside’ perspective and a third party arbitrator is what is most desperately needed. Resolving an internal communal crisis, I suggest, is the compulsion behind ‘interpretation,’ the quest for meaning, and the drive of theory-making whether

ancient or modern. Brueggemann (1997:62-63) shapes his Old Testament theology on such a basis, reading into the Old Testament the same crisis of rival interpretations that is the crisis of post-modernity.

The quandary of post-modern thinking is the realization that no objective third party exists. As Eagleton (1990:27-28) postulates: ‘theorizing is itself an historical event,’ and is subject to ‘joining the very history it ponders, altering it in the process.’ Thus to understand a theory in history would require a ‘meta-theory’ which as ‘an historical event will be absorbed into the history upon which it reflects, and will thus require yet another act of theory to show how all this comes about. The only way out of this infinite regress is a ‘Theory of Theories’ ‘the Grand Global Theory.’ Even Janzen (2004:60) entertains a similar objection. The labeling of one worldview as ideological presumes the superiority of an outside critique that has its own ‘worldview.’ This is part of his argument that we must restrict our inquiry to the context. Strenski (2006:337) as well, has convincingly demonstrated how closely bound the theory is bound to the theorist.

Although this is admittedly so, Janzen (2004:3), and structuralists like Detienne and Vernant (1989:20) easily succumb to the temptation of theorists to negate an opposing theory, or category of theory, by identifying the underlying motivation of the theorist himself. The prime suspect is the Christian view of sacrifice which for nearly two millennia located all inquiry into religion, sacrifice, and ritual in a dialogue around the Eucharist. Sounding sympathetic, yet disapproving, Janzen speaks of theorists like Girard who are ‘driven’ to the ‘appeal’ of ‘monolithic’ theories. Janzen (2004:80), as the objective outside observer, apparently has the interpretive talent to determine that Girard’s ultimate arrival at the Gospels was his underlying motivation all along.

Strenski (2003:4) can also discern the ‘moralistic’ underpinnings of Girard and therefore discounts much of his ideas: ‘But, what drives Girard, I would submit, is his deeply felt moral conviction roundly and loudly to denounce sacrificial victimization, whether it is functional or not.’ Strenski (2003:205) admits that some of this is simply the ‘context’ of our times: ‘For better or for ill, it is not our fashion to believe that the data speak for themselves. Current-day post-positivist attitudes to reading data involve being critical of the reader as well as of what is read.’ It is precarious, however, and disingenuous to

ignore ideas simply on the basis that we can detect the theorist most inner motivations. I know of nothing more anti-scientific than to denounce a theory based on the secret motivations or personal character of the theorist, especially in light of rigorous appeals by Girard that it is a mechanism at work. It has nothing to do with morals.

Yet even Strenski 2006:337 stresses the ‘psychological and socio-cultural conditions that gave these theories their salience and life.’ He concedes that theories should not be discounted because we see from hindsight what kind of influences were at play in the theorist.<sup>49</sup> Strenski (2006:140) explores this dynamic in a considerable way and categorizes the theorists of religion by their motivation to be a ‘caretaker,’ ‘undertaker,’ ‘critic,’ or some combination thereof. He concludes: ‘...the mere fact of their being motivated to study religion for one of these purposes can and ought to be separated from how they actually propose we study religion.’ This criticism is true of almost anyone coming up with a ‘theory’ of sacrifice. There is a ‘sacrificial’ nature in theory-making about sacrifice. Strenski, (2006:3) speaks of ‘cutting up’ theories:<sup>50</sup> ‘Every course in methods and theories that I know seems to conclude by leaving a trail of wreckage—a littered scene of disabled or terminated theories breathing their last.’ There is a real cat-and-mouse game going on here, and we cannot be ignorant of the fact that egos are at stake. There are no stand out authorities, and thus there is only, as Hauerwas (2007:20) puts it: ‘I am talked about, therefore I am.’

We can take off the veneer behind the ‘moralist’ label given to Girard. It is an attempt to exclude theological interpretations from the public dialogue about religion, ritual, and the like.<sup>51</sup> It is certainly legitimate for Strenski to demonstrate Girard’s connection with Hubert and Mauss and Durkheim and to show the moral concerns that were working concurrently with such formulations. But attempts to demoralize religion and ritual are equally problematic. Following the line of many anthropologists, Janzen (2004:21)

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<sup>49</sup> It would be interesting to know from Strenski what he would say about Girard in light of his further inquiry into theories of religion. As it stands, there is a glaring inconsistency between his earlier assessment of Girard as a moralist and his latter conclusion of theory-making in general.

<sup>50</sup> In the proceeding chapters, it will be pointed out how prominent the notion of separating, dividing, and cutting are connected to mythological narratives of origins.

<sup>51</sup> This assertion is part of Milbank’s (1990:1) thesis in *Theology and Social Theory*: ‘...all the most important governing assumptions of such theory are bound up with the modification or the rejections of orthodox Christian positions.’

argues for the moral nature of ritual and insists that the expected moral behavior of community is part of what the ritual ‘means.’ ‘Ritual demands moral response from its participants, and it places them fully into social roles which they must either fully accept or fully leave.’ Morality simply cannot be filtered out of an inquiry into the nature or ‘meaning’ of ritual. It is not only unavoidable, but completely necessary if ritual is to ‘work.’ Thus, issues of religion, ritual, sacrifice, social groups, and morality are inseparable.

Nor for that matter can morality be hermetically filtered out of any pursuit of knowledge, even scientific inquiry. Hauerwas (2007:46) argues for the moral nature of all knowledge. The argument that Janzen gives above for the moral nature and function of ritual is strikingly similar to Hauerwas’s (2007:46) argument for the inseparability of morality from knowledge:

A focus on the virtues means you cannot easily separate what you know from how you come to know. Any knowledge worth having cannot help but shape who we are and accordingly our understanding of the world. Thus I use the description, “moral formation,” rather than education, because I think all education, whether acknowledged or not, is moral formation.

We must regard with some suspicion the dismissal of Girard on the basis of moral underpinnings. This type of criticism provides a ready-made mask for one’s own bias. What I have made reference in passing, I now confidently assert. The moralism charge is a veiled attempt to keep theology out of the public arena under a less-than-convincing garb of objectivity. The social sciences in particular enjoyed the privileged positions in the modern era as providing a more sure footing for public dialogue in a secular, democratic, pluralistic society. This sure footing, however, has since evaporated, yet there is reticence toward allowing the theological task to be a part of the desire toward and task of truth formulation, even though theology has centuries of experience in the art of interpretation.

Strenski has demonstrated well enough the modernist agenda around theory-making as the viable alternative to theology. Yet even after demonstrating the problem of theory-making in the modern era, Strenski (2003:232) still argues against theologians, such as

Milbank who advocate that since there are not privileged positions, theology should be a part of the post-modern dialogue.

As already mentioned, the tide of negative feedback to Girard became suspiciously aggressive the more the Gospels became his favored subject. Even though his earliest explorations into mimetic desire were hailed as championing anti-religious criticism, he later was viewed as an opsimath.

In his recent book, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God*, Hauerwas (2007:18ff) thoroughly investigates the still antagonistic resistance toward the theological enterprise. Echoing Strenski's conclusions, the theory-making flurry in the twentieth century was 'chaotic.' What made the American university flourish was an immense 'bureaucratic overlay' whose sole purpose was its serviceability to the state. Knowledge must find its usefulness for society and in this regard found itself seriously challenged to justify itself. One does not need a scholar, however, to identify the social purpose of the university at least in America. It is all about getting a higher paying job, having a higher income, and bolstering a liberal democratic state. One of the most common complaints of students is that of being required to take certain classes that don't readily transfer to usefulness, most of which has to do with *the interpretive* enterprise, but also includes such subjects as basic literacy and math skills. The challenge to justify itself is especially acute, Hauerwas (2007:130) points out, in the humanities. Hauerwas (2007:21) demonstrates that the academic offerings in ethics and religion are especially 'controverted.'

Be that as it may, it appears that even today the recalcitrance toward theological contributions to the pursuit of knowledge still stands, even more so since the financial pressures for self-preservation, and hence its usefulness to the state, have multiplied. As Hauerwas (2007:19) observes, not even science is 'pure' knowledge, dependent as it is on federal funding.

Hauerwas (2007:20) further challenges the 'secular' universities resistance toward theological dialogue: 'One suspects such dismissals of theology have more to do with the politics of liberal social orders than whether theology passes muster as a knowledge of



the university.’ This for Hauerwas is what is behind the drive to keep religion private. It wants to avoid any subject too ‘controversial to secure cooperation between individuals in liberal societies.’

Theology is certainly not without its responsibilities. The bickering caused by theological entrenchment was a major impetus for the state to seek a saner path. Be that as it may, I need only point out here the readiness to dismiss Girard entirely on the grounds of ‘moralism’ has its own dubious judgments lurking in the background. We must also be reminded that Girard was reticent to even address the biblical implications of his ideas precisely to avoid such charges. He still claims that his ‘theory’ is not particularly theological, and not even particularly ‘religious.’ If anything, it is highly critical of ‘religion.’

It is readily apparent that there is an intensified element of conflict and rivalry inherent to the subject of sacrifice, whether it is the actual practice or the interpretation thereof. Strenski’s (2003:10-20) emphasis on the moralistic predilections of Girard is two-fold. One, he wants to place Girard in the long line of thinkers of ritual and sacrifice that goes back to the intense political debate of Durkheim at the turn of the century. He explores the powerful moral underpinnings to such ‘scientific’ inquiry, not just for Girard, but even for those who presumed to be completely void of such starting points. From a historical perspective, Strenski explores the subject of theory-making around sacrifice to demonstrate what it says about the theorist and his time, more than about the theory itself. Second, Strenski points to one of the more enduring criticism’s of Girard—his resounding negative view of sacrifice in all circumstances. This is what the ‘moralist’ label usually refers to. Strenski argues for a positive value to ‘sacrifice’ that not only Durkheim espoused, but most societies uphold. More will be discussed of this under the discussion of scientific theory and theology below.

In this regard I will offer what I believe is most telling. In our most long and consistently virulent history of violence toward one another, it truly is astounding that a theory which tries to explain such an ingrained social behavior is readily dismissed as being moralistic. It just may be as Girard has asserted—we humans find it near impossible to face up to our own violence. In the age of state run militaries, professional police forces,

heightened techniques in crowd control, the ever increasing delusion of individuality amidst mega socio/economic and electronic systems, all of which the pursuit of ‘knowledge’ is in service of, it shouldn’t surprise us that we can grossly underestimate the role of ritual in societies that had none of this to hold human violence in check.

### **3.4 Girard and Theory in the Late Modern Context**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, examining the criticisms of Girard’s theory jettisons us into an immense web of intertwined variables that is anything but easy to sort through. Overall the goal was to place the whole discussion of theory within the ‘context’ of our current discussion for addressing the subject, and in this way, revealing the relevancy of his ‘theory’ as well as to neutralize objections to it, especially since for the most part, much of the criticisms against Girard equally apply to all theory-making. Also, I wanted to demonstrate the amiability of Girard’s ideas to the more established ‘disciplines’ as well as the elusiveness of it to be easily categorized. This I believe is an advantage and explains Girard’s own reluctance to even call it a ‘theory.’

Before addressing the question of biblical theology in regards to Girard’s theory, it would be will to state some conclusions that I will be operating with for the rest of this work.

**3.4.1. What is post-modern?** Upheaval certainly could be an appropriate designation of the modern period that hardly needs rehearsal. Post-modern, if nothing else, simply signals an ending period for modernity. It does not signal anything new. In some ways it mirrors the beginnings of modernity, especially its aggressive pull to negate that which came before it in an effort to avoid the kind of exhaustion over competing theological dogmas at the beginning of the modernity and theoretical dogma, i.e. ideologies, at its end. Some would say that we are actually beyond post-modernity, labeling it post-post-modern.

Walsh (1990:3) questions, however, whether we are really in a post-modern or even a post-post modern period in that: ‘...we have not comprehended the degree to which we have separated ourselves from the spirit of modernity itself; we do not recognize the

extent to which we have become in the deepest sense postmodern.’ Our ‘trading on the past’, as Eagleton (2003:2) puts it, is still very much the operating procedure. Surely, we have been in a stage of rejecting or repudiating much that has gone on in the last century, but this is a backward looking endeavor. It is still grounded in rejection, still struggling to free itself from its nearly two millennial theological foundation, still struggling to distinguish itself from that which came before. Eagleton (2003:17) asserts that post-modernism spends most of its time assailing a past as if it still had the same force as in modernity.

In our examination of a ‘contextual’ theory of Janzen, for instance, we must notice the repeated emphasis on *difference*, so much so that we should question whether ultimately difference is what is meant by context. The emphasis is not so much on variables as on that no similarities may be entertained. As Janzen (2004:15) insists: ‘*Different* studies of the same ritual performed in *different* social settings indicates that it can express quite *different* social meanings.’

Eagleton (2003:46) identifies this obsession with difference to be an acute postmodern sentiment, but also finds it ironic: ‘Whatever linked us, whatever was the *same*—was noxious. *Difference* was the new catch-cry...’ ‘It was ironic that postmodern thought should make such a fetish of difference, given that its own impulse was to erase the distinctions between image and reality, truth and fiction, history and fable, ethics and aesthetics, culture and economics...’

It appears then, that the ‘context’ of avoiding ‘grand narratives,’ ‘universal theories,’ or ‘trans-contextualization’ is fostered in an ending period of modernity characterized by, dare I say, a sacrificial flurry. It is an over-reaction to the comparative method at the heart of ‘theorizing.’ And of course, from the perspective of Girard, the obsession of difference is the tell-tale sign of the lack thereof. If he be right, we could anticipate that what will emerge is not an absolute respecting of infinite varieties of differences, but rather an insatiable drive toward *the* difference—the one distinguishing factor that can

make sense of a wide variety of variables. This for Girard, is the perfect situation for a new scapegoat since the previous ones have lost their unifying effect.<sup>52</sup>

Eagleton (2003:13) rightly observes that for many postmodernists, the quest of difference has led to a preoccupation with: ‘...what stands askew to society as a whole—the marginal, mad, deviant, perverse, transgressive...And this, ironically, is just the kind of elitist, monolithic viewpoint which postmodernists find most disagreeable in their conservative opponents.’<sup>53</sup> Eagleton (2003:15) goes on to argue that: ‘The postmodern prejudice against norms, unities and consensuses is a politically catastrophic one. It is also remarkably dim-witted.’ In his article, ‘Why Johnny Can’t Dissent’, Thomas Frank (1997:8) convincingly agrees with Eagleton’s assertion, arguing that the marriage of capitalism with consumerism has made it all but impossible to dissent ‘because hip is their official ideology.’ We are all remarkably uniform in our infinite quest for difference.

Eagleton (2003:58) astutely observes that the big difference in this period has become ‘culture.’ Culture is the bottom line of what context means for both Janzen (2004:79) and anthropologists. Culture is not a kind of intellectual preference, but rather the latest in a list of possibilities for an authoritative basis for liberal societies. Having already dethroned God from such a foundation, modernity entertained such candidates as society, progress, nature, class conflict, nationalism, desire, science, etc. Culture it appears, is now the final arbitrator of order, morality, and the resolution of conflict because ‘culture’ has an amazing *self-preservation* drive. Hence cultural criticism takes priority over the criticisms of the past, especially historical criticism.

Walsh (1990:258) similarly assesses the search for an ‘authoritative truth of reality’ as central to ideology. The displacement of Christianity’s role in that reached crisis pitch at the beginning of modernity. Because of this, Walsh (1990:258) asserts, ideological thinkers were more profound in their recognition of the need for a new authoritative

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<sup>52</sup> Girard (1999:164) predicts Christianity to become the scapegoat victim of last resort for the new millennia.

<sup>53</sup> Girard (1972:56-63) has amply pointed out that obsession with difference is reflected in a phobia around sameness. For instance, many cultures express a deep-seated fear of twins or reflected images from a mirror or photograph.

reality.’ ‘Culture’ is the logical end of such a search because it speaks of ‘humanity’s capacity to provide its own absolute reality.’ Culture has become as Walsh (1990:262) puts it ‘the contemporaneous desire to found the new order of reality on the basis of the closed self.’

Anchoring our orientation for reality and resolving conflict in culture is already proving inadequate. ‘Culture’ becomes as slippery a term as we discovered ‘context’ to be. Culture can become, as Eagleton (2003:48) states, ‘trivial or momentous.’ It becomes a circular justification that presents a series of ironic propositions. There is, for instance, the dogmatic assertion that we should avoid all appearance of dogmatism. Also, there is the twisted logic of individualism—the uniform look to our manic pursuit of difference. As Eagleton (2003:49) observes: ‘Everywhere you look, people are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to be themselves.’ For Eagleton (2003:101) the most devastating criticism that can be leveled against cultural theory is its ‘failure to deliver.’ It has failed to grapple with fundamental issues of morality, love, religion, evil, and is ‘dogmatic about essence, universals and foundations...’

He reiterates the dilemma ‘culture’ creates for us, and it is precisely the same dilemma discussed with Janzen and ‘contextual’ theory—no one is standing ‘outside looking in.’<sup>54</sup> Eagleton (2003:55) vividly describes the dilemma of observing ourselves ‘Since our culture is what we are made out of, it would mean that we would have to leap out of our skins, see ourselves seeing something, reflect on the very forces which make us human subjects in the first place.’ This is the assertion of anti-theorists.

Eagleton (2003:73) points to ‘a much deeper irony:’ ‘At just the point that we have begun to think small, history has begun to act big.’ Capitalist globalization has once again brought ‘grand narrative’ on the scene.

It is here, where we once again encounter this unqualified, other than its rejection of similarities, preference for difference. All cultures are different, yes, but all humans inevitably create culture. Girard and others are after the question as to why that is so.

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<sup>54</sup> The lyric by the 60s rock band Moody Blues discusses the psychotic drug cult figure Timothy Leary, the discoverer of LSD. Certainly the experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs was an attempt to step outside of culture and the self to observe them.

Why do humans inherently move towards ‘culture’? Why do they develop along similar lines? Why do they inevitably create ritual? It appears that for Janzen and anthropologists these are not interesting questions or that the questions are outside the field of anthropology. This may in fact be the case.

**3.4.2 What is ideology?** We would do well to clarify the use of the term ‘ideology’ since it has been applied to Girard. I assert that what makes for an ideology is simply the shutting down of self-reflection, the interpretive enterprise.

Let us return for a moment to our analysis of Janzen. Within his discussion of the rhetorical power of ritual, Janzen (2004:27) makes clear the ideological nature of ritual itself:

Ritual is not a debate, for it does not generally allow discussion about competing pictures of cosmic and moral reality. Its formal character excludes discussion almost entirely, and makes only assent to or absolute rebellion against its worldview the only choices participants can make.

Ritual is naturally ideological, equating ideology with worldview and the collective desire of the community. This description remarkably echoes Walsh’s (1990:xii) definition of ideology which is the bane of post-modernism. For in comparing the ‘great ideologies’ of modernism with the ‘lesser ones’ of today, he states: ‘What they often share with the great ideologies is a pattern of thinking or, of not thinking. The ideological style is the refusal to entertain questions that might jeopardize one’s convictions.’ Put another way, ideology is where we maintain ‘parallel monologues.’<sup>55</sup> My suggestion is that in the vastly diminishing ability of academic disciplines to maintain their own distinctive (and thus justify further funding) the entrenchment into every increasing specialization is just that kind of ‘parallel monologue.’ Nobody, and especially not a literary critic or theologian, understands anthropology like an anthropologist does. Let us have no illusions here; ‘universal theorists,’ and theologians are not the sole proprietors of ideology and parallel monologues. The drive for distinction gets ever more entrenched.

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<sup>55</sup> A phrase coined by Richard Neuhaus (2002:e) in reference to Orthodox/Catholic dialogue.

There is, however, another ‘thought-stopping’ endeavor that works from an opposite direction. As Paul Ricoeur (1986:2) has suggested, all one has to do is attach the label ‘ideology’ to someone to expel it from the public arena. The sacrificer becomes the next sacrifice, and thereby a system for establishing difference and prohibitions is once more established. This is especially acute in American politics, for accusations of ‘ideological agendas’ flourish the moment the attempt is made to take an idea, nurtured partly by systematic formulations of ideas (theory) and partly by haphazard formulations (political ritual), and *apply it* to real world situations. It is evident that the labeling of ‘ideological’ is the attempt to differentiate by claiming to stand outside or above the fray.

Hauerwas (2007:180) has addressed this in his discussion of the secular. Hauerwas (2007:170) defines secular in terms of our view of time: ‘By secular I mean the name given to that time, and the correlative politics, in which time is no longer interwoven with higher time.’ The social sciences, in their attempt to have the objective view point, have been ‘antihistorical’ and reductionistic in outlook, replacing narrative with demonstration. ‘The problem,’ Hauerwas (2007:178) states: ‘...quite simply, is that secular time results in the attempt to secure peace without eschatology.’

Hauerwas (2007:174) argues that the ‘secular’ state attempts to create a scenario which contains the Christian narrative, and in effect ‘displaces’ the Christian narrative. Rather, Christians affirm all of humanity is part of a story that is already structured to go a certain way. Christians structure time as narrative, and each Christian is to find oneself within that Great Narrative called the gospel. At least from Hauerwas’ point of view, we can better understand why the story elements in the Bible, more than ritual description, does and should preoccupy us more. It speaks to our compulsion to place our immediate ‘context’ within a greater one, a universal one.

Eagleton (2003:99) echoes such sentiment asserting that what still gives the Christian message such power is its ubiquitous scope, both in terms of its unifying element and its ability to encompass a vast array of culture particularities. Eagleton speaks of the need for a ‘home of the human spirit.’ For most of human history, that home was religion, but in the postmodern era, ‘culture’ has been bequeathed with that responsibility. Because of this Eagleton postulates: ‘it is no wonder, then, that culture has been in perpetual crisis

since the moment it was thrust into prominence. For it has been called upon to take over the functions in a post-religious age.’

For Eagleton (2003:99), the genius of religion was its ability ‘to link fact with value’ for all of society. Religion ‘could create a sense of common purpose far beyond the capacity of a minority culture. It outlined the grandest narrative of all, known as eschatology.’ ‘Culture, however, divides these domains down the middle.’

Christianity is powerfully self-reflective. Indeed, in the doctrine of the incarnation it profoundly addresses the whole issue so perplexing in modernity. It reflects and perceives from inside the community, as a part of the community. It insists on transcendence by discovering the full depth of our shared humanity.

Similarly, Eagleton (2003:155) grounds our universal or common perspective solidly on our biological, physical body. ‘It is because of the body, not in the first place because of Enlightenment abstraction that we can speak of morality as universal. The material body is what we share most significantly with the whole of the rest of our species, extended both in time and space.’ It is our fundamental physical nature and likeness, which inherently draw us to be together. Says Eagleton (2003:159): ‘Human bodies are of the kind that can survive and flourish only through culture. Culture is what is natural to us...Because our bodies are materially geared to culture—because meaning, symbolism, interpretation and the like are essential to what we are—we can get on terms with other cultures...’

Curiously, Strenski (2006:134) concludes something similar to Eagleton: ‘But the truth may be that religion is sublinguistic and prerational in its origins (Girard), and may just be the name of the ultimate shape people give to the way they live. But so what? As long as human beings are *embodied beings*, it would be odd indeed if our embodied nature should have nothing positive to do with being religious. We can at least thank Robertson Smith for recognizing that human religiosity can be firmly embodied...’

Within this context, we can interject something significant and unique about sacrifice that distinguishes it from other ritual. As Jay (1992:4) observes: ‘...sacrifice...*does not* so divide meaning and matter. Sacrificers act through and upon meaningful matter: the



living body.’ Jay interjects this critical observation within the debate as to the ‘instrumental’ aspect of ritual—what I have discussed as the *nature* or *characteristic* of ritual that has a universal effect on those performing it and the immediate significance, what Jay calls the ‘expressive aspect,’ the community gives to it. It is actions on living flesh, and especially the human body, that most symbiotically connects utility with morality, design with spontaneity, and inflective social behavior with reflection on it. And it is the body that resolves the crisis of competing interpretations. ‘Our bodies,’ Jay (1992:11) asserts, ‘are not really the main obstacle to knowledge of the world; they are instead our access to the world, the fallible and mortal ways we have of being in the world. So also, it is membership in a social world...that makes ritual potentially intelligible for us to begin with.’ It is a social act upon the body that profoundly binds social forces, both good and bad, together.

It is on this base that Eagleton (2003:160) confronts the ‘orthodoxy’ of post-modernity. With all of its fervor against universality and ideology, post-modernity has only duplicated another version:

Compare, then, this materialist idea of universality, one based on our bodies, with the familiar bogymen of universality peddled by post modernists. On this view, universality is a Western conspiracy which speciously projects our local values and beliefs on the entire globe...It is significant that when postmodernists turn their thoughts to universality, they see it first of all in terms of values and ideas...*This is an idealist*, not a material conception of universality.

What is the true bane, then, of ideology is that even more than shutting out ideas, it shuts out others. For all of its exaltation of culture, it in reality destroys culture.

**3.4.3 Theory-making.** There is, I suggest, a common thread among many referred to in this work who attempt to address ‘ideology.’ We can affirm with Strenki (2006:3) there is ‘no perfect Prince Charming of theories’ awaiting us. But with those who have attempted to address postmodernism and ideology some suggestions are worth considering. At some level, it is a matter of reaffirming and refining the theoretical enterprise rather than scrapping it.

Central to Eagleton’s thesis is a call to break out of a postmodern ‘spirit’ that ever so quickly settled into its own ‘orthodoxy’, its own dogmatic ways. This being among other

things, its repudiating of commonality and its subsequent obsession with difference and its playing all the cards on culture as the authoritative basis. Eagleton envisions much of the move forward is a reinvigorating of the fundamental aspect of theory-making—self-reflection, the interpretive endeavor, which is always an inside out enterprise. It should not and indeed cannot be done by seeking the removed objective outside observer position. As the discussion of ideology brings to bear, this posture lends itself quite readily to shutting down or out of perceptions outside its purview. Self-reflection is at the heart of theory-making and Eagleton insists that this must flourish. Theory is simply for Eagleton (2003:2) ‘...a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions.’ It is critical reflection on what we are doing as a culture. Theory is ‘the taxing business of trying to grasp what is actually going on...’ (Eagleton, 2003:223).

Strenski (2006:2) defines theory as: ‘the object of a disciplined academic or systematic program of self-reflection.’ He (2006:338) concludes something similar to Eagleton, reaffirming the need for self-reflection as essential to human existence. ‘Theorizing is an often passionate, engaged activity driven by an intense desire to find meaning in what passes before us in the world...a fundamental human orientation to the world.’ Certainly, theory-making had its hubris, and if anything, we can agree with Strenski that theory-making has become a more humble affair.

Walsh (1990:246) also sees critical self-reflection as essential and that it must be more intrinsically tied to our common humanity. This is the failure of theory turned ideology—‘It must be admitted that the abrogation of all moral restraints occurred first in the realm of thought; the wholesale extermination of historically retrograde peoples was no more than an application of accepted intellectual principles.’ Self-reflection is not the passing fancy of academics in ivory towers. Walsh (1990:247) believes it is essential to our survival (and here I remind that it is in competition with mythology’s, ritual’s, religion’s, ideology’s and society’s sense of social survival). For Walsh, those who have mounted a ‘successful resistance to the ideological extreme of modernity succeed when they are willing to explore the full human experience to its depths, to contemplate ‘humanity’s true participation in divine being.’ This contemplation must include the willingness to reflect on ‘how such unlimited cruelty and misery could have happened.’

It must also include the reflection on the culpability of every human. True critical self-reflection—theory-making—shares Solzhenitsyn’s conviction that ‘there are no loopholes for anybody who wants to be honest.’ This, I suggest, is profoundly Girard.

Among those mentioned above, all agree. Theory-making is essential human work. It is critical self-reflection *from the inside out*. It doesn’t abandon humanity for ideas, but seeks to explain and explore humanity in all of its depths. And it is a ‘messy’ business fraught with difficulty and always, always, in the heat of conflict. In fact, it is in the stress and duress of human conflict, as Strenski (2006:337) stresses, that gives a good theory its ‘salience and life.’

Simply put, the very impulse toward ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ is a drive toward connectedness. It is inherently comparative. It is an inside (the community) endeavor, and it always moves outward, toward the greater ‘context.’

Perhaps we, the human community or at minimum the Western community, are facing the limits of limitlessness. From strictly a human point of view, have we come to the limit of what we can appeal to as ‘authoritative’—that is Culture? All we have is us.

**3.4.4 Scientific or not?** Having explored to a limited extent the context of ‘theory-making’ in a postmodern ideologically suspicious environment, it would be important to address the discussion of science and scientific theory, for some of the debate around Girard is in such a direction. It is evidently part of Janzen’s concern in his contextual approach to establish a surer more scientific foundation for inquiry rather than the more speculative enterprise of ‘theory.’ Questions of verification arise with Girard. If the sacrificial mechanism can’t be seen, observed, measured, or tested by scientific method, how can it be considered scientific? Then there is the question in an opposite direction—what does it matter whether it is ‘scientific’ or not? Hasn’t the whole positivist higher critical approach run into its own dead end? Aren’t we done with the ‘assured results of science’?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Brueggemann (1997:61-116) ‘Retrospect 2: The Contemporary Situation’ for a summary of the negative evaluation of higher criticism from 1970 on. North (1985:26) cautions against theology being too closely attached to a ‘falsifiable’ proposition.

The question as to what extent mimetic theory should be considered a scientific hypothesis to be tested, or an hermeneutical insight to be explored is entertained not only by critics but also with those who consider Girard's ideas worthy of exploring.<sup>57</sup> Certain 'Girardians' such as Williams (1991:14) speaks of a 'social scientific model of explanation and argues that it 'has great analytic power in interpretation of data.' The value in Girard's 'model' is for Williams' (1991:4) its ability to engage a variety of traditional academic disciplines. In other words, like scientific inquiry, it is broad in scope and moves toward explanation, not away from it. I agree with Williams (1991:17); Girard is one of the few who ventures into *why* humans sacrifice. The issue of the origin of culture discussed above is common among Girard's most aggressive critics, and fundamentally, this has to do with the lack of verifiability. But this holds true of any inquiry into origins, including the origins of the universe. The lack of verifiability does not alone exclude it from 'science.'

In the early Modern period, a good deal of scientific inquiry into social behavior dealt with sheer observation and classification of newly available amounts of previously unavailable data. It was highly descriptive. Certainly, anyone who wants to appear scientific can safely remain in the descriptive realm, cataloging data and explaining processes. This appears to be much of the current trend in social sciences. Strenski (2003:18) for instance, makes the distinction between *theories* of sacrifice and *accounts* of sacrifice, the former being *explanations* of the object while the latter merely *descriptions*.

It is no secret that the discussion of the 'scientific' centers around a claim to legitimacy.<sup>58</sup> This, of course, is greatly enforced by the utility of applied science, i.e. technological innovation and its useful partnership with the state. As Barrow (2007:244) states: 'Science is most at home attacking problems that require technique rather than insight.' Girard and others have attempted to ground mimetic ideas as more scientific theory probably because a 'scientific' theory is less inclined to suffer the 'ideological' label.

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<sup>57</sup> See Kirwin 2005:112-125 "The Future of Mimetic Theory"

<sup>58</sup> In his assessment of currents in sociology and religion, Kuenzlen (2007:187) states: 'Sociology has become a hermeneutic authority, whose concepts and images concerning human existence and the world govern our understanding of the external and internal factors of human life.'

Bottum (1996: e), however, believes Girard to be evasive about such a label in order to avoid the pseudo-science malaise that Freud ended up in. Nonetheless, Girard (1978:219) speaks of his model being scientific, not in the positivistic sense, but in an analytic one, and this position has attracted some of the sharpest attacks as well. The labeling of Girard as a ‘moralist’ attempts to undercut claims to objectivity.

As I have already argued before, there is nothing that has more of a universal drive to it than science. The very drive to explain is a comparative enterprise, and we should not be the slightest surprised that the early modern theorists of sociology and religion took their cues from the emerging evolutionary model. Even to this day, biology textbooks for high school espouse the powerfully simplistic explanatory model of evolution. It is the heart of scientific inquiry to reduce inexhaustible variation into its simplest form. Scientific inquiry never leaves distinction, variation, or difference alone. It must find its connection to the total. Barrow (2007:227) asserts that universality is grounded in reality. That there is a connection to things is fundamental to a true perception of the world: ‘...there must exist some invariances of the world as we change the locations in space and time of all its most elementary entities so that the most basic fabric of reality is universal rather than dependent upon parochial things.’

Barrow (2007:8) rightly observes that the universal drive is *not* fundamentally a ‘scientific’ impulse, but a religious one: ‘The unity of the Universe is a deep-rooted expectation...we notice that this motivation is essentially religious. There is no logical reason why the Universe should not contain surds or arbitrary elements that do not relate to the rest.’ Nevertheless, the unifying urge is inseparable from scientific inquiry as evidence by the very subject of Barrow’s book, *New Theories of Everything: The Quest for Ultimate Explanation*.

Strenski (2006:3) confirms that a theory is universalistic by nature and further suggest that theology’s explanatory power had diminished in the modern era partly due to its sectarian or sequestered thinking. In other words, a Catholic or a Quaker had little compunction to explain things beyond the needs of its particular group. The approach of studying religion from a standpoint that the Christian perspective was the central or pivotal standpoint to evaluate other religions—that is, the presupposition that the

Christian religion was unique or fundamentally different (and superior) in almost any aspect under consideration—also contributed to quarantining theology. This presupposition took theology out of the discussion of the universal, out of the realm of ‘science,’ and it was theory that could now best keep pace with scientific inquiry. Theory replaced theology in the modern era because the fundamental demeanor and outlook of theory-making was universal whereas theology was increasingly limiting its outlook.<sup>59</sup>

The need to speak of religion in scientific language came as the outlook on religion dramatically reversed. Whereas before religion was a way to explain problems, later on religion was the problem to be explained. Strenski (2006:3) explains how the scientific model of comparison took hold in the study of religion:

But the theories provoked by the general problems of religion did need to speak across sectarian and religious lines. These theories need to speak in the manner of ‘science’ and try to appeal to the broadest consensus about the nature of facts, evidence, and such that they could. The new scientific studies of religion had therefore to be comparative, and never allow one individual religious perspective to hold a privileged place.

Theories in a sense are ‘scientific’ especially and maybe only when they are universal in perspective—comparative. For sure, one aspect of theorizing should not be squelched—seeking to explain one of the most formidable and profound phenomenon of the human venture—human violence.

It can easily be deduced from here that part of the prominence of science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is precisely its ‘grand narrative’ appeal. It is curious to see the ready recognition of Christianity’s influence on the study of sacrifice, but the complete inability to see its influence on science’s drive toward universal principles. Up until the modern era, the drive for universals in faith and knowledge abided side-by-side. Taking our cue from Strenski, it may have been the sectarian division of Christianity in Europe that drove many to solace in the sciences. Due to the continued inability of Christianity to live up to

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<sup>59</sup> Milbank (1990:1) reiterates this assertion: ‘The pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease, because once theology surrenders its claim to be a meta-discourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy.’ Hauerwas (2007:54-55) makes a similar assessment, saying theology’s inability to engage secularism has created among other things a ‘fortress’ mentality.

its ‘grand narrative,’ science still to this day seems to provide a clearer vision of universality and is therefore, as Strenski<sup>60</sup> is arguing, a more solid ground for a pluralistic society to count on. It provides a surer forum for public dialogue. The reticence to allow theological discussion back into the public square, although not really justifiable, is none-the-less understandable. Certainly some of the resistance to Girard is girded by such sentiment.<sup>61</sup>

Odd as it is, theorizing has now suffered a similar fragmentation, and in this respect ‘post-modernity’ is bi-polar. Like our early modern processors, we are disgusted and exhausted from the interminable bickering of theorizing, ‘parochializing’ each other’s theory with the ‘ideological’ label. Universalizing has its nasty side-effects, and post-modernism, if in fact we are in a postmodern phase, has developed a profound distaste for it, insisting on the complexity of the world, in particular human complexity. All the while, we cling to the surety of science precisely because it still can and does reduce things to manageable, serviceable simplicity, in other words, to universal characteristics. And this is valuable because it seemingly goes hand-in-hand with *our survival*.<sup>62</sup> Even more so, it as Eagleton (2003:72) points out: ‘There is, however, a much deeper irony. At just the point that we have begun to think small, history has begun to act big.’ Capitalist globalization has once again brought ‘grand narrative’ on the scene.

A universal perspective is not so easily evaded, and it seems science understands this well. Fundamental to science and math, Burrows (2007:11) asserts, is its compatibility with humans to ‘algorithmically compress’<sup>63</sup> data, in other words, to reduce vast amounts of variables into manageable portions, filtering out the rest. It also has to do with the major question I have been addressing throughout this chapter—How do we observe the

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<sup>60</sup> Strenski 2003:232 ‘Thus, all along, for the Durkheimians and for me, the critical perennial issue in this rivalry has been the question of whether theological discourse...can qualify as public discourse—especially in the domain of religion...The Durkheimiens represent the view that it cannot.’

<sup>61</sup> Both Williams (1991:19) and Strenski (2003:21) object to De Heusch, Luc’s (1983) ‘ludicrous’ critique that Girard’s theory is simply a disingenuous attempt to sneak Christianity back into the public dialogue.

<sup>62</sup> This said, of course, with irony since our technology is also contributing to global disaster.

<sup>63</sup> Barrow (2007:11): ‘Any string of symbols that can be given an abbreviated representation is called algorithmically compressible. On this view, we recognize science to be the search for algorithmic compressions.’

very thing that we are a part of? The very act of our observation alters not only us, but, when it comes to human behavior, alters the object.

Barrow (2007:231) advocates a kind of circularity to algorithmic compression. Our own survivability requires an ability on our part to make sense of the world and adapt. The more this is done through time the more we get hard wired to compress data. Barrow (2007:232) states:

But we recognize that the human mind plays a non-trivial role in this evaluation. Inextricably linked to the apparent algorithmic compressibility of the world is the ability of the human mind to carry out compressions. Our minds have evolved out of the elements of the physical world and have been honed, at least partially, towards their present state by the perpetual process of natural selection. Their effectiveness as sensors of the environment, and their survival value, are obviously related to their abilities as algorithmic compressors.

Again, scientific thinking is intrinsically universal in outlook, and fundamental to that outlook is the ability to describe the world around us with a compressed language of expediency. This, explains Barrow (2007:232), is why the ‘expedient language’ of math works so well to describe the physical world.

A critical common element in theology and theory (if they are not parochialized) and science is their universal scope of inquiry. This is a bottom line conviction, perhaps even still influenced by theological paradigms.<sup>64</sup> It is a conviction that a unity among humans, and indeed the cosmos, is desirable, obtainable, and perhaps even essential.<sup>65</sup>

But there are varying aspects of what it means to think ‘scientifically.’ Barrow (2007:243) suggests three levels primarily dependent on the subject matter.

Science is at its best when its ‘compressions’ are *computational*—there can be a ‘step-by-step sequence of better and better approximations to the phenomenon under study.’ In this respect, the best science is able to predict outcomes. This prediction is less interpreter or author dependent. Any trained scientist or mathematician can calculate the

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<sup>64</sup> ‘This modern urge for completeness had developed hand-in-hand with the desire for a *unified* picture of the world...the legacy of the great monotheistic religions is the expectation of a single over-arching explanation for the Universe’ (Barrow 2007:213).

<sup>65</sup> The proceeding chapters also conclude a similar goal in mythological cosmogonies.



data. In some respects, mimetic theory has such potential. Thus the engagement of the *Colloquium of Violence and Religion* into contemporary affairs. The human compulsion to ‘get rid’ of a troublesome student, employee, neighbor, boss, child, or public official is highly predictable. To some degree, Girard appeals to the predictability of humans to resort to scapegoating in a crisis.

But when the representations (compressed model) of the subject are not consistent, making our approximations less verifiable, this is a *linear* or *listable* level of scientific inquiry. Barrow (2007:244) does not downplay this kind of science. He simply concedes that: ‘These phenomena do not permit the effective use of the minds most successful device for making sense of complexity.’ This may be simply because ‘our minds are not adapted for this *kind of complexity*.’ It is in this second category that most social or cultural theory would fall. Certainly, the sacrificial mechanism is a compressed model of diverse data even though it is not fully computable.

Finally Barrow (2007:245) speaks of the *prospective* features of our world—‘those which we cannot recognize or generate by a series of sequence of logical steps...they cannot be encompassed by any finite collection of rules or laws...Beauty, simplicity, truth...There is no magic formula that can be called upon to generate all the possible varieties of these attributes.’

Barrow concedes that there are certain irresolvable tensions within scientific theory that greatly impede arriving at a ‘theory of everything.’ One dynamic is between the symmetry of the universe and its ‘broken symmetry.’ Barrow (2007:138) reminds us that the ‘laws of Nature,’ although few, are powerfully simple. But no one can see a law in action. One can only see the effects, and the effects can be extremely complex: ‘Despite these ongoing tendencies, we are aware of the fact that no matter how often scientists tell us that the laws of Nature are simple, symmetrical, and elegant, the real world isn’t. It is messy and complicated...the reason is clear. We do not observe the Laws of Nature; we observe their outcomes.’ Girard (1972:309) makes a similar case. We cannot see the mechanism in operation precisely because it would not work if we did. We can recognize the scapegoat mechanism only by its effects. It remains open as to whether Girard says this by way of analogy with science or whether he is making a case for its verifiability.

In an explanation such as this, I find a window of understanding in this tension between ‘context-dependency’ and Girard’s reduction of a single operative mechanism. For starters, both are an aspect of scientific *thinking*. In an era where, science has preeminence, it is doubtful that anyone could be outside the realm of its contours. As Strenski (2006:338) reminds, all the modern theorists of religion thought they were scientific. The modern period, especially in the social sciences, was driven perhaps more by the latter, to find fundamental forces at work in human behavior and reduce things to certain ‘laws,’ ‘functions’ or ‘structures.’ In reaction, the contextualists decried the bowling over of observable complexities. This, I suggest, is an overreaction. The over emphasis on complexity simply leads to the compulsion to micromanage it and leads to yet one more alternative universal theory in the guise of no theory. As Eagleton says (2003:45): ‘Everyone was thinking small. Micropolitics broke out on a global scale. A new epic fable of the end of epic fables unfurled across the globe.’

Even in the frontiers of scientific thought, there may be limits to what we can know. Barrow (2007:239) sees that there are two streams of thought in science’s view of the universe: symmetry or computation. Is the Universe a cosmic kaleidoscope or a cosmic computer, a pattern or a program? Or either. To choose is problematic, Barrow warns. ‘Throughout the history of human thought, there have been dominant paradigms of the Universe. These mental images often tell us little about the Universe, but much about the society that was engaged in its study.’ We can follow a whole history of viewing the universe as an organism (the Greeks), as a Clock (Newtonian), a machine (industrial age), and Barrow casts doubt that science can answer this question. Barrow reminds throughout his book that our ability to comprehend the world around us is symbiotically linked to our capacity to comprehend ourselves. It is uniquely tied to who we are as humans, for we are not only able to think about the universe (computation), but even more so, we are able to think about how we think about it (interpretation).

The objective of this discussion was simply to place some perimeters around this discussion of ‘universal,’ ‘context,’ and ‘science’ in regards to certain objections to Girard. It seems as though some in an effort to counter Girard stretch the limits of his theory far beyond its reasonable intention or design. Being ‘universal’ in outlook does

not mean it seeks to encompass ‘everything.’ It does not mean that there is an avoidance of complexity or diversity simply because one perceives indelible patterns in human thought and behavior. Indeed, the drive towards deciphering destructive human patterns, like in psychoanalysis, is accompanied by a desire to disrupt or abrogate it. It does not mean that it is a closed system, limited only to data that will not challenge its premise; on the contrary, it opens up viable venues for further exploration. For it is as Barrow (2007:143) reminds, not even a theory of everything can cover everything: ‘There is no formula that can deliver all truth, all harmony, all simplicity. No Theory of Everything can ever provide total insight. For to see through everything, would leave us seeing nothing at all’ (2007:246).

There is a tremendous pliability to Girard’s theory. It is scientifically minding as well as hermeneutically sensitive. As Kirwin states (2005:113): ‘Girard has managed, perhaps better than anyone, to hold these in tension without succumbing to any.’ Kirwin (2005:1120) ironically remarks that if Girard’s theory holds to be true, its verifiability will be in that there will be no one around to verify it.

With this in mind, I turn attention to hermeneutical and theological critiques and considerations.

### **3.5 Theological and Hermeneutical Concerns.**

The insights of Girard have caught the attention in some theological and biblical circles, especially in America.<sup>66</sup> Often, one can find a passing reference to Girard, either positively or negatively. Some, like John Milbank, Urs von Balthasar, Raymund Schwager, Williams, Hamerton-Kelly, and William Schweiker, have considered the work of Girard important enough to devote some interaction with him within their own theological projects. The brief summary below in no way exhausts this interaction, but provides an adequate sampling of the kind of dialogue that is currently going on. Here, we find both the admiration and critique to veer in alternate and competing directions with that which has been addressed so far.

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<sup>66</sup> Agnew (1987), Hunsinger (1998), McKenna (1985), North (1985), Wallace (1989)

**3.5.1 A theological critique.** In his work *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, John Milbank offers poignant critique of sociology and its engagement in theology and religion during the modern era. Within this evaluation, we find a critique of Girard's work from a theological perspective.

For one, Milbank (1990:397) finds an overall positive assessment to the insight Girard brings to biblical interpretation: 'Now such an analysis is profoundly perceptive, and manifestly in accord with the Augustinian perspective which I am advocating.' His criticism, however, is two-fold. First, in keeping with his overall thesis of the book, Milbank places Girard squarely within the positivist vein of sociology. Sociology, Milbank contends, has attempted and failed to 'encompass' or 'police' religion by presuming to 'explain' it. Ultimately, sociology creates its own religion and its own faith. Milbank (1990:144) states:

Sociology is doomed simply to rediscover, everywhere, the specifically modern confinement and protection of 'the religious sphere.' The positivism which defines religion at , beyond, or across the boundaries of the 'social fact,' is always subverted by a more radical positivism which recognized the peculiarity and specificity of religious practice and logic, and, in consequence, the impossibility of any serious attempt at either scientific explanation or humanist interpretation.

Most critiques of Girard addressed so far in this chapter have been, as it were, an internal debate within the general contours of the 'social sciences.' The above discussion as to how 'scientific' a theory is, especially when clarifying religion, is doomed to failure in Milbank's view. For Milbank, modernist attempts to get at the heart of religion inevitably project modern dilemmas and power struggles on to the ancient world. As already discussed with Strenski and Barrow above, theories tend to say more about the theorist and his times than anything else. In essence, Girard and the sociological vein with all its variations has unsuccessfully tried to usurp philosophy, the true medium for theological formulation.

For Milbank (1990:397) the whole sociological discussion of the origins of culture and religion is simply attempting to project the modern problem of hierarchal social

arrangements by imagining some natural more egalitarian and chaotic origin to society.<sup>67</sup> There is no reason to assume the priority of a society of rival equals over a hierarchical arrangement. If a hierarchal arrangement was already in place, then certain things could be valued objectively and not be dependent on another who ‘models’ desire. Arguing similar to Augustine, Milbank (1990:398) asserts that the whole myth of chaotic beginnings has more to do with a community’s protection from an *external* threat rather than an internal one. Thus, internal debate about the origins or genesis of culture, and perhaps even the universe, is mythical. Just like the ancient myths, the view is of violent beginnings. The cosmos as well as the human society goes from chaos to order.

There are a few things that are problematic with this evaluation. For one, even though Milbank disapproves of the whole discussion of the origins of culture as a positivist construct, he employs the same reasoning, assuming the preexistence of culture before representation and ritual rather than as simultaneously and serendipitously emerging. Milbank, like the anthropologists discussed earlier, have misread Girard. Also, Milbank appears unaware of Girard’s distinction between external and internal mediation of desire. Hence, Girard affirms that there can be objective desires that do not lead to rivalry. Finally, it must be said that the critical aspects of Girard’s theory *do not depend* on an explanatory model of origins.<sup>68</sup> Milbank (1990:398) is right to conclude that there are severe limitations to our conceptions of social origins, whether Girard or anyone else. No matter how rigorous our thinking may be, we can only imagine the dynamics involved in the emergence of human culture. A valid critique of Girard depends much more on his evaluation of how human desire operates. This aspect, I assert, is verifiable to some degree as the work of social cognitive science may reveal more.

Milbank’s (1990:398) second objection has to do with the outcomes on theology.

Milbank objects to Girard’s resoundingly negative view of human desire and thus

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<sup>67</sup> As I proceed through this thesis, it will become clearer that narratives of origins have always been contentious and are attempts to legitimate the current social arrangement by projecting it back onto a distant past. In a subtle way, this affirms Girard’s thesis. What is fundamentally at stake is rivalry over competing desires. We argue over who possess the original desire.

<sup>68</sup> This point is perhaps a bit tricky. Certainly, Girard’s seminal works are attempting to engage the *ongoing* discussion of the origins of culture so hotly pursued in modernity. But at least as I understand Girard, the issue of the origins of culture *is not the pivotal issue* to which Girard’s theory rests on. That scapegoating is an intrinsic part of human social behavior seems obvious to me even *if* it developed *from* culture rather than developing culture.

echoing the moralism charge of Strenski. Is it not possible for humans to positively desire an object, ultimately God, without any mediation? In other words, can humans generate good desires that are separate from social awareness or dependency? Girard only speaks of a negative assessment of humanity with no real positive alternative. Girard's Jesus can only resoundingly negate our violence. We are offered no way out or forward, especially through a sacrificial paradigm. Essentially, there can be no positive mimesis that can be associated with sacrifice and no genuine alternative way of living. This creates Christological problems especially around the incarnation.

Milbank's critique here, in my view, is more valid than what we have reviewed so far. For one, we should continue to question the extent sociological frameworks can or should replace philosophical ones for the work of theology. As Kuenzlen (2007:187) suggests, the 'hypostatic' view of society, the boast of sociology, is on the decline. Brueggemann (1997:52) also believes that Old Testament theology cannot be at the service of sociology. Milbank (1990:112ff) is correct that social sciences are a-historical, and although Old Testament theology has run into its limitations with the historical-critical approaches, there is no compelling reason to abandon it altogether for a sociological model. Ironically, this frees up mimetic theory. Girard's attempt to engage social theory has too often been equated with social theory. Mimetic theory is not social theory even though it actively engages social theory. The same applies to psychology, philosophy and theology. Its closest affinities are to literary criticism.

Second, Girard has left the theological implications of his theory open-ended, unaddressed, or unresolved. This criticism is a recurrent one among Christian thinkers.<sup>69</sup> I venture two explanations. Girard has displayed much caution in venturing into the specialized disciplines of not just Biblical studies, but also theology and the social sciences. He does not claim expertise in any of these areas and invites further inquiry. Also, Girard's evasiveness can be attributed to a French intellectual disposition that is long on analysis and short on prescription.<sup>70</sup> It is quite evident that Girard's later works

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<sup>69</sup> See "René Girard for Holy Week" by Oaks (2007: electronic version), North (1985:26), Wallace (1989:318, 322).

<sup>70</sup> Jacques Ellul, a popular French thinker in the 70s and 80s wrote prolifically in a dialectic style, and rarely offered a way forward. In his book, *The Technological Bluff*, Ellul (1990:vii) speaks of his earlier

reflect serious consideration as to the positive aspects of mimetic desire and its relation to a positive view of sacrifice.<sup>71</sup> The positive view of sacrifice is certainly explored in the Genesis story. Milbank (1990:402) for instance, offers a solution to a Christological problem that Girard inadequately addresses. The question remains quite open as to what extent an exegete should be guided by mimetic theory.

The exegetical results of Genesis 1 and 2 in the proceeding chapters will contribute to this aspect of Girard's theory. I speak of an 'alternative sacrifice of Yahweh' that is a sacrificial paradigm but moves away from a scapegoating arrangement. In *The Scapegoat*, Girard (1982) works out a clearer perspective on this than his previous formulations and his ideas have influenced the exegesis to follow.

In his section on soteriology in *Theo-Drama III*, Hans Urs von Balthasar reiterates both the positive force Girard has been in engaging modern thinking with critical theological perspectives and the dissatisfaction with unresolved theological ramifications. Balthasar (1988:297) credits Girard with significantly bridging the gap between the ancient 'theory and practice' of sacrifice and the modern reader. To this, Balthasar (1988:310) believes Girard has 'rendered to us a service' by pressing in on the question as to the extent God takes pleasure or is pleased with the cross of Christ. In other words, how necessary was the death of Christ from *God's* perspective? How is it that the Church offers something to God which he does not desire?

Calling Girard's theory a 'cosmo-analysis' as opposed to Freud's psychoanalysis, Balthasar (1988:298-99) views Girard's 'system' as similar to those of Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner in distilling 'the basis of a total anthropology from an all-embracing Christology; only in Girard, it is 'marked by sharp antithesis.' He rightly views the interplay of human desire as the core interaction in Girard's work, and the

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analysis of technique coming to fruition, and the remainder of the book only speaks a resounding 'I told you so and its too late now.' His insightful writing rarely lays out possible solutions. Bottum (1990) also attests to a French intellectual 'tradition' going back to Descartes. Mack (1985:136) speaks of the French way of doing things: 'Thus his theory of religion and culture is comprehensive, his methodology axiomatic, and his reading of a text radical.'

<sup>71</sup> In a 1993 interview with Rebecca Adams, Girard significantly modifies statements made in earlier works (Williams ed. 1996:62-65). This is a good example of why criticisms of Girard that only reference his seminal works can easily misread Girard.

dialogue with structuralism, Marxism, and ethnology as secondary. Most significantly, Balthasar sees Girard's work as primarily a theological work especially in tune with his own *theo-drama* perspective.

That Girard has aggressively reopened central Christian issues in the post-modern dialogue without pressing towards the full ramifications of it creates two concerns for Balthasar.

For one, Balthasar (1988:308) finds Girard's insistence on being 'purely scientific' problematic, inevitably leading to a 'closed system.' Here he echoes Milbank's observation that the claim to 'pure science' leaves Girard among the positivists.<sup>72</sup>

Balthasar (1988:309) notes that not even Girard holds to a pure scientism, bringing in 'a theological dimension that explodes his allegedly pure scientism; so introducing an ineradicable contradiction into his system.' In other words, one cannot claim to be 'purely scientific' while interjecting purely theological statements.<sup>73</sup> Balthasar's assessment is what has given rise to the criticisms from anthropology or of Strenski that Girard is trying to smuggle theology in under the guise of 'science,' a particular sensitivity of post-modernists. As discussed above, science has perpetuated an unjustified over-confidence in the limits of its discipline, and Balthasar is correct to point out that a pure science or objectivity is unobtainable precisely where it meets up with human desire. As per the discussion of scientific theory above, perhaps it is Balthasar's understanding of 'science' that needs modification.

At issue, for Balthasar (1988:310), is the question of God's transcendence. Girard and Schwager<sup>74</sup> concede that the methodology has its limits. It cannot ultimately venture into the issue of true transcendence—that is, since the 'sacred' is mostly a human concoction, then how is it that God can be viewed as transcending this besides just being

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<sup>72</sup> Girard's latter works have engaged Shakespeare and philosophical works. It does appear as though Girard has backed off advocating for this, perhaps solely out of exhaustion over the debate.

<sup>73</sup> It should be reiterated that both Milbank and Balthasar have fairly refined perspectives on the theological endeavor whereas Girard does not and does not claim it.

<sup>74</sup> Raymond Schwager (1978) *Must There Be Scapegoats*



antithetically opposed to all violence? Girard is consistent in his reluctance to assert theological implications into his project. He does not bridge the gap between a scientific approach and theological concerns. He certainly implies them, but does not fully develop them theologically. Balthasar questions Girard's lack of reference to God's justice. 'God' seemingly only comes into play in relationship to power. Girard is too quick to dismiss Anselm's formulation of a judicial aspect to sacrifice, since for Girard, 'law' is simply a more sophisticated sacrificial system. Balthasar is right in asserting that any cooperation between two free agents intrinsically includes judicial arrangements.<sup>75</sup> At bottom line here is Balthasar's question as whether under Girard's construct, the cross only addresses a reconciliation of humankind to itself. Or is there a reconciliation that must take place between a truly transcendent reality (God) and humankind? Is there a *true* sacred realm?<sup>76</sup>

In the most crucial aspect of Balthasar's assessment, we find the most consistent *Christian* objection to Girard. Girard, like Barth, leaves no room for any positive natural inclination towards the good or towards God. In a sense, Girard leans too heavily towards 'no one does good, not even one.' This perspective works against what Balthasar (1988:309) proposes in his theological treatise of divine-drama. It leaves little room for a real engagement between two free entities: 'The dramatic tension between the world and God is so overstretched that the link breaks, rendering impossible a drama that involves the two sides...the self-concealing mechanism eliminates all freedom on man's part.'

Balthasar (1988:309) finds man's sense of justice inadequately addressed by Girard: 'We constantly meet with words "power" and "violence", never the word "justice." Can it be proved scientifically that the justice for which men long is nothing but power in disguise?' Girard (and Barth) view human desire as totally corrupt, and is in contrast to

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<sup>75</sup> For Balthasar 1988:257, '...there is not opposition between the juridical and persona aspects of the God-man relationship. In view of the foregoing, all polemics against Anselm in this area should be dropped.' In a sense, a 'relationship' between two free entities necessarily implies certain juridical arrangements.

<sup>76</sup> In the proceeding chapters, I propose an alternative sacred realm.

Augustine (and C.S. Lewis) who view human desire as boundless and thus leading to God.<sup>77</sup>

Balthasar (1988:311) questions Girard's rejection of a God of justice, of a God who requires something from the death of Christ, but he is largely satisfied with the explanation provided by Schwager<sup>78</sup>: 'Thus Jesus takes sin and holds on to it, lest it should fall in vengeance on the heads of those who have committed it. This is the conclusion of the largely convincing analysis of Old Testament texts in which god moves progressively from being a God of violence and wrath (ca. 1,000 instances) to being a god who does not himself wield power but only allows the power wielded by men to have its effect on them.' It is also conceded that the Old Testament never quite resolves this tension, wavering as it does back and forth.

Thus Balthasar's critique approaches a part of my central inquiry, and again echoes that of Milbank in that Girard's work, never intending to be a theological treatise, has profoundly infused the implications of the cross into the modern situation, yet has left unfinished critical theological implications. Balthasar 1988:312 states:

...it will not be enough to follow Girard and Schwager in demythologizing the Old Testament picture of God so that he changes from a violent, wrathful God and becomes a powerless God who does not engage in retribution. What we have, in fact, is a new form of the problem latent in both Old and New Covenants: What is the relationship between God's love and his justice, particularly in the case of the Cross? God's justice, which Girard never acknowledges as something primal, is evidently quite different from power. If we recognize this, Anselm's presentation of the problem acquires a new significance. So far the whole question of what Paul calls 'judgment,' John calls 'crisis,' and the Book of Revelation calls 'the wrath of God' has not been thoroughly explored.

The inquiry here is compelled by the sense of 'unexplored' ramifications of Girard's thinking. What does it mean that God is angry and is presented in the Old Testament as compelled to do something about it? Is this just the 'theology of the crowd' coming through or is there a free transcendent being beyond that who seeks a reconciled relationship with humankind based on both the good and the right?

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<sup>77</sup> I believe my reading of Genesis 2 offers a mediating position here.

<sup>78</sup> Schwager (1978:214-15, 139)

**3.5.2 Girard and the hermeneutical task.** Congruent with the maze of intersecting problems and concerns discussed so far, hermeneutics has also undergone a series of challenges and reformulations during the modern period. If my evaluation of Girard's critics be valid, two things are evident. There are those who have rejected Girard outright, and for the most part have moved on. In the 'post-modern' fashion, I find this wholesale rejection of Girard highly suspicious or at minimum, problematic.<sup>79</sup> This rejection for the most part comes from within the social science quarters and is basically an internal discussion. With those whose pursuits are more towards literary and biblical interpretation or theology and ethics, there are varying degrees of willingness to engage mimetic theory.

Returning to the previous 'contextual' discussion of Janzen's as opposed to 'universal theories,' there are two general observations that can be made in considering current hermeneutical frameworks. First, Janzen (2004:61) expresses a legitimate concern that is not peculiar to post-modernists. It has always been a fundamental concern in hermeneutics throughout the modern period that our interpretive grid doesn't overtake those who are more immediately related to the text.<sup>80</sup> It cannot mean to us what it did not mean to the 'original' hearers. We must seek to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those participating in it. This is nothing new and certainly not limited to 'post-modern.' But after the above discussion, we may now have to realize that the original writers and hearers struggled with the same dynamics of 'meaning' as we do. Second, fundamental to the task of interpretation is to somehow transfer that meaning to successive generations even to us today. Again, this is a legitimate concern and has certainly become problematic especially in the heightened ideological frenzy of the late

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<sup>79</sup> Wallace (1989:322) advocates an acceptance of Girard's hermeneutic as a positive 'post-modern' contribution: 'But if this model is biblicist insofar as it refuses to bar the biblical texts from the experience of truth, then in what sense is it postmodernist? Or is it? It is, I contend, if (1) the term 'postmodernism' can be recast to designate an intellectual habit that follows after, and resists, the theological modernist assumption (quintessentially embodied by Bultmann) that the exegetical task consists of purging the Bible of its controversial mythology and imagery; and it is postmodernist if (2) this term can stand for an exegetical practice that acknowledges, even celebrates, the zones of indeterminacy, fractured surfaces, and occult detours within the Bible that make the art of interpreting it both a trying and exhilarating endeavor. In other words, let deconstructive biblical exegesis stand for a way of *reading* that is serious about the Bible's intertextuality, not an *ideology* that dogmatically limits its message to a self-contained, self-referential exercise in semantic complexity.'

<sup>80</sup> This is the concern expressed by Levine (1985)

20<sup>th</sup> century. And it echoes the sentiment behind Janzen's and anthropologists' leery disposition towards 'universal theories.' Certainly, theory runs the risk of running roughshod over particular contextual variables.

But this concern has become over-blown in the other direction, and it is here where Janzen's argument becomes problematic on several fronts. Janzen argues that our understanding of sacrifice becomes 'damaged,' 'imposing,' and 'misconstrued' the moment the observer brings any of her own worldview into the observation. This, I assert, is not scientific thinking at all. The task of the scientist is to interpret the data, not just catalogue it. In Janzen's thinking, if a lynch mob believes that the Jew is causing the plague, then it is left at that! This is okay if one only wants to catalogue ritual. He has a valid word if it is one of caution—the immediate context needs to be considered, and to whatever extent that can be determined, that must be a part of the 'understanding.' But if we stop here, we have left the hermeneutical task undone. We must still determine if and/or what the earlier meaning has for us. Jay (1992:13) articulates it well:

But what is this work of understanding? It cannot be to reach a meaning identical to that of the ritual actors themselves, because their meaning is an organization of their experience which is inaccessible to us. There are two kinds of situations, that of the sacrificers and that of the interpreter. The one is unattainable and the other is escapable. The task is to build some kind of bridge between the two to hold the worlds together, not accurately to decode their meaning, but to make what they do and say intelligible to us.

The task then, is not so much to get the original context but to understand how we are connected to it. It is still, in a sense, the hermeneutics of the Church Fathers, that of analogy. It is one that presumes a bigger context than all of us.

The uncomfortable thing about mimetic theory is that it so equally critiques our modern politics and theory-making as it does the thing we are trying to observe or reflect upon. Jay (1992:145) objects to this: 'Girard, who recognizes two societies, has two collective subjects: "the primitive mind" and the "modern mind."' This critique—Girard is more after a modern critique than addressing ancient ones—is pervasive through most of the writers mentioned so far, but it is not something that should be so aggressively resisted as is the case with Balthasar. For one, it is simply impossible not to. We simply cannot as

Eagleton says, jump out of our own skin to look at ourselves. Second, it just may very well be that there are striking parallels with our more ancient past.<sup>81</sup> The formation of the Old Testament and of Greek tragedies comes at a time when most human cultures were emerging from a worldview (mythological) that had dominated for several millennia. This is reflected in the Old Testament's struggle with idolatry and boastful use of power and the critique of mythology found in the Greek Tragedies. The affinity is clear enough. Like 'post-modernism,' there was a great skepticism of a thoroughgoing worldview on the wane. While at the same time, there was a great uncertainty of what was to replace it. At times like these, 'ideological' clashes are inevitable and intense, and the stakes are high; hence, there is rivalry over who possess the original 'sense' of things.

There is a critical difference between modernity and the 'axial age'—the ancients did not have the same 'techniques' for containing violence as we have today. Legal systems were paltry and the ability to enforce law was virtually non-existent. It is my contention that much of the criticism of Girard grossly underestimates the dynamics involved in containing violence and how threatening the 'quotidian' existence really was. This underestimation, in my view, is one of the biggest biases of modernity projected back onto ancient times.<sup>82</sup>

In his book *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology, and Ethics*, Schweiker interestingly explores mimesis as a way through the postmodern hermeneutic problem. The Modern era, in Schweiker's (1990:30) view, has pushed us toward a 'crisis of imitation' because: 'the idea of God is dependent for its cogency and motive power on being an imitative, imaginative figuration of forms of the categorical imperative.' Thus, 'we are forced to consider again the hermeneutical and expressive dimensions of mimesis in our God-talk.' Schweiker (1990:35) reevaluates the problems of pre-modern employment of symbol, representation, and text that moved toward *idea* and proposes not a rejection of mimesis but a restructuring of it. He appreciates Derrida and Girard for

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<sup>81</sup> Schweiker (1990:14) agrees: 'Little wonder then that premodern interpretive practices, like allegory or narrative, have captured the postmodern deconstructionist mind. We live in a free play of signs.'

<sup>82</sup> As will be pursued further in the debate in the Old Testament of how much a 'chaos' is envisioned at the start of creation, the current trend minimizes this element in mythological narrative, especially in the Bible. If anything is being projected back into the ancient world, it is our situation of having extensive technical, legal and police systems in place which inoculate us from direct and lethal exposure to violence.

bringing the issue of mimesis to the fore. Schweiker provides a critique of Girard from the hermeneutical viewpoint. In this brief review of his critique, we will find similar objections to ones covered earlier.

For Schweiker (1990:25) Girard's view of Christian revelation is more about revealing the truth of human societies than anything about God. Conceptions about God and Jesus are restricted to a kind of ultimate social critique, and thus, Girard never leaves the fundamental view of Durkheim that religion is best understood in terms of its social function. This leads to a kind of Christian gnosticism, possessing an inside knowledge about violence and desire. Schweiker (1990:25) also questions the resoundingly negative view of sacrifice that neither the Old nor New Testaments affirm.<sup>83</sup>

Of particular interest in Schweiker's (1990:186) critique is the addressing of the fundamental aspects of Girard's theory: 'At bottom the dispute is over the way mimesis is understood and what it is used to understand.' All cultural communication is figuratively mediated, even language. We don't have direct access to the referent; it is mediated through an imitation of some kind.<sup>84</sup> Because of this, Schweiker reminds us of a critical and fundamental maxim of getting at 'meaning': 'What is closest to us is often most concealed. The task of interpretation is to understand what lies hidden.' At issue is to what extent the figurations gravitate toward deception or distortion. This, I would contend, is very much at stake in the Old Testament's battle with idols. Schweiker (1990:187) appreciates Girard and Derrida for bringing the issue of mimesis to the fore. They have forced the issue which post-modernity must address and to which Schweiker's book offers a way forward:

Derrida's and Girard's readings of mimesis raise profound problems for previous construals of understanding and its world, the character and status of texts, and the being of the self.

Furthermore, because talk about the divine has been related to these topics, these criticisms of mimesis render problematic theological discourse.

Schweiker's (1990:189) concludes two things about Girard which are valuable and curious. Girard's perspective of the role of violence in the formation of religion and

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<sup>83</sup> Since the writing of Schweiker's book, Girard has since modified his view of sacrifice. This work reflects Girard's modified view.

<sup>84</sup> Schweiker (1990:26) has made note of how Platonian this is.

culture's development of representations is critically insightful. Girard's thesis leaves us little room to avoid such considerations from here on. Girard, however, reduces things too far, leaving little room for other variables to be considered. Here Schweiker, like Janzen and the anthropologists, appeal to post-modernity's devotion to 'difference.' Religion and culture are far too complex to be reduced to one common mechanism. Difference and complexity trump commonality in our current sentiment, and thus Schweiker appeals to ambiguity and the circular reasoning which elevates culture as the ultimate authority. Girard's reductionism is oddly not universal enough. It 'doesn't exhaust the meaning of religious traditions.' There is one universal truth that trumps all others—ambiguity. Complexity always leads to uncertainty.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The main objective of this chapter was to locate Girard's thinking within the current context of dialogue or debate. The examination here can hardly scratch the surface of the complexity and variety to which mimetic theory interfaces with a wide range of trends, inquiries and trajectories. Within this objective, I assert overall that the verdict should remain out about Girard and his 'theory.' It offers a valid and practical venue for pursuing the pressing challenges of late modern interpretation. Contrary to the claim that mimetic theory is ideological, it is very open-ended and encourages inquiry rather than shuts it down. The fact that criticisms have come from such a wide range of disciplines and perspectives is ample evidence to its boundary-crossing characteristics. A legitimate view of Girard should question to what extent his thinking can properly or easily fit into the category of 'theory', 'approach' or 'perspective.'

Moreover, a wholesale rejection of Girard is unwarranted on several grounds. The rejection of his thinking based on its universal or reductionist perspective has its own set of precarious assertions. It won't be long until this repugnance for 'meta-narratives' or 'trans-contextual' perspectives will be understood as untenable itself. At least as Barrow has discussed, our human propensity to 'compress' vast arrays of data and complexity may just be a critical component for human survival. Theory-making in general is a

legitimate, needed, and unavoidable enterprise. It is ‘universal’ in scope; it cannot be otherwise. This does not mean, however, that it therefore must lead to ‘totalizing’ claims and to closed ‘ideological’ frameworks. Theory-making does not necessarily lead to a bowling over of peculiarity, insensitivity to difference, ignoring of contextual variables, or avoidance of complexity.

The affinities of mythological cosmogonies, theology, theory-making, and scientific inquiry should now become evident. All are attempting to place a current situation into the large scheme of things. They push toward the largest context of them all. This noble and good pursuit is, unfortunately, where we as humans are most contentious. Girard’s ideas challenge us to seriously examine what desire is fundamentally behind the ‘sides’ we take in this arena.

One thing at issue is what and to what extent can we talk about that which is common to humanity? It seems as though we are comfortable with positive assertions of our commonness, but when it comes to negative ones, well then, we are moralists or theologians. The problem is that Girard’s theory applies equally to theory-making and institutions of higher learning as it does to ‘sacrifice.’ In particular, theory-making is within the context of its own ‘sacrificial crisis’ and displays strong sacrificial tendencies. We seem in a cycle in which our capacity to establish our own sense of belonging in the world is on the corpse of that which came before. This, I would say, offers a particular and extremely uncomfortable critique of academia that underscores many critiques. Girard critiques critique, and thus Girard is predictably unsettling in contemporary theory because it implicates all of us.

Most rejection of Girard comes from the social sciences which are themselves in a crisis, one of which is its long standing antagonism toward theology. After 200 hundred years of the discipline the social sciences can neither contain nor explain two of the most common elements of human social behavior—religion and violence. The rejections are not based on a thorough understanding of Girard’s development nor its foundation.

Although the criticisms of Girard were primarily placed within an Old Testament exegetical model, the larger goal was to identify the fundamental objections to mimetic



theory. By doing so, I can proceed without constant interjection to address ‘underlying’ presuppositions, assumptions and objections. As I proceed with exegeting the narratives of Israel’s origins in Genesis 1 and 2 from a mimetic perspective, I can devote more to the interaction of Girard with Old Testament scholarship, especially the historical-critical paradigm that still holds prominence.

#### 4 OBJECT OF DESIRE—THE STRUCTURAL SHAPE OF THE PENTATEUCH

The Pentateuch, and particularly the book of Genesis, shares a fundamental pursuit with Girard, that of origins. Whereas Girard believes he has found the locus of religion and culture in humankind's peculiar imitative qualities that lead to rivalries and a crisis of communal violence, the first books of the Bible are after the origins of Israel. When it comes to seeking origins, one can choose a variety of angles to start from, and what I'm advocating below is that the two share a common basis or key in their investigation and presentation of origins. Girard calls it mimetic desire, and the Pentateuch calls it *barakhah*, blessing.

For Girard, when a model is seen desiring an object, the disciple also learns to desire the same object. As in the archetypal discussion of fathers and sons (Oedipus, Freud), this shared desire for the same object is initially a good thing. This is how the disciple will learn to get on in life. It is a fundamental function in parenthood. But because of the proximity of the disciple to the model, the disciple begins to view the model as not only desiring the same object, but actually *possessing it*. The model and the object become so fused that Girard insists that the object is lost completely. The model, in a sense, incarnates the object. The only way for the disciple to obtain the object is *through* the model. The disciple must replace the model in all things. There is a double-bind to imitative desire because the disciple is encouraged to imitate the model in his desires, but at some point, the model discourages the disciple from pursuing it because the disciple becomes a threat to the model's desires. Even more so, the model has grown accustomed to worshipful status due to the fusion of desire and object in himself. The model has become an obstacle. Desire becomes double-bound—desire what I desire, yet don't acquire the object of that desire. The object meanwhile takes on enormous value the more it becomes elusive and seemingly allied with the model. The more IT is linked with a model, the more it takes on a presence and power all its own.<sup>1</sup> It is what everyone desires, and all presume that someone else is in control of IT. This imitative desire is what fueled Girard's early work with the great novels.<sup>2</sup> The central characters in the works of Shakespeare, Proust, or Dostoyevski seem in

<sup>1</sup> A distinctive feature of blessing Westermann (1968:54) observes is found in the fact that the father has only one blessing and once it is given, not even the father can revoke it. It takes on a separate power from the father.

<sup>2</sup> Girard 1961 *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*.

constant pursuit of what everyone else seems to have and the character feels completely devoid of. The character in essence is in search of being.

From his study of blessing in the Pentateuch, Westermann (1968:19) identifies a similar elusive object as *blessing*, defining it essentially as: ‘...having vital power in its deepest, most comprehensive sense.’ ‘Blessing is vitality...this vital power, without which no living being can exist’ (Westermann, 1968:18). Blessing is equated with life and the power of life (Westermann, 1968:20). It is the ability to thrive. By way of a starting point, it is critically important for our examination of Genesis 1 and 2 to realize two things about blessing. First, there are close parallels with Girard’s development of the object of desire being wrapped up with a model. Second, the interplay of desire for the object among humans structures the narrative. It is especially this second similarity which is elaborated below because it lays a critical ground work for the exegesis of Israel’s origins as having sacrificial underpinnings.

If we are willing to follow Girard’s thinking, there are two interpretive keys which must remain prominent. One is the dynamic of mimetic desire among humans leading to a communal crisis and the second is the resolve of crisis through the expulsion of a scapegoat. To reiterate Girard (1972:288, 229):

The translation of this violent process into terms of expulsion, evacuation, and surgical operations is made in the most diverse cultures.

...we are not dealing here with a heterogeneous collection of references [to expulsion or purgation across the board in myth and ritual], but rather with a unified system, to which the surrogate victim holds the key. Whenever we describe the generative process or its products in terms of expulsion, purgation, or purification, we are attributing natural causes to phenomena that are not in the least natural because they derive from violence.

Most junctures in the story of Israel’s origins revolve around the *going out* or the *leaving* of someone. Light comes out of darkness (Gen 1), the woman is taken out of man (Gen 2), Adam is expelled from the garden (Gen 3), Abel is killed and Cain is sent away (Gen 4), Noah enters the ark (Gen 6-9), Abram leaves Haran (Gen 12), Isaac flees to Egypt, Jacob flees the wrath of Esau, Joseph is taken to Egypt (Gen 37), the Hebrews are expelled from Egypt, David flees Saul, the Samaritans are exiled, and finally the Jerusalemites are exiled. Even more so, these expulsions are the repeated affirmation that God himself is in a peculiar way *with* the one going out. God’s

presence is evident in such movement. Expulsion is another word for sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> And once this is accepted, one begins to see a structure to episodes all through Genesis and culminating in Exodus. Indeed, we can see how this whole first part of the Pentateuch is structured by the theme of generative expulsion. The ‘birthings’ (*toledoth*) from the earth and Israel are sacrificially structured.<sup>4</sup>

Van Seters (1992:200) confirms that the patriarchal narratives center on a pattern of wandering or journeying and the establishing of genealogies. This *genre* is best located in a Greek or ‘western antiquarian’ tradition of the wandering hero. He views this theme<sup>5</sup> as etiological, primarily meant to explain how a certain city or region came to be settled. From a mimetic perspective, however, Van Seters fails to notice the scapegoat feature of heroes and the nature of ‘journeys’ as an ordeal. The hero is *alone* in his ordeal. Common to such stories is the isolated nature of the founding father. He had to have come from outside the community in order to establish it.

The equation of Girard’s sacrificial notion of expulsion with the Pentateuch’s descriptions of ‘going out’ or ‘leaving’ is bound to make some uncomfortable. Milbank (1990:394), for instance, objects to Girard’s easy conflation of sacrifice and expulsion. This cannot be fully addressed within the limits of this work precisely because some of the critical theoretical assumptions are either not fully understood or accepted. Although the last chapter attempted to dissipate much of this, it is admitted that this is simply a juncture. Those who know and incorporate Girard’s thinking have little difficulty with this and seem to concede to the now conventional objections to his theory. It is not that they agree with the objections as much as concede that for now, no response by Girard and others to such objections is able to dissipate such objections (Reineke

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<sup>3</sup> In Westermann’s (1968:9) argument against dividing ‘salvation history’ and history, he affirms the notion that God’s movement and his Presence are inseparable. God is present in the goings and comings of the patriarchs.

<sup>4</sup> Westermann (1974:16) asserts that *toledoth* always retains the sense of birth even in P’s use in Genesis 1. Even more so he adds: ‘P has expounded with extraordinary power the real meaning of the genealogy, namely the continuous event of generation following generation.’ In this regard, Jay’s (1992:xxv) ‘lens’ into the connection between genealogy, male descent, sacrifice, and social cohesion is invaluable. She clarifies what is critically at stake—the continuity between fathers and sons is established through the social act of sacrifice. To say that Adam begat Seth is affirmed sacrificially.

<sup>5</sup> Van Seters creates confusion when he speaks of ‘genre’ and then ‘theme’ as if they were synonymous. A ‘Girardian’ reading, however, would carefully distinguish between them. There can be an infinite variety of ‘themes’ and yet a single ‘structure.’

2009:16). Common among conventional commentators is to view the leavings as simply the migratory patterns of sub-transient groups.<sup>6</sup> I would suggest, however, that there is little that is ‘normal’ about migrations, then or now. As the stories of Cain and Babel poignantly reflect, the ancients display a high degree of anxiety around wandering.<sup>7</sup> We need only remind ourselves that the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness was largely viewed as punitive.

Brueggemann (1977:2) claims that the concern for ‘landedness’—‘being displaced and yearning for place’—is more central than past theological outlooks have considered.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he connects that directly with the kind of anxiety over transiency created by the modern world.

Homelessness, both then as now, is a fearful prospect and intensifies the imitative mechanism *to possess*, and as Girard (1968:91) reminds the desire for *having* are dependent on the desire for *being*. What people, both then and now, *accept* due to circumstances, need not be confused with what they *prefer* or *long for*.

Based on current archeological evidence, Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:89) have advocated that the period before the occupation of the early Israelites in the Levant indicates a widespread collapse and upheaval of the region at the close of the Late Bronze age, often for mystifying reasons. In other words, the Israelites would have come upon a considerable amount of ‘ghost towns,’ as well as ‘hordes of uprooted people roaming across the Mediterranean to find new homes and livelihoods’ (Finkelstein and Silberman, 2001:89). It was an especially nervous period. Along with the consciousness of having been wanderers and sojourners in Egypt (and perhaps elsewhere), the desire for landedness must have been intense.

The mysterious forces that procure possession are a major concern in the Pentateuch, and Genesis profoundly connects that with blessing—the power of life, ‘vital power.’ Even more so, blessing is inextricably linked with ‘going out.’ In fact, the proclamation of blessing is what

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<sup>6</sup> McKeown (2008:78) speaks of the journey of Abraham. Gunkel (1901:258) speaks of migrations and Westermann (1981:78) of ‘transmigration’ and ‘transhumance.’ Relying heavily on ethnographic studies of the Bedouin, Westermann (1981:148) argues against Gunkel and others that Abrams migration was out of the ordinary.

<sup>7</sup> De Vaux 1965:14

<sup>8</sup> Here Brueggemann (1977:6) along with Westermann (1968:8) contests the preference for dynamic salvific actions of God over a more static view of Presence. By constructing ‘polarities of time and space, history and nature’, a central theology of land has been neglected. Westermann (1968:15) contends the theological constructs around blessing have been similarly marginalized.

makes the ‘leaving’ inevitable.<sup>9</sup> A pattern around blessing is recurrent in Genesis. First, there is a proclamation of blessing. Then there is a ‘going out’ followed by a bestowal of blessing. With Abram, the blessing proclamation is simultaneous with the command to leave. Here in, we might have things in a nutshell. Westermann (1968:30) suggest that such a pattern shapes the Pentateuch itself. Salvation—the act of divine intervention to deliver—is sandwiched in on both sides by the announcement of blessing (Genesis) and the enjoyment of blessing (Deuteronomy): ‘The placing of the history of deliverance (Exodus to Numbers) in a framework of the two books where blessing is the dominant theme is important because it shows that the arrangement of the Pentateuch, the Torah, expressed the close relationship between God’s saving activity and the blessing he bestows. There is at least a hint of a wider framework.’

Blessing, Westermann (1968:29) insists, plays a key role in the opening chapters of Genesis. With this in mind, insight into the reading of Genesis 1 and 2 to follow will be enhanced by a brief survey of some key passages. By way of representative examples, Exodus 1 and the narratives of Abraham and Isaac’s expulsions are elaborated on below. Exodus, of course, is the most obvious of expulsions as our English title demonstrates, and the first chapter explicitly makes clear that the initial pronouncement of blessing in Genesis 1 has become the very source of the crisis in Exodus one, for the Hebrews were fruitful and multiplying. It was blessing gone amuck. The connection of Genesis 1 and the opening scenario in Exodus over the blessing proclamation is much too overt to be glossed over. Furthermore, it is clear that in some ways, the leavings of the patriarchs are structured to justify the expulsion of the Israelites from Egypt. Similarly, the narratives around Abraham’s and Isaac’s expulsions from Egypt and Gerar,<sup>10</sup> explicitly center on blessing and expulsions.

The survey seeks to establish several foundational points to the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. First, the opening chapters are aware of and indeed are reinforcing a common narrative structure. The structure itself demonstrates a unique perspective on the generative notions of sacrifice, namely God’s propensity to instigate a sacrificial crisis for the express purpose of identifying with the sacrificial victim, the one thrust out. Something of God’s own identity, revelation, is

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<sup>9</sup> Westermann (1968:24-27) argues that in the New Testament, blessing is part and parcel with the commission of the apostles. This call to ‘go out into all of the world’ has its locus in Genesis he argues.

<sup>10</sup> As will be discussed below, the periscopes in Gen 12, 20, and 26 are considered by many as variations on the same story.

uniquely tied to the expelled one. Second, Girard's triangular notion of mimetic desire operating with a desired object has strong correlations with the notion of blessing found in Genesis. Finally, the mythical structure of sacrifice is being uniquely addressed in these opening chapters; God is 'creating' a sacrificial alternative, what I call 'counter-sacrifice,' displacing the mythical sacrificial structure and transforming its sacred realm into a new sacred realm which does not rely on the regeneration of victims.

#### 4.1 Exodus 1 and the Crisis of Blessing

There is little doubt that a continuity with Genesis is intended in Exodus 1, yet there is an intended discontinuity as well for 'Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died' (Ex 1:6) and 'the Egyptians did not know about Joseph' (Ex 1:8). This is in keeping with Brodie's (2001:19) observation that Genesis is dyptically structured around near death encounters.<sup>11</sup>

The fundamental issue of Exodus 1 is closely related to a recurring pattern in Genesis, and what we might conclude is one of the defining issues or themes in Genesis, that of blessing. We can leave little doubt that the 'problem' of the Israelites in Egypt echoes the blessing found throughout Genesis, beginning as it does in Genesis 1. The proclamation of Genesis 1:28: 'be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...' is virtually carried out to excess in Exodus 1:7: 'And the descendents of Israel grew fruitful and swarmed. They exceedingly multiplied and the land was filled with them.' In Exodus 1:12, the ferocity of God's blessing pronouncement is compounded in that the more the Israelites were oppressed, the opposite of 'subdue,' the more they increased. The multiplication of a people also meant an increase in strength and hence a *growing threat* and a rival. There is also a tinge of irony here, however, for the filling of the earth is in a contested space. The blessing is closed in. The issue, then, becomes a question as to whether both sides in a rivalry can thrive in the same space.

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<sup>11</sup> For Brodie (2001:19) there are four 'shifts' in the drama in Genesis (chapters 6, 18, 31, and 43). 'These four shifts have a certain continuity, and this continuity provides a glimpse into the larger kinds of continuities that exist between all four dramas. In each case the shift involves some form of confrontation with death.' Brodie (2001:47) views this structure as ordering the whole primary history from Genesis to 2 Kings.

Strongly implied in the Israelite ‘problem’ is the provocation of Yahweh. The relentless march of volitional blessing aggravates the sacrificial arrangements of men. This is something that we must reconcile in any recounting of Genesis and Exodus. Yahweh is consistently and boldly presented as the One who initiates and even provokes the crisis, *and* presses it to the full extent. At first glance, this would seem standard mythical fare: some prohibition has been secretly transgressed; the gods are offended ushering in some disaster into the community; a sacrificial crisis intensifies into a swirl of reciprocity; a scapegoat emerges who then is expelled from the community and peace is restored. This is all the doings of the gods. But there are glaring fissures in the structure here. For the most part, the crisis is completely stripped of sacred connotations. In other words, the crisis is situated as a human to human dilemma. In Exodus 1, as elsewhere, Yahweh is strangely uninvolved, letting the human players run their usual sacrificial course. The difference, I’m suggesting, is that in the mythical structure humans provoke the gods, whereas in the biblical narratives, Yahweh provokes humans. The God of these stories is anything but benign. To borrow from Exodus 15:3, God is a military genius, a fighter. This God, it appears, aggressively addresses the sacrificial crisis; ironically at the same time, it is more by His absence and acquiescence than by intervention. Always the proclamation of blessing agitates and aggravates the scapegoat mechanism.

Another difference I see in the biblical narratives from Girard’s mythical structure is its ability or compulsion to hold two perspectives simultaneously. It does not opt for the persecutors perspective over the victim’s nor *visa versa*. It refuses to make an absolute enemy out of either. In fact, a kind of sympathy prevails toward the expelling community.<sup>12</sup>

**4.1.1 The pseudo and the real sacrificial crisis in Egypt.** Ex 1:10 also critically sets up the story, for it is a matter of the Egyptians not wanting them to ‘arise from the land.’ We can in every way understand this as a civil, internal problem. It is a problem of rivalry and wanting to ward off a crisis. Although the phrase ‘arise from the land’ is admittedly tricky, there is little to dissuade us from the narrative that the Egyptians benefitted from the Israelites remaining in the land. The NIV simply translates it as: the Israelites will ‘leave the country’, and it is made clear,

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<sup>12</sup> This is a very uncomfortable thought today where the view of colonial domination crystallizes into absolute evil. Venard Eller (1987:73-102) provides an excellent article on our ability to turn our enemy into an absolute evil, while simultaneously absolutizing our own righteousness. Girard also says this is a way for us to take on the veil of myth in modern garb (Golson, 2002:145).



that the exodus of the Israelites is most problematic, at least to Pharaoh. The concern that the Israelites will fight against the Egyptians if a war breaks out, is a trivial secondary concern as the narrative presents it. Not until verse twelve are we provided with a negative view of the Israelites by the Egyptians, and this only after they began to ‘oppress’ them. Certainly, this sets up one of the more powerful themes in the story. The one thing the Pharaoh does not want is for the Hebrews to leave, and this desire we should note is what Pharaoh must first convince the Egyptians of.

The scenario of Exodus 1 places competing versions of the scapegoat mechanism before us. The issue from the author’s perspective is over the *kind* or *nature* of the sacrifice—Pharaoh wants infanticide, but Yahweh wants expulsion. Both, however, agree on two factors: the method is that of passing through water and the victim revolves around first-born sons. Pharaoh instigates the standard sacrificial solution, but Pharaoh’s crisis in chapter 1 is presented as near folly. It is made to appear ridiculously invented. What Girard (1985b:111) says about the Joseph story as opposed to the myth of Oedipus equally applies here: ‘At every turn, the biblical story ridicules the nonsensical evidence against the scapegoat which we have in mythology and replaces it with arguments favorable to the victim.’ But more importantly, Pharaoh’s preferred sacrificial procedure, infanticide, is set up in competition with Yahweh’s—expulsion of a ‘victim’ chosen by Yahweh and choosing to obey Yahweh. In this, the arbitrary ‘choice’ of a victim by the ‘crowd’ is seriously challenged. The deliberateness of Yahweh’s command supersedes the arbitrariness of the gods’ (read in crowd here) acquiescence. As the exodus story repeatedly reminds us, Pharaoh tenaciously resists expelling the Israelites. The story, moreover, presses in on this resistance with a kind of fierce interrogation, as if to meticulously breakdown a well rehearsed line of reasoning, pushing it to a breaking point. Yahweh sets up the series of plagues in a scaffolding attempt to back Pharaoh, or the line of reasoning he is characterized by, into a corner.

There is a circularity, or symmetry, to Pharaoh’s accusation. The Israelites are desirable to the Egyptians in some way. We could infer that they are already in some service or are a major contributor to the Egyptian culture, but the reason is strangely absent. It may be that it is too obvious to be mentioned, but as we survey the similar pattern in the Abraham narratives, we will find this strange absence of reason a standard structural element. Pharaoh and the Egyptians

*need* the Israelites in some critical way. Simultaneously, however, the Israelites are undesirable, based on a perceived potential crisis and not an actual one. Here, we have Girard's stereotypical model/obstacle and the classic double-mind of the crowd—I love you; I hate you. Girard (1985a:11-18) poignantly narrows this down as the key issue between Job and his people. The community desires the kind of 'vital power' perceived to embody Job. Girard (1985b:110) outlines the typical scapegoat in Oedipus—some prominent idiosyncrasy or deformity becomes 'the sign' that something is amiss. Here the Israelites function similarly to the Joseph story which Girard insists strips away such pretense. Joseph's brothers and the Pharaoh's wife seek Joseph's destruction out of sheer jealousy. This very 'destroying the credibility of mythology' is what Girard (1985b:11) declares is the 'anthropological truth' which the Bible persistently presents.

Oddly though, the mimesis seems to be reversed—it is the apparent model who desires something from its potential victim.<sup>13</sup> We are not presented with reciprocity of violence at all. Strangely, the Israelites are never presented as desiring anything of what the Pharaoh or the Egyptians have. But Pharaoh appears to desire what the Israelites have—blessing, that vital power, the capacity to thrive. This, of course, is implied, but infertility of the Egyptians, or at least of the royal house, may in fact be the hidden crisis.<sup>14</sup>

In Ex 1:11, the Egyptians (or vaguely 'they') established taskmasters<sup>15</sup> over them. We can rightly assume that up until this point, the Israelites were quite autonomous from the Egyptians. It is not clear whether the Israelites were already serving the Egyptians in some capacity, but it is clear that a dramatic shift has occurred here. As Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:117) note, immigrants in Egypt were a constant, and the benefit could easily turn into a liability, much like the similar tension of immigrants today. There was a kind of etiquette for groups of people living among or near a nation's borders (Deut 20:11, Jud 1:30ff). That they should be organized into work groups is specifically mentioned as a way to control them. (The laying upon them 'their' heavy burdens is interesting. But again, the Egyptians never view this as of benefit to

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 1 may give us an extraordinary glimpse into the absurdity of the voice of the crowd. Peculiarly, Pharaoh's voice is isolated from the Egyptians.

<sup>14</sup> Among other things like the plague, Girard (1965:43) views infertility as a classic sign of a sacrificial crisis.

<sup>15</sup> The *sere misim* does not out of necessity require a negative connotation here. It could simply suggest labor managers. If we assume that the noun *mas* is related to the verb *masah*, we may find a more negative connotation. *Masah*, which essentially means to dissolve, liquefy, or dissipate, carries the idea of consuming or using up (BDB 587). Psalm 39:12 indicates a kind of complete consumption, causing to disappear completely.

them other than to be a prophylactic, a kind of preventative measure.) Most importantly, the classic scapegoat scenario is radically laid bare or even reversed. The Israelites are not viewed by the author or the characters within the drama as the cause of any plague, draught, or crisis. As mentioned already, there is the possibility of a crisis of infertility, but even so, the text refuses to make this overt. Pharaoh himself is manufacturing a crisis that the text meticulously debunks. The exodus story in fact, reverses the conventional structure—first a scapegoat is produced, then the plagues, and finally a sacrificial crisis. The plagues are in response to a botched attempt to scapegoat. In essence the call for a scapegoat is the plague, and it is of the kind the God of the Israelites is particularly fond of instigating.

Pharaoh's infanticide (Ex 1:15) apparently begins as a covert operation. This again, signals the weakness of the mechanism. If it were mythical, the Pharaoh would have appealed to the needs of the gods, and the obviousness of their 'crime.' This is one of the more striking features of Pharaoh—he never makes an appeal to his god(s). In fact, the whole story is strangely 'secular,' a pattern we also discover in Genesis.<sup>16</sup> The mechanism is so weak that Pharaoh does not initially call for the crowd to work this. If it were a text of persecution, again, there would be a disaster of some kind to lay responsibility on the scapegoat. But here, this can only be implied; nevertheless, the storyteller strips the 'real' crisis (say, infertility) of any force. That the target are boys clearly points to the bottom line issue—rivalry. We could imply a crisis within the royal house which was not uncommon to Egyptian dynasties—a genetic weakness in the line. However, this is not the slightest indication that this was in view.

The opening chapter of Exodus is calculated in its analysis of what is really going on. The roles have been reversed. The model (Egyptians, but particularly Pharaoh), should possess and embody IT, *should* be an obstacle to the disciple and *should* incite a rivalry, but there is not the slightest envy on the part of the Israelites. Nor for that matter, do the Egyptians, apart from Pharaoh, appear envious of the Israelites. There is nothing the Israelites desire of Pharaoh. Instead, it is the supposed model who believes the Israelites to be in possession of the object which Pharaoh desires. The Israelites should be viewing Pharaoh as their model, but they don't.

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<sup>16</sup> That the Genesis narrative is nearly devoid of references to other gods is something of great interest, although it cannot be pursued here. The absence alone may in fact be a polemic against the idols of the great powers. What can clearly be deduced is that crisis of rivalries is reduced and limited to the realm of humans, and here it shares a foundational aspect to Girard's theory of generative violence—violence is particularly human.

Instead, they are driven by the irrevocable proclamation: ‘Be blessed.’ There is no reason why Pharaoh should see Israel as having anything desirable, but he does. But we have a critical juncture in the model/obstacle triangle. It is when the model senses a disciple to be a threat who is attempting to dispossess the model of IT. The model perceives that he no longer incarnates the object. A loss of or transference of ‘being’ is perceived.

It is now the disciple who has what is desired—blessing, the ability to thrive. The model perceives the disciple to be a rival who seeks the model’s annihilation. In contrast to Pharaoh, the midwives fear God over against the unwarranted ‘dread’ of the Egyptians. Reciprocal exchange is transcended; there is no retaliatory action by the Israelites. We don’t know whether the mid-wives are lying or not, but again the ‘blessing’ is the problem.

In the last verse of Exodus chapter 1, the absurdity of the accusation is taken to extremes. The command to throw every new born male into the Nile is Pharaoh’s second direct appeal to ‘the people.’ Here in verse 22, the accusation is strangely (or intentionally?) absent. Now the scapegoat action is overt, and Pharaoh calls on the crowd to action. Drowning is a stereotypical scapegoat procedure. It perfectly embodies the victim being totally enveloped by the crowd all the while appearing as if it was self-induced.<sup>17</sup> The victim sinks and his voice silenced under the voluminous mass of the crowd’s verdict. The discrepancy in the text, whether it is ‘every boy’ or ‘every boy born to the Hebrews,’<sup>18</sup> can be addressed from a structural instead of a textual problem. For one, the command is presented as extreme. No one ‘inside the text’, that is the Egyptians, the Israelites or even Pharaoh for that matter seems terribly convinced of the accusation. The Hebrew midwives easily manipulate the edict offering smug answers to those supposedly enforcing the edict. Nevertheless, it does reveal what is perhaps, as Levinson (1993:ix) proposes, the ‘strangely persistent impulse’ to sacrifice children. Moses projects the same impulse in the avenging of the Midianites (Num 31:16-19) even extending the slaughter to

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<sup>17</sup> Drownings hangings, and stonings Girard (1982:133) believes, ‘suggest a natural mechanism of self-destruction rather than supernatural intervention.’ In other words, the mob can avoid detection.

<sup>18</sup> The Masoretic text simply reads, כָּל-הַבֶּן ‘every son.’ Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Targums add ‘born to the Hebrews.’

the mothers as well. It is the *vertical* relationship, predominantly expressed in the father/son relationship that Pharaoh goes after.<sup>19</sup>

The ‘sacrifice’ is equally extreme even if it is limited to the Hebrew infants. Girard (1982:131) makes note of such extremities as telltale signs of the ‘demented logic’ of mimetic desire’s search for an object. In his commentary on the beheading of John the Baptist, he speaks of Solome’s extreme request for the head of John the Baptist as a ‘revelation of imitation as pure essence of desire, for Solome is asking of her mother to ‘provide her with *the desire she is lacking*’ (emphasis Girard’s). Pharaoh appears similarly as one with no object for his desire, and with this logic, Pharaoh’s call to sacrifice his own son is easily comprehensible.<sup>20</sup> When desire has no object, it is where, in Girard’s (1982:144) view, ‘sacrificial intensity reigns supreme’:

Submerged in mimeticism the subject loses awareness of self and purpose. Instead of rivaling the model he is transformed into a harmless marionette; all opposition is abolished and the contradiction of desire dissolves. But where now is the obstacle that was barring the way and pinning him down? The monster must be lurking somewhere; for the experience to be complete the monster must be found and destroyed. At this moment there is always an appetite for sacrifice that requires appeasement, a scapegoat to destroy, or a victim to behead.

This drive toward a scapegoat is what Girard (1982:146) calls the ‘terrible paradox of human desire’ that can only find reconciliation in the destruction of the object rather than its preservation, and this is critical to my exposition below. For the agreement on a sacrificial victim in order for a rivalry to reconcile is ‘the sacrificial beginning of all such exchanges.’

There are other telling absences as well. There is no mention that the edict was ever carried out by the Egyptians. Of all the moaning that the Israelites did, it is strangely silent about the loss of children, which one would think to be the most grievous.<sup>21</sup> The groaning of the Israelites is always in reference to the labor. Also missing is any mention of any infant boys, Hebrew or otherwise, actually being lost to the Nile. Nobody it seems including the Pharaoh’s own household takes the accusation or the edict seriously.

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<sup>19</sup> Levinson (1993:15) points to the example of the king of Moab who slaughters his own son on the wall to avert a slaughter of the whole city (2 Kings 3:26-27): ‘At the very least, this argues for more continuity between Israel and its neighbors to the east in the ninth century that the crude dichotomy of Israelite and “pagan” would suggest.’

<sup>20</sup> This is a good example of how a mimetic reading dispels some of the thorny moral issues in exegesis that has often artificially forced interpretation in certain directions, like calling for a textual problem.

<sup>21</sup> The historical rehearsals such as Psalm 78 and 105 make no explicit mention of infanticide, but do of the hard labor.

By the end of Exodus 1, a great reversal is evident. The chapter drives the compulsion for a victim to the river's edge. What should be the end of the story in a mythical narrative is the beginning of the story, and this is what is accented in the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 to follow. Because of 'blessing', not a 'curse,' the Israelites are being persecuted. Instead of the good life being restored as the *result* of the victim's expulsion, it is presented here as the *cause* of another sacrificial crisis, but one that steadfastly moves away from the recycling of victims. Ironically, the blessing is the plague to those caught up in the mythical cycle of mimesis.

The radical notion insisted upon through our narrative is this—nobody possesses the vital force, the 'object,' except Yahweh. The 'object'—vital power—is inseparable from Yahweh.<sup>22</sup> It is not a thing that Yahweh has apart from who he is. Yahweh doesn't *have* life-giving force; he *is* life-giving force. The bestowal of blessing belongs to Yahweh and is inseparable from him. Furthermore, it appears that only by 'leaving' can one discover this. Only a survivor of expulsion can understand the true object of desire and its shared nature.

**4.1.2 Exodus 1 an accurate reflection of the 'age-old rhythm'.** The threat of a sojourning family or people in a foreign country, especially Egypt, is a recurrent one not only in Exodus, but in all narratives of Israel's emergence, and upon closer examination, we find an established pattern.

One thing is for certain. The basic situation described in the Exodus saga—the phenomenon of immigrants coming down to Egypt from Canaan and settling in the eastern border regions of the delta—is abundantly verified in the archaeological finds and historical texts. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:52) assert that the pattern of the patriarchs and of the Israelites fits 'the age-old rhythm in the region.'

From earliest recorded times throughout antiquity, Egypt beckoned as a place of shelter and security for the people of Canaan at times when drought, famine, or warfare made life unbearable or even difficult. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:53) remind us that: 'The historical relationship is based on the basic environment and climatic contrasts between Egypt and Canaan.' Canaan is a typical Mediterranean climate. It is dry in the summer, relying mainly on

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<sup>22</sup> A point Westermann (1968:27-28) insists is central to the Biblical view in contrast to the common 'magical' views of blessing shared among Israel's neighbors.

winter rains for water. The unpredictability of these rains in turn makes for a general instable region. Although Egypt has its fluctuations too, there is ‘rarely outright famine’ due to the predictable spring flooding of the Nile. Thus Finklestein and Silberman (2001:53) conclude: ‘There is good reason to believe that in times of famine in Canaan—just as the biblical narrative describes—pastoralists and farmers alike would go to Egypt to settle in the eastern delta and enjoy its dependable fertility.’ It is evidently clear why the Israelites would benefit from a life in Egypt.

A variety of reciprocal relationships could develop from such a pattern, according to Finklestein and Silberman (2001:54). Landless laborers could be employed for construction projects. Because of the more transient lifestyles of sojourners, they were readily adapted for trade. And as the Bible provides ample examples, often times they were captives of war made into a slave labor force, some of which could rise to important positions managing royal estates. The lines between such distinctions were anything but ‘official,’ fluctuating depending on the situation.

Much like today, issues around immigration and transient populations are strained and double-minded. They make up a valuable, even necessary, part of the infrastructure of a society. Yet, if they remain unassimilated, they can easily become a threat and a target. But for all the historical, environmental and cultural considerations, we must also consider the structural need. The Exodus narrative as well as the stories examined below speaks of the precarious nature of communal relationships. The operative mechanism was a sacrificial system. These biblical narratives accurately reflect the kind of conventional sacrificial arrangements of people trying to ward off volatile reciprocal exchanges of violence both from within a community and between communities. From this perspective, what Pharaoh needs is a stable sacrificial system to which immigrants can provide as long as they can be put in check.

Girard (1982:175) speaks of ‘sacrificial arrangements’ in the gospel story of the demoniacs at Gerasa. In addressing the seemingly odd request of the demons to go into the pigs, he writes:

It is essential for them [the demons] not to be *completely* and *definitively* expelled. The reciprocal bond between the demons and the Gerasenes reproduces on a different level the relationship between the possessed and these same Gerasenes observed in our analysis. They cannot do without him or he without them. The conjunction of both ritual and cyclical pathology is not peculiar. As it degenerates ritual loses its precision. The expulsion is not permanent or absolute, and the scapegoat—the possessed—returns to the

city between crises. Everything blends, nothing ever ends...Physical violence gives way to the violence of psychopathological relationships that is not fatal but is never resolved or ended.

This kind of sacrificial arrangement is similar to one more centered in a cult.<sup>23</sup> It is a sacrificial system that ritually seeks to avert violence by, in a sense, keeping a quasi-permanent scapegoat on file. Westermann (1968:57) similarly speaks of a near mimetic understanding of the ‘magical’ origins of the act of blessing: ‘...magic is placed on the same level as religion and even science, as one of the possible ways for man to control reality [and its violence], or to put it differently, one of the possible ways to encounter powers and forces that are superior to man and that can be at his disposal.’ Girard (1982:175) continues: ‘There remains enough difference between the voluntary exile and the Gerasenes who refuse to expel him, enough real drama in each repetition to achieve a certain catharsis.’ The kind of community reflected in the Gerasenes, Girard admits, is fragile and precarious, just as most migrating and semi-pastoral communities would have been in the Levant at the start of the Iron Age.<sup>24</sup> Girard’s insight here makes clear Pharaoh’s need to retain the Hebrews; their relationship ironically provided stability to the community.

These ‘sacrificial arrangements’ vary depending on the equity of the parties involved. For the most part, they are rarely symmetrical. The narratives of Israel’s emergence in Genesis and Exodus usually deal with how the lesser negotiates with the greater, but even here, everything is precariously balanced.

#### **4.2. Sacrificial Arrangements and the Expulsions of Abram**

The constraints of this thesis do not allow a full development of what I’m advocating in this chapter—that the narrative of Israel’s origins is structured around generative expulsions. To reinforce what has already been discussed above, the stories of Abraham’s expulsions from Egypt will further illustrate. Narratives such as these are invaluable because they make explicit the ‘leaving’ or the ‘going out’ of the one heeding the blessing oracle as expulsion. They clarify

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<sup>23</sup> Westermann (1968:56) concludes that the account of blessing in Genesis 27 reflect a well-established ritual that must ‘precede both theological and cultic ritual.’

<sup>24</sup> Here we can add the assertion of Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:86-87) that the Mediterranean region must have experienced a ‘great upheaval’ where ‘problems would bring the whole economy and social structure of the Late Bronze Age crashing down.’ The violent and overwhelming influx of ‘the Sea Peoples’ was most likely the major cause.



what is dormant in other narratives such as man leaving his father and mother (Gen 2:24) or Abram ‘leaving’ Haran.

The opening scenario in Exodus reveals a reversal of what appears to be conventional sacrificial arrangements of the Ancient Near East.<sup>25</sup> The counter pattern—proclamation of blessing, the going out, and then being blessed—is variously repeated in the patriarchal cycles. The chapters leading up to the call of Abram are dominated by the proclamation of blessing in Genesis 1:28.<sup>26</sup> The proclamation in and of itself almost automatically jettisons the receiver into an ordeal, expulsion, leaving, or exodus. It thrusts him toward dispossession and wandering. A dispossession is evidently the prerequisite to possession, at least for the God of Israel.

**4.2.1 God irrevocably pronounces blessing.** By God’s proclamation, life must come forth. Once blessing is pronounced, it cannot be retrieved. This in and of itself busts up the scapegoat mechanism. Choice defeats destiny. An important aspect, however, must be clarified. This irrevocability of blessing is most evident in the story of Jacob’s theft of Esau’s blessing (Gen 27). Westermann (1968:56) believes it reveals an early, non-theological, and magical view of blessing. Blessing is an entity acting separately from the giver—not even the pronouncer of it can revoke it—and it is physically transferred. Finally, there is no mention of God and there is only one to give upon the death of the father. The power of life, it appears, eludes all. Desired by all, precariously handled, and only transferred upon the death of the father. Blessing is the elusive Object. A fundamental truth is buried behind this primitive rite. It is an entity all its own. Even still, it is most aligned with the father. Its precarious possession is acquired only by the father’s absence. Here we encounter a foundational aspect of mimetic theory—the object is completely consumed by Desire itself. Once one perceives that the Object resides in the desire of another, the true object vanishes. Says Girard (1978:310):

There is no longer any object. Everything comes down to the relationship between the mimetic rivals, each of which is model and disciple to the other. The fact that the object disappears must, I imagine be an aspect of desire’s tendency to become a caricature of itself and proclaim in its own terms its own truth—the ascendancy of the mimetic model over the object.

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<sup>25</sup> Westermann (1968:42) identifies the locus of all religion: ‘We must therefore be aware that what both Testaments say about blessing preserve the memory of a procedure that was once central to religion. It is then clear that what the Bible says about blessing involves not something that still survives somehow on the periphery of the biblical message by something that was *once of all-encompassing significance for religion.*’

<sup>26</sup> Westermann (1968:15)

The perception of the autonomous and omnipotent power of life gains momentum the more a crisis of difference takes hold, the more it is perceived to be possessed by the other. It may, then, appear as if this irrevocable aspect of blessing belongs to the realm of the ‘savage sacred’ realm. It falls in line with the common theme of destiny or luck found in myth. Girard (1978:297, 310ff) thinks it of little coincidence that both gambling and madness have ancient origins. They all take on a magical quality.

Westermann (1968:31) clarifies the critical distinction in the Bible as it places the power of blessing solely in the proclamation of God: ‘This says that Solomon will be blessed, and the contexts show that Yahweh acted with complete freedom in making him the bearer of blessing.’ For Westermann (1968:36): ‘The distinctiveness of Israelite worship consisted in the fact that for it, history—the history of God’s dealings with his people—played a decisive role. The center of Israel’s worship was not some form of fertility cult that directly bestowed blessing; it was rather God’s activity in history, the covenant, the commandments that grew out of the covenant, and the promises given with the covenant.’ Blessing is consistently viewed in the Pentateuch as being the exclusive possession of God. All mystery as to its origin and control are vanquished. When it comes to transference of blessing in the patriarchal narratives, the critical factor for both father, who is threatened by the son, and the son, who can only gain IT by the death of his father or beguiling his brother is in trusting the choice. It is in honoring the word of blessing.

**4.2.2 Parallel oracles and colliding flights.** It is then, the logos, the definitive word, that drive the narratives of origin. Central to that logos is the object of desire—life. Similarly, in his reading of the Oedipus myth, Girard emphasizes the powerful role the oracle of Laius plays, for it is the undercurrent and center of the drama. Although the oracle is rarely mentioned, the dialogues perpetually revolve around the prophecy: ‘the son will kill the father and marry the mother.’ Life is not received, but seized. The son seeks to dispossess the father of what he perceives he embodies. The disciple at some point will seek to seize ‘being’ that he perceives resides in the father and is absent in himself. As Girard (1965:50) interprets this oracle in Oedipus, all the characters in the drama move toward its fulfillment even as they ironically flee from it. Girard (1965:50) calls it the ‘truth of the oracle’ precisely because it speaks to all of humanity and human history—you must kill to possess. It is the truth of the Other. Something of a similar oracle dominates the book of Genesis: ‘On the day you eat of the knowledge tree of

good and evil, you will be put to death’ (Gen 2:17).<sup>27</sup> Cain and his descendents flee from the oracle only to compulsively fulfill it.

One thing that makes the Genesis narrative different from the Oedipus drama is that we encounter two ‘oracles’ operating simultaneously. The ‘counter-oracle’ declares blessing: ‘be blessed, increase, subdue.’ The other ‘oracle’ of the elusive object predestines: ‘if you consume the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, you will be put to death.’ Up until the call (going out) of Abraham, the opening chapters of Genesis pit these two oracles against each other. Cain and his descendants act similarly to those in the Oedipus drama. All are fleeing from the oracle that: ‘you will be killed.’ They build cities and practice reciprocal violence in an effort to keep the oracle at bay (Gen 4). And they seek at all costs to avoid being a wanderer, being scattered. This is amply put in the voice of the people of Babel: ‘lest we be scattered over all the earth’ (Gen. 11:4).<sup>28</sup> The irony, Girard (1965:50) argues, is that in the Oedipus myth, the flight from the oracle only means that everyone is moving toward it. This is equally true in Genesis. The narrative moves with lightning speed and brevity from Cain’s mark to Lamech’s boast of excessive vengeance and the nihilistic lament of God in Genesis 6.

Seth and his descendants also experience flight on account of the counter-oracle exemplified with Noah (Gen. 7:1). Noah’s abandonment begins with and indeed is constituted by the proclamation: ‘I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark...’ Noah’s self-imposed expulsion<sup>29</sup> in response to the promise leads him through the ordeal toward the reception of blessing, for God ‘blessed Noah’ (Gen. 9:1). In the Oedipus and Cain myths, the characters desperately flee from the oracle only to return to it. In fact, the Noah narrative exposes the logical end of this kind of flight. It leads to a complete submergence in undifferentiated violence. Noah also flees in response to the ‘counter-oracle,’ but he willingly moves toward the promise by volitionally entering ordeal as a righteous person. Again, both

<sup>27</sup> The force of the verb מוֹת is more on ‘put to death’ than dying of natural causes. This will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup> The uses of the word פָּרָץ have predominantly negative connotations: scattering of an army in defeat (2 Kings 25:4), of a flock (Jer 10:21), and of a community falling apart (Deut. 4:27). In the hiphil, it has the added force of being driven out (BDB 806).

<sup>29</sup> Girard (1978:143) makes the case that Noah is a victim of expulsion similar to Adam and Eve and Abel: ‘...a sole survivor in a world where all others perish can, thematically, amount to the same thing as a single victim extracted from a group in which no one, save the victim, perishes.’

oracles are irrevocable. Oedipus and Cain involuntarily drive toward the fulfillment of the prophecy. Even more so, Cain's descendents must willingly refuse the counter oracle to head down such a path. With the proclamation of blessing, however, the volition of both the one issuing the proclamation and the recipient is repeatedly emphasized. For one, God always waits on the recipient for willing response. This is most evident in the clumsy happenstances of the patriarchs, discussed below, and in the Hebrews reticence to leave Egypt. It is also evident in the curse of Cain where God immediately modifies the curse in response to Cain's objection. God intervenes to retard the force of the other oracle: 'you will be killed.' As Westermann (1968:48-49) points out, the curse in Genesis does not have the same force as blessing. It can be revoked. Westermann (1968:23) concludes that in the Old Testament, the curse was never 'theologized' as was blessing.<sup>30</sup> Especially in Deuteronomy, the volitional aspect of blessing is inextricably linked with the covenant.

Girard (1978:142-143) points to the structural similarity in the oracle in Oedipus and the proclamation of blessing in Genesis and Exodus:

If we turn to the Old Testament, and particularly to the books that come first or those that may contain the oldest material, we find ourselves immediately in familiar territory. Immediately we come upon the three great moments we have defined:

1. Dissolution in conflict, removal of the differences and hierarchies which constitute the community in its wholeness.
2. The *all against one* of collective violence
3. The development of interdictions and rituals

Girard (1978:143) runs through the list of the narratives in Genesis and Exodus and summarizes: 'In every one of the great scenes of Genesis and Exodus there exists a theme or quasi-theme of the founding murder of expulsion.'

In conjunction with the proclamation of blessing, however, the father *voluntary* flees. There is a volitional self-expulsion and willingness to go through ordeal. God commands to leave and to enter ordeal. Had this been interjected into the Oedipus myth, we would have seen Laius flee

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<sup>30</sup> This is critical, for the curse very much functions like the logic of the crowd, like sacred logic.

with his family, but in response to an oracle counter to the closed oracle: ‘the son will kill the father and marry the mother.’

From the opening lines in Genesis, the book is characterized by movement. From Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and finally the Israelites, the apex of the narratives center on a volitional expulsion in the midst of a sacrificial crisis.<sup>31</sup> The voluntary expulsion completely undermines the mythical structure. God is present with those who are moving toward the fulfillment of blessing.<sup>32</sup>

This self-expulsion has two goals in mind. One, it seeks to defuse or dissipate the anger of the rival, or the rivalry itself. It says, I don’t have IT, at least not of my own power, my own will, *or by having killed the rival for it*. Its outcome is similar to mythical sacrificial arrangements; it dissipates the rivalry. But where as in the conventional sacrificial arrangement where the effect fades, the one’s heeding the ‘counter-oracle’ leave the sacrificial arrangement behind. Their flight is toward something and not a return to something. The Object, IT, is forever in the hands of One who gives it out as He wills. Second, it seriously calls into question the need for a scapegoat. The sacrificing community is also caused to question the compulsion for sacrifice.

**4.2.3 Desire driven narrative and the father/son relationship** We need not mistake anything here; the movement in the narratives leading up to the great exodus (Ex 14) are driven by the model/disciple relationship where the desire for ‘being’ as Girard calls it, or ‘vital force’ as Westermann calls it, is centrally at stake.<sup>33</sup> This contention, ‘the tremendous struggle’ as Westermann (1968:46) calls it, is most exemplified by the potentially lethal relationship between

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<sup>31</sup> At first glance, Abram’s exodus from Haran does not seem to allude to a crisis, but it is the whole pre-history of Cain and his flight from the oracle that finds its apex in the closing lines of Genesis 11: ‘The Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.’ Abram leaves Haran and his father, who is also in flight, when the ‘whole world’ is in a crisis of undifferentiation.

<sup>32</sup> Westermann (1968:51) clarifies how the ancient magical origins of blessing transform into the Biblical notion of blessing as promise. ‘Blessing was related to them in that they arose out of the power of the divine in blessing. The continuity of the effect of blessing is shown by the genealogies, the outlines of family history. The Yahwist then combined this prehistoric view of blessing with history by connecting blessing to God’s promise, and thereby blessing became a component of history.’ This transformation, I assert, come about through the volitional act of both God and human agent.

<sup>33</sup> Zornberg (1995:xv) grounds his commentary on Genesis squarely on the ‘tension’ or ‘cycle’ of desire that ‘is present in all dimensions of life, intellectual, interpretive, as well as overtly emotional. He further describes the impetus behind Genesis as ‘the animation of desire, which is generated, paradoxically by the experience of “not to have. This “what it has is what is not” dynamic, Zornberg curiously labels “the economics of desire.”

father and son.<sup>34</sup> Life is transferred sacrificially. In other words, it requires the giving up of a life.<sup>35</sup> Fundamental to this requirement is where the object of desire has disappeared, or more accurately, who has incarnated the object.

To possess the father is a basic structure of all myth according to Girard (1965:28): ‘Desiring what the latter desires, soon to possess what he possesses, always and everywhere, the son wants to conquer the father’s being.’ ‘Every man, when he leaves his father and mother, goes towards his father whom he will kill and towards his mother whom he will marry’ (Girard, 1965:30). ‘The structure reverses itself at the moment the son flees. The circularity of myth turns on perpetual reversals’ (Girard, 1965:31).

In his provocative thesis, Levinson (1993:55) argues that the ‘impulse to sacrifice the first-born son never died in ancient Israel...’<sup>36</sup> Even though child sacrifices in antiquity included both males and females, Levinson argues that the primary concern in child sacrifice, at least in the Middle East, is the father/son relationship. Levinson (1993:55) proposes that the theological notion of the firstborn belonging to God is only a ‘transformed’ version of child sacrifice, a practice, Levinson argues, that had a long and *accepted* history in Israel. In this regard, Levinson (1993:26-27) ventures into the same territory Girard has, following the hunch that sacrifice is fundamentally grounded in sacrifice of a human, especially to ward off a ‘great crisis of danger.’ The ‘danger’ included a mob style killing of a father, a king, or a potential massacre of inhabitants.<sup>37</sup> At issue, is appeasement which inevitably is projected onto the sacred level. The gods themselves understand the fundamental requirement of sacrifice (Levinson, 1993:26-27). In his recalling of a story from the king of Moab (2 Kings 3:26-27), Levinson (1993:15) reminds that the Israelites scattered in flight because they saw, ‘Mesha’s sacrifice of the first-born son

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<sup>34</sup> Although Jay (1992:97) proposes a very different direction than here, she still points to the issue of male descendents as a ‘continuing tension’ in the patriarchal narratives. Westermann (1968:30) adds: ‘The promise of blessing is a motif that permeates these narratives, and the bestowal of blessing, often by a father blessing his child, occurs frequently...Blessing is realized in the succession of generations.’

<sup>35</sup> I will leave unaddressed for now the bottom-line issue as to whom is requiring it. From Girard’s perspective, it is ultimately the community who calls for the surrogate scapegoat.

<sup>36</sup> The premise of Miller’s (2003:3-5) book is that the sacrifice of a son is prevalent all through history.

<sup>37</sup> Levinson (1993:27) makes a critical point here that cannot be overlooked, for he notes that the sacrifice of a son is a *substitution* for fathers and kings.

having a profound effect upon the deity to whom it was offered.’<sup>38</sup> The outcome of a rivalry over ‘being’ resulted in a mob-style death of either the father/ruler/model or the son/heir/disciple. The father offers ‘as a gift’ his most prized object, his son.<sup>39</sup> The original sacrifice was human (Levinson, 1993:21). Its cause was the envious rivalry that threatened to engulf the whole community in a frenzy of desire. The effect of the collective slaughter of the one was miraculous unity, peace, and the reestablishment of difference.

There is, then, the proclamation followed by an expulsion, flight, a leaving. This is the case for both myth and the biblical ‘prehistory’ of Genesis. Similarly, peace is restored, but the biblical narrative dramatically shifts here. The victim is saved, not just as some narrow escape from death, but with lavish results.<sup>40</sup> He prospered even more! Even more so, it was the expelling community who directly provides such prosperity. There is profound conversion here, for both the victim and his community experience deliverance. The expulsion is the saving act both in the sacrificial mechanism and in the ‘counter-sacrifice.’ The difference lies in the long-term result. For the first, the community is saved *minus one*, and the mechanism is concealed from the view of all. In the biblical narrative, it is the victim who is saved *and* in the sight of all. The delivered victim leads the sacrificing community first by revealing the mechanism and then by moving away from the compulsion for sacrifice. In all of this, Yahweh claims victory over all his enemies.<sup>41</sup>

For Girard (1978:149) the biblical accounts constantly exonerate and exhume the victims, insisting on their innocence. Girard calls this the inversion of the mechanism. Herein lays perhaps some difficulty with Girard as I am presenting it. Girard has a hard time saying that these acts of God are still sacrificial. Perhaps it is just a matter of wording, but what I’m advocating is that God is still moving towards and operating within the framework of sacrifice.

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<sup>38</sup> The weakness of Levinson is, as so many who delve into the topic, that he does not pursue the whole question as to why such an act appeases. The sacrifice of the king’s son makes explicit the loci of such sacrificial requirements—the crowd. It is the *one* sacrifice that dissipates the rage of all.

<sup>39</sup> The offering of the son from a mimetic perspective is effective precisely because it realistically or symbolically functions as the death of the rivalry itself. With the termination of the apparent rival, the tensions are dissipated.

<sup>40</sup> An important distinction needs noting here. The interplay of feast and fast is common in ritual and Girard (1972:96) explains out both play their part in ritual reenactment of the original murder. Some sacrificial victims are known to be treated like royalty right up until execution. The paradigmatic scapegoat story of Jonah also amply demonstrates how extravagant measures are connected to the victim. The sailors tossed over most of the cargo along with the victim. The difference with Jonah, Abraham, and the Hebrews leaving Egypt is that the expelled one lives.

<sup>41</sup> Westermann (1968:46ff) connects the blessing, kingship, and themes of Yahweh’s victory ‘over all the earth.’

It is an ante-sacrifice, like an antidote. It is a counter-sacrifice, which completely undermines the sacrificial system based on the scapegoat mechanism, but it is still a sacrifice. It is an offering made by God.<sup>42</sup>

### 4.3 Sacrificial Protocol and the Counter-sacrifice in the expulsions of Abram.

The episodes of Abram's sojourn in Egypt reinforce what was been proposed so far. All this to reiterate several key 'assumptions' going into the exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. First, the narratives in Genesis are keenly aware of sacrificial arrangements which accurately reflect a longstanding protocol of the age and region. The sacrificial protocol finds its fundamental impetus in a desire for being that is connected to rivalries of father/son, brother/brother or community/community relationships. Last, the theological outlook of Genesis finds in the God of Israel a 'counter sacrificial mechanism.' If properly responded to, it leads one completely aware from the compulsion for sacrifice.

**4.3.1 The clash of cultures.** Westermann (1968:59) emphasized the critical juncture in greeting the stranger in the conceptual development of blessing.<sup>43</sup> It is perhaps underestimated just how volatile a transient entourage would be in Canaan. The encounter of David and Nabal (1 Sam 25) amply demonstrates the volatility of wandering groups. The encroachment of a transient group upon a sedentary community is bound to exacerbate a 'sacrificial crisis.' The sojourner is close enough to be a part of a community, but different enough to become a rival. The sojourner is perfect sacrificial material. They automatically bring a crisis of difference. Hence, the greeting is as critical as anything could be. It is an extremely tense moment where the slightest gesture could turn things toward disaster. Nabal's near fatal encounter with David was luckily countered by the wisdom of Abigail.

The opening scenario of Genesis 12 reiterates the pattern of blessing. First, there is the 'oracle' the proclamation of blessing. In this instance, the promise fully lays out the pattern and immediately emphasizes the irrevocable step toward the true object—Abram must first 'surely *go out* from your kindred and *your father's house*' (Gen. 12:1). That the proclamation explicitly

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<sup>42</sup> Girard, I believe, would have a hard time saying that this is sacrificial.

<sup>43</sup> In a discussion of the institution of the priestly blessing (Num 6:22-27), Westermann (1968:43) recognizes a theologized version in the 'approach' of potential hostile parties. The blessing of the priest to the people 'involves God's friendly approach to those who will receive him.'



requires a leaving from both the father and the community is worthy of notice. It is only through the experience of expulsion, of being singled out for exclusion, that Abram will be blessed. A true father is one who has left his father. Furthermore, it is only through this ‘leaving one’ that a true transference of vital power, the IT which all seek but harmfully attach to the imitation of another, is realized. Probably most important, it is a voluntary expulsion. And to some this would seem not to make it an expulsion at all, and they are right. The force of expulsion is dissipated by the awareness of the victim, especially by the community expelling him.

In order to understand the unique difference in the structure here, the similarity between the Abram narrative and that of Oedipus or Cain should be reiterated. Both have an oracle laid before them and enter into flight. But significant differences are evident. The first difference is the oracle itself. The oracle in Oedipus/Cain echoes a truth of who we all are—we presume that the very basis of being is acquired through imitation of the Other. The Self will seek to possess the Other’s being. ‘You will kill the father and marry the mother’ or in the case of Cain: ‘if you eat the fruit of the knowledge tree, you will be put to death.’ This is the fundamental truth of all myth according to Girard (1965:48-50): ‘The original oracle is truth, even for us. It is the expression of the totality, the authentic enunciation of human relations. And that indeed is what explains history.’ It is the truth that the culprit that Oedipus so earnestly sought to find in the Other was in fact himself. Unfortunately, the myth succumbs to the sacrificial mechanism once more, for where the realization of culpability should be a realization for *all* simply becomes a transference from one potential victim to another. Each character in Oedipus scrambles in a frenetic attempt to keep the omnipotent choice of a victim at bay.

And this brings us to the second key difference. For in the Oedipus/Cain drama, all are fleeing away from the truth that we will sacrifice someone in order to procure our own being. The ability to thrive requires the destruction of someone else. Everyone seeks to avoid the essential truth of myth—*all* are the culprits. All hide their culpability in the one whom is expelled from the community, the one whom the community has pinned all their culpability on. ‘Sophocles’ conclusion opens onto the truth of the Self and the Other, meaning their identity in a common non-transcendence:’ reiterates Girard (1965:49). This very truth is explicit in the oracle of Yahweh: ‘On the day you eat of the knowledge tree of good and evil you will be put to death.’

Hence, just like all of those in the Oedipus myth, so too are generations of Cain. In their effort to avoid the curse, they run headlong into it.

Herein lies the significant difference in the flight of Abram. For one, it is based on a counter-oracle. Rather than ‘if you consume the fruit, you will be put to death,’ it boldly pronounces that you will find life if you go this way. Rather than madly scrambling to avoid the oracle only to move closer to its realization, the proclamation of Yahweh says, heed the oracle and you shall live. Rather than all fleeing to avoid death at the cost of one, the flight of the one ushers in life for all.

There is one other key difference between the Oedipus myth and narratives in Genesis/Exodus. In the Oedipus myth—and it is myth because the crisis ultimately finds its resolve in the expulsion of a victim—there is only one oracle that dominates the scene. In the narrative of Israel’s origins, there are two.<sup>44</sup> These two oracles are not parallel, however, for they are constantly colliding. At each juncture, the scenario repeats: the collision is implicitly instigated by Yahweh; there is a sacrificial crisis where the two sides set up a typical sacrificial arrangement; Yahweh directly intervenes to debunk the sacrificial solution by in essence creating another sacrificial crisis. Finally, Yahweh offers a counter-sacrificial arrangement that not only spares the victim, but spares the scapegoating community as well.

Yahweh’s ‘solution’ is sacrificial; it will also require expulsion, but of a different nature. It is not based on an apparently transcendent and miraculously spontaneous destiny, which in reality is the non-transcendent crowd hiding behind the mask of deity. The sacrificial solution of Yahweh is based on the profoundly volitional choice of the Other who truly and exclusively transcends the violence of the community. There are other divergences as well. God is with the expelled one. He favors him and he moves with him. What is strongly implicit in the Genesis narratives and parts of the Exodus narrative becomes profoundly manifest in the standing pillar at the Reed Sea. God is both present and moving out with the one who is moved out.<sup>45</sup> Last, and

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<sup>44</sup> The story of Israel is the story of two kingdoms. This will be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter of this work.

<sup>45</sup> The paradoxical idea of presence and movement are beautifully held in tension with the pillar at the Reed Sea. It is a ‘standing thing’ (עמוד) while simultaneously being a ‘guiding thing’ (נורה).

perhaps most important, the victim not only survives expulsion, he thrives and *does not return* to the previous sacrificial arrangement.<sup>46</sup> He moves steadfastly toward that fundamental desire of all humans for ‘being’ without sacrifice. Equally important, but perhaps even less noticed is that the sacrificial community is left to contemplate such *mighty wonders*.

The tremors from this sequence are ubiquitous, for in it, something profound will be revealed. In Abram’s exodus from ‘his father’s house,’ God promises: ‘I will show you’ where you are going (Gen. 12:1). Furthermore and ironically, this land of blessedness will be revealed to ‘all the families of the earth.’ This will spare even the sacrificial community even as they too abandon the veil and ‘leave’ behind the mythical system. In the end, the God of Israel, the One, has sacrificed the sacrificial system itself. The ‘diffuse haziness’ of the mythical system is the ultimate victim of Yahweh’s sacrificial intervention.

**4.3.2 Abram in Egypt: Gen 12:10-20.** A brief rehearsal of Abrams encounters in Egypt helps accentuate what is proposed above.

After the pronouncement of blessing in Genesis 12:1-4, Abram obeys the command. He leaves his father’s house in Haran and enters the land of Canaan where he builds an altar at Bethel.<sup>47</sup> But when famine hits, Abram moves away from the land of blessing and opts for Egypt. When faced with a sacrificial crisis,<sup>48</sup> Abram opts for the conventional system. He moves away from the command and returns to a more stable situation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> As this scenario is rehearsed below, we will see that this transpires in spite of God’s people who constantly relapse into the mythical structure. God bars them from returning.

<sup>47</sup> The absence of Abram’s father, Terah, should not escape our attention. The voice of God is heard simultaneously with the death of Terah. Interestingly, in the story of Cain and Abel, the knowledge of God’s desires, pleasure in a sacrifice, becomes evident precisely at the moment when the father is conspicuously absent. Although this cannot be explored at length here, it can be conjectured that something of the will of the father is transferred to God. If this be the case, there may be something to the voluntary giving up of the son by the father asking for a voluntary expulsion from his son.

<sup>48</sup> We need not concern ourselves with hidden or figurative meanings. Famines can obviously exacerbate a human crisis and it is a perfect reflection of a human crisis. As far as the narrative here, the famine and the perceived threat to Abraham’s life are the same.

<sup>49</sup> The going back and forth between Canaan and Egypt in the patriarchal cycles indicates a relapse into the mythical structure, regardless of the obvious natural explanations. Girard (1965:31) comments on a similar pattern in Oedipus: ‘The double movement from Thebes to Corinth and from Corinth to Thebes suggests a double reciprocity in which identities are confused. In the midst of this confusion which needs to be rendered systematic, certain distinctions remain and even become sharper, but they are always relative and reversible.’

As mentioned before, everything hinges on the greeting. A sacrificial arrangement must be forged in order to ward off an all-against-all outbreak of violent reciprocity. Abram offers a surrogate victim, his wife. The handing over of a woman is easily attested to in the Old Testament as a ‘diplomatic’ arrangement.<sup>50</sup> The beauty of the woman is inevitably central and signals the potential volatility of the crisis. One would think that the narrative would focus on rising tensions over the scarcity of resources; instead, the crisis is squarely focused on mimetic rivalry.

Sarai’s beauty indicates two things. She is a sign, *par excellence*, of a blessed state (Job 42:15, Amos 8:13, Esther), especially if accompanied by wisdom (Prov. 31:10ff, 1 Sam. 25:3). They are seen as enhancing the vigor (blessed state) of the ruler (1 Kings 1:3). Second, a beautiful woman can be an extremely volatile entity that can potentially set off a flood of unrestrained violence. Helena of Troy readily comes to mind, but the Old Testament bears witness as well: the daughters of men and the Nephilim (Gen 6), Dinah (Gen 34), Tamar (2 Sam 13), Abigail (1 Sam 25). It is not out of an unwarranted fear that Abram acts in such a matter. He well knew that some had no qualms about over-stepping such a boundary (Gen 19, Judges 20). Girard (1972:220) also argues that marriage arrangements as well as the universal taboo of incest are by nature sacrificial arrangements primarily designed to dissipate the potential lethal threat of warring males over a desired female.<sup>51</sup>

The ‘taking’ of Sarai into Pharaoh’s house (Gen 12:15) seems to intimate an accepted ritual practice. Westermann (1981:161-162) makes the case that these narratives of encounters are dependent on an ancient structure that must reflect well-established patterns around greeting (1981:274-276). Abram understood that he would need to offer ‘a sacrifice.’ And we must understand, as perhaps we haven’t in past readings, that an offering of a woman is a peace-offering. It is a gesture that can signal release of rivalry. Pharaoh, in a sense, asks the stranger

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<sup>50</sup> De Vaux 1965:116

<sup>51</sup> De Vaux (1965:33) reminds that there were hardly any religious overtones to ancient marriage arrangements. It was strictly a ‘civil’ arrangement, but Girard would add that it serves the utilitarian need to police violence.

and possible rival to give him a part of his ‘vital force.’ This may in fact be a way to weaken Abram as a rival.<sup>52</sup>

The immediate consequence falls in line with benevolent aspects of sacrifice—peace and prosperity, for Abram declares that the ‘taking’ of Sarai will result in a good situation for him (Gen 12:13). In several ways, the language here indicates a surrogate offering, for Abram insists it is ‘on account of you’ his life has been spared. This word is a noun cognate form of עבר which carries vestigial connections with scapegoat sacrifice. Its most basic sense is to cross-over or pass over. It is a possible eponym for Hebrew, which may in fact be a derisive term for immigrant or ‘border-crosser’.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, certain noun forms denote excessive or extreme outbursts of rage, to infuriate. The idea suggests anger that overflows the boundaries that normally contain it.<sup>54</sup> Oddly, another form denotes generation, growth, or production.<sup>55</sup> The generative cognate form is used here with the prepositional use of ‘for the sake’ or ‘on the account of.’ It is used to affix blame (Gen 3:17), and significantly to spare one from destruction, especially from interminable rage (Gen 18:26, 29). It also speaks of showing favor based on the selection of another (Gen 26:18). The idea of surrogacy is further reiterated with another word in the phrase, גלל, which means again ‘on account of’ or ‘for the sake’, but also carries more a volitional force; hence, someone might be spared based on the good actions of another (Gen 39:5) or be punished based on evil actions of another (Deut 15:10, 18:2).<sup>56</sup> The latter part of verse 13 is chiasmically arranged placing special emphasis on Abram’s life:

בעבורך – because of you

חיה – that it lives

נפשי – my life

בגללך – on account of you

<sup>52</sup> The verb for take לקח equally denotes to give, go out or to take, seize, and even steal. *Laqach* holds a wide array of both positive and negative denotations (TWOT, 482). And as we will probe more in the next chapter, this duality to words may in fact be a vestigial remain of the polarity found in the original scapegoat victim. The victim holds omnipotent benediction and malediction nearly simultaneously. As the victim is seized and her life taken, the community receives its life.

<sup>53</sup> BDB 720

<sup>54</sup> BDB 720

<sup>55</sup> BDB 721 Again, benevolent and malevolent ideas coincidentally sharing the same root.

<sup>56</sup> BDB 164

Sarai was ‘taken,’ לָקַח, into Pharaoh’s house, and this ‘caused Abram to be treated well.’ The hiphil indicates that the source of Abram’s prosperity was due to the newly established peace arrangement brought on by the exchange of a woman. It could quite possibly have been a token of loyalty of one under subjection.<sup>57</sup> Westermann (1968:29) correctly makes clear lines of distinction between blessing and peace: ‘*berakhah*, is the power of growth vertically, from generation to generation...; *shalom* is the well-being of a community horizontally.’ The ability to thrive, blessing, appeared to have been procured just as easily under the conventional sacrificial method. Simply put, this ‘angle’ made Abram wealthy, so it is made to appear as if blessing can be obtained via the conventional sacrificial arrangement.<sup>58</sup> It effectively brought peace, but it endangered the ‘vertical’ relationship. It effectively derails the destiny of the one whom God has called to heed the oracle and to pass on from ‘generation to generation’.

The conventional sacrificial arrangement is rudely interrupted by Yahweh, for He ‘afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues on account of Sarai, Abram’s wife’ (Gen 12:17). Several key elements of the narrative require attention.

First, up until this verse, the story proceeds along human-to-human lines. Yahweh is silently acquiescent. Abram proceeds to carry on with his life negotiating the usual hazards of human existence. But this particular human has a problem because his life has been disrupted by the counter-oracle, a proclamation of blessing. The oracle is irrevocable and unavoidable. Herein lies a key which must be grasped simply because of its repetition in nearly every ‘leaving’ in Genesis—*strongly implied is the provocation of Yahweh toward the sacrificial mechanism*. This is a covert operation, not for public scrutiny. It is critically implemented at the moment of proclamation and with the one who in heeding the oracle ‘leaves his father’s house.’<sup>59</sup>

Second, Yahweh’s intervention implicates everyone, indeed the whole situation. It is a judgment on both Abram and Pharaoh. For one, Abram did what he ought not to have done. He offered a

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<sup>57</sup> De Vaux 1965:116

<sup>58</sup> Westermann (1968:46) identifies here as elsewhere a three-fold fertility—body, field, cattle—that sums up the very essence of blessing: ‘Blessing is the power of growth—of fertility, of prosperity as that power expresses itself in a healthy people in a fertile land.’

<sup>59</sup> This point is expounded upon more thoroughly in the next chapters, but by way of cursory examples, we can recall the Exodus 1 discussed above. There is also Genesis 3 where Yahweh is nowhere in the picture, but suddenly appears ‘walking in the garden.’ Yahweh is apparently absent in the flight of Jonah as well. Finally, we can note that in the story of Esther, there is no mention of an overt action on the part of God, yet the whole story reads of perpetual provocations to conventional scapegoating mechanisms.

married woman. He intentionally put Pharaoh and Egypt in a dangerous situation. Abram dangerously manipulated the sacred boundaries that keep the floods of chaos from encroaching.<sup>60</sup> In the complaint of Pharaoh (Gen 12:18), the narrative takes pains to exonerate Pharaoh in this regard. Even so, the plagues particularly single out Pharaoh's house. The flippant assumption to seize a sacrificial token is aggressively cut down. The requirement for sacrifice is roundly judged as human concoction and profoundly flawed. There is one notable exception to the culpability of the community—the surrogate victim. And in this regard, the plagues particularly function to rescue Sarai while simultaneously deconstructing the sacrificial system. The very reception of Sarai by Abram is a profound rebuke, for the call to 'go out' was given to Abram in particular. The acquisition of being, blessing, is only realized when the son leaves and does not return to possess all that his father is.

At this point, the story reads in mythical fashion (Gen 12:17-20): there's a violation of sacred prohibitions, a god is incensed and instigates a plague.<sup>61</sup> The frenetic search for a culprit ensues, and a victim is cast out. The problem is fixed by expulsion. First, Abram is to take, לקח, his wife back and commanded to go. In Pharaoh's command, I find a double-play which is unique to these narratives. Even as the community expels the involuntary scapegoat,<sup>62</sup> Pharaoh, perhaps mercifully, calls on both Abram and Sarai to 'go' (הלך), requiring a volitional act. Pharaoh commands them to go, and yet *sends* them out. This is different than Gen 12:4 where Abram *left* in response to Yahweh's command. We must retain this distinction as the Bible does. There is a voluntary leaving, for Pharaoh's command to go (Gen 12:19) echoes that of Yahweh (12:1). But in the case of Pharaoh's command there is also an involuntary expulsion. From Pharaoh's point of view, the sacrificial mechanism proves effective, for the plague ceased. But from the narrator's point of view (and ours), a marvelous irony has emerged. The expelled one, now both Sarai and Abram, not only *survives*, but *thrives* (Gen 13:2). If we imply here what is overtly expressed in the exodus narrative, then it was Pharaoh who lavished riches on Abram

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<sup>60</sup> This may be of some divergence here, but I'm reminded of the great civil war in America. Surely, the tension over slavery was a sacrificial crisis, but the war that finally broke out was far more devastating than anyone had imagined. The deep national wounds from that war are problematic to this day. Lincoln had always felt that slavery would slowly die out. The modern era clearly demonstrates the problem of violent, over-powering, 'shock and awe' solutions to *our own* violence.

<sup>61</sup> We may well read that the incensed god is really the threat of mob violence. The relationship between Abram and Lot clearly indicates that internal rivalries were equally volatile (Gen 13:5ff).

<sup>62</sup> In the piel, being sent away, שלח, clearly involves expulsion, death, or divorce. It carries a clear sense of abandonment (TWOT: 929).

even as he was casting him out. In this act, Pharaoh acknowledges a certain dismemberment of the sacrificial system even in the very act of upholding it. Something has affected the victimizer. There is a blessing in the expulsion. Abram comes through it and is even more blessed.

Most importantly, Abram continues on in his steadfast march away from his father's house, always with the irrevocable oracle as his impetus. There is an implied blessing throughout. One that Abram does not see himself. Abram is protected and rescued even from his own botched sacrifice. Furthermore, it is a saving act for both Abram and Pharaoh; both are spared. Finally, it is Yahweh's pronounced and irrevocable blessing on Abram that guides the whole story. The main attribute of blessing at this point is protection.

There is something else which we cannot fail to notice—Sarai is rescued as well. Abram sought to avoid becoming a victim by seeking a surrogate in his wife. Abram, moves away from the counter-oracle to leave the father, to volitionally leave the desire to possess the father. He retreats into conventional 'safe' patterns. He gives up his wife. He chooses to sacrifice rather than to be a sacrifice. This narrative will have none of that. Time and again, Abraham and his sons seek to return to 'the father whom he will kill and his mother whom he will marry.' But even more so, time and again Yahweh intervenes to thwart the pattern. Repeatedly, the efficacious conventional sacrifice is denied. It matters little whether the surrogate is a woman or a son, Yahweh repeatedly refutes surrogate sacrifice. The onus is exclusively on the father—leave your father and don't turn back.

As for comparison with Oedipus, the whole story revolves around the hunt for a culprit, who ends up being the scapegoat victim. As in Oedipus' case, by the end, it matters little whether Oedipus is actually the cause. That he is effectively the cause is all that matters. Abram may perhaps have done nothing wrong, but he is effectively the cause. He is expelled. He is the scapegoat.

**4.3.3 Abraham and Abimelech.** This narrative follows an established pattern, one which is repeated with slight variations in the story of Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 20) and of Isaac and Abimelech (Gen 26:1-16).<sup>63</sup> Westermann (1981:161) considers it a settled matter that these three

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<sup>63</sup> The symbolic nature of the ruler's name, 'Abimelech' (my father is king), should not escape us.



narratives are variations of the same story with Gen 12 being the earliest. Even more so, Westermann (1981:162) argues that this pattern is not just a textual similarity. It must accurately reflect a common reality among semi-nomadic communities.<sup>64</sup>

‘The structure of the narrative is particularly neat and clear,’ Westermann (1981:161) asserts. It is all set in motion by upheaval. The plight of famine is not mentioned here; instead, the story comes on the heels of the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19).<sup>65</sup> Here, we must recognize that movement, especially flight, dominates the whole structure (Gen 19:17). A sacrificial crisis sets the stage. There is a premeditated sacrificial arrangement in anticipation of encountering *the* major obstacle to one’s desires (Gen 20:2). There is only room for one to pass on the narrow road.<sup>66</sup> Someone’s life must be relinquished (Gen 20:2). The reasoning is provided for such sacrifices to be offered—it is to spare the life of the one in flight. The one who by oracle was called to voluntarily leave the father, now seeks to renege, acquiescing to conventional protocol. The one who should have chosen a volitional expulsion—the very act of voluntary expulsion radically undercuts the involuntary nature of scapegoat victims—opts to offer an involuntary replacement.<sup>67</sup> The sacrificial arrangement backfires, creating an exacerbated crisis, for now there is a plague (Gen 20:3). This crisis is viewed as the deliberate intervention of Yahweh. The variations in the story make clear that it matters little whether there was an actual plague (Gen 12:17) or a potential one (In Gen 20, Abimelech finds out in a dream and in Gen 26 he finds out by seeing Isaac and his wife together). The critical factor is that a major prohibition has been breached, and this is by far and away the most dangerous of situations. The breach of this prohibition threatens to set off a plague of reciprocal violence where ‘everybody wants to make the Other the scapegoat whose death or banishment will save the collectivity’ (Girard, 1965:53). Furthermore, the contagion of violence is left vague as to its

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<sup>64</sup> We can further add the affirmation of Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:115) that this pattern spans several millennia. It is deeply embedded in the socio/psychological patterns of the region.

<sup>65</sup> Here is a case in point. Like parables, variation in details should not distract. Famine has the same potential to annihilate a city as does a rain of fire. Speaking of the famine of Athens, the priest says in *Oedipus Rex*: ‘Keep the State from going down in the storm!’ A crisis of undifferentiation, whether by nature or human invention, is always the precursor to sacrificial demand.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Father and son meet on the same road, and this road is too narrow for the both of them. One must yield his place to the other. At no time can the city have more than one king, at no time can Jocasta have more than one husband. To want to be Oedipus is to desire what Laius desires, it is to imitate Laius at the fundamental level of desire, it is to desire *to be* Laius. Driven by the *same* desire, the two men are constantly headed towards the *same* violence.’ (Girard, 1965:28, emphasis Girard’s).

<sup>67</sup> As is equally the case with Isaac (Gen 22), the story is deaf as to the thoughts, feelings, or volition of the victim.

target. For it could just as easily refer to a threat of death from within one's own community or between communities. This is where the attempt to exonerate Abraham's rival comes into play, for ultimately it is the community who is demanding sacrifice.

The crisis is resolved by the expulsion of a victim, but as mentioned above, this is where the story takes a decidedly different shape. In this version, the innocence of Abimelech is especially accented (Gen 20:4-6). At first glance, this appears like the classic mentality of persecutors who see their actions as completely right and the victim as completely guilty.<sup>68</sup> Abraham, however, is an equal partner to the sacrificial arrangement. With the insistence on Abimelech's innocence,<sup>69</sup> Abraham's guilty is strongly suggested. Of course, Abimelech knows no other protocol, but Abraham must learn an entirely foreign approach. The narrative is interrupted with clear commentary—Abraham should know better because he has been given a counter-oracle. The insistence on Abimelech's innocence provides reasoning for the ironic lavishing on the victim. This too is common practice,<sup>70</sup> but again, the glaring difference that the victim not only survives, but thrives and *God is with* the one going out.

First, Abram must take back his wife just as he must take back his son in a later more infamous story. Yahweh, it appears, is not interested in fathers sacrificing their women and children in their stead. Next, Abram's counterpart enacts this double-play expulsion—he forcibly expels him even while simultaneously and ironically beseeching him to leave (Gen 20:15). Ironically, we have a sacrificial victim being blessed even in his expulsion. He is rewarded for leaving on his own volition. The victims not only survive, they thrive. They receive IT, the object of their desire without possessing another, without seizing it from another. They are caused to see that the object of their desire resides outside the imitation of another human.

Again, the later stories make clear what was implicit in the first; the very source of Abram's blessing is the community who is expelling him. The sacrificing community survives as well

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<sup>68</sup> Girard (1982:6)

<sup>69</sup> In the 'integrity of heart' (Gen 20:5) phrase, the word □□ carries a strong sense of completeness, suggesting a kind of thoroughness as to proper protocol (BDB 1070). Abimelech soundly reasoned from the logic of the mythical structure. The parallel phrase 'cleanness of hands' reinforces the idea of completely free from guilt. Abimelech acts completely within the framework of conventional practice. Violence can be avoided if sacrifice is made.

<sup>70</sup> Girard (1972:96)

albeit still through the conventional scapegoat mechanism. But in their lavishing the victim with gifts something of a revelation has occurred. Through the voluntary sacrifice of Abram, the community is caused to question the source of such sacrificial demands. They see their ‘victim’ as human. In an act of newly realized humility, they lavish gifts on their victim and effectively acknowledge that ‘vital power’ does not reside in them. The Object has been separated and distanced from the model. In the account of Abimelech and Abraham, the picture of a redeemed community is accented. Abimelech ‘restored his wife to Abraham.’ The victim returns *alive* to the community that expelled her. This return, meant restoration for the sacrificial communities, resulting in the blessing for all. By returning the victim (and we should notice that it is the sacrificial community who does this), the rivals are reconciled and thrive. Abraham reciprocates in a ‘turn around’ as well. Abraham intercedes for the expelling community. Again, this is exactly how the mythical structure works; the victim becomes the source of blessing as it takes on a sacred character. In this case, however, a huge exception must be noticed—the victim is alive, thriving, and viewed as fully human.

A further irony occurs, for a certain fear or sacred aura overtakes the community (Gen 20:8). Visitors often did take on such an aura, as the story of the visitors at Mamre (Gen 18:1-16) reveal. But the healthy fear of strangers diminishes the more settled and fortified a settlement is.<sup>71</sup> In Girard’s mythic structure, the victim also takes on a sacred character. This in fact is how Girard envisions the origins of divinities. Victims are dead kings, heroes, ancestors, sons, or strangers who because of the scapegoat style death resulted in peace for the community.<sup>72</sup> The critical difference is that now the sacrificing community sees the expelled one as the product of their violence. The veil has been torn into.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

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<sup>71</sup> Yes, there was an interdependence between settled and semi-nomadic communities, but the vulnerability still resides mostly with the *ger*. Westermann (1981: 276-77) explains the sacred character of the visitor expressed in the reception of the three visitors at Mamre (Gen 18:1-16). But Westermann explains this sacredness strictly from the point of view of a Bedouin culture. In other words, a semi-nomadic people simply encircled offer precious little protection. An encampment of such a nature has much to fear at the approach of a coming entourage. And as always, everything depends on the initial encounter, the greeting. The situation is most dangerous and can easily result in an outburst of violent reciprocity.

<sup>72</sup> Baile (1997:97ff) offers an detailed example of this in the case of the Aztecs and the myth of Quetzalcoatl.

When one thinks about the narratives of the patriarchs, we can understand why the stories of the patriarchs are called cycles because it recycles the same narrative structure. The stories of Abraham almost all center on these dangerous encounters of negotiating the potential sacrificial crisis. There is Abram's encounter with Melchizedek (Gen 14), the visitors at Mamre (Gen 18), and Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19). Also, there are the cycles of Abram's relapses into the old sacrificial system: twice offering Sarai, the *aqedah* of Isaac (Gen 22), and the expulsions of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21). There are the leavings of Jacob (Gen 27:28) and of course Joseph as well.<sup>73</sup> In particular, the primeval history sets up parallel tracks based on the expulsions Cain (Gen 4) and Adam/Abel/Seth (Gen 3).

Girard equates sacrifice as primarily an all-against-one expulsion of a victim which resolves the crisis and ushers in a return to prosperity. The Genesis/Exodus narratives are structured around a series of 'leavings,' while simultaneously offering a peculiar bent to the typical sacrificial resolve. For one, the narrative doesn't challenge the primary and necessary premise that an expulsion of a victim is the definitive act of generation. From the expulsion of light from the desolation of primordial earth (Gen.1:2, 3) to the extraction of a woman from the side of Adam, from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden to the pronouncement of Cain's restless wandering, from the destruction by the flood and Noah's preservation to the scattering of people at Babel and to the leavings of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, God is shown to be the driving force behind all these expulsions. Along with the structuralists, Girard's (1978:108) fundamental assertion that myth is a movement from undifferentiation to differentiation collaborates with the Bible's narratives of origin. The stories in Genesis and Exodus are mythical in the sense that communal vitality, life, and productivity—blessing—are generated from a particular and crucial moment when the crossover from crisis to clarity happens. It is the decisive moment when something is jettisoned or emerges from undifferentiation to differentiation. This notion is ubiquitous in myth.

Two things, however, emerge from the expulsions, 'leavings' or 'departures' of the patriarchs: first, the conventional sacrificial arrangement is proven defective; second a new 'sacred' sense

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<sup>73</sup> Girard (1985b:107ff) delineates the similar scapegoat characteristics of Joseph and Oedipus.

emerges. There is a potential threat of mimetic rivalry over the primary issue of blessing, botched attempts at a sacrificial resolve, and a resolve in the expulsion of a victim. There are also, however, some odd glitches or hiccups in the usual mythical arrangement that bear examination. The sacrificer, the Egyptian ruler who ultimately expels the sojourner displays a consistent reluctance to expel. Even more so, the expeller is shown to be relatively innocent of his actions, or to be at least tricked or manipulated into a forced removal of the sojourner. There is a driving reason why expulsion is resisted that needs examination. Within these curious stories of Abram in Egypt, we have one of the curious interplays so prominent in Exodus—Pharaoh must ‘drive you out’ and ‘let go’; simultaneously, Yahweh will ‘bring you out’. Immediately, it must appear as an expulsion, but overall, it is Yahweh who brought about His plan in, through, and around the conventional sacrificial mechanism. Yahweh is viewed as a sacrificer, but of a unique kind. For one, God chooses the victim in stark contrast to the arbitrary selection that the crowd produces. In a powerful dynamic, He calls or asks his ‘victim’ to voluntarily undergo expulsion. Even more so, He compels his chosen one to trust in Him that he will survive the sacrificial experience. The sacrifice is a voluntary expulsion. The powerful theme is that God is on the side of the victim and the victim can survive being sacrificed. Here, the biblical narrative appears to radically diverge from the conventional scapegoat mechanism. The victims not only survive, he and she thrive. But perhaps even less noticed is that the expelling community is spared and also thrives. The reciprocal rivalry leading to the threat of all-against-all is dismantled in a way that spared all.

In the next two chapters, we will see how Israel’s versions of origins, chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis frame the generative activity of God similarly to what has been discussed above with the patriarchs, extending the unique sacrificial intervention of God to ‘the heavens and earth.’

## 5 The Sacrificial Structure of Israel’s Cosmogony: Genesis 1

In the proceeding chapters, the exegesis of the Bible’s most familiar creation passages will yield priority to the assumptions and approach of mimetic theory. This is not to ignore the more conventional methods of criticism established over the last two centuries in biblical studies. But whereas the usual concerns of authorship, historical development of the text, and the historicity of the content are addressed first, here we will explore how or to what extent the narrative is operating by the structure of mimetic rivalry and its resolve in the scapegoat. Furthermore, we will interrogate the extent to which the author is aware of such a structure and addresses it in some way, either by reinforcing, reinterpreting, or perhaps dismantling it. The conclusions arrived at from this perspective will then be incorporated into reevaluating some of the current issues in Old Testament studies of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

Hopefully, enough explanation of Girard’s perspective and the criticisms of it have been supplied that will allow us to proceed without a constant apologetic regression. With this in mind, a reiteration of some basic mimetic concerns bears repeating. The dynamic of imitative desire playing out in rival doubles is, of course, critically important. In this regard, the elusive IT, the object of desire that the model appears to possess and even embody, is explored. Genesis has given it an identity and elaborates extensively on it. It is called *blessing*, that vital force that everyone in the narratives appears occupied with. The other key component will be to locate the sacrifice of the victim or the vestigial traces of a scapegoat sacrifice in the text. The victim is the central locator for the sacrificial crisis and its resolve for the community.

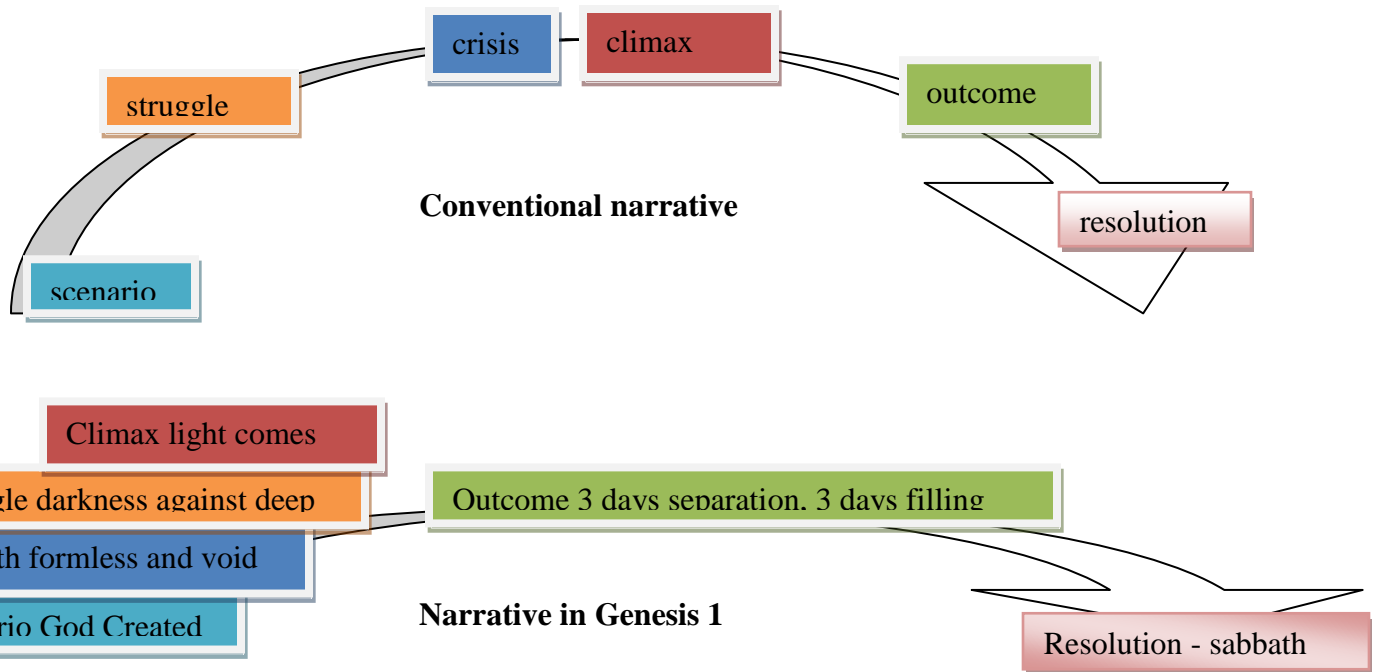
### 5.1 Forcing a Sacrificial Reading on the Text?

Immediately, there is a striking difference with Genesis 1 as compared to the narratives of the rest of Genesis as well as mythological accounts such as *Enuma Elish*. Genesis 1 has only one animated character—God. Thus at a cursory glance, a ‘sacrificial’ reading of Genesis seems more like eisegesis rather than exegesis. How can one speak of rival

desires, of violent resolve in an all-against-one expulsion and a restoration of peace by the establishing of prohibitions? Sacrifice is a communal affair, and hardly any ‘community’ is in view. We are investigating, however, a sacrificial structure, and this does not out of necessity require ‘characters.’ Nevertheless, Westermann (1974:80) affirms its narrative structure; it is a story.<sup>1</sup> Albeit stripped of narrative elaboration, the structure can be elicited as follows:

- 1) There is symmetry, parallel parts which exacerbates a loss of difference.
- 2) An entity emerges, goes out, or is expelled from this symmetry.
- 3) The exiting entity is the focal point that reestablishes difference.

The anomaly of Genesis 1 is that the ‘dramatic’ element is compacted into the first three verses. ‘If one were to look for any tension in 1:1-2a,’ Westermann (1974:80) observes, ‘it would be in 1:2 and its link with the preceding and following verses.’



**Figure 1.**

<sup>1</sup> With this we can also be aware of Watts’ (2007:178) insight that the more violent aspects of sacrifice are more apparent in narrative than in prescription.

In essence then, Genesis 1:1-3a densely compacts the key structural elements of a narrative, what Westermann (1974:xii) calls *Geshehensbogen*,<sup>2</sup> and then extensively elaborates on the final elements—resolution and outcome. Viewing the *movement* of the narrative as arch, Genesis 1 differs from a more conventional narrative structure (see figure 1).

It may seem striking at first to those with little exposure to René Girard’s anthropological theory of violence and the sacred. For Girard and adherents of his theory of generative violence, evidence of a sacrificial paradigm and a scapegoating mechanism appear everywhere in literary texts throughout history, both ancient and modern. Thus, Girard stands in contrast with a strand of Old Testament scholarship which has marginalized the sacrificial strands of the Old Testament to the fastidious concerns of an emerging priestly class during the exile. The ethical dimension of Yahwism exemplified by the prophets is viewed as the dominant and driving concern of Israel’s religion and for the most part, sacrifice was frowned upon by prophets and modern interpreters alike.

If Girard is to be seriously considered, then we should accept his assertion to test the validity of his case on ancient texts. Girard (1972:309) expresses confidence that we can ‘gain access to the generative event through constant reference to these enigmatic sources [ancient sources].’ After rehearsing the exegetical discussion generated by Gunkel, Westermann (1974:62-64, 80) concludes something similar to Girard and what is being advocated here. There is a broad reliance on a basic worldview. It isn’t direct borrowing. In essence, the reliance is structural. In my view, Westermann comes very close to recognizing what Girard has.<sup>3</sup>

**5.1.1. The Direction of the projection.** There are several points of interest in applying Girard’s point of view to the picture of primordial creation presented in Genesis 1. One of the more challenging perspectives to be worked through because of our scientific perspective is the congealing of natural forces with cosmological and theological

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<sup>2</sup> In the preface to Westermann’s (1974:xii) commentary, the translator John Scullion relates Westermann’s explanation of *Gesehehensbogen* in a letter: ‘...*ein Geshehensbogen* is like the arch of a bridge which spans the whole from beginning to end. Likewise the narrative arch spans an event from beginning to end.’

<sup>3</sup> In his discussion of the ‘mythologization’ of history Van Seters (1992:25) makes similar conclusions from a different approach. The blending of history and myth that is part of the ancient historiographic literature is an attempt to give an historical account a universal and *paradigmatic* appeal.



paradigms so common to ‘mythological narrative.’ It is clear enough for a reader of such texts that the interchange between natural and supernatural forces was, at times, almost indistinguishable, even though the biblical texts are to a lesser degree. Debates over the ‘anthropomorphic’ views of God have been a preoccupation for centuries. From our modern perspective, we can reason how natural it would have been in pre-scientific times to project the behavior of nature onto social structures. From the pattern of planting and harvest come notions of dying and rebirth of kings and kingdoms.<sup>4</sup>

Girard, however, insists that the reverse is true.<sup>5</sup> From the earliest of times, humanity has projected and infused one of its fundamental notions of communal existence onto the cosmological world. Humanity’s unique mechanism for dealing with its own escalation of rival desires leading to an outbreak of uncontrollable violence through the scapegoat is seen as functioning on every level of the natural world. Thus the turbulent<sup>6</sup> crisis brought on by a draught, plague, flood, or storm is viewed as acting under the same ‘rules’ as a communal crisis—sacrificially. Girard (1972:31) insists:

The very weapons used to combat violence are turned against their users. Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very objects intended to smother its flames. The metaphor of fire could well give way to metaphors of tempest, flood, earthquake. Like the plague, the resemblance violence bears to these natural cataclysms is not limited to the realm of poetic imagery. In the acknowledging that fact, however, we do not mean to endorse the theory that sees in the sacred a simple transfiguration of natural phenomena. The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man’s effort to master them... *We have yet to learn how man succeeds in positing his own violence as an independent being* (emphasis mine).

In the examination of the Bible’s narratives of origins (Gen 1 and 2), the question is straightforward—just how much of Israel’s most comprehensive account of God’s creative involvement in the natural world is viewed from a sacrificial dimension? Is the account structured by a scapegoat mechanism?

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson (1967:11-40) provides an eloquent formation of this kind of thinking brought on by the discovery of the library of Ashurbanipal and Herman Gunkel’s seminal works with it.

<sup>5</sup> Girard 1972: 31ff, 96ff, 182, 255, 282ff

<sup>6</sup> We can take note that turbulence derives from the Latin *turba*, essentially meaning disturbed crowd, i.e. mob.

Genesis 1 does not stray very far from the Girard's notion that generative acts are founded upon and come out of life-threatening crisis, what he calls a sacrificial crisis.<sup>7</sup> The Bible wastes no time getting to the fundamental starting point of generation—the crisis of creation, *the undifferentiated state of the world*.

**5.1.2. Much ado about nothing.** The crisis of creation as described below has affinities with the doctrinal formulation of *ex nihilo*. Out of nothing, God created. One does not need to delve too far into the discussion of origins, either ancient or modern, to discover the oft contentious discussion over the fundamental substance(s) involved in generating 'the world.' The nature of 'nothing' is far from settled. As McKim (1984:283) reminds in his historical rehearsal of the doctrine, there is something profound and essential at stake, especially in formulating 'our most basic conception of God.'<sup>8</sup> Both Watts (2007:206) and Westermann (1974:43) observe that the discussion of origins both ancient and modern is highly polemical, especially where issues of authority are at stake.<sup>9</sup> Bartlett (2009:90) even takes the discussion of origins one step further, claiming the very reflection of origins is a part of the 'originary event.' In other words, reflections on 'the beginning' is an inextricable part of representation which moves humans toward culturization.<sup>10</sup>

The impetus for the doctrine is polarized with 'dualistic systems.' McKim's (1984:281) description of such 'systems' is certainly grounded in mythological cosmogonies as well as Aristotle and Plato, and it sounds similar to Girard's picture of a sacrificial crisis: 'positing two equal and primary principles in the universe. In some of these, "creation" occurs when two complementary principles unite in some way to produce a new "form"

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<sup>7</sup> Girard provides numerous and extensive explanations of what this entails. His chapter in *Violence and the Sacred* is very thorough. For now we may choose the following description especially since Girard (1977:51) expressly connects it with our Genesis passage: 'As in Greek tragedy and primitive religion, it is not the differences but the loss of them that gives rise to violence and chaos... This loss forces men into a perpetual confrontation... *the undifferentiated state of the world*' (emphasis mine).

<sup>8</sup> A Google search on the word 'genesis' generates over 53 million hits.

<sup>9</sup> Van Seters (1992:25, 31-32) does not overtly mention the polemical nature, but sees the concern for unity to be central in historiographic literature. Thus, 'classical' historiography of Mesopotamian region infuses mythological elements into chronological narrative to establish the beginnings of culture in the *origins of the sacred* and the cult (Van Seters, 1992:71)

<sup>10</sup> The statement is in the context of a compare and contrast between Eric Gans's 'generative anthropology' and Girard. Both hold to a notion of cultural formation based on a deferral of internal violence. Gans asserts that the first deferral was through representation (language) whereas Girard holds that it was in the first victim.

out of the already existing, independent “matter or principle.” According to McKim (1984:282), combating a ‘moral dualism’ is equally at stake and perhaps primarily so.

The debate over the substance of the world’s origins heightened with Darwin’s famous publication, but the lesser known discovery and publication of the Babylonian account of the primeval flood by George Smith in 1875<sup>11</sup> had probably a greater impact on Old Testament studies. As will be discussed in more detail below, Gunkel’s positing of Genesis 1 as dependent on a broader Mesopotamian cosmogony put new strains on the doctrine of *ex nihilo*. Westermann (1974:43) forcefully concludes that issues of belief in a creator God are nowhere in purview for the ancients.

The issue, then, is what is the nature of ‘nothing’? Is it a dark, foreboding picture of colliding forces in a swirl of contention, a cataclysmic battle, or is the description simply the ancient’s way of giving a time reference to the distant past, a way to say, ‘not yet’? For Westermann (1974:43), the universal concern of beginnings reflects a deep-seated longing yet to be realized. Images of origins are infused with the unease of the present. It has everything to do with conflict-resolution.

In the first verses of Genesis, however, the Bible addresses more acutely the *annihilation* and *regeneration* or reconstitution of the heavens and earth. The opening pages of the Bible do not stray far from the common ‘mythological’ understanding of the ancient world that generative acts naturally, indeed necessarily, proceed from tumultuous conditions.<sup>12</sup> Birch et al (1999:48) and Westermann (1974:46) affirm that one will have to look elsewhere for affirmation of *ex nihilo*. Girard’s perspective would compel us, however, to reverse the idea that the ancient near eastern world was mostly perplexed by nature’s recurring cycles of chaotic intrusion. The ancients were certainly perplexed by the ever encroaching specter of chaos, not produced by nature however, but by human community. For ancient peoples without the protection of a legal system and police force, the ominous threat of annihilation either externally by massacre or internally by

<sup>11</sup> George Smith, 1875 *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*.

<sup>12</sup> Birch et al (1999:47) is but one example of downplaying the negative connotations of Gen 1:2, yet even they cannot avoid descriptions like: ‘negative backdrop,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘undifferentiated’ or ‘chaotic situation.’ Pointedly, however, they describe the most critical negative factor: ‘a state of affairs prior to God’s ordering, a state that is not *yet* consonant with the divine purposes.’ Certainly the context of Gen 1:2 subordinates this negative feature; nevertheless, the author is *compelled* to address it and immediately so.

implosion or communal disintegration was, as it still is today, a real and ever present threat. The threat of a city, village, or even a nomadic encampment being reduced to ‘nothing’ is the repeated concern of the prophet’s laments. Humankind’s astounding veracity left unbridled is truly a frightful specter. As argued in the previous chapter, the presence of or stories of ghost towns was ever present.

Foremost for the concerns laid out above is a clear notion that the goodness of the earth, *ha’eretz*, and the uniqueness of humankind, *ha’adam*, is portrayed as *emerging* out of a state of indifference.<sup>13</sup> The good thing *comes out* from something else. This is a fundamental sacrificial notion that is not relinquished in this text. The question becomes: is this state of indifference one of crisis and confrontation or ambiguous time? Does the emergence of light usher in the progression toward peace or the beginnings of history?

Commentators are correct when they notice how devoid of mythical elements this account of earth’s beginning is. When compared alongside mythical stories such as *Enuma Elish* or the Osiris myth, the absence of a crisis among the gods leading to an execution of a scapegoated victim and the excarnation of the corpse becoming the raw material for the fundamental elements of the world is obvious. There is still, however, a fundamental and vestigial remain of this sacrificial view of the world’s origins. The significant building blocks of the world *come out* of something. They emerge from a peculiar situation or happenstance. That situation, from a mimetic perspective would be, of course, a sacrificial crisis, a situation where all difference is lost in an escalation of mimetic desire. What emerges or is expelled from a dangerous crisis is a sacrifice that becomes the source of benevolence.

The affinity of Genesis 1 with other ancient myths cannot be ignored completely.<sup>14</sup> The notion that the world originated from a kind of chaos, a *Chaoschompf* where a theogenic

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<sup>13</sup> I want to avoid for now the use of the word ‘creation’ for two reasons: For one, ‘creation’ carries a formidable amount of theologically and politically loaded connotations that can readily distract us from recognizing the mimetic elements; second, the word ‘creation’ (especially in terms of cosmos or universe) is not in the text or in the purview of the author at all. It is the earth, *ha’eretz*, and humanity, *ha’adam*, that are the dominant concerns. The word itself, however, attests to precisely what is being discussed here. The English word shares its root with the word crescent, *crescere*. Its first reference was that of the emergence of the moon from a darkened or undeveloped state to its fullest.

<sup>14</sup> This is the premise to Westermann’s (1974:4) introduction to his commentary on Genesis.

war among the gods ensued, was brought to the fore by Gunkel's<sup>15</sup> seminal work at the turn of the twentieth century on the heels of significant archeological discoveries. The similarities between *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 seemed obvious. By the end of the twentieth century, however, this idea has been cast in serious doubt. Perry (1993:4), for instance, concludes: 'The older, mythological view is now largely discredited but has left its impact on our current interpretation.'<sup>16</sup> He concludes that it had more to do with the imagination of scholars than what the text brought forth. In a similar vein, Tsumara (1989:34) accentuates the type of creation story categorized by Westermann (1974:43) as the 'when there was not yet...' strategy for describing creation. Of the seven categories,<sup>17</sup> this one has the potential to be interpreted as the most passive. It is more descriptive than narrative. Genesis 1:2 has no chaotic pre-creation or anti-creation view in mind. Instead, it is a rather benign affirmation simply to affirm that the earth as we know it had not come about yet. Westermann (1974:44), however, argues against such an understanding of this category: 'This way of speaking is of great significance because it is the place where talk about creation becomes narrative in the strict sense. It brings a flash point into the creation event.' It signals a *unique transformative event* has occurred.

Tsumara's view is equally forced. Even the most casual of readings would conjure up a foreboding and fearful sense from Genesis 1:2.<sup>18</sup> Jaki's<sup>19</sup> presentation of the history of exegesis of Genesis 1 amply demonstrates that cosmological and theological concerns

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<sup>15</sup> Gunkel, Hermann 1895 *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton*. Gunkel, Hermann 1901 *Genesis*.

<sup>16</sup> Perry is correct to down play a picture of a cosmic battle being portrayed in Genesis 1:2., i.e. God as storm god defeats *Tiamat*, but a theogenic crisis among the gods is but a mythical (meaning something is being concealed and simultaneously revealed) overlay of a *real* communal crisis. Mimetic theory offers a way through the impasse in this debate.

<sup>17</sup> Westermann's (1974:26-47) categories of mythological texts of origins are creation: (1) by birth, (2) as result of struggle or victory, (3) by an action or activity, (4) by word (5) as involving the rest of the creator, (6) as 'when the world was not yet,' and (7) as praise to god. As we proceed, it is evident that a more mimetic interpretation finds affinities with all the categories as does Genesis 1 and 2.

<sup>18</sup> Westermann (1974:103) concludes that the *tohuwabohu* of Gen 1:2 must certainly conjure up an 'ominous' situation: 'It would be nearer to the sense if the nothingness, the non-existence, were understood as something gruesome.'

<sup>19</sup> Jaki (1998:32) 'A detailed and carefully documented survey of those commentaries is necessary to achieve the task of these lectures which is to put Genesis 1, once and for all, at a safe remove from its greatest peril. The latter is the ever recurring temptation to make that magnificent chapter appear concordant with the science of the day in order to assure it cultural respectability. Since the lure in this age, when all science has become cosmology to a stifling degree, is more seductive than ever, and even greater has grown the contrast between the biblical cosmogenesis and scientific cosmogony.'

have overwhelmingly clouded the picture here. The case is made here that the basic contours of a sacrificial event are evident and this has been clouded over by weighted theological and cosmological concerns. The exegesis below explores the possibility of a more ‘down to earth’ reading.<sup>20</sup>

The first verses of the Bible realistically addresses this, but immediately derails the standard mythological outcome as if the author sees through the ‘diffuse haziness’<sup>21</sup> that requires the perpetual recycling of the story—that is to once again establish communal life via a scapegoat-style sacrifice. Out of earth’s sacred and violent realm, God forges a new sacredness, one that leads to a new creation, a new way to order communal life and invites it into a domain of wholeness and harmony. From such a perspective, it is apparent that the infusion of Israel’s crisis, the exile,<sup>22</sup> into that of the created order was intended to encourage those who feared a complete annihilation of their existence as God’s people. Perhaps even more feared, however, may have been the total absence of God’s Presence among his people. A mimetic perspective, however, would question the necessity of an exilic perspective. We can equally assume that the specter of communal disintegration was an ever present reality for millennia, and not limited to the ancient Near East. On this assumption, there is nothing that requires the exile as the paradigm for such pictures of origins. Communal breakdown, whether by socioeconomic, geographic, or human conflict run all the way through human history and certainly through Israel’s checkered story. Certainly the language of the prophets used to depict the exile is evident in Genesis 1. It would only be natural for an exilic or post-exilic writer to incorporate such language. This does not require, however, that such language of annihilation originates with the prophets. Ghost towns were an ever present reminder of this reality for millennia.

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<sup>20</sup> The caution of many (Birch et al, 1999:46; Middleton, 2005:235ff) of not reading too much of a ‘war’ in Gen 1:2 is healthy. Nevertheless, there is an equal propensity to so disassociate this passage with anything worldly that it clouds the picture. For sure, Genesis 1 is heavily theologized, but no biblical theology has ever attempted to disassociate itself from the ‘real’ world. Here, we must insist on the ‘incarnational’ view of theology as does Westermann (1974:44). Creation stories are destined to demonstrate something of the world people live in and hope to live in.

<sup>21</sup> Jaki (1998:259) coins this term as characteristic of myth.

<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann (1982:29) postulates, ‘If our text is linked to the exile, then the historical experience of exile may be the “formless and void” about which this verse speaks and from which god works his creative purpose.’

**5.1.3 Hermeneutical considerations.** Two hermeneutical considerations induced by mimetic theory need be mentioned here that influence our inquiry.

First, an intriguing aspect of Girard's perspective is how the sacral victim holds together extreme opposites in a 'terrible equilibrium.' Unlike the structuralists and Freud, who would relegate these opposites to unexplained anomalies, Girard finds an internal logic to it when viewed in sacrificial terms. Binary opposites are a fundamental aspect of the sacred, and the failure to recognize this by scholars has oft times resulted in contorted readings of the text.

Girard sees this even in the way lexicographers have failed to connect the duality and sacrificial element inherent in the words themselves. As Girard (1972:262) states:

Many languages, most notably Greek, contain terms that reveal the non-difference between violence and the sacred. And it is easily demonstrable that cultural evolutions in general, and lexicographers in particular, have a tendency to put asunder that which primitive language has joined; that it, to suppress the scandalous conjunction of violence to the sacred.

Hence, even words can leave a vestigial record of the crisis that lead to the original mob murder.<sup>23</sup> Girard (1972:256ff) has questioned persistent resistance or ignorance of lexicographer's to connect the use of a word to a meaning referencing some part of the original murder, choosing to ignore clear references to violence and opting for more benign references to a conceptual idea.<sup>24</sup> There, a primordial event among a collective of humans began in a whirlwind of escalating reciprocal and symmetric exchanges of violence and the rapid degeneration of the loss of difference. The crisis which loomed over the collective threatened to annihilate everything until an instantaneous and spontaneous all-against-one killing took place that had a miraculous and positive effect on the community—peace was restored. Whatever the reason why lexicographers have failed to examine the connection, it is one more demonstration, for Girard, of how words and text function sacrificially<sup>25</sup>—they restore peace to the community while

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<sup>23</sup> Baile (1997:100) provides a prime example in the word myth: 'In order to fully appreciate the relevance of this mythology, we must be willing to read it as a distorted misrecognition of real events...myth, from the root *mu*, always involves a *mutation* or *mutilation* of the memory of an actual event.

<sup>24</sup> The word *sacred* falls under such a category for Girard (1972:65).

<sup>25</sup> For Girard (1972:256-262), the text doesn't just testify to the sacrificial system it acts as part of it. The language itself functions sacrificially, displacing and hiding (as does the sacrificial victim) our violence.

simultaneously concealing the mechanism that makes it happen. In the case of word studies, we often come up with theological notions removed from its sacrificial origins, but the words themselves betray remnants or traces of the original murder. The connection between the meaning and its origins may have all but faded; nonetheless, we should pay attention to such connections, especially where a word appears to have radically opposite or disjointed denotations. Westermann (1974:33-35) comes close to recognizing this aspect in words, but does not pursue the ramifications, noting the nearly ubiquitous notion of *separation*, *cutting*, or *slashing* in creation accounts. What Westermann wonders about, Girard explains.

In a similar vein then, this inquiry below admittedly questions some conventional ground rules of etymology. The kinds of theological and political concerns have often guided word studies into certain conclusions. This no more evident than the discussion of God's first act in the Bible, **אָרַץ**, which in the past has derived a sense of non-existence from it. In his discussion of 'image' and 'likeness' of Gen 1:26, Middleton (2005:44) reminds that word studies alone do not settle hermeneutical issues. The thrust of word studies here is to rethink the peculiar binary opposites that are particular to notions of the sacred. As has already been discussed in chapter 3, however, the argument for 'context' can have its own conundrums. The discussion of root meanings to follow seeks to demonstrate how a sacrificial understanding of origins is more grounded in mythological accounts of origins than has been perceived in the past. This, to remind, not only applies to commentators but to the author(s) of the text itself. The approach here echoes that of Middleton (2005:45):

This interpretive movement, from textual details to broad patterns within the text and ultimately to a shared intertextual symbolic world, is rooted in the conviction that no text (idea) is an island. Rather, every text is informed by—even constituted by—other texts and ultimately by a network of ideas, many of them tacit, that are shared by the culture of the text.

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Girard (1972:263) in particular points to a duality of words that lexicographers neglect to take ample notice of.



The second consideration has been elaborated more fully in the previous chapters, but needs reiteration here. For Girard, sacrifice, execution, purgation, or expulsion are synonymous with sacral violence. In this regard, it is argued below that the infusion of ‘the spirit of God’ into the undifferentiated state of the heaven and earth (Gen. 1:2) and subsequent coming forth of light is the sacrificial and generative force for all of creation. This sacrificially structured version, however, steadily and even stealthily unfolds in a different direction than a mythical structure.<sup>26</sup> Although operating within the realm of sacred violence, there are substantial differences. From the very opening words, God is established as mastering the crisis with lightning brevity and deliberation. God is viewed as actually bringing on the crisis of indifference (Gen 1:1) for the express purpose of calling forth light from it. God himself generates the crisis, involves himself in it (entrance of ‘the breath of God’), and thrusts his own unique sacrificial offering (the emergence of light), and thus marshals in an irreversible, rival and superior sacredness. Against the backdrop of myth’s recycling *savage sacredness*, described in Genesis 1:2, is a view of *Sabbath sacredness*—one of wholeness, goodness, rest, and blessing. It is an offering to humankind’s destructive and uncontrollable force that can reverse its elusive but ever present mechanism.

## 5.2 בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים - Genesis 1:1

Genesis 1 is among the most exegeted portions of scripture throughout history.<sup>27</sup> There is a considerable amount of variations concerning how it is structured. The understanding here, agrees with Westermann (1974:94) that these opening verses are not parenthetical but integral to the whole pericope. The pronouncement of the completion of heaven and earth (Gen 2:1) and the subsequent explanation of the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3) appear in synonymous parallel to Gen 1:1-3a. This means, for one, that Genesis 1:1-2 structures the whole pericope in some way. It also means that Genesis 2:1-4 reiterates that structure. In a similar fashion to Isa. 46:10, the end or completion (Gen 2:1), is already

<sup>26</sup> Middleton (2005:264-266) also holds that an alternative narrative of origins, especially to the Mesopotamian view of royalty, is intended in Genesis 1.

<sup>27</sup> See Jaki 1998 *Genesis 1 Throughout the Ages*. Arnold, 2009:29.

in sight from the start. In a lengthier discussion of the relationship between Babylonian creation myths and the development of Jewish apocalyptic literature, Gunkel (1895:233ff) notes the ‘common idea which lies at the base of these particular pieces, i.e., that the things of the end time will be similar to those of primal time.’ Hence, creation accounts are eschatological in the sense that what happens at the end (*endzeit*) corresponds to how things began (*urzeit*).

The first lines of the Bible are retrospective and purpose driven. This does not only apply to this pericope; it also reflects or projects a perspective running throughout the Pentateuch.<sup>28</sup> The sense of moving toward or emerging out of something is present throughout the Old Testament. That ‘something’ I don’t think the Hebrew scriptures ever quite get a hold of.

**5.2.1 In the beginning.** The grammatical anomaly of *beresheth*, בְּרֵאשִׁית, has generated much contention since it leaves quite vague the object it is modifying. Jaki (1998:2-3,45) suggests that traditional translations have been overly constrained by concerns to jibe with contemporary cosmologies. Arnold (2009:35) concedes that entrenched theological perspectives have impinged on interpretation. In this sense, the concern to counter myth with an immediate sense of ‘history’ is induced. Thus, Anderson (1967:111) sides with Eichrodt’s ‘absolute temporal beginning’ in order to insist that history, as opposed to mythology or cosmology, is in view here. It is the start of human history, indeed Israel’s history, that this verse is concerned with. Anderson (1967:111), however, qualifyingly accepts Gunkel’s belief that the beginning (*urzeit*) and the end (*endzeit*) are both in view:

In the Bible, creation opens toward the horizon of the future...Creation and consummation, first things and last things, are inseparably joined together, like Siamese twins. The first words of the bible, “in the beginning,” have as their counterpart the prophetic expectation, “in the end.”...creation is an eschatological belief.

The beginning and the end are *structured symmetrically*, like twins. ‘*In the beginning* God created’ corresponds to, ‘*on the day*’ God finished. *Bereshith* emphasizes the setting

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold, 2009:29-32

in motion of an unrelenting march towards the goal or end. In a sense, what God does ‘in the beginning’ must happen because of where it must end. There is a necessity to the first action of God induced by the desired end. The question to start with is not so much when did God create everything or what, if anything, was before this start? Rather, the concern of this pericope is what *out of necessity* must proceed in order for all things to reach their ‘end,’ ‘fulfillment,’ and ‘rest’? *Bereshith* retains here its most common reference to first in a series or process.<sup>29</sup> Another primary denotation of both ראשית and *archē* is that of first importance and a priority of order.

Thus, an accent on a foundational and necessary condition is shared with the concern to establish an absolute historical beginning.<sup>30</sup> The first word of the Bible sets up two critical factors for Genesis 1. It emphasizes the utter necessity, the unquestioned precondition and sequence of what is to follow, and God’s unqualified prerogative over all of it. Westermann (1974:94, 96) is insistent that the first statement in the Bible is unparalleled in its all-encompassing praise of God. It is as Brueggemann (1982:29) affirms, ‘a primal assertion of God’s rule.’<sup>31</sup> It is a word of destiny which drives toward ‘completion’ (Gen 2:1).

There is perhaps another consideration. The previous chapter examined common structural elements in expulsion stories of Abraham and the Hebrews in Egypt. In a peculiar, less overt way, God actually ‘brings on’ the sacrificial crisis for the express purpose of confronting the sacrificial mechanism of the community. As in Exodus 1, the sacrificial crisis is covertly exasperated by the Israelites amazing ability to ‘increase’

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<sup>29</sup> BDB 912 states: ‘first phase, step, or element in the course of events.’ In his lengthy discussion of *bereshith*, Westerman (1974: 98) echoes F. Delitzsch: ‘His [P] point is not that heaven and earth had a beginning, but that the creation of heaven and earth was the beginning of all history.’

<sup>30</sup> In his discussion of *archē*, Coenen (1982:165) argues that: ‘The meaning of foremost or highest rank is found alongside the temporal meaning. This comes from its rendering of Heb. *rosh*, head, with its wide range of nuances...[closely related to *protos*-first] ‘The connotations of beginning and of the highest rank come together in certain passages, e.g. Ps 111:10, where the fear of the Lord is the *archē tēs sōpias* (beginning of wisdom). Here *archē* is the principle which governs the components of beginning, progress and result of the whole.’ See also TWOT 2098.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the interpretations of jazz musicians does not belong here, but in Duke Ellington’s sacred work, ‘In the Beginning God,’ the phrase ‘in the beginning, God’ is intentionally repeated several times to emphasis the presence of the subject above all else. Arnold (2009:36) asserts: ‘...the text announces with the utmost simplicity that it was God—and God *alone*—who created the cosmos.’

under the worst conditions. Strongly suggested throughout that story is the command of God over the situation. Perhaps the author here makes explicit what is implicit in the other stories. If Genesis 1 is written from the perspective of the exile, the author may well wish to emphatically assert God's command of a communal crisis.

**5.2.2 The initial act of God.** We should thus understand the initial action of God, **ברא**, as encompassing all of God's activity throughout the first chapter and culminating in completion.<sup>32</sup> It is in this first act of God where we encounter a peculiar duality to its meaning of which Girard mentions. It is also where we should question the entrenched notion that this word exclusively belongs to the 'divine fiat' of God (Jer 31:22, Deut. 4:32). Although *bara* is found in late works, Gunkel (1901:104) argues for an ancient origin for it, albeit having heavy theologized overtones here. If this be the case, we could envision the very thing Girard speaks of where the connotations associated with a sacrificial act—mainly its beneficial result—gradually eclipse a direct referent to the original scapegoat. Hence, Jaki (1998:6) challenges the propensity of theological lexicons to completely theologize a word with no referent to a human act. Only God, it is repeatedly affirmed, can *bara*. Hence, there has been a whole theological category—creation theology—spawned by this assumption. Jaki (1998:3-6), who is not influenced by mimetic considerations, also calls for a reevaluation of the word 'created.'

*Bara* has connections with an Aramaic usage 'to fashion by cutting' or 'to pare a reed for writing or a stick for an arrow.'<sup>33</sup> A parallel is found in Phoenician with an 'allusion to a trade involving cutting.'<sup>34</sup> Von Rad (1972:40) connects this with artistic creations,<sup>35</sup> but we should not neglect to notice that cutting is the primary act in sacrifice.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the connection with the carving of images and the excarnation of a victim may have more

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<sup>32</sup> Von Rad (1972:49). Arnold (2009:37)

<sup>33</sup> BDB 135. Westermann (1974:98-100). Arnold (2009:37)

<sup>34</sup> BDB 135

<sup>35</sup> Middleton (2005:74-77) connect the word *bara* to artistry and views the whole chapter in terms of God as artist. That God's creative act is artistry is not in opposition to sacrificial notions. All kinds of primal art centers around the sacrificial victim, including using parts of the victim.

<sup>36</sup> Recent discoveries of the Moche sites in Peru provide graphic reminders of this. During a period of extreme changes in climatic conditions where the Moche experience first deluging rain, then severe and extended draught, archeologists discovered large amounts of sacrificed human remains. Of particular and gruesome interest, the markings on the victims' remains showed not only that they were sacrificed, but that their flesh was meticulously peeled of the bones in an apparent effort to extend the efficacy of each sacrifice, epitomized by the remaining skeleton (Popson 2002: electronic version).

than analogous connections. The act of carving images out of wood resembles that of excarnating a victim. There is an initial ‘cutting down’ followed by a stripping away that gradually produces a representation.<sup>37</sup>

The term is prominent in exilic works, especially Second Isaiah, Ezekiel and P, to accentuate the emergence of something new or extraordinary.<sup>38</sup> *Bara* is the driving force behind something completely different. It bears the force of something coming about that was not conceived before or was not considered possible. It is a miracle verb, one of radical reversal. Middleton (2005:73) defines it as ‘acts of radical reversal.’

Interestingly, the new thing in these verses is that of Yahweh redeeming his people from exile, i.e. a victim who returns, reversing the scapegoat mechanism via the sacrificial system. The emphasis lies in a contrast with that which preceded it. The old situation pales in comparison to a situation brought about by God:

You have but to inquire about bygone ages that came before you, ever since God created man on earth, from one end of heaven to the other: has anything as grand as this ever happened, or has anything like this ever been known? Has any people heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have, and survived. Or has any god ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and awesome power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes (Deut 4:32-35).

Of particular note, the action of God *bringing forth* a people from a communal crisis in Egypt is singled out as the action which sets the god of Israel apart from other gods. It is the act of a god who willfully engineers an expulsion for the express purpose of identifying with the one expelled and in the process dismantling the sacrificial structure. This is the singular (mono) feature of this god (theism). *Bara* is an action of extreme contrast; hence, the final outcome totally eclipses the process. This is exactly how Genesis 1 unfolds.

*Bara* connotes the sense of transformation more than formation. It is through a reversal of a dismal situation that the new thing comes forth. We may even go so far as to say

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<sup>37</sup> Westermann (1974:35) notes that along with mud or clay, woodshavings are sometimes seen as the substance of humans. Westermann reminds that this notion is nearly universal.

<sup>38</sup> Again, if we avoid the loaded ‘creation’ word, we must fall back on words such as ‘emerge.’

that the building material of the new thing<sup>39</sup> is the dismal situation itself. In David's famous prayer of repentance (Ps 51:12), he beseeches God to create in him a 'clean heart.' As a matter of first importance, God must annihilate and purge his sin, his sinful heart being the raw material for the new heart. Isaiah speaks of a new thing as an astounding, indeed impossible, reversal (Isa 40:17ff)—streams from bare hills, a desert into pools of water, cedars in the wilderness, cypresses in the desert.<sup>40</sup> *Bara* is the action of God bringing forth some astounding, never heard of thing of either unspeakable judgment (Num 16:30) or extraordinary rescue, like Yahweh creating a covenant with a people (Ex 34:10) or creating a people from scratch (Ezek. 28:13). Regardless, it is always from one thing to another, and usually, as in the above examples, it is from a desperate, bleak situation to one of rejuvenation.

In this first act of God, we encounter a duality of meaning that has been overlooked. Approaching meanings near to its etymology<sup>41</sup> are occasional uses in connection with 'cutting.' Joshua instructs his countrymen to cut down trees in order to clear a dwelling space in a forest (Josh 17:15, 18).<sup>42</sup> In Ezekiel's allegory of the wantonness of Jerusalem, the sinful woman is to be stoned and 'cut down' (*bara*, Ez 23:47) with the sword by the assembly (Babylon). This is a clear reference to both a scapegoat style execution—a women caught in adultery—and the kind of purging massacre associated with the sacking

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<sup>39</sup> The use of 'creation' has been so theologized that it has lost the primary sense of something *new* coming about, as the Latin root, *creare* or *crescens*, indicates.

<sup>40</sup> Of this we should take note that the new thing is derived from a desert-like condition. Tsumura (1989:34) builds his understanding of *tohu wabohu* in verse two on such an understanding, as discussed below.

<sup>41</sup> Agreeing with Tsumura (1989:47) that discussions of etymology create 'confusion,' I hope here to proceed with caution. My argument does not rely on which sense of the word came first; instead, I seek to demonstrate only the connection theologized or sacralized words have with real human actions, many of which retain good and bad connotations. Westermann (1974:100) notes that attempts to disassociate *bara* from 'cutting' is a recent development which perhaps has its own predilections behind it. It does seem a more natural assumption, especially in ancient times, that the verb's association with a human action probably reveals a fundamental understanding. Westermann (1974:99) concludes that *bara* must be based on a 'concrete' idea, similar to **בָּרָא**, to form or fashion out of clay.

<sup>42</sup> McKeown (2008:20) asserts that any time there is a human action attributed to *bara* it is 'another Hebrew word spelled the same as the verb.' BDB (135) makes no such distinction nor does Westermann (1974:99). Arnold (2009:37) explains that the supposedly different roots are based on a weak differentiation of Hebrew verb stems. Clearly there is an association between these two meanings, so for one, this is not an issue of etymology per se. The act of separation clearly dominates in Genesis 1. The issue is more what is the connection, and why is it avoided? Here is a case in point of how Girard can go against the grain of established disciplines, claiming to understand something that remains an anomaly for those who should be able to figure it out.

of a city (probably referencing the Babylonians who plundered the temple). Ezekiel also uses the word *bara* in reference to the king of Babylon selecting a spot ‘on which the sword of the king of Babylon may advance’ (Ezek. 21:24), hence denoting a decisive act as well as the instrument used for cutting.<sup>43</sup> In these instances, the action of a new thing coming about is directly connected with a clearing out or making a way, especially through a cutting action. This clearing or purging is the precondition or foundation for the new thing coming about. One might think of a new development having to excavate or break ground as the necessary precursor to the project.

Botterweck and Ringgren (1975:245) say of *bara*: ‘It can be regarded as certain that *bara* was introduced in the Old Testament literature as a theological idea for the first time in the exilic period. Its prior history is unknown. The exilic authors who introduced it into the Old Testament may have taken up an old word and given it a new character.’

However heavily theologized *bara* became in Old Testament usage, it is readily apparent that its primary referent is the befalling of something. This is precisely Botterweck and Ringgren’s conclusion: ‘...probably a radical of *br*...The Hebrew root *br*’ probably had an original meaning of separate or divide.’ The same notion of cutting down or splitting is further reinforced when we examine the Greek words associated with creation. Esser (1975:376) states: ‘the verb *katabollo* (Homer) derives its basic meaning from its two roots *kata*, down, and *ballin*, to throw. It thus means, to bring from an upright into a horizontal position (e.g. to throw down, fell to the ground, kill, throw away; in fig. sense, to put sown, disparage, reject, and also pay down). Esser (1975:378) says of the more common word in Greek for create is *ktisis*, which ‘expresses the decisive, basic act of will behind the bringing into being, foundation or institution of something.’ Jaki (1998:7) is able to clearly see the connection between cutting down and the connotation of decisiveness: ‘the verb *bara* means basically “to split” and “to slash” or an action which conveys that something is divided and that the action is done swiftly.’

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<sup>43</sup> This may also have a reference to the large scale felling of trees around a city as part of a siege (Deut 29:19)

Gunkel's association of biblical creation texts with the conflict narrative in *Enuma Elish* is not all together erroneous.<sup>44</sup> Even though there are significant difference between them, it appears that the writer of Genesis 1 has still retained at least the language and underlying premise for something 'new' coming about. In *Enuma Elish*, the language is stark and clear as to what 'cut down' refers to. It is a sacrificial victim. Jaki's (1998:16) vivid description of the myth is poignant:

Marduk has to shoot an arrow into the raging Tiamat's belly before he can 'cut through her inward parts' and 'split her heart'...Marduk can very well be imagined as one who tries to catch his breath as he has to wield a huge club in order to perform the task of producing the universe from Tiamat's slain body:

'The lord trod upon the hinder part of Tiamat, and with his unsparing club he split her skull. He cut the arteries of her blood and caused the north wind to carry it to out-of-the-way places....The lord rested, examining her dead body, to divide the abortion and to create ingenious things (therewith). He split her open like a mussel into two.'<sup>45</sup>

The cutting action is two-fold. It refers to killing Tiamat and to her dismemberment. Westermann (1974:34) observes the frequency to which the 'splitting' of the heavens and earth signals the beginning of a new creation: '...the separation of heaven and earth must have been an early and widespread tradition. The dividing of heaven and earth not only signals the initial act, but also characterizes the whole creative process according to Westermann (1974:34). It is not a borrowing of a word or concept, whether directly or indirectly, that we need to be concerned with. It is much more engrained than that. The idea that human creation and new things come from an act of cutting down, splitting or dividing has its genesis in the original victim, and this appears to be ubiquitous across ancient cultures. As 'demythologized' as Genesis 1 is, it still steadfastly retains this

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<sup>44</sup> Middleton (2005:185ff) makes a strong case for *Enuma Elish* being the primary *literary* source that Genesis 1 is playing off of. If this is so, which I believe it is, it compels interpreters to account for the grotesque (by our standards) depictions of execution and dismemberment in that account with Genesis 1. The Orthodox Divine Liturgy speaks of the 'unbloody sacrifice' (which is also referred to as a 'reasonable sacrifice'). Perhaps the author of Genesis 1 has something like that in mind, to paradoxically envision a 'sacrifice' that is not violent.

<sup>45</sup> In Moche (Popson, 2002:e) iconography, the decisive act of killing the victim was with a club to the skull. This required severe and repeated action. We may well assume that before swords, blows to the head would be more readily used and would retain the more spontaneous element of the original scapegoat murder. Crushed skulls are a common find in sacrificial burial sites.



notion of beginnings.<sup>46</sup> The symmetrical pair of heaven and earth is still viewed as initially one thing that required splitting in order to generate new life, ‘like a mussel into two.’

The benefits of such an act also seem to be linked to sacrifice. An obscure and seemingly disconnected use of *bara* from those mentioned above is found only in the reflexive form. Eli’s scandalous sons are making themselves fat by gorging on the choice portions of meat from the sacrifices (1 Sam 2:29). A parallel Arabic word connects this with being ‘free from disease, or debt’ and is probably a derivative from the Assyrian word meaning ‘well fed, fat, or digestible’ and hence agreeable.<sup>47</sup> The noun form, **בָּרִיאַ**, refers exclusively to the fattened animals used for sacrifice.<sup>48</sup> Hence it connotes the choicest or finest that life, via the corpse of the victim, has to offer. In the adjectival form, **בָּרִיאַ**, fat is a symbol of health, prosperity, and blessing.<sup>49</sup> These derivatives, then, point to the end result of cutting down, befalling, or cutting up—life, blessing, goodness. It speaks of the benevolent effects of the sacrifice.

This connection between an action creating a completely new situation, cutting down, and fat as a symbol of abundance could be dismissed as odd or as an uncertain meaning. Yet, from the point of view of generative violence, the connection is logical. The action of cutting down the scapegoat in a collective killing, and dismembering it, especially the fatty portions being offered to the gods and of the ensuing benefits of the collective murder coming on the community would easily be associated with a new ‘creation.’ Girard (1972:277) explains the logic of eating the victim: ‘The victim is not killed to be eaten, but eaten because it has been killed.’ The act serves a dual function for the community. It relieves the model/obstacle tension. By consuming the victim, the disciple ‘possess all that the father has’ all the while emulating the model’s desires (Girard 1972:266). Girard (1972:265-266) explains the connection between sacrifice as appeasement and food for the god. Because violence has transcended the community and is held within the realm of a god, it is easy to make the connection that a sacrifice is a

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<sup>46</sup> Girard (1972:84ff) understands the prophets as well as the Greek tragedies as attempts to interpret myth and not so much to demythologize them. This was an attempt to ‘dismantle’ them.

<sup>47</sup> BDB 135

<sup>48</sup> BDB 537 Isa1:11, 11:6, Ez 39:18, Amos 5:22

<sup>49</sup> Ez 34:3, Ps 73:4, Gen 41

part of the divinity's very substance. 'Every time the sacrifice accompanies its desired effect, and bad violence is converted into good stability, the god is said to have accepted the offering of violence and consumed it.'

If we accept that *bara* contains vestigial traces of sacrifice, then we can conclude that in the first instance, Elohim is viewed as the sacrificer, the executioner of the sacrifice.

That God must first wipe away that which came before is, of course, nothing new to the prophets. It is given cosmic dimensions, for it includes the 'heavens and the earth.' This word pair is common in a variety of texts and is a way to refer to the ubiquitous scope of such actions; it will affect everything. But if we read Gen. 1:1 in a straight forward manner, then it is this pair that is the object of *bara*. If we grant that *bara* may have strong sacrificial connotations, can we assume that symmetrical pair is a sacrificial victim?

In the book of Isaiah, the connection between the leveling of the heavens and earth and that of both Israel and the nations is variously repeated.<sup>50</sup>

See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins...Therefore I will make the heavens tremble and the earth will shake from its place in the day of his burning anger' (Isa 13:9-13).

In a prophecy against Edom, Isaiah 34 abounds in sacrificial language congealing the very real specter of Assyrian annihilation with the Lord sacrificing Edom and the leveling of the heavens and the earth.

Come near, you nations, and listen pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! The Lord is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter...All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree...The sword of the Lord is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat—the blood of lambs and goats, fat from the kidneys of rams.

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 41, 42:14-17, 51:6-10, 54,

For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in Edom (Isa 34:2-7).

Of particular note in the above passage is the declaration of total annihilation of Edom where the language of Gen 1:2 is the same: ‘God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos (*tohu*) and the plumb line of desolation (*bohu*).

The language of God sacrificing Israel and the nations (heaven and earth) is so integrated into the polemic against idols (Isa 44) that one wonders if the writer of Genesis 1 has the making of an idol as the chief metaphor for God cutting down the heavens and earth, splitting it, and chiseling away until it comes to ‘all its glory’ (Isa 44:13). The nations may cut down trees to make their gods, but Yahweh does this with the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1 does not abandon the mythical structure that generative acts require a severing. To structure generative narrative such was as conventional to the author as speaking of evolutionary mutation and adaption today. It was an operating and ritualistic assumption and required no direct borrowing. The author may be attempting to distance his version of the earth’s genesis from his Mesopotamian counterparts, but he still structures the narrative sacrificially. It is in the act of ‘cutting down’ the heaven and earth that light can come forth.

But the appeal of this pericope, as well as in the prophets, is that the God of Israel is a master of a sacrificial crisis, and not just a player in it. Over against those who are hesitant to say that God created the situation of verse 2, we should view God’s first and essential act of generation sacrificially. As a matter of first importance, God leveled (cut down) the (old?) heavens and the earth, and thus making the nothingness of verse two. Perry (1993:9) is so inclined to view it such: ‘...the God who creates out of nothing becomes the God who creates—nothing; the one who ‘forms light’ (Isa. 45:7) thereby creates the very possibility of its absence.’ *Bara* is not only the act that encompasses all of Genesis 1, but also in particular the creative act before the six days of creation. The precursor to generation is annihilation. Hence, in similar fashion to God provoking a sacrificial crisis with Abraham and Abimelech or with Pharaoh and the Israelites, so he does here. God ‘cut through’ the sacrificial arrangements of humans with his own.

I agree with von Rad and Gunkel. Von Rad (1972:48) rejects a strict chronological reading in the first three verses. Gunkel (1901:107) goes so far as to declare that God did not create darkness, but rather, ‘God takes possession of darkness although it is not his creation and includes it in the order of his creation.’ There is not a sequence from verse one to two, but rather *scenario*.<sup>51</sup> The force is then that the state of the heavens and the earth in verse two is simply the state in which God finds it in at the time of ‘creating’. This view is consistent with the posture of God in the expulsion narratives explained in the previous chapter. The *waw* may have a causal emphasis.<sup>52</sup> Accepting Westermann’s (1974:96) caution that the matter cannot be settled semantically, but also questioning the powerful overly of theological/polemic concerns that have influenced translations, one might wonder how our understanding of this passage might alter if it read: ‘At the (right) moment, God *cut down, severed, or split* the heavens and the earth *since* the earth....’ The emphasis then is on God’s perfect timing and action. The right conditions prevailed for God to decisively act. That act comes in the decisive moment when light comes forth.

### 5.3 Genesis 1:2 – the undifferentiated crisis of the world

From Girard’s (1989:30-31) point of view, we must also take note of the symmetry of the ‘heavens and earth’ that has been ‘reduced to a single characteristic,’ of which verse two describes. The ‘heavens and earth’ are given synonymous descriptions in verse two.<sup>53</sup> They are symbiotically linked. As goes the heavens, so goes the earth, just as the beginning is similar to the end. They are mirrored images of each other. Tsumura (1989:74) believes a hyponymous relationship is in view here where all that is of the earth is included under that of the heavens. But this distinction is reduced to nothing in verse two. All hierarchal distinctions have been obliterated to the level of a ‘conglomeration of difference’ (Girard, 1977:252). That the beginning of this story has

<sup>51</sup> Westermann’s (1974:102) summation, then, follows the structure I laid out in the previous chapter. God intervenes at the height of a sacrificial crisis, when the rivalry has exhausted itself.

<sup>52</sup> There is a ‘circumstantial’ use of the *waw* that: ‘introduces a statement of the concomitant conditions under which the action denoted by the principal verb take place’ (BDB, 252).

<sup>53</sup> Perry (1993:4) finds a chiasmic arrangement between verse 1 and 2 of the same kind as Gen 2:4. Thus, the ‘deep’ of verse 2 is a referent to the heavens, while the ‘waters’ is viewed as belonging to the earth.

been ‘reduced to a single characteristic...in an extremely stylized and transfigured form, reduced to its simplest expression’ is a telltale sign of myth for Girard (1982:30).

In this chaotic<sup>54</sup> description of the earth’s primal state, the author lays out a fundamental assumption about generative acts—they come out of crisis. The author never ponders the ultimate question—why is it necessary for all of the goodness of creation to come out of such a gloomy milieu? Why, within God’s creative activity, was the world found in a ‘terrible equilibrium’? The author, on the contrary, proceeds immediately to tell the story of earth from what Girard (1972:87) calls a ‘structural mold of all mythology’—generative acts come out of chaos, crisis, and a terrible circumstance.<sup>55</sup> It is primarily a communal crisis, one that Girard calls a sacrificial crisis. In these opening verses of the Bible, the writer can only imagine that the earth began in such a crisis as is common to the human social endeavor.<sup>56</sup>

**5.3.1 והארץ היתה תהו ובהו.** In every way, verse two sets up a series of symmetrical contrasts.<sup>57</sup> There is conflict here, but not as Gunkel imagined. The earth is in conflict with itself and so are the heavens. The heavens and the earth are up against each other, *and* the ‘spirit of God’ is facing the ‘deep,’ that is opposing the *whole situation*. Surely a contradiction in terms and precisely what Girard means by a sacrificial crisis, a monstrous double and a paroxysm.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Gunkel (1895:5-12) was correct to connect the conflict with Babylonian myths. But the primary rivalry of verse two is between the heaven and the earth. Yahweh does stand in opposition to this ‘monstrous double’ (Girard 1972:72), but as one standing outside the rivalry and in ultimate mastery of it.

<sup>55</sup> In his summary of multiple creative narratives of the ancient world, Gunkel (1901:105-106) reiterates this point. Still to be addressed, however, is the extent to which descriptions such as here are simply benign pictorial expressions to say: ‘not yet.’

<sup>56</sup> A word of caution is necessary here. The exegesis here agrees with Westermann (1974:108) and Anderson (2009:29-30) that direct borrowing from other texts is doubtful: ‘...one cannot derive Gen 1:2 one-sidedly from the Mesopotamian descriptions. Its prehistory is so broad and far-reaching that a direct derivation is not required.’ I suggest that the writer of Genesis 1 simply has no other way of viewing the beginning of the world apart from this ubiquitous framework. Going back to a more deconstructionist hermeneutic, the writer is not necessarily aware of ‘what’s behind’ this framework. This equally applies to the authors of Mesopotamian text.

<sup>57</sup> Westermann (1974:43, 102-103) asserts that the three lines of verse two synonymously describe a ‘condition.’ As we will examine, however, there are contrasts or tensions within this.

<sup>58</sup> ‘All the mock battles that genuinely take place prior to sacrificial ceremonies and all the ritual dances whose formal symmetry is reflected in a perpetual confrontation between the performers lend themselves to an interpretation in which the performers are seen as imitative responses to a sacrificial crisis’ (Girard, 1972:98). In his discussion of the ‘not yet’ notion that he believes is prominent in Gen 1:2, Westermann (1974:43) speaks of the central theme of separation in cosmogonies. The critical connection is that ‘not yet’

In one rhythmic phrase of verse 2, the picture is masterfully painted. The earth was *tohu wabohu*. The original situation of the earth is condensed into this terse phrase of synonymous and ambiguously abrupt terms.<sup>59</sup>

Several words in the generative story of earth indicate an approximate basis in a communal and sacrificial murder, more accurately, in the kind of communal crisis in which the scapegoat emerges. Following Albright's conclusion, BDB<sup>60</sup> locates *tohu* as a masculine singular form of a word *tahah*, תהה. It possibly originates from the Aramaic טהה meaning 'rage, roar,' or 'bluster.' Again we must note the connection between virulent winds and man's anger. This connection, so easily recognizable from a mimetic perspective, unanimously escapes exegetes. Predominantly the word denotes utter desolation especially from a terrifying and destructive act, usually of the violent destruction of a village (Isa 24:10).<sup>61</sup> Jeremiah (4:19-41) makes this connection profoundly clear. Strikingly, the very elements of nature—earth, sky, light, mountains, hills, animals—are reduced to the same condition as the desolate town (Jer 4:23-26). It is precisely what Girard (1972:30) believes is the pinnacle of a sacrificial crisis that goes unchecked. It is a severe and sudden escalation of violent reciprocity. It is a communal swirl of escalating and symmetrical rivalries. It is a much feared end result unless some communal mechanism is not found to break up the 'terrible equilibrium.' A communal concern is never out of the purview as Westermann (1974:104) reminds: 'Creation and the world are to be understood always from the viewpoint of or in the context of human existence.' As argued earlier, a communal crisis is projected back on to the origins of the world itself. And to remind, this condition of the world's beginnings is broadly shared throughout mythology. The author is tapping in on a conventional sense of origins. Neither he nor any other author of a mythological text needs necessarily to be aware of such sacrificial underpinnings anymore than a presider of ritual would understand the

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statements are designed to 'set up a contrast to the present state of things.' In ritual, the contrast is the crisis leading to the resolution in the expulsion of a victim.

<sup>59</sup> Middleton (2005:75) suggests an 'onomatopoeic' feel to the phrase similar to 'helter skelter' or 'hurly burly.'

<sup>60</sup> BDB 1062. The other key use of *tohu* is used in polemics against idols (1Sam 12:21, Isa 41:29).

<sup>61</sup> In both cases outside of Gen. 1:2 where *tohu wabohu* is found '*tohu* here is almost equivalent to *sammah*'—destruction (Tsumura 1989:32).

origins of a given ritual. The author of Genesis 1, often designated as simply ‘P’, intentionally pushes the conventional cosmogonic framework in a different direction.

Tsumura (1989:17) views the referent in Deut 32:10 ‘desolation’ as the primary meaning of both *tohu* and *bohu* and says it simply refers to a dry barren land.<sup>62</sup> His argument seeks to negate the connotations brought on by the *chaoskampf* interpretation, saying that Gen. 1:2 is simply saying the earth was ‘not yet’; it hadn’t come about. Tsumura’s presentation is meticulous and convincing. I would argue, however, that he does not pay close enough attention to the *cause* of the barrenness in biblical reference, nor does he notice the primary referent—the fearful prospect of any place devoid of human habitation. It is a city, now destroyed and/or abandoned, that once again returns to the desert. When a community disintegrates either by natural or social causes, its remnants remain in its state of undifferentiation—the desert. Dust it came from and dust it returns. We should also not fail to notice the cutting down of trees in association with a siege which would have real and direct connotations of not only the city, but also the earth being raped and left barren.<sup>63</sup> Also, the kinds of desert animals that inhabit such abandoned places always have demonic-type connotations.<sup>64</sup> Tsumura also minimizes the fearful connotations of the sea and the desert in both the Psalms and prophetic verse. In Tsumura’s (1989:30) catalogue of uses of *tohu* in the Old Testament, there is always a fearful, terrifying connotation with it; indeed, the fearful connotation is the primary reason for reference to the desert. The attempt to insulate any negative connotations in Gen. 1:2 is weak. The archetypal concern in Babel reverberates through the ages of antiquity: ‘lest we be scattered.’

*Bohu* appears to mean ‘empty,’ but Tsumura (1989:21) stresses that *bohu* always has a concrete reference—an empty house or tent—and not some abstract concept of ‘nothingness.’ *Bohu* does not have a referent in the Old Testament outside of its synonymous connection with *tohu*.

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<sup>62</sup> He argues against Albright’s assertion, saying instead: ‘...it is probable that the Ugaritic *thw* is a cognate of Hebrew *tohu* and that both have the common meaning of “desert” (Tsumura, 1989:19).

<sup>63</sup> The prohibition against cutting down of trees in Deut 29:19 references this kind of desolation.

<sup>64</sup> Following the *tohu wabohu* of verse 11 in Isa. 34 is a list of such creations among such is the desert night hag *lilith*.

Of particular interest are the two passages from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah where the two words, *tohu* and *bohu*, are found in parallel.<sup>65</sup> Comparing Ugaritic references primarily to the womb, Tsumura (1989:28) ventures that the phrase connotes the idea of disfunction or barrenness, as in being unproductive or ‘out of order.’<sup>66</sup> But here again, Tsumura’s neutral view of Gen 1:2 ignores the persistent reference *tohu wabohu* has to ‘meaningful human existence.’ It is as Levinson (1994:12,24) states: ‘Throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel, the point of creation is not the production of matter out of nothing, but rather the emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life sustaining order.’

Together they form an umbrella statement speaking of the total annihilation of a city. It’s a perfect picture of a settlement that has been ‘reduced to dust.’ It speaks of the horrible and indiscriminant massacre and abandonment of a once vibrant place. Hence, *tohu* is also used as a reference to the lifelessness and desolation of the desert (Deut 32:10). These two terms together signal one thing, the lethal volatility of mimetic rivalry. It is a hendiadys meant to conjure up something frightening (Westermann, 1974:103). Girard (1982:31) is able to piece together what Tsumura struggles to hold apart:

Lack of differentiation in myth sometimes has idyllic connotations...Usually its character is catastrophic...Myths that are thought to ‘invent death’ in reality invent nothing but rather distinguish it from life when ‘in the beginning’ both are confused. I believe this to mean that it is impossible to live without dying or, once again, that existence is unbearable. ‘Primordial’ lack of differentiation and the ‘original’ chaos conflict strongly in character. Those elements that are indistinguishable often have conflictual connotations.

The first chapter of Genesis has conventionally been viewed as a Priestly document that has been strategically placed at the beginning of Israel’s history to set the stage for the telling of Israel’s origins. The text is powerfully influenced by the devastation of Israel’s

<sup>65</sup> Only Jer 4:23 uses the exact expression. Isa 34:11 has the two in parallel without the *waw*.

<sup>66</sup> Tsumura (1989:40) concludes that the Isaiah and Jeremiah passages where the phrase *tohu wabohu* is found is not a direct borrowing from Genesis 1:2. Instead, he suggests they ‘share a common literary tradition in their use of *tohu wabohu*, which, according to Jeremiah context, refers to a “desert-like state of the “earth.” As has been discussed above, however, there is no compelling necessity for a literary borrowing. It is simply part of the general ‘worldview’ in the ancient world.



greatest loss—Zion. There is a surprising similarity in language and topoi in Genesis 1 and the prophets who were most closely associated with Israel’s most profound crisis. Hence, notions of a primordial chaos come from the real life experience of people ravaged by a devastating ruthlessness, perpetually recycling itself in communal life.<sup>67</sup> Gauging from the well-known ruthlessness of the Assyrians, Israel spoke often of the horror of such events.<sup>68</sup> At least in Israel, it would be easy to draw an analogy between their own experience as surviving victims of such violence and the total breakdown of nature itself (Jer 4:23-26). Indeed, for the Israelites, it was not analogous at all. The degeneration of the communal situation had wide-ranging ripple effects. Violence is a contagion that if left unabated will ‘overflow its confines and flood the surrounding area’ (Girard, 1977:10). Human violence easily oversteps its boundaries into the natural and heavenly realms.<sup>69</sup>

I look at the earth. It is unformed [*tohu*] and void [*bohu*]; at the skies, and their light is gone. I look at the mountains, they are quaking; and all the hills are rocking. I look: no man is left, and all the birds of the sky have fled. I look: the farm land is desert, and all its towns are in ruin—  
Because of the Lord, Because of His blazing anger. For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be desolate (NJPS: Jer 4:23-27).<sup>70</sup>

In Isaiah’s prophecy of doom upon Edom, there are unmistakable references to the sacrificial element in Yahweh’s fierce judgment:

For My sword shall be drunk in the sky; Lo, it shall come down upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed. To wreak judgment. The Lord has a sword; it is sated with blood. It is gorged with fat—the blood of lambs and he-goats, the kidney fat of rams. For the Lord holds a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom...Jackdaws and owls shall possess it; Great owls

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<sup>67</sup> Tsumura’s neutral view of Gen. 1:2 still affirms a foundational view that meaningful life first and of necessity comes out of an undifferentiated state.

<sup>68</sup> Habakkuk’s prophecy profoundly addresses such terror. See also, Finkelstein and Silberman’s (2001:217-229, 245) vivid description of the destruction of Lachish and of Samaria.

<sup>69</sup> My basic argument is that the returning to the desert is simply ‘the age old rhythm’ of the region. Hence a view of the exile is not as pressing for a reading of Genesis 1. Annihilation and/or desolation of an inhabited place were common knowledge.

<sup>70</sup> Tsumura surgically removes *tohu wabohu* from its *broader* context. *Tohu* is a dry, barren waste *primarily* brought on by the destruction of the city. His is a telling example of how the concern to be ‘context dependent’ and ‘culturally embedded’ can lead to a constricted, myopic reading.

and ravens shall dwell there. He shall measure it with a line of chaos (*tohu*) and with weights of emptiness (*bohu*) (Isa 34:5-11).

This last phrase is most telling. With impeccable irony Yahweh promises to demolish with an instrument used for construction, a plumb line, and to devalue with a devise used to measure worth, a scale.

**5.3.2 Darkness up against the deep.** The second line of Gen 1:2 finishes out the description of complete indifferenciation. The attempts to distance the text from a ‘mythical’ struggle between animated/personified gods is justified,<sup>71</sup> yet *tehom*, typically translated as ‘deep’ or ‘abyss,’ is also a cognate of *tahah* mentioned above.<sup>72</sup> Tsumura (1989:65) challenges Gunkel’s influential notion that *tehom* is derived from the Babylonian goddess of the sea, *Tiamat*, saying instead that it simply means ‘ocean.’ Again, Tsumura’s attempt to distance the text from mythological reference has neglected the connection between the ocean, the apparent root idea of rage or bluster, and a stormy tempestuous goddess of the sea whose sacrifice establishes a new creation. One need only be on a ship in a stormy sea to know the sense of dreadful fright. Westermann (1974:106) argues that the root goes back to a very common ancient notion of a watery beginning.

A mimetic perspective, however, would also not fail to notice the emphasis in *tehom* on ‘flood of water.’<sup>73</sup> Thus, an overpowering, overwhelming body of water is a perfect description of the ‘crowd’ as it swallows its victim. Again, drowning a victim was a preferred method of scapegoat murders. ‘What is the sign of Jonah?’ Girard (1982:117) asks... ‘The sign of Jonah is yet another sign of the collective victim.’

Following Perry’s (1993:3-4) analysis, the deep, *tehom*, is chiastically a reference to the heavens of verse 1. Perry points to the curious relationship of the deep to darkness. It

<sup>71</sup> Westermann (1974:106) convincingly argues against a literary dependence on *Enuma Elish*, yet still uses words like ‘opposition,’ ‘struggle,’ ‘chaos’ and ‘contrast’ when describing this sentence.

<sup>72</sup> BDB 1062

<sup>73</sup> ‘תהום occurs 35 times in the Old Testament... תהום always means a flood of water or the deep,’ says Westermann (1974:105, 106), ‘the most notable characteristic of the Egyptian cosmogonies.’



Critically then, the last statement of verse 2 is a comprehensive statement similar to verse 1, and *it is set in contrast* to the 2 preceding lines. If we ventured a reading of these verses without the two middle statements, it would read:

God	created (cut)	the heavens and the earth...
The spirit of God	was moving against	the waters

There is a consistency here with the general structure of the expulsion narrative examined in the previous chapter. As in the case of Pharaoh and the Israelites for instance (Ex 1), Yahweh's presence is profoundly implied in the escalation of the crisis. Humans perpetually drive toward reciprocal rivalries, and Yahweh uses that to provoke a 'sacrificial crisis' where then He can interject his own sacrificial alternative. The 'creative act' of verse 1 is being set in motion.

Perry may be correct to dispel the perhaps overly imaginative connections with *Enuma Elish*; however, that a confrontational view is being depicted here is consistent in comparison to biblical use, especially the exilic and post-exilic prophets. Vestigial remains of a rivalry are still present, but not between Yahweh and gods or goddesses in verse 2. A startlingly clear picture of Girard's (1972:49) rival doubles is retained between the heavens and the earth for they are completely symmetrical and *up against* each other:

A single principle is at work in primitive religion and classical tragedy alike, a principle implicit but fundamental. Order, peace, and fecundity depend on cultural distinctions; it is not these distinctions but the **loss of them** that gives birth to fierce rivalries and sets members of the same family or social group at one another's throats.

Rivalries that become so intense and symmetrical in the imitation of the other are what Girard (1972:252) calls a 'monstrous double.' The rivalry itself is a single monster that must be dealt with lest it destroys all. It is this 'monster' that Yahweh is 'cutting down' and in a most peculiar maneuver.

**5.3.4 God's intervention with the 'monstrous double.'** A war of 'mythical' proportions may not be envisioned, but what seems to be overlooked is the interjection of an active Presence of God in the very midst of this crisis of creation. The active

participial form of the verb רָחַף, has few biblical references.<sup>78</sup> Deuteronomy 32:11 speaks of finding Israel in the desert and watching over him ‘like an eagle who rouses the nestlings gliding down on her young.’ It seems to connote a nurturing type activity. A vague use of it is found in Jeremiah 23:9 where it may reference the ‘shivering of bones’ from fear. *Rachaph* in either instance probably conjures up a stirring about in nervous anticipation of a good or a terrible thing. Von Rad (1972:49) even goes so far as to suggest that it should be understood as an agitation creating a ‘terrible storm.’ This depiction would place it along similar lines to Ezekiel’s (Ez 1) storm cloud of Yahweh’s intervening Presence. Similarly, Yahweh’s intervention with Abraham and Abimelech or Pharaoh and the Israelites is an intentional aggravation or agitation of a certain situation. Yahweh has a liking to compounding a crisis.

The stirring anticipation especially makes sense as an action of רוּחַ, the wind or spirit. With the introduction of God’s spirit into the generative event, we once more are made aware of its sacrificial allusions.

There is a diverse range of meaning around *ruach*, but again, we come across a word that holds a benevolent and malevolent duality to it. Since its most basic understanding has to do with moving air: breath, wind, or spirit, it can have a wide array of benevolent and malevolent denotations. Malevolently, *ruach* speaks of the weak and often empty or shallow aspects of human life—man’s life is but a breath. Of note also, is its connection with the snorting kind of hard breathing associated with raging anger of both God<sup>79</sup> and man. *Ruach* is used to speak of the disposition of a person that can be moved positively, towards courage or vitality, but also negatively, towards bitterness, volatility, impatience or seemingly uncontrollable impulses.

*Ruach* is of course used to speak of the natural forces of wind with all of its positive and negative aspects. From Girard’s perspective, this connection is not coincidence or mere analogy.<sup>80</sup> From the mythic perspective, natural forces behave in the same way that

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<sup>78</sup> BDB 934

<sup>79</sup> Jb 4:9, Ps 18:6

<sup>80</sup> Speaking of the Greek *pharmakos* ritual, Girard (1972:96) states: ‘The sole possible model remains the sacrificial crisis and its resolution. Nature enters the picture later, when the ritualistic mind succeeds in detecting certain similarities between nature’s rhythms and the community’s alternating pattern of order

human violence does. The same particular natural forces are usually called to mind: wind, fire, draught, plague, thunderstorm, earthquake, or volcanic eruption. These all characterize the dual nature of the sacred. They, like reciprocal violence, are potentially dangerous and volatile, requiring a meticulous and careful approach to them. The community must keep a calculated distance from them. Like human rage, it must remain outside the perimeters of the community, but not so far that the community cannot glean its therapeutic and benevolent forces. Most of all, these forces are unwieldy, outside the manageability of human effort, just as outbursts of violence appear to be.

Of particular note here is its immediate association with the deep or waters and with God. It is the spirit/wind/breath of God that is anxiously stirring against the waters.<sup>81</sup> When the *ruach* is found in construct with Yahweh or Elohim, it is most often in connection with prophetic activity. Harkening back to the earliest expressions of prophetic activity, the spirit would come upon a person or group in some kind of visible display of agitated frenzy.<sup>82</sup> Of particular note are several episodes of this around the story of Saul and David (1 Sam 16: 15, 18:10, 19:9). Yahweh would even bring an evil spirit to Saul with obvious and disturbing effects. This coming upon a person by a spirit has a likely origin with pre-war ritual.<sup>83</sup> The intense anxiety and nervous anticipation of either horrific failure or ecstatic victory is localized in an individual who can rally the troops into a spirited charge. The force of the spirit in regards to this prophetic activity is viewed as irresistible and irrevocable in anticipation of a mighty act of God that has been decreed by Him.<sup>84</sup>

The spirit or wind of Yahweh is closely tied to Israel's great deliverance from the Egyptians at the Reed Sea. Here the closest possible connection is made with natural forces (wind and water, Ex 14:21), Yahweh's *ruach* (Ex 15:10), and a redemptive, sacrificial act. When the moving of Yahweh's *ruach* is found in proximity to Yahweh's

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and disorder. The modus operandi of violence—sometimes reciprocal and pernicious, sometimes unanimous and beneficial—is then taken as the model for the entire universe.'

<sup>81</sup> Perry (1993:5) argues for that curiously repeated phrase *al peni*, should be understood in its 'primary meaning' as 'opposite, over against...not on the face of, but rather facing.'

<sup>82</sup> Num 11:17,25,26,

<sup>83</sup> Jud. 3:10, 6: 34, 11:29, 13:25; 1 Sam 11:6

<sup>84</sup> Gunkel (1901:123) finds parallels with God's victory of the seas in Ps 104:5-9. '...a battle between Yahweh and the deep took place before creation. The sea stormed and tossed and held possession of the earth. But Yahweh intervened frightfully so that the waters fled.'

presence, referenced in the exodus story as the pillar of fire, it signals a drawing near or approaching for action. Yahweh's presence in spirit signals again an irresistible and vital life force. 'Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?' (Ps 139:6). All of this imagery of wind, fire, and water is repeatedly conjured up from the exilic period, wherein the near total loss of 'life' will be miraculously reversed.<sup>85</sup> Oddly, the power and might of Yahweh's wind defeats all human violence while not resorting to it. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, said the Lord of Hosts' (Zech 4:6). Repeatedly, those who envisioned a miraculous rebirth of Israel, relied on the same imagery as the first verses of Genesis.<sup>86</sup> As of human designs, especially of the usual means of human violence, Israel was helpless and hopeless. Only Yahweh alone could reverse the situation.

In this regard, the Spirit of God is closely associated with blessing and generative acts. 'Thus says the Lord, your Maker, Your Creator who has helped you since birth... Even as I pour water on thirsty soil, and rain upon dry ground, so will I pour My spirit on your offspring, and my blessing upon your posterity' (Isa 44:3). Yahweh is called 'your Creator,' *יָצַר*, or the one who formed/fashion/shaped you (Gen 2:7). As with many other prophets of the exile, the *ruach* of God which so powerfully moved at the Reed Sea is recalled. But rather than splitting the waters, the Spirit is viewed as water itself that is poured out from above. Whereas in one form water is foreboding, dark, and abysmal, in another form, it is redemptive and life giving.

The spirit is viewed often in connection with a movement on the part of God that must precede a mighty act. Its application towards creation comes from an already established notion of the spirit's involvement in Israel's acts of deliverance. This application must apply here also, being as it is a direct response to the crisis of creation—the loss of differentiation. The spirit's agitation is viewed as the essential precursor for God's response to the 'savage sacredness'—a term used by Girard (1972:266) to describe the sacrificial crisis. It is:

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<sup>85</sup> Ezek 39:29, Isa 44:3, 63:10ff, Hag 2:5, Zech 4

<sup>86</sup> Gunkel (1901:122) posits a strong case for the material of Genesis to be very ancient.

...the domain of the savage sacredness, which recognizes neither boundaries nor limits. This is the realm not only of gods and supernatural creatures, of monsters and the dead, but also of nature itself...of the cosmos and of all the rest of humanity.

On a more theological note, Yahweh is both master of and responder to the savage sacred. Above all, the first two verses of the Bible establish that all of God's creative activity is most profoundly counteracting the crisis of creation—the empty, decimated, dark, confused, and ruinous condition.

Two critical points are being made in the first verses of the Bible that masterfully set up the rest of chapter one, the book of Genesis, and perhaps the Torah. First, the precondition for generative acts is assumed to be annihilation. This we can say, at least from Girard's view of scapegoat violence, is assumed without question. The earth's creation is imagined from a common sacrificial basis. More significant, though, is the Israelite's view of their God in this situation, for the crisis of primordial creation is subordinated and ruled by a God who decisively yet mysteriously moves *in* and *through* the crisis of creation, even, in fact, provoking it. It is a response where God mysteriously engages heaven and earth's 'terrible equilibrium' through spirit and light all the while remaining above and in control of it.

#### 5.4 Genesis 1:3 – Light—the intervention, the offering, the reversal

The answer to the crisis of creation is boldly set forth in the precursor to the first day of creation, and it is sacrificial. Light comes forth or arises even from within earth's crisis, but even more so it is directly from the voice of God. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי-אוֹר. There are good reasons to consider that the nature of this light is associated not only with God's action, but also His Presence.<sup>87</sup> In the coming forth of light, God initiates a

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<sup>87</sup> The discussion here is in keeping with a long-standing Old Testament dialogue over the nature of God's Presence as viewed by the Israelites. A review of this dialogue has been addressed in my dissertation, *An Evaluation of the Nature of the Glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1-2* (Ruckhaus, 2005). J.T Strong (2000:73) has also highlighted some of the current discussion about notions of deified presence, suggesting the idea of a hypostasis, '...abstract aspects of Yahweh that were personified and given substance.' Sarna (1989:7) reminds that the association of light with God's presence is firmly established in rabbinic tradition. There



sacrificial offering, and in a peculiar way, God is present in that offering to the earth's crisis.<sup>88</sup>

**5.4.1 The structural features of the emerging light for Genesis 1.** First, since the great lights are not made until the fourth day, it is readily apparent that the light preceding the first day must be considered in some different way. We need not assume complete cosmological ignorance on the part of the ancients. They knew the sun was the source of daylight, but they also affirmed that the lights in the sky relied on an even more fundamental light. 'The Oriental...did not think of light and darkness exclusively in connection with the heavenly bodies' (Von Rad 1972:51). The great lights rule by representation (Gen 1:14-16). They lead, guide and mark off the days by imitation. Just as a statement of wisdom cannot be fully expressed until it is placed alongside (משל) another, so it is with the great lights. Their light is a likeness of a more essential nature.

Also, there are several structural features within Genesis 1 that indicate viewing the light of verse three as significant and unique.<sup>89</sup>

Within the verse, light is not said to be made or fashioned by God<sup>90</sup> but simply called forth: 'Let there be light' (יהי אור). Only here, Arnold (2009:39) asserts, is divine fiat. The verb 'let there be' (יהי) is a jussive and expresses God's volition.

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can be no uncertainty here; P is fully aware of such associations. See also Samuel Terrien's book *Elusive Presence* (1983).

<sup>88</sup> The doctrine of *ex nihilo* sought to correct Gnostic and other heretical ideas of creation being constituted by emanations from a deity. Nothing of what follows wishes to modify or challenge that. Of course, the text has no explicit concerns with such notions. The Priestly tradition, on the other hand, is very concerned with the meaning of God's Presence in the visible world, especially with the loss of the Temple. Gunkel (1901:127) points out that in the ancient world light is often deified—given a separate identity—especially in connection with battling chaos or darkness. Strong (2000:73) reiterates that this identity is a hypostasis of the greater deity, and is not to be understood as 'other gods in a polytheistic pantheon.'

<sup>89</sup> Arnold (2009:39) warns against the propensity to overly philosophize or theologize light to which my reading might be objectionable. He does, however, reiterate an important point being made here that the introduction of light structures the whole pericope. It is a precursor to all six days leading to rest on the seventh.

<sup>90</sup> There are similar statements in Genesis 1 which begin with the mild command יהי (Gen 1:4, 14), yet in each of these a subsequent verse states that God proceeded to make them. This is a subtle nuance, but it seems intentionally so. Unlike the other days of separation, it is not clear that light comes about *via* the separation. The first separation is not to bring forth light, but *day*. Ultimately we cannot say from whence does light come, other than emerging from darkness. We can only affirm with verse three that it *came upon* darkness or *in the midst* of darkness. Curiously, Gunkel (1901:121) leaves verse 3 out of his discussion of

Another structural feature is the placement of light in relationship to the *tov* formula. As nowhere else in the sequence of creation, once light has come about, it is immediately proceeded by the formulaic ‘and God saw that the light was good.’ There is little apparent pattern to this formula other than its correspondence to the seven days. It is not spoken of on day two and is twice mentioned on day three. Statements that precede it vary as do those that follow. There are seven proclamations of goodness which intentionally give a sense of wholeness and completion. The significance of the statement especially becomes evident in verse thirty-one. There, God’s reflection on all creation as ‘exceeding good’ is reiterated and elaborated on in the seventh day. Each time God affirms the good; He stops, ceases, or rests. The proclamation signals an interval or break in the sequence. Hence the statements of ‘good’ are closely allied with ‘day.’ Indeed, light is the necessary precondition for all of creation. Light sets up the constitutional element of all creation—day. It is comprehensive of all the days of creation. Light, as the most substantial element of ‘day,’ signals that space, interval, or domain of God’s overpowering benevolence. The light of verse three symbiotically and inseparably links both cosmological and theological, the physical to the spiritual.

Furthermore, we should not fail to notice that the goodness of light is constituted solely in God being able to see it. We may not be comfortable with such an anthropomorphic view of God—that He needs to turn a light on in order to see—but this should not distract us from what is important. Light was necessary for God to ‘see’ goodness and that this ‘seeing’ by God precedes all that comes of creation. This has a purely theological perspective to it. Goodness belongs to the visible,<sup>91</sup> and it belongs to God.<sup>92</sup> Strong (2000:76) discusses the notion of the Israelites rebelling against the ‘eyes of Glory’ (Isa 3:8).

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the structure of the verbs *made* and *create*. For a writer such as P whom Gunkel (1901:118) insists is scientific in his meticulous presentation, we should not consider the absence of ‘made’ here as haphazard.

<sup>91</sup> Oddly, Von Rad (1972:52) talks of a ‘*declaration* of value,’ but the text consistently speaks only of God seeing, not declaring, the goodness. He is correct in connecting the good with ‘purpose and correspondence’ and not so much with aesthetic judgment. One must be able to see in order to know where one is headed.

<sup>92</sup> A notion surviving even to the time of Jesus (Luke 18:19).

Although the verb, רָאָה, is the common word for seeing, it is also a highly charged word referring to prophets and prophecy. Before they were called prophets, *nabi*, they were called seers, *ro'eh* (1 Sam 9:9). Visions (*marah*) were part and parcel with revelation, perception, and clarity (Num 12:8). They became the source of intense controversy in and around the exile as a frenzied pitch of rival visions barraged the situation in both Jerusalem and Babylon. So, the prophet Ezekiel echoes Yahweh's disgust for most of his contemporary prophets as 'seeing nothing' (Ez 13:3). This is further exasperated by the complaint of Jerusalemites under siege that 'Yahweh doesn't see; he has abandoned us' (Ez 8:12).<sup>93</sup> Thus, a 'seeing God' is one who intervenes in a crisis. It is a god who both delivers and brings blessing. In a crisis of differentiation—sacrificial crisis—vision, the ability to see beyond the symmetry of reciprocal violence, to forge a path out of eminent and total disaster is the valued commodity.<sup>94</sup>

Girard (1972:267) states: 'The birth of the community is first and foremost an act of separation. That is why metaphors of severance permeate the generative act... Whether we refer to catharsis or purification, purgation or exorcism, it is actually the idea of evacuation and separation that is foremost.' Here we have a definitive connection between Girard and the biblical notion of *holy*. This generative act of separation is a constant theme in Genesis.<sup>95</sup> The placement of the light proclamation holds a strategic place in the text. It is interventional, standing between the crisis of creation and the six days of creation. Light arises out of darkness and then God pauses to perceive its goodness. Then, God proceeds with a reversal of earth's chaotic situation, first by separation, then by filling. The two sets of three days address the crisis in full. The first three days reverse the world's foreboding characteristics. It is completely indifferenced. It is dark and decimated. Through a series of separations God provides distinctions, structure, order, and form. What Girard (1972:284) would call, 'a rebirth of difference' the writer identifies as the separation of light from darkness. The next three conquer earth's deep emptiness (*tohu wabohu*) by flurries of generative activity. We must

<sup>93</sup> In this verse of Ezekiel, we should further take note of the connection of seeing with Presence.

<sup>94</sup> Girard (1965:37-42)

<sup>95</sup> See Chapter 4 above.

reiterate that it is the *expulsion* of light from darkness that is seen as the necessary precursor and precondition to all that is to follow.<sup>96</sup>

**5.4.2 Theological characteristics of the emerging light.** The theological character of this light is further accentuated in that it comes about in darkness. The first three days, which are made by separation, find their constitutional element from the crisis of heaven and earth—darkness and the deep (Gen 1:2). But unlike the coming about of sky and earth that are ‘made’ as a result of a separation, light precedes separation. It is the entity that constitutes all separations. It is day that comes about via the separation of light from darkness. Before that, there is a mysterious congealing of light and darkness.

This notion is perhaps unacceptable to our more scientific sensibilities, but the Israelites had little problem with viewing the sacred in terms of both light and darkness. Prayers of Yahweh who dwells in darkness flourish at the Temple (1 Kings 8:12). The Psalms speak of God’s *mastery* of darkness as especially related to Yahweh’s ability to redeem his people and king: ‘He made darkness His screen; dark thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky were His pavilion round about Him’(Ps 18:12). The prophet Ezekiel in his vision of Yahweh in a storm cloud intensifies this view (Ez 1 and 8). Ezekiel envisions the light emanating from God to be of such a brilliant and intense a nature that darkness was a necessary shield lest all would perish. The juxtaposition of light and darkness here is similarly intended to accentuate God’s mastery of the savage sacred realm of verse two.

Of curious interest, Psalm 139 masterfully proclaims Yahweh’s inescapable Presence in key terms discussed so far. When Yahweh’s Presence approaches, the devotee prays:

Where can I escape your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?...If I say, “Surely darkness will conceal me, night will provide me with cover.” Darkness is not dark for You; night is as light as day; darkness and light are the same. It was you who created my conscience; You fashioned

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<sup>96</sup> Perry (1993:2) views the description of darkness upon the deep as ‘...occupying the place from where the new light of the next verse will shine forth.’ He takes this a different direction than I do here, yet still reads that light *emerges* from the situation described—and *created* by God—in verse 2. My suggestion is that light is emerging from the annihilation of verse two. It is precisely when the scapegoat is revealed that an astounding clarity returns to the community.

me in my mother's womb... Your eyes saw my unformed limbs; They were all recorded in Your book.

As Girard (1965:40) understands the scapegoat mechanism, 'Nothing...<sup>97</sup> is more significant than the interplay between images of light and darkness, vision and blindness.' The congealing of light with darkness is the realm of the sacred, precisely where malevolent violence and benevolent violence meet. It is the heart of the mythic structure. It is a sacred realm<sup>98</sup> because inevitably and mysteriously the scapegoat will be revealed.

In his discussion of God's Presence as the 'glory,' Strong (2000:73) also discusses a sacred realm where God enters to do battle with chaos:

The domain of Yahweh's hypostasis was the unclean regions of the earth... The duty of this hypostasis was to fight the enthroned king's battles against Chaos... The *kabod* would fight Chaos, pushing it back to reveal fertile land and reclaiming the temple as the portal to Yahweh's throne room.

Speaking of Isaiah's Temple vision (Isa 6), Strong (2000:770) further describes this peculiar construct of Zion theology in terms that resonate with the picture presented in Gen 1:1-5:

In Isaiah 6:3, the seraphim are describing the realm of Yahweh's *kabod*. This bicolon presents the complete domain of god through a merismus. The first line focuses upon Yahweh Sabaoth, who is holy, heavenly, and other. The parallel line sets his Glory in the domain of the unclean regions of the cosmos, which is the view of Zion theology in the earth. Moreover, the distinction made between Yahweh and his *kabod* in this verse creates a theological construct that gives a great amount of flexibility and strength to Zion theology. Yahweh Sabaoth remains enthroned, yet through his hypostasis he still roams the unclean regions of the cosmos.

Strong's description of 'the unclean region of the cosmos' is yet another way to speak of Girard's sacrificial crisis. It is the crisis of Gen 1:2. We should then begin to understand

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<sup>97</sup> Girard is speaking of the dialogue between Tiresias, the blind prophet, and Oedipus, the lame, but within that context, he clarifies much of his ideas about the scapegoat mechanism.

<sup>98</sup> Realm is the word of choice here because it includes both the physical and metaphysical world. More importantly it includes areas of both space and time, concepts often pitted against each other in discussions of Presence. Terrien (1983:138ff) for instance, argues for a priority of Name over that of Glory.

that from a Biblical point of view, the author is making a concerted attempt to distance the God of Israel from the conventional view of the mythical realm of the sacred. When light comes out of the confluence of difference described in verse two, the stirrings of opposition to that realm decisively separate or cut away from that realm.

The theological character of light in Genesis 1:3 is reinforced when compared with prophetic and priestly material traditionally held to be exilic. It then becomes readily apparent that the loss of Zion propelled many to ponder the meaning of Yahweh's Presence.

**5.4.3 Light as salvific action.** Isaiah 60 sheds a particular understanding of light. Light is equated with 'the Presence of the Lord' כבוד יהוה (Isa 60:1-2).<sup>99</sup> This verse has a similar construction to Gen 1:1. Light is called forth, and then it is put in contrast to darkness. The light (glory) of Israel will cause a great pilgrimage, a gathering, to occur at the temple. A notion such as this is derived from the liturgical tradition of Zion. Hence Psalms 89:16 speaks 'of walking in the light of your presence,' a clear reference to being at the Temple. Furthermore, it speaks of Yahweh's anointed who will have victory over his adversaries, one who will survive being a sacrificial victim. Also of great interest is Yahweh's unwavering love for David, 'his son.' He promises never to betray him. Yahweh will not succumb to 'sacrificing' his son. He will never see him as a rival.

The nations, who tormented Israel—that is, the nations who made Israel the scapegoat—will come to a great revelation of their deed and will repent. 'Bowing before you, shall come the children of those who tormented you; prostrate at the soles of your feet shall be all those who reviled you...the cry "Violence!" shall no more be heard in the Land' (Isa 60:14ff). Interestingly, Isaiah 60:19ff clearly equates Yahweh himself with a light that does not require sun or moon. 'The Lord shall be your light everlasting' (אור עולם). Here, we revisit the odd reversal in the narrative found in the expulsions of Abraham and in Exodus where the victim is lavished upon by the one who is expelling him.

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<sup>99</sup> The connections of Genesis one with other exilic works, especially Ezekiel, has been amply noted by Zimmerli (1979:124); Allen (1994:36) Terrien (1983:205), and Albertz (2003:336). J.T Strong (2000:69-71) explains Yahweh's glory as a hypostasis of Yahweh especially in the contested realm of chaos.

Thus the light of Yahweh is equated with a mighty redeeming act, one even greater than the exodus. This is all the more extraordinary because it is spoken in the midst of darkness and emptiness—the exile. Even more significant, it is the rescuing of the scapegoat victim in which this new creation will come forth.

Even among Israel's earlier prophets, light is connected with the redeeming, intervening and sacrificial presence of Yahweh. Used in a passage referring to a punishment for sin by foreign invasion, Micah provides a catalogue description of a sacrificial crisis that has brought on the calamity (Mic 7). As with the prophets, they view it as something brought on by the Lord. Yes, Israel is a victim – 'Do not rejoice over me, Oh my enemy...He will champion my cause, uphold my claim. He will let me out into the light; I will enjoy vindication by Him' (Mic 7:9). Here, being brought out into the light means a rescue from victimization and forgiveness. To be liberated from death is light indeed.

Micah's prophecy finds its basis in the liturgical tradition at the Temple. All references to Yahweh as light refer to being led into the Presence of God, especially at Mount Zion. They also reference a sacrificial crisis in which they have been victimized. The light leads them through the 'death' the writer is experiencing. Schwager (1978:92) states:

The genuine locus of Old Testament revelation is the experience of the one individual being beset by the many. The expulsion of a victim, instinctively experienced as a positive event by the many, is gradually unmasked in the light of revelation as a banding together of violent evildoers.

Especially clear texts about this collective persecution of an individual are found in the Psalms.

In these cases, they do not necessarily view themselves as innocent. Light is associated with God's just ways of dealing with humanity.

Several Psalms (Ps 27:1, 43:3) speak of Yahweh as 'my light' echoing Micah. Yahweh rescues from a sacrificial crisis and from becoming victim to a mob—'evil men assail me to devour my flesh.' This is unlike Girard's scapegoat, who is innocent, the penitent of this prayer connects his sin to his trouble. Nevertheless, he expects Yahweh's light to lead 'out of darkness' and towards 'your dwelling place.'

Isaiah and traditions associated with him seem to have especially enunciated a theology of light.<sup>100</sup> That light is connected directly to acts of creation appears to have been heightened in and around Israel's exile. Isaiah 45:7, for example, connects Yahweh's creative acts to the theological statement: 'There is none but Me, I am the Lord and there is none else.' Yahweh 'fashioned the light and created darkness.' Also of interest is the next phrase, 'I make weal and create woe.' Once again, light is directly related to Yahweh stepping into human crisis. We may be disturbed by such a statement, for it indicates that God designs the sacrificial crisis. When read in the context of Isaiah 45 and the calling out of Cyrus, this has a clear message that God makes the very situation—sacrificial crisis—in which the sacrificial victim will emerge for the sole purpose of rescuing him and thereby demonstrating a mastery superior to savage sacred realm of other gods. This is what is behind the word: 'I am the Lord and there is none beside me.'

Isaiah 45 makes evidently analogous the creation of heaven and earth and the 'birthing' of Israel with that of the exile, coming forth from a sacrificial crisis. It is clearly polemical. It is as if to say Yahweh intentionally employs the crisis in order to convincingly demonstrate his mastery of it. Ps 89:9 declares Yahweh's mastery of chaos (the ocean, and sea monsters) as analogous to his mastery of human crisis. Always there is this parallel between conquering the forces of nature and 'scattering the enemy.'

The light of Gen 1:3 should be understood as an encroachment of God into the very heart of the crisis of creation. God is mysteriously present in the most definitive act of creation. We can affirm with Westermann (1968:8) that: 'In the Old Testament, what is said of God's coming and of his presence belong together. Neither is absorbed by the other; neither negates the other.' With the emergence of light from darkness, God is made known, and it is sacrificial. In other words, God enters into and opposes the crisis of the world as spirit, and it is light that is expelled. This light mediates between and mysteriously reverses the crisis of creation and its generative acts. It 'fixes' the crisis along humankind's sacrificial methods, but also reveals the mechanism for what it is. Its connection with glory demonstrates that light is that aspect of God that allows itself to

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<sup>100</sup> Isa 2:5, 9:1, 10:17, 42:6, 49:6, 51:4



contact the ‘unclean regions of the cosmos,’ especially in confronting its terrible equilibrium.

### 5.5 The Sacrificial Role of Light in Genesis 1

Westermann (1974:112) speaks of light’s defining role in the generative act: ‘...the creation of light is more than just the “condition of all order” in the cosmological sense; it makes the order possible and determines it.’

Girard (1974:64) speaks of the expulsion of the scapegoat victim: ‘Thus the *representation* of nondifference ultimately becomes the very *exemplar* of difference.’

The sacrificial role of light is further accentuated in view of the structure of Genesis 1. The six days of creation are divided into three days of separation—counteracting the world’s dark and unformed situation—and three days of filling—counteracting the world’s empty and abysmal situation. It is of particular interest that generative activity—the filling out of heaven and earth in the latter three days—necessarily proceeds from acts of extrusion, expulsion, separation, or division. Westermann (1974:129) repeatedly affirms how the act of separation permeates the whole process in Genesis 1: ‘The echo of v. 4 in v. 18 is intentional; separation colors the whole of God’s work of creation.’ This, for Girard (1972:267), originates from a primordial sense of an archetypal victim. Any notion of separation, division, expulsion, purging, extraction, or purification comes from this notion:

The birth of the community is first and foremost an act of separation. That is why metaphors of severance permeate the generative act... Whether we refer to catharsis or purification, purgation or exorcism it is actually the idea of evacuation and separation that is foremost.

The first generate act is the reestablishment of difference which for Girard is the reestablishment of prohibitions, the reestablishment of boundaries. Westermann (1974:33, 113) has made note of how universal the notion of separation is in connection with origins. In the first act of separation, day from night, we return to the cutting action suggested by *bara*.

**5.5.1 The emergence of light and the first three days.** The annihilation of the heavens and the earth first finds its salvation through a process of severing. The separation of light from darkness is presented as God's first fundamental and active role in the crisis of the heaven and the earth, and it is imitative. It imitates the prime generative act of light coming out of darkness. God separates (בָּרָא) light from darkness (Gen 1:4). Noun forms of *hibdil* refer to the thing taken out of the whole: a severed piece (Amos 3:12, *badal*) or a set aside place (Josh 16:9, *mibdalah*). *Bedilah* has metallurgical references in which it refers to an alloy, usually tin (Num 31:22), extracted from ore. Conversely, it also refers to the dross or slag which has been separated out to make a purer metal (Ez 22:18). The prophets Isaiah (Isa 1:25) and Ezekiel (Ez 22:18) metaphorically speak of the *bedilah* as the evil to be removed from Jerusalem. Again we find a sacrificial duality—what Girard calls a symmetry—in the word itself, carrying both destructive and constructive meanings. In the sacrificial victim, the malevolent forces stored up in the community are expelled, but from that act, a new sense of clarity and peace comes to the community.

We must also note that the expulsion of light from darkness creates a gap, chasm, or wedge between darkness. The repetition of בֵּין, 'God separated *between* the light and *between* the darkness' is incorporated when, according to BDB (1980:107), 'the space separating two distinct objects is to be indicated.' That a unique space is created with light's departure from darkness is more apparent on the second day where the expanse is *in the midst* of the water, separating water from water (Gen 1:7). Thus the expanse, which becomes the space to be filled on day five, becomes a new sacred space where God continues and fulfills His generative activity. This gap or sacred interval is called Day. It is the wedge between darkness and darkness. There are three realms of God's generative activity presented in the first chapter of Genesis. Each comes into being via a severing or going out from the crisis of creation—Day (separated from darkness) and sky and land (separated from the deep).

**5.5.2 Evening and Morning.** Each word, evening and morning, have sacrificial overtones<sup>101</sup>. The formula ‘evening and morning,’ however, refers primarily to the appointed burnt offerings of the temple. Since the reverse formula, morning and evening, is also used, I suggest that the priority of evening holds a particular meaning. The various connotations around evening especially deal with darkness. The evening sacrifice is viewed as a gateway or entrance into darkness. In this case, it is closely tied to the paschal sacrifice which is to be offered ‘between the evenings’ (twilight), and Israel’s experience of the fiery pillar that kept watch during the night between the two armies. The phrase ‘evening and morning’ especially signals the passage of night. The sacred assembly around the evening and morning offerings cordon off night.<sup>102</sup> We should view this similarly to the way the waters of day three are ‘gathered into one place.’ Most importantly, *day* becomes the interval between night and night, and the sacrificial crisis is contained.

It is this fundamental separation of light from darkness that structures all of God’s bringing the world into being. Every ‘day’ of the creative activity of God is structured by ‘evening and morning.’ All the days imitate the first day in ushering in distinctions. This is more obvious in the first three days which whittles the elements down to the peculiar focus of God’s activity—**הָאֵרֶךְ**. The latter three days are concerned with filling that which was separated, but here too, concerns for separation are evident. On day four, the lights fill the expanse above. In imitation (*mashal*) of the original light of Gen 1:3, they also separate (*bedil*) day from night and establish a sense of time.<sup>103</sup> The making of lights in the firmament reveals the role of created objects that fill in the spaces made by

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<sup>101</sup> Morning, **בֹּקֶר**, can mean to inquire, split, divide, discern, rip. Eze 34:11ff, Lev 13:36, Lev 27:33 speak of the sacrificial animal – dividing/separating good from bad. *Boqar* is used of Yahweh’s decisive action (1 Kings 16:15). It makes sense that morning has clearer connotations of separation since it is the ushering in of the morning sun. Evening, **עֶרֶב**, has a diverse set of meanings. Primarily, it has to do with mixing together. Since evening is the ushering in of darkness, it makes sense that it is seen more as a mixture of light and dark. It signals a retreat of light and the blurring of difference. It is related to the acceptability of sacrifice, being sweet or pleasant Prov 3:24 (as opposite of fear or terror); Jer.6:20, Hos 9:3 of sacrifice (not pleasing to Yahweh), of prayer Ps 104:34.

<sup>102</sup> Num 9:15, 21, Isa 17:14, Zeph 3:3, Ez 24:18, 33:22, Ps 30:6, Ps 90:5,6. The mythological idea of the celestial lights as gates is common (Westermann, 1974:133).

<sup>103</sup> Here in my view is a much clearer reference to God’s setting ‘history’ in motion than Gen 1:1.

separation—they *maintain* the separations. On the fourth day, for instance, the lights separate and mark all the calendric distinctions and in this way they govern or preside over them. The lights separate, mark, and rule.

Distinctions other than calendric are evident on day four, and may, in fact, be a more critical concern. Westermann (1974:127) and Arnold (2009:42) view the curious elaboration, repetition, and allusions to Gen 1:3 on day four as a polemic against the pantheon of gods in mythology. Celestial bodies are readily associated with divinities *because they are light bearing*. They too share in the essential nature of light—its emergence, expulsion, or severing from darkness—and in the essential function of light—to establish difference. They too have passed through the mysterious realm of congealed difference. The de-deifying of these lights is a theological assertion that Israel’s God is distinct and unique from the gods. Unlike the gods who readily move in and out of darkness, the lights are set (Gen. 1:17).

From a mimetic perspective another distinction is being made which perhaps even the author is not fully cognizant of. The drama between the gods that sets up a scapegoat murder, such as in the *Enuma Elish* or the Osiris myth, reveals the crowd-like nature of the gods. The logic of the crowd is the ultimate realm of the sacred. Girard (1972:266) statement bears repeating:

...the domain of the savage sacredness, which recognizes neither boundaries nor limits. This is the realm not only of gods and supernatural creatures, of monsters and the dead, but also of nature itself...of the cosmos and of all the rest of humanity.

In a subtle yet profound way, the author of Genesis 1 distances the true God from that of the mob. When the light was expelled from darkness it takes the most critical attributes of divinity, the ability to reestablish difference. The very notion of light as a fundamental nature of divinity is not abandoned here.<sup>104</sup> The critical distinction in Genesis 1 is that this light never returns to darkness. It never cycles back to the place of undifferentiation, so it cannot be deified. It does not join the ranks of the sacred. The God of Israel is not the god of the crowd.

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<sup>104</sup> ‘We can be certain that the description in v. 16 and 17 belong to an older stage in the tradition,’ says Westermann (1974:128)

**5.5.3. The filling of the world and God’s act of blessing.** The fifth and sixth days also indicate a primary concern for the maintenance of distinctions, for they fill in the ‘in-between’ space with creatures ‘according to their kinds,’ a phrase repeated seven times within these two days. The author takes pains to correlate the ‘bursting forth’ of ‘living,’ ‘teeming,’ ‘life-consuming,’<sup>105</sup> beings (Gen 1:20) with keeping distinctions. Vibrant life flourishes in diversity or maintenance of distinctions. It is in fact, this symbiosis of taking in life and maintaining distinctions that jettisons the pronouncement of blessing by God. On the heels of the statement ‘according to their kinds,’<sup>106</sup> ‘God saw that it was good and God blessed them saying be fruitful and multiply and fill...(Gen 1:21).’ All of the world should drive toward overflowing abundance (רָבָה), the satiation of desire within the context of clear distinctions. To remind, the impetus for all distinctions was the initial ‘coming forth’ of light from an arena of annihilation.

The unique pronouncement of *adam*’s creation is placed within this cycle of separation, demarcation, and flourishing of life (Gen 1:26-27). Adam is made in a sense ‘according to his kind’ and that ‘kind’ is the *image* and *likeness* of God. In verse 26, the strongest possible connection between maintenance of distinctions and ‘dominion’ are reinforced. ‘Let us make’ is parallel with ‘let them dominate.’ Adam is a distinction keeper *par excellence*.<sup>107</sup>

That God created (בָּרָא) *adam* is thrice repeated in Gen 1:27. Traces of ‘cutting’ or severing are retained. Image/ likeness both carry allusions to cutting and to sacrifice as will be discussed below.

*Bara* is curiously thrice repeated in Genesis 1. First, God split the heavens and earth in Gen 1:1. Then, God distinguishes the ‘great sea monster’ from all the ‘swarming living things’ in both sea and air. Even though all the swarming living things in the sea and air are included in the act of creating in verse 21, the *tannim* appear to represent all of them and in a sense rule them, especially in being singled out. The pattern of day five goes as

<sup>105</sup> As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the word נֶפֶשׁ is closely related to desire or satiation. ‘Soul’ beings are ‘open-throated,’ open to taking in life.

<sup>106</sup> Yet another word which fundamentally means to divide or separate, גָּיַץ, BDB 568.

<sup>107</sup> That the image/likeness is related to *adam*’s function to share in God’s rule over creation is a major assertion of Middleton (2005:54-55).

such: God made the ‘swarming living things’ of sea and air; God ‘creates’ the *tannim* and consequently the ‘swarming living things’ ‘according to their kinds’; then, God blesses with the command to be fruitful and multiply. The *tannin* is strategically placed in *between* the creatures of sea and air and the blessing of them. God blesses, which is always corporate—God blessed *them*—only after the *one* has been singled out. This *one* rules the many by virtue of being singled out from the rest. God’s creative act, *bara*, is particularly focused on the *one*. Westermann (1974:22) surveys the interplay of the one and many in creation accounts of the ancient mythologies and concludes: ‘...the theme of the creature of a particular object is older than that of the general creation, and in particular the creation of humans is older than that of the creation of the world.’ To be discussed more below, it is the one singled out that *represents* the whole and *procures* the cohesion of the whole.

The same pattern is repeated on the sixth day; first, the land creatures are made; then God creates *adam*; then God pronounces blessing. Here, God ‘creates’ *adam*, and thus singles him out or separates him from all the living creatures and especially those who dwell ‘upon the earth’ (Gen 1:25).

The most prominent ‘severing’ is in Gen 1:27 where *adam* is split into male and female. The curious chiasmic arrangement itself emphasizes the split:

ברא אתו    created *him*  
 זכר        male  
 ונקבה    and female  
 ברא אתם    created *them*

Again, only after this ‘creative’ act by God is blessing pronounced. Gen 1:28 combines all aspects discussed above under the act of blessing. For now, the bifurcated *adam* can be fruitful, increase, fill, subdue and have dominion.

**5.5.4 The sacrificial origins of image.** The discussion of the *imago dei* is vast indeed. Of the limited biblical references to it (Gen 1:26, 27, 5:1-3, Gen 9:6) the reference here is primary.

Again, the doctrinal concerns around *imago dei* can easily overshadow as in the case of *ex nihilo*. The call to ‘context’ is always present and most everyone claims to be true to it.<sup>108</sup> As discussed in chapter 3, ‘context’ has its own set of problems. Westermann (1974:144-161) arrives at several interrelated conclusions concerning Gen 1:26-28. By way of approaching this topic, these conclusions will be discussed in conjunction with mimetic theory.

The emphasis lies in an *event*, a process rather than a statement of substance or nature. Westermann (1974:155) relies on an understanding of the theological outlook of the author. P is concerned with an *encounter* with the holy. Humans cannot reveal God; God reveals himself through an encounter with the *kabod* of Yahweh. Westermann (1974:158): ‘...in the theology of P, it is humanity as a whole that is created as the counterpart of God; the intention is to render possible a happening between creator and creature. And this for P is directed toward the holy event in which history reaches its goal as indicated by Gen 2:1-3.’

This sacred event is dominated by God’s action of **כָּרַע**, repeated three times in verse 27. As proposed earlier, if we venture to retain some of the more banal action of ‘to cut’ or ‘cut down,’ the sacrificial connotations are clearer.

Image, comes from the verb **צָלַם** with clear root associations with cut, cut off, or cut out.<sup>109</sup> The verb form is not found in biblical reference, causing some, like Westermann (1974:146) to doubt the associations of cutting with this verse. Something ‘concrete’ like a statue or sculpture, however, is strongly denoted. Westermann (1974:146) opts for a general meaning of reflection or representation which eliminates the need for etymological dependency. This may be another example of how the *significance* of something like a word, a ritual, or symbol loses its more direct associations with a concrete event.<sup>110</sup> We embrace the significance of a word while simultaneously severing the connection to its primary referent. The word for likeness, **דְּמוּת**, may equally have a

<sup>108</sup> Middleton (2005:13-42) aptly clarifies the current issues involved and his approach is balanced.

<sup>109</sup> BDB 853. Middleton (2005:47).

<sup>110</sup> In speaking of Gans’s Generative Anthropology, Bartlett (2009:91) reminds that the very act of formulating language, giving an object a designation, is the very act of deference, making it one step removed from the referent.

vestigial connection to cutting. A peripheral survey of words derived from דם reveal intriguing associations with the death of a victim. דם of course is blood, but more importantly, it mostly references blood made visible, that is shed blood.<sup>111</sup> This association is most specific in Gen 9:4-6 where ‘life,’ ‘soul,’ ‘shedding of blood,’ ‘recompense,’ and ‘image’ are inextricably linked.<sup>112</sup> Mostly, דמוּת is viewed as deriving from the verb דמה with a basic meaning of ‘to pay a price.’<sup>113</sup> Westermann (1974:146) ascribes the meaning of comparison without associating it with paying a price, but there is more than a casual connection when seeking recompense for the shedding of blood. The comparison of equal value is easily associated in the phrase ‘a life for a life.’ Kutsko (2000:70-76) provides an extended discussion of the link between idolatry and shedding blood, linking it with the Priestly tradition of the *imago dei*: ‘The frequent charge against Israel shedding blood generally occurs in the same context as the charge against Israel worshipping *gillulim*.’ The mixing of blood with mud and wood shavings is a common reference in mythological accounts of the formation of humans.<sup>114</sup> The most telling example is in *Enuma Elish*:

It was Kinu who contrived the uprising, and made Tiamat rebel, and joined the battle. They bound him, holding him before Ea. They imposed on his guilt and severed his blood. Out of his blood they fashioned mankind.<sup>115</sup>

Also of interest, is another grouping of words derived from דם. דום, דמה, דמי, and דמם all relate to silence or making silent or dumb. Once again the associations of cutting, or cutting down are evident. דמה means to cutoff, destroy, bring to an end (Jer 6:2, Hos 4:5).<sup>116</sup> Thus, the cutting down of the victim silences the voice. There is a

<sup>111</sup> BDB 196. Middleton (2005:47) explains that *damut* is merely assonantly related to *dam* and the inclusion of *tselem* is intentionally placed alongside *damut* to disassociate it from any notions of blood connected with the origins of humanity.

<sup>112</sup> Surprisingly, the discussion of *imago dei* often overlooks this verse. Westermann’s (1974:144-161) does not mention it.

<sup>113</sup> BDB 197.

<sup>114</sup> Westermann (1974:35): ‘The formation of humans from mud or clay is probably the most common and most widespread creation motif.’ Curiously, in a bilingual Assyrian account of creation, the blood of the gods produced different kinds of technological skill (Van Seters, 1992:59). Genesis 4 and 10 also directly connect bloodshed with technological advance.

<sup>115</sup> ANET (1958:35)

<sup>116</sup> BDB 198, 189.



possible association of this word group with אָדָם which has the obvious connections of humanity coming from red soil.<sup>117</sup>

Jay (1992:xiii) ventures in territory perhaps too uncomfortable for male exegetes. Depictions of origins of both humans and gods via vaginal birth pale in comparison to humans coming forth via dismemberment or extrusion. A man's claim to descendents, is not through relation to the mother giving birth, Jay (1992:xxiii) hypothesizes, but rather from participation in the cult. The origins of the community are most often viewed as dismemberment.<sup>118</sup>

Since a father is not involved in the birthing process, he begets the child via a communal act of severance. The *act* of patrilineal descent must be decisive, clear, and obvious. Jay (1992:36) asserts:

When the crucial intergenerational link is between the father and the son, for which birth by itself cannot provide sure evidence, sacrificing may be considered essential for the continuity of the social order. What is needed to provide clear evidence of social and religious paternity is an act as definitive and available to the senses as is birth. When membership in patrilineal descent groups is identified by rights of participation in blood sacrifice, evidence of paternity is created which is as certain as evidence of maternity but far more flexible.

A critical aspect of establishing the man's paternity with his children is the need to create a 'resemblance with the father.'<sup>119</sup> A likeness to the father does not carry the 'natural certainty' as in childbirth especially without the technical apparatus of today. Quite realistically, there was no way to *socially* establish the paternal link. In a sense, without some social action, all the children in a community are illegitimate. There would be no fathers.<sup>120</sup> Only sacrifice, Jay (1992:36) asserts, establishes essential continuity for social order.

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<sup>117</sup> In Akkadian, *adamatu* is 'dark red soil' and *adamu* is 'red blood.' In Aramaic '*adam* is as blood' (TWOT:11).

<sup>118</sup> Dismemberment best connotes the duality inherent in sacrifice. As will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, rites of passage are closely linked to sacrifice. The initiate must undergo a dismemberment, some kind of isolation, before re-membering his place in the community. Malachi 2:10-12 bolsters Jay's view where fatherhood, covenant, fidelity, idolatry and lineage are intertwined.

<sup>119</sup> Here Jay (1992:30) relies on the assessment of Vernant's (1980:136) evaluation of Ancient Greek sacrificial functions.

<sup>120</sup> Jay 1992:36

This aspect certainly is encompassed in a core concern of P for intergenerational continuity, especially in his use of the *toledoth* formula. The creation (cutting) of adam's image in the likeness of God establishes a *legitimate* lineage going back to the origins of the community. In form criticism, P goes from Gen 2:4a to Gen 5 without a hitch. But we must not neglect the connection it has to Gen 2-3. All birthings *proceed* from expulsions. Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden and then Eve conceives and then Cain is 'brought forth.'<sup>121</sup> Significantly, it is Eve who names. In other words, she can make the clearest claim to the child via natural childbirth and so can 'name' the child. Again she 'bears' and 'names' with Adam nowhere in sight. Bartlett (2009:91) reminds that naming, the first formulations of language and/or signification, is of itself an act of deferring violence, especially in connecting the disenfranchised male to the child.

A highly significant pattern plays out in Genesis 4. Cain is expelled, and then he has sex with a woman who conceives and 'bears' (יָלַד) a child. The child is given a name. Culture flourishes with technological advancement and *in reciprocal violence*. By the end of the chapter, the pattern is repeated with Adam, Eve, and Seth. Eve names her son Seth. But Genesis 5 intervenes. In a deliberate attempt to reiterate the connection with origins (Gen 5:1-2), P now has Adam *beget* Seth. Others had begot their sons (Gen 4:18-20) and yet reciprocal violence escalates to the point where 'men began to call on Yahweh' (Gen 4:26). But Adam, begets (יָלַד) Seth who is 'cut' (צָלַם) in a blood-likeness (דְּמוּת), and Adam *names* him Seth, one who has been constituted in likeness.<sup>122</sup> The issue of social cohesion and membership of males are especially acute in the themes of blessing, lineage, image, representation, and sacrifice.<sup>123</sup>

This leads us into another conclusion of Westermann (1974:158). It is the origins of humanity in view here, not individual humans. This, also, is in keeping with P's theological outlook where the encounter with the Presence is only conceived of

<sup>121</sup> The fundamental idea of יָלַד is to *bring forth* especially after an extended struggle or an utter expending of energy. Its primary reference is, of course child birth, but its figurative uses accentuate the notion of logical or natural consequence of the struggle (Job 38:28, Isa 55:10), BDB 408.

<sup>122</sup> BDB 1011 finds a transformative denotation of likeness or comparison, to make someone or something 'like' something else (Hos 2:5, Isa 16:3).

<sup>123</sup> Again, Jay presents valuable insights, but misjudges the impetus for such notions in a desire among males to get back to a Greek notion of a 'Golden Age' of immortality, rather than in a more utilitarian need to divert social disaster.

corporately. It is the community, the sacred assembly that is in view. **קָהָל** must be viewed in a communal sense. When speaking of community, we are not talking about the vague whimsical notion tossed around in our disintegrated modern society where sharing a general interest or the same cyberspace is spoken of in some sense of a community at large. It must have closer correspondence to tribal or village groups who truly must survive in a cooperative effort.

When humans live in a real, down to earth communal setting, a powerful dynamic is at work. We moderns like to speak of ‘community’ and long for it, but ironically, we know all too well its ‘dangers.’ People like to ‘have their space’ because they know that to live in close proximity means the enmeshment of desires. They know it means real conflict.

The origin of communal life is the driving force behind cosmogonic narratives, Westermann attests (1974:160). Thus, the dynamics of human interaction is projected onto the natural world. All of the above leads Westermann (1974:151) to the fundamental concern of the ‘image of God’ *in the context* of Genesis 1. Agreeing with Barth,<sup>124</sup> the image of God has to do with ‘correspondence,’ the ability or capacity to correlate. The community, **קָהָל**, is God’s counterpart, a conspirator<sup>125</sup> in life. This makes the most sense out of the plurality in the declaration, ‘let us make.’ Westermann (1974:151, 152, 157, 158) subordinates the royal allusions in reference to the dominion emphasis under this notion, especially recognizing the father/child (son) relationship. The relationship of father and son is only conceived in terms of the *original communal event*. Jay’s (1992:xxiii) remarkable insight misses the mark when she asserts that sacrifice is primarily concerned with ‘a remedy for having been born of woman.’ No, the primary concern is the volatility of males in a confined community. Many rites and mythological narratives deal with the formation of community and entail the emergence of a representative patriarchal figure, a king. Behind every hero, monster, or royal figure is a victim Girard (1972:258) maintains. Royalty is the incarnation of the sacred. Behind every living king is a victim in waiting and behind every god is a dead king.

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<sup>124</sup> Middleton (2005:21-25) provides a detailed correlation between Barth’s exposition in *Church Dogmatics* and Westermann.

<sup>125</sup> Conspire in its basic sense comes from the Latin *spirare*, to breath. It is breathing together.

Isolation is the critical concern; thus P addresses the problem of ‘being alone in his isolation’ in a similar fashion to Gen 2:18. This is the primary reason for the sexes, but Westermann (1974:160), misses the logic of his own reasoning when he places the total emphasis on the isolated individual from the community. The isolation of the disconnected father from a child is certainly volatile, but even more at stake is the volatility inherent in an isolated community. Without an outlet, it will implode on itself. Unlike many in our culture today who constantly push the volatility of sex to the background, the ancients knew better. They did not have the technical apparatus to conveniently discard the lethal consequences involved.

The correspondence of Westermann’s conclusions with mimetic theory is clear. Girard repeatedly asserts that the sacrificial crisis is *always* an internal crisis. A contagion of desire is sure to cultivate in the confinement of a Petri dish. When the disciple is too close to the model (internal mediation) without enough distance to diffuse desire elsewhere (external mediation), a conflagration of rivalry ensues. Girard (1972:279) explains how seemingly separate social rituals such as rites of passage, war, and marriage arrangements, are vehicles to dissipate *internal* communal tension.

The conclusions here lend themselves most readily to a fundamental seemingly radical assertion of Girard that a scapegoat mechanism is the pivotal process in the birth of human culture. The victim is the first and most powerful signifier or sign that births representation. Girard (1972:235) insists: ‘The origin of symbolic thought lies in the mechanism of the surrogate victim.’ The proximity of representation—the transference of the real object to a signifier of it—to the emergence of human culture has been the subject of an extensive and ongoing dialogue between Girard and Eric Gans who has advocated *Generative Anthropology*, which according to Muller (1996: e) is ‘the deferral of violence through representation.’ Both Girard and Gans agree that representation defers communal violence, but whereas Gans envisions an *original scene* where language emerges as the first movement toward the deferral of desire for an object, Girard sees a

*process* in which the scapegoat victim emerges as the prime representation of corporate desire.<sup>126</sup> Girard (Muller, 1996:e) states:

Moving towards representation would be an extremely slow process and one cannot say anything about it in a concrete historical way, to be sure. It would be a long series of ‘scenes.’

Gans’s view tends to see representation in a more positive role. Representation through word is a way to delay gratification of desire. It mediates between the object of desire and its appropriation.<sup>127</sup> Girard, on the contrary, views the first representation as essentially false because of its proximity to the scapegoat mechanism. It sacralizes the victim and therefore misrepresents the role of the whole community. Says Girard (Muller, 1996:e):

The first representations to me would be false representations of scapegoating, which are the **sacred**... The sacred is right there as a powerful experience that precedes representation but constantly moves towards representation. And at a certain stage which of course cannot be defined it must become a kind of representation.

Indeed, it is the ritual enactment of the process of scapegoating that distances the victim from the community. Thus the victim moves more and more towards representation and towards *separation* from the community. That is, the victim becomes sacred object. Girard views the ritualizing of the scapegoat mechanism<sup>128</sup> as the ‘genetic engine of representation’ and shies away from envisioning an originary scene. Whereas Gans would emphasize the form that the transference of object to representation takes, Girard would emphasize the content of the representation.<sup>129</sup>

It is at this convergence of scapegoat victim and representation where the notion of royalty emerges. Arnold (2009:45) echoes the prominent view that the image of god is best understood in the context of Ancient Near Eastern royalty. Indeed the immediate

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<sup>126</sup> Bartlett (2009:90-165) provides a thorough evaluation of the discussion between mimetic theory and generative anthropology. Both theories agree that representation is fundamentally connected to the deferral of communal violence.

<sup>127</sup> Bartlett (2009:94) describes it as ‘the gesture of appropriation that names the central object of appetite and desire *in the absence of the object*.’

<sup>128</sup> Here, Girard (Muller, 1996:e) reminds as discussed in Chapter 3 of this work that ritual does not require signification ahead of time. Ritual can precede representation.

<sup>129</sup> Bartlett (2009:92).

context in Genesis 1 with its repeated emphasis on dominion and rule are undeniably connected with the image.<sup>130</sup> But the question remains as to where the idea of king originates. It is directly related to original communal murder who was most likely a prominent male. The all-against-one event is what creates that ‘one’ who is separate from the community, but who can now arbitrate difference for the community. ‘Every god, hero, and mythic creature so far encountered, from the sacred African king to Chief Pestilence of the Tsimshians, embodies the *interplay of violence projected by an act of generative unanimity* (Girard, 1972:250). In the royal figure, theogonies and cosmogonies come together.

Taking Westermann’s conclusions in conjunction with Girard, it becomes clearer how notions of dismemberment, separation, cutting or dividing in relationship to the birth and perpetuity of communal life are connected to ideas of representation and image. Human community must cultivate a notion outside itself, a notion of something separate and distinct from itself in order to have communal life. That notion is the sacred, and its ‘genetic engine’ is the scapegoat mechanism.

Again, Genesis 1 speaks of origins with the same context and images as its neighbors, so what, if anything, is different about the image of God here?

The likeness of man to God has several reference points within the first chapter, all which speak of a ‘counter sacrifice’ to the conventional sacrificial arrangements. Three swaths cut through God’s relentless march from annihilation to Shabbat. The emergence of light from darkness is the primary referent. The ‘great lights and the ‘great sea monsters,’ imitate the original light especially in maintaining distinctions. Finally, God ‘cuts’ a unique being who corresponds and conspires with him in bringing about a new heaven and earth. Through a sacrificial sequence this bifurcated creature is recognized as ‘belonging to the father.’ The likeness of man to God then, corresponds to ‘blessing,’ and blessing has to do with the ability to flourish, not just in terms of reproduction but also in terms of the ability to e-value it, that is, to instill it with ‘the good.’ Gen 1:29 also comments on the peculiar rulership of *adam* over living creatures. It cannot escape

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<sup>130</sup> Middleton (2005) provides the most thorough case for this.

us that the food supplied for man is different than from the rest and that this has to do with desire. It is ‘seed-bearing’ plants and trees that is adam’s food while the animals should eat ‘green plants.’ Chapter 2, as we shall see, more explicitly connects fruit with open expressions of fulfilling desire. Here the connection is more subtle; nevertheless, food is one of the fundamental aspects and metaphors of human desire. Here as well as in the chapter 2, desire is viewed positively as good and godlike. God, it appears, not only makes the goodness of life obtainable, He makes it *desirable*. Indeed we may also affirm that man reflects God’s likeness when he desires life.

**5.5.5 The seventh day – Sabbath Gen 1:31-2:4a.** The reconstitution of the heavens and earth find the completion upon God’s final proclamation of goodness at the end of the sixth day. As mentioned already, the old heavens and earth of Genesis 1:1 were ‘cut down’, and in the process of separation and filling this action finds its completion after the sixth day. The necessity of a ‘clean slate’ finds its completion then, and because of this, God can cease from work and rest. The symmetry of a previous world (heaven and earth) which inevitably produces the ‘monstrous double’ of indifference, a sacred space of congealed barrenness and darkness finds its ‘end’ with the ushering in of a new symmetry of holiness (separation) and blessing (filling).

God ‘blesses (ברך) and separates (קדש)’ the seventh day, and here as well, it is a symmetrical product of completion and rest. God blesses the day, instilling and invigorating the ‘day’ with ever increasing and flourishing life, and He ‘separated’ it, making it that ‘between’ time and space even among the six days.

In the picture of completion and rest we find a symmetrical restitution, but not of indifference. There is a picture of symmetry without rivalry, without violence or degeneration. There is heaven and earth, completion and rest, blessing and hallowed area. God’s initial act in Genesis 1:1 has cut clean through to completion. God has cut a new heaven and earth.

In Gen 2:4, we have the first of the *toledoth* formulas. Although much has been debated about the structural role of this formula, we should not neglect the obvious. Coming from the verb *yalad*, to give birth, this verse sets up not necessarily the structure of the

book, but the structure of the narratives. Just as God ‘birthed’ the world, so he birthed, or perhaps rebirthed Israel. God ‘cut down’ the old rival symmetry, entering a crisis of indifference and then emerged from it. By being both the sacrificer and in some sense the sacrificed, God marshaled in a series of sacrificial acts that irreversibly destroy the old symmetry of rivalry which inevitably leads to a recycling of victims.

## 5.6 Elohim’s Creation – a new Sacral Realm

When viewed through the lens of Girard’s mythical structure, Genesis one can readily be viewed as having been structured through a sacrificial lens. For Girard (1972:8, 306), this would be a given since all ancient cultures are structured thus.

There is no aspect of human existence foreign to the subject.

All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual. Such is the case...with political power, legal institutions, medicine, the theater, philosophy and anthropology.

Amazingly, even within the Bible’s opening lines, a terse and tightly compacted theological summary of a sacrificial paradigm is laid out. In the opening lines of the Bible, God proceeds through a sacrificial sequence. We have the executor of sacrifice who never ignores the crisis of undifferentiation (our sacred realm), but also mysteriously engages it by identifying with the focal point in the crisis, the entity coming forth from it.

This sequence becomes clearer in the way Girard (1978:56) especially links the sacrificial sequence with kingship. ‘Ultimately there is not even a myth of the origin independent of the inauguration of the monarch. Royalty is a mythology in action.’ He (1978:57) further explains:

...kingship and divinity...constitute two somewhat different responses to the basic question of ritual. How should the violent resolution to the crisis be reproduced? In kingship the dominant element is what happens before the sacrifice, in divinity it is what comes after the sacrifice...Everyone repeats that the king is a kind of ‘living god’ but no one says that the divinity is a kind of dead king, or at any rate an ‘absent’ king, which would be just as accurate.

A sacrificial crisis is described, one which Girard takes volumes to unpack but here unfolds with an uncanny theological brevity. The symmetrical *tohu wabohu* falls in line



with Girard's multiple descriptions of a sacrificial crisis and conjointly with what Girard believes to be the sacred.

The sacred is that realm where the symmetry of reciprocity spirals ever more tightly into a paroxysm where 'opposition is most radical and difference non-existence' (1972:40). As Girard (1972:39) understands myth, this symmetry of reciprocal violence is always reversing what it first undoes. Thus reciprocity spins tighter towards a 'reduction,' 'condensation,' 'abbreviation,' or 'foreshortening' of reciprocity (1968:80). This centrifugal 'simplification' of reciprocity brings to light the scapegoat with an impeccable internal logic. This is what Girard has variously labeled the coherence of myth or the mythical structure. It is 'the unanimous polarization of hostility [toward a single victim] that produces the reconciliation' (1972:287). The state of annihilation of Genesis 1:2 precisely describes the 'derisory' or 'savage' realm of man's sacredness. That sacred realm is the place of 'dazzling ambiguity' (*tohu*) and an 'anarchy of value' (*bohu*). The 'evanescent difference,' the 'circularity of myth,' the 'duality of myth,' the realm of 'perpetual reversals' is the sacredness of myth and the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>131</sup> Only in this realm does the scapegoat come to light. Indeed, the appearance of the scapegoat is light itself, so it is, of course, good as Elohim declares. It is here where the expulsion of the one will relieve the crisis. Out of the one, the many are blessed. Man's sacred realm is the land of annihilation.

The separation of light from darkness marches steadfastly through Girard's stages of the scapegoat mechanism. The expulsion of a scapegoat, light, relieves the crisis. But it is in the separation of light from darkness where the author of Genesis makes a radical shift, one which redefines the sacred along different lines.

If the Genesis passage were to follow the pattern of the mythic structure, the narrative would proceed differently once light was extruded (*bedil*) from darkness. Light would, for one, be deified. It would become a god because it had passed through the sacred realm. Through the expulsion, the victim has taken on first the malevolent forces of the

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<sup>131</sup> Girard has compiled an extensive list of terms referring to violence, the sacred, sacrifice, and the sacrificial crisis. See (1972:250-273) and (1978:29-47, 58-87)

community and then the benevolent. The sacrificer becomes the sacrifice and the sacrificed becomes deified. But myth always returns to itself, so the light of Genesis 1:3 would return to the realm of deities—chaos, the realm of undifferentiation, of scrambled categories. The god of light, whatever form or name it took on, would of necessity return to the congealing of light and darkness. The mythic compulsion is to undo the resolve it moves toward, for it cannot conceive of an answer to our violence apart from the violence of the scapegoat. The scapegoat opens a window to resolve our violence only to quickly close in on itself once again.

Israel's creation story goes beyond the sacrificial structure, and in so doing, it more fully reveals the sacrificial system. Greek tragedy also reveals the sacrificial system, but it is unwilling, says Girard (1965:40), to fully unpack the ramifications of such a revelation. Thus Oedipus the King entertains that 'myth is not a totality' and a 'pre-existing wisdom external to the hostile dialogue' exists, but tragedy is repeatedly 'drawn [back] into the vortex against his will.'<sup>132</sup>

The sacral beings (the sacrificed) do not operate outside of the crisis. Their passage through it only means they are masters of it, and they return to the realm of the sacred as players who aid in perpetuating the sacred realm. They remain commingled with darkness. Without that, they could not remain sacred.

In the Oedipus myth, Girard (1965:39) says, 'The truth [all men are violent], a product of the myth itself, emerges [with the expulsion]...and the lie also emerges...the effort of all men to shunt their truth onto the Other.' Myth, religion, and tragedy both reveal and hide. It reveals the violence of the Other all the while: 'It conceals from us essential aspects of the structure, the role that we personally play in it.' This sacred realm thrives off of the reversal of symbols where 'light is a lie, and the darkness is light.' But then, through the expulsion of the victim, the truth of myth restores the original order Girard (1965:43) asserts:

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<sup>132</sup> Here Girard (1965:40) is speaking of Tiresias. Oedipus appeals to Tiresias' prophetic profession as a way out of the sacrificial crisis, but Tiresias claims that not even he can resist the forces of the sacrificial crisis. Hence, the sacrificial system always leans toward a closed system.

The overall structure which assures the full dialectic of symbols is, in a sense, a restoration of the original order. Light is light once more, darkness no longer anything but darkness. But light and darkness are no longer the object of an exclusive and definitive division [as is not the case in Genesis]. All light in this world ‘supposes a mournful shadow half.’ The more intense this light is, the more the darkness accompanying it thickens.

The picture in Genesis diverges precisely at this point. The light is separated from darkness and *never returns* to the savage sacred. Furthermore, darkness is cordoned off into night while light has forged a new sacred realm, Day. This sacredness is the realm in between the water’s deep foreboding presence both above and below. It has extruded from the earth’s abyss the dry ground, a new earth where life flourishes and God’s image is revealed. And all of this is marching steadfastly to the fullness of days, the day of days, the day of rest—Sabbath Day. It is a realm of never ending light where light never returns to darkness. It is a Sabbath sacredness, a Paradise.

We must remind ourselves that this other sacredness forged its divergent path only by light’s encroachment into the crisis of creation and its subsequent expulsion. Sabbath sacredness could be forged only by passing through savage sacredness. The Genesis passage never even questions the necessity of that. It understands all too well that it is we who require death for life. But Israel’s vision of God is one where mastery over this other sacredness is demonstrated by a sheer act of volition over it and through it. God has, most of all, demonstrated His mastery over the savage sacredness by ‘cutting it down,’ engaging it, passing through it, and forging a new creation, one that does not require another sacrifice. It is the sacrifice provided by God, and of God, that generates a sacredness of a different kind.

This vision, in my view, only reiterates the song of God’s victory first sung at the Reed Sea and relived with the songs of Zion at the Temple. It is for all who find themselves in a formless and meaningless whirl that the God of Israel prevails most profoundly.

## 6 THE SACRIFICIAL CRISIS AND ITS RESOLVE IN GENESIS 2

The literary structure of Genesis 2 and its relationship to Genesis 1 and 3 has been rigorously debated. Even though the scope of this work can only briefly address this, it is nonetheless important to establish some interpretive perimeters as they guide interpretation here to some degree.

The ‘author’ has been broadly associated with a ‘J’ or Yahwist source who is significantly different in style and theological perspective from ‘P’ of Genesis 1. Gunkel (1901:xlvi, lxix) asserted that J was mainly a compiler or redactor, relying on a vast array of images, ideas, cultic contexts, narratives, oral traditions and possibly even texts common to the Ancient Near Eastern world in the Iron Age. For Gunkel (1901:lxix), the writer mainly ‘preserved’ as much of Israel’s legends into a ‘good unit’ of confluent sources. In the case of Gen 2-3, Gunkel (1901:2) concludes that a comprehensible structure for Gen 2-3 is not discernable; the chapters cannot be viewed as a unit.

Furthering this notion, Westermann (1974:190) asserts that Gen 2-3’s multiple anomalies do not allow it to be understood as a literary unit.<sup>1</sup> It is best to understand it as a ‘composite’ of multiple influences that have been crafted, forcefully, into a workable *geschehensbogen*, a narrative centered on an over-arching event. Westermann (1974:193-195) categorizes the over-arching event under a common *crime and punishment* mythological motif, but here too, J is more a literary craftsman than an author. Campbell and O’Brian (2005:1-5) modify this view espousing that all the authors of the Pentateuch had a considerable storage of storytelling devices in which to craft a different spin on a story depending on the circumstances. Westermann (1974:191-192) understood that many of the features of Gen 2, like the prohibition of the knowledge tree of good and evil, are merely setting up the critical climactic event in Gen 3, the crime. The reading below, agrees with Westermann on several points but for different reasons and with different conclusions. There is a ‘tremendous tension’ in the narrative as Westermann observes, but this, according to a mimetic read, is conventional for a mythic structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Mimetic theory views ‘glitches’ in the narrative as an integral aspect of the structure, and hence it does not necessitate viewing the text in such a disjointed fashion.

From this kind of inquiry, a confident consensus has established that little if any of the images, features, or themes of the paradise story are unique to the biblical narrative. This does not require viewing the text in a fractured way. There is simply ‘a shared intertextual symbolic world’ as Middleton (2005:45) explains, and this leads back to Girard’s proposition—there is a reason, more accurately a common experience, behind these amazingly universal features. Even more so, the unique feature of Israel’s ‘myth’ of origins is its struggle to *come out from* or *emerge from* the grips of the mythological structure.<sup>2</sup> It senses something out of place and views the God of Israel as addressing the mythological operation in a unique way.

The garden narrative can be viewed as not only a literary unit, but a narrative one as well with a distinctive ‘authorial’ stamp. Van Seters (1992:328) proposes that ‘J’ is more a historiographic author/researcher than a mere compiler with a clear theological outlook to present. He is cognizant of both Mesopotamian and Greek primeval traditions and has *structured* the narrative *similarly*. Thus there are numerous rhetorical features in Genesis 2 unique to the author who is shaping the dramatic tension of the story in a certain direction contrary to the conventional mythological views. In this regard, Van Seters (1992:5) views Genesis as a unified literary whole in which the primeval account (Gen 1-11) provides a ‘prologue’ to Israel’s emerging history. Van Seters (1992:4-5) holds to a unity of composition to Gen 2-3 and this unit is part of a greater literary unity. Significantly, Van Seters (1992:29) confers with Westermann that the crime and punishment theme is the major thrust of the passage, but connects it much more closely to the Deuteronomistic agenda. Van Seter’s (1992:126-129) argues against the notion that Gen 2-3 is simply a disjointed conflation of sources; rather, it is a literary unit where the author has creatively employed the conventional mythological features. This is similar to Girard’s parabolic understanding of myth. The features can and are being manipulated for rhetorical effect.

Brodie (2001:12-16) explores even further the literary unity of Genesis. He asserts a three-fold unifying structure in the book of Genesis. First, it is ‘binary’ or ‘diptych.’ It is ‘balanced between pairs,’ and in this regard, Brodie speaks similarly to what Girard

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<sup>2</sup> Girard (1972:66 )

would call symmetry.<sup>3</sup> From this, Brodie views the second ‘frame’ as ‘spiraling toward greater complexity.’ It is also chiasmic, in which the second frame reverses what had come before. We can see something of this in the first two chapters of Genesis. The garden story is both parallel and sequential to the account of Genesis 1. For one, the scenario beginning in Genesis 2:4 shares the same features as Genesis 1:1.<sup>4</sup> It functions as an overarching comment on all that is to follow as well as a segue to what immediately follows in 2:5. Brodie (2001:16) asserts that this parallel accounting, what he calls diptych, structures the whole book of Genesis. The author, then, is structuring things symmetrically. The emphasis in Genesis 2, however, is exclusively on the earth, *ha’eretz*, and this suggests that the symmetry between the first two chapters is hyponymous<sup>5</sup> rather than synonymous. In other words, the heavens and earth are not symmetric of equal weight, each being a mirrored image of the other. Instead, the Sabbath pericope with the first toledoth formula serves more as an introductory statement than conclusion. The garden story is more the outcome of the Sabbath day than a conclusion Genesis 1, as Middleton (2005:294) advocates. Brodie (2001:12) views something similar in that the second ‘panel’ ‘spirals in complexity.’ It elaborates and comments on the first. As I proceed, reversals are also apparent. In Genesis 1, the emergence of light reverses the state of annihilation. Something similar also occurs in Genesis 2.

### 6.1 Earth’s Crisis and the Emergence of *Ha’adam*: Gen 2:5-7

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<sup>3</sup> Van Seters (1992:107) points to the ‘problem’ of doublets as one of the major points of contention over literary unity among Old Testament scholars. Again, what mimetic theory has to offer is being able to see how fundamental symmetry is to mythological structure *and what that structure could mean*.

<sup>4</sup> Middleton (2005:291-293) believes the consensus has moved away from the earlier view that Gen 2:4a was a part of Gen 1. Coupled with Perry’s (1993:4) discussion in chapter 5, it is much more possible to see a deliberate correlation between Gen 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> Tsumara (1989:67-74) argues for a kind of parallelism found in Genesis 1:2 that is found in poetic verse. He variously calls it *hyponymous* or *inclusio* where the subject in one line is said to be subsumed by the other. In the case of the ‘heavens and the earth,’ all that is of the earth is included in the heavens, but the heavens are more than the earth. This ‘hyponymous’ symmetry may be a peculiar way in which the author diffuses the sense of a symmetry of equals that leads to rivalry and a loss of difference.

In his introduction to Genesis 2:4b-3:24, Gunkel (1901:4) asserts the near complete difference with that of Genesis 1, but when looked at it from a mimetic structure striking similarities abound. The structure of origins as outlined in the last chapter is evident and adhered to here as well:

- 1) There is a symmetry, parallel parts which exacerbates a loss of difference.
- 2) An entity emerges, goes out, or is expelled from this symmetry.
- 3) The exiting entity is the focal point that reestablishes difference.

In the precondition for *ha'adam's* emergence, earth is depicted in terms of a congealed loss of difference similar to Gen 1:2. Most notably are the absence statements: 'there was *not yet* shrubs of the field', '*no* herbs of the field', the Lord God had *not* caused it to rain, and most critically, 'there was *no* man to serve the ground.' In light of the sequence of 'it is good' statements of Genesis 1, these negations should not be minimized. In other words, rather than saying 'it is bad,' it appears preferable to say 'it was not.'

Westermann (1974:43-47) as well as Tsumara (1989:34) have variously explored these statements of negation, classifying them in a 'not yet' formula that is widespread in mythology. Both deduce that a less chaotic depiction is intended. It is a typical narrative device to signal a beginning to a narrative of origins. Since this diverges significantly from what is proposed here, it is important to address this.

**6.1.1 Genesis 2:5-7, a description of an indifferiated state.** Modern interpreters<sup>6</sup> lean toward an 'etiological' concern of the author here as well as in mythological accounts of origins. Thus in our passage here, the tendency is to believe the author was primarily concerned with explaining things like how rain or food came about.

Westermann (1974:216) reasons that an explanation of water must be supplied before plants can be cultivated. As already argued in the last chapter, mimetic theory challenges just how etiological the concern really was in comparison to the concern for reciprocal violence. Even if one must strain too hard to read such sacrificial undertones as being presented here, one should wonder at the amazing way most modern interpreters fail to

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<sup>6</sup> Gunkel (1901:5), Westermann (1974:216), Van Seters (1992:42)

notice the concern for difference and distinctions and believe the ancient thinkers to be consumed with the kind of scientific inquiry of nature just like modernity is.

The peculiar syntax of Gen 2:5 bears notice and adds force to the sense of annihilation similar to Genesis 1:2. Gunkel (1901:5) reminds that the depiction is overwhelmingly negative ‘as is common.’<sup>7</sup> The *every* ‘plant’ or ‘vegetation’ of the field was ‘not yet.’ The word for plant, פִּיט, is rare in use, and its primary reference is to wild plants.<sup>8</sup> It is doubtful that it has any reference to cultivated vegetation. The phrase, ‘every herb of the field’ which can have a reference to edible food such as in Gen 1:11 is a symmetrical addition to emphasize the utter desolation of *ha’eret*. The line perhaps should be read as: ‘there were *not even* wild plants *let alone* cultivated vegetation.’<sup>9</sup>

The string of negatives continues in the next symmetrical pair: ‘The Lord God *did not cause it to rain* upon the earth and there was *no adam* to till the soil.’ Most certainly the depiction is of an uncultivated place, but Westermann (1974:20) notes, ‘Creation and the world are to be understood always from the viewpoint of or in the context of human existence.’<sup>10</sup> This depiction is meant to portray the opposite of meaningful existence. Tsumara (1989:34) tries to minimize the significance to mere inhabitation, but the emphasis is stronger than that. The primary emphasis is on a complete undifferentiated state. In a discussion of Sodom and Gomorrah, Van Seters (1992:203) confirms that

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<sup>7</sup> Arnold (2009:57) minimizes the negative connotations of the verse by noting that the syntax is merely signaling background information; nevertheless, he still describes this scene as ‘uninhabitable’ and ‘the problem with the earth.’ Here again, the etiological concerns around where basic human resources come from pale in comparison to the etiological concern as to where desire comes from and what one will do with it.

<sup>8</sup> Oddly, פִּיט has an idea of muse or complain (BDB 967). It is hard to see a connection here, other than perhaps the notion of wild bushes as something unkempt, twisted, or meandering. The two other references in the Old Testament have such a view in mind. In Gen 21:15, Hagar leaves her child under a ‘bush’ in the wilderness. In Job 30:7 it also speaks of wild bushes and is in parallel with nettles. Cassuto (1978:102) connects פִּיט with the ‘thorns and thistles’ of Adam’s curse (3:18), as opposed to the cultivated plants עֵשֶׂב of wheat and barley.

<sup>9</sup> Westermann (1974:199) concludes similarly.

<sup>10</sup> In a different context, Girard (1972:220ff) argues extensively against the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, and in that, affirms something similar to Westermann—the structuring of human society, especially of obligation and prohibition was not derived primarily from biological operations. On the contrary, it was social operations, particularly around a community’s ability to deal with its own violence, that sets in place essential social structures. Again, it is the social operations in which analogies with biological and environment functions are made.



places of utter desolation are more commonly associated with annihilation, where ‘the existence of utterly barren and desolate regions is based upon an event in primeval times.’ This is a common ‘mythical story.’ Places are desolate because something terrible happened there. Significantly, this place of annihilation is the precise opposite of ‘the garden of the Lord’ (Gen 13:10).

In this regard, we must return to two significant references to vegetation in Genesis 1. The first reference comes at the end of the 3rd day (Gen 1:11). It appears as an appendage to the three preceding days of separation. But indeed, the emphasis is still on separations, distinctions being drawn, and on vital life emerging from the necessity of divisions. The ‘spouting plants’ ‘spout’—both the object and the verb are derived from **נשף**—but only after all things are properly distinguished. Even here, though, the potential for life is necessitated by a concern for separation, for each plant and its seed must be ‘according to its kind.’ The term, **למינהו**, is found exclusively in P especially dealing with purity issues. Here we definitely have the concern for purity or distinctions. Westermann (1974:125) agrees that the term is exclusive to P, but insists here that P is taking on a pre-scientific interest for classification. The term is devoid of purity concerns here. Even so, Westermann (1974:125) still insists that the author is concerned about vegetation being an ‘unorganized mass.’ In the holiness codes, *all* distinctions are a sacred matter. The emphatic negation of *any* plant life in Gen 2:5, then, indicates the complete absence of distinctions deemed as the critical condition for human life. But yet again, it is also assumed as the unqualified precondition.

The second reference to edible plants is of course found on the heels of man being fashioned and made in the image of God (Gen 1:28ff). More importantly, vegetation for both man and beast proceed from man fulfilling God’s blessing to fill and rule the earth. The emphasis on seed in Gen 1:29 is on edible produce. Something similar is in view in Genesis 2 with the need for man to serve the ground. Oddly, ‘serving the ground’ corresponds to his calling to rule and subdue it. The picture of man is priestly in the sense that he would be able to *maintain the distinctions* of plant life. That *ha’adam*

should till the ground is in imitation of God’s meticulous care of the world, especially that of keeping distinctions.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, Middleton (2005:89) concludes that the *imago dei* in Genesis 1 has *both* a royal and a priestly function especially in continuing God’s work of separating and filling:

The meaning of ‘rule’ goes well beyond our contemporary hermeneutical preconceptions. The royal metaphor (and thus the *imago Dei* as rule) does not exclude—but integrally includes—wisdom and artful construction... This portrayal of God as artisan might suggest that God’s twofold creative activity of separation and filling (represented by the two panels of creative days in Genesis 1) is replicated in the twofold task assigned to humanity in 1:28... But the *imago Dei* also includes a priestly or cultic dimension. In the cosmic sanctuary of God’s world, humans have pride of place and supreme responsibility, not just as royal stewards and cultural shapers of the environment, but as priests of creation, actively mediating divine blessing... The human vocation as *imago Dei* in God’s world thus corresponds in important respects to Israel’s vocation as a ‘royal priesthood’ among the nations.

This same connection is asserted here as well. Middleton’s conclusion also significantly connects to a mimetic point of view in connecting *representation* with the genesis of culture and imitation of God’s desires and actions.

The fact that the waters covered the whole earth (Gen 2:6) also speaks of a loss of difference similar to Gen1:2.<sup>12</sup> The source of the water that gushes from the earth is a bit obscure, but it is perhaps less benign than as often translated as ‘mist.’ Van Seters (1992:133) suggest that 𐎗𐎍 is associated with the Akkadian *edu*, the cosmic underground waters. Gunkel (1901:5) insists that ‘flood is more preferable.’ Dahood (1981:532) purports:

The definition ‘rain cloud’ or ‘mass of clouds’ admirably suits all four texts, and the etymology most frequently cited by the léxica, Arabic *Dāda* (‘*wd*) to bend, burden, weigh down, and *Dawda*, burden, load, can easily be reconciled with the proposed definition of *ēd* as ‘rain cloud’ or ‘mass of clouds,’ which give the impression of an overhanging burden.

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold (2009:58)

<sup>12</sup> Arnold (2009:59) notes the syntactical similarity with Gen 1:1-3.

Be that as it may, the covering of the whole earth with אֲרָצָה necessitates the dividing of the river into four in the following verses.<sup>13</sup> Again, a picture of water congealed with sky and ground without boundaries is similar to that of Gen 1:2.

The description of *ha'adam*<sup>14</sup> being formed from the 'dust' also seems calculated to emphasize an undifferentiated state that is the precondition to the emergence of life. The reader is a bit hard-pressed to make the connection between water-soaked ground and God forming *adam* from dry dust. After all, the fine powdery dirt is the preferred kind for making clay, and God is 'shaping' (יצר) *adam* as a potter would work with clay. Contra to Cassuto's (1978:105) interpretation, Westermann (1974:205) argues against the understanding of 'mud' here and insists that there is another strategic reason for insisting on dust as man's essential substance. Within our texts examined here, there are several synonymous or overlapping terms, such as earth, field, land, dirt, and ground. עֶפְרָא, however, best references surface dirt or the ground.<sup>15</sup> It is the primary reference to the substance of the earth and the material of the human body. *Apar* is the earth's covering in a similar way as skin is the covering of the body. The dust of the earth has a double sense to it in that it covers the ground (*adam*) yet it points to the earth being exposed and open to erosion and decay. The skin from which the Hebrew derives nakedness retains this same notion. This will be elaborated more as I proceed.

Westermann (1974:205-206) insists on the dry nature of *apar* and its disconnect with moist clay used by potters. The use of *apar* is deliberately calculated to emphasize the unique never-to-be-repeated feat.

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<sup>13</sup> The geographic and geological information in Gen 2:10-11 has caused some to believe that these verses are a parenthetical insertion, but Westermann (1974:199) and Van Seters (1992:110) view the verses as necessarily proceeding from verse 6. All of the separations in Genesis 2 proceed from the undifferentiated state described in Gen 2:5-6, just as they do in Genesis 1. Brueggemann (1982:51) insists that 'boundary keeping' is one of the major concerns of the Genesis 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Goodhart (2007:62) sees great significance in that the first human is called *ha'adam*, 'the adam' up until the creation of woman. I agree, but conclude something different than Goodhart. I am using *ha'adam* throughout the commentary to be consistent with the text to emphasize the significance of change from *ha'adam* to *ish and iyshah*. Perhaps a better English equivalent is 'the earthling,' in keeping with his obvious connection with the ground.

<sup>15</sup> BDB 779.

A number of negative connotations of *apar* reference destruction, death, and annihilation.<sup>16</sup> In Job 4:19, *apar* is in parallel with clay in reference to human life being like a clay house with a common origin in dust. Psalm 18:43 speaks of pulverized dirt, mostly in reference to ‘crushing’ human life. *Apar* refers to the debris of a city (of Zion, Ps 102:15, 2 Kings 23:6, 12, 15), of utter and complete destruction (1 Kings 20:10, Ez 26:4, 12), of the earth as the grave, (Job 7:21, 20:11, 21:26, Ps 22:30, Isa 26:19), and even the ‘dirt of death’ (Dan. 12:2). Two important things converge in the use of *apar*. Dust is preferred to emphasize the substance of both earth and man, and dust, like the phrase *tohu wabohu* of Gen. 1:2, is a perfect picture of an utterly undifferentiated state, i.e. annihilation. That fine dust is easily lost to the wind and cannot be contained in the hand best illustrates an elusive notion of utter loss. Finally, it is the condition that humans return to upon their death (Gen 3:19).

Genesis 2:5-6 begins the account of *adam*’s formation similarly to Genesis 1:2. It is a total undifferentiated situation, and it is overwhelming negative. In his thorough investigation into the ‘not yet’ statements found throughout mythological narratives, Westermann (1974:46) steers the emphasis away from such associations in order to be more compatible with his form-critical assumptions of J,<sup>17</sup> saying: ‘The formula “when there was not yet” makes it possible for the old creation narratives to describe creation as an event or as an act... The purpose of the formula is to give creation the character of an event.’ Westermann (1974:199) and Tsumura (1989:34) minimize the negative connotations of these verses. In my estimation however, Westermann is inconsistent with his own presentation. First, Westermann (1974:46) affirms that Gen 1:2 corresponds to the ‘not yet’ formula as it does in Gen 2:5-6.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, when Westermann (1974:46-47) discusses the ‘not yet’ motif in conjunction with ‘praise of the creator’ texts he once more moves to more explicit negative associations: ‘The most obvious point of contact between the *saving act as a turning point in distress* and the activity of the creator

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<sup>16</sup> BDB 779

<sup>17</sup> These assumptions is part of Van Seters (1992:330-332 ) rigorous objection to Westermann. Instead of viewing J as more of collector and redactor of older traditions, Van Seters views J as a creator and innovator of traditions.

<sup>18</sup> On a similar note Van Seters (1992:112 ) sees a loose chiasmic arrangement with Adam’s expulsion in Gen 3:17-18, 23-24).

in creation is seen as a turning of chaos-nothingness into the ordered world of humankind.’

Westermann (1974:47) admits that the ‘drama of creation’ is ‘expressed and experienced much more strongly in the more ancient accounts.’ Here we should revisit Girard’s (1982:78-79) assertion that the more a text or ritual moves away from its original event, the less dramatic and overtly violent it becomes. Westermann (1974:47) also affirms that the ‘not yet’ motif ultimately performs the same function as does ritual, *to ensure the stability and survivability of the community.*

Finally, Westermann (1974:46) confirms what is being advocated here. Even though he minimizes the ‘intent’ to *describe* a state that precedes the event, he emphatically confirms the ‘negative’ state as the essential precursor to a ‘*dramatic* event’ that begets human culture. That dramatic event ushers in a birth of humanity, of culture, of growth, and of *distinction*. It births the community and ensures its stability. And it radically reverses what was ubiquitously recognized as prior to it—desolation, emptiness, undifferentiation, and annihilation. Furthermore the pre-event is not only described in negative terms, it is a situation that *involves all*, the heavens and the earth, the ‘whole earth.’

**6.1.2 Gen 2:7, God’s intervention in the earth’s crisis.** God’s decisive and forceful<sup>19</sup> action to form a ‘living being’, echoes the ‘stirring of God’s spirit’ at the end of Gen 1:2.<sup>20</sup> A ‘living being’ emerges as God converges in the desolation of *ha’eretz*. This ‘being’ is designated by the author as ‘the adam,’ אָדָם. Unlike the first chapter of Genesis, God provides no designations here; only the author and *ha’adam* give names. In mimetic terms, this is a decisive shift away from an emphasis in Genesis 1. Here, naming has everything to do with setting up model/disciple relationships which means the potential for acquiring desire. In the view presented below, it becomes evident that

<sup>19</sup> The verb פָּעַע exclusively denotes a forceful, direct, and concentrated blowing as on to a fire to incite or kindle its flame. It is also used negatively as the expression of anger as in Ez 22:20-21 “blow upon with the fire of my wrath.” (BDB 655) There is a forceful, deliberate, confrontational aspect here similar to ‘the spirit of God over against the waters.’

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, in Isa 45:7, ‘light’ is also said to be ‘fashioned’ (*apar*) by God.

this kind of relationship is addressed, but only in apparent, but deliberate circumlocution. As I proceed, I will avoid using the conventional English word, *man*, because it may not lead to the best understanding of the passage. The repeated use of the definite article before *adam* does not lend itself to a formal name, as is so often read that way.

Furthermore, the use of *ha'adam* is intentionally and strategically employed to emphasize a unique quality which is not easily translatable. As will become evident, *ha'adam's* uniqueness is centered in a composite or corporate sense, like speaking of 'humanity' or in a Girardian sense of the 'crowd' or the 'community.' Westermann (1974:202) confers similarly. It is also centered in a 'hermaphroditic'<sup>21</sup> as well as a royal sense.<sup>22</sup> Finally, a significant narrative shift occurs upon the emergence of *ishah*, woman, for *ha'adam* perhaps mistakenly declares that *ishah* has come from *iysh*, man. These reasons will become more evident in the exposition below.

*Ha'adam* emerges from a congealed state by two decisive actions of God. He is separated and formed from an undifferentiated state, and he is invigorated, or more accurately inspirated, by the breath of God. It is in this dual act of separation (holy) and invigoration (blessing) that man becomes a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, a living soul. Although the denotations of *nephesh* vary, this verse is often pointed to as primary. It is closely associated with breath, and its fundamental reference is more than likely the throat.<sup>23</sup>

The open-throat becomes a primary connotation for that vital conduit for the sustenance and maintenance of animal life for obvious reasons. It allows for the inhaling and exhaling of air as well as the systolic and diastolic flow of blood through the jugular vein (i.e. the synonymy of 'life (*nephesh*) of the flesh is in the blood': Lev 17:11). But in one critical way the open throat is only a vessel for satiation—the intake of food. And it is the satisfying of hunger that the *nephesh* is the dominant metaphor to convey the satiation of all human desire. Thus *nephesh* can be translated 'desire,' 'appetite,' 'passion,' 'lust'

<sup>21</sup> Goodhart (2007:67) outlines such a view from Midrashic interpretation.

<sup>22</sup> Echoing many scholars, Brueggemann (1982:45) understands the tree of life as a possible reference to a royal figure. He also asserts that the emphasis is on wisdom and knowledge of good and evil; therefore, it could be an apologetic against the royal abuse of wisdom. This royal sense is definitively expressed in the 'crowning' sacrament of marriage in Orthodox churches. Middleton (2005:185ff) provides a thorough examination into the royal motif.

<sup>23</sup> TWOT 569 – 'The case for an original, concrete meaning of "breath" is also suggested by the use of *nephesh* to denote "throat" in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew: e.g., "therefore Sheol had enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure' (Isa 5:14; cf. Hab 2:5)

(Jer 2:24), ‘longing’ (Ps 107:9), or ‘craving’ (Ecc 2:24).<sup>24</sup> In the *Shema* of Deut 6:4, *nephesh* is conjoined with heart and strength to convey the all out, singular direction of desire toward God. Everything that follows Gen. 2:7 strongly points to *ha’adam* as a *life swallower*. Oughourlian (2010:34), a psychologist who was a major contributor to Girard’s earlier work *Things Hidden from the Foundations of the World*, describes the essence of humanity: ‘. . . there is no self apart from desire, that it is desire that animates the self, and that the self is a “self-of-desire” or “desire-self.”’

It is in *ha’adam*’s capacity to take in life that the author of Genesis 2 is offering his own commentary on the ‘image of God,’ for God appears to be the primary model for this desire. *Ha’adam* is to desire life as God does. The paradigmatic triangular structure of desire is established. By the model (God) pointing to an object (the desirable trees), the disciple (*adam*) acquires his desire for life.<sup>25</sup> Brueggemann (1982:42) argues that the text is overwhelming concerned with anthropology and not theology, and hence God is not a primary player in the drama. God is admittedly ‘elusive’ in the narrative, but not for the reasons set forth by Brueggemann. The choice laid before ‘the adam’ in this narrative has everything to do with what kind of God the human will be perceived.

The emergence of *ha’adam* from dust is laden with sacrificial overtones. A crisis of undifferentiation is alleviated by expulsion. The victim now stands outside the community as an ‘objective’ perspective. This sacred being also now arbitrates for the community, making and maintaining distinctions. In other words, it now informs the community on how to avoid a return to a sacrificial crisis. The emergence of *ha’adam* sets in motion a series of separations as the emergence of light does in Genesis 1:3. *Ha’adam* saves the earth and allows for distinctions and boundaries.

## 6.2 *Ha’adam*, the impetus for divisions – Genesis 2:8-17

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<sup>24</sup> BDB 659

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, many of the early Church fathers understood both the life tree and the knowledge tree as something God intended on Adam partaking of (Louth et al 2001:61:62).

‘The problems of earth at its inception have been met with the creation of the human and the garden’ (Arnold, 2009:59). Of first order, the formation of *adam* sets in motion differentiation.<sup>26</sup> Three separations immediately occur all of which are of God’s doing, but only by reason of the emergence of *ha’adam*. There are three important structural notes to these separations. For one, they are parallel to the undifferentiated state of Gen 2:5. The absence of vegetation is reversed with the planting of a garden. The mist is reversed by a river, and *ha’adam* is settled in the garden to till it. Second, the divisions come from a common hub or source: the garden is divided into ‘kinds of trees,’ the river splits off into four branches, and *ha’adam* divides into animals of all kinds. Finally, separation creates an in-between space which is the particular focal point of God’s ability to bless.

**6.2.1 First two acts of separation Gen 2:8-14.** In the first separation, God plants a garden. The verb for plant, נָטַע, mainly refers to planting olives trees, vineyards (Deut 6:11), and people (2 Sam 17:20) in the Hebrew bible.<sup>27</sup> It should not escape us that נָטַע is derived from the verb נָטַח meaning to surround or defend.<sup>28</sup> Gardens in the semi-arid Lavant fundamentally refer to orchards which serve to not only provide fruit in due season, but also buffer against the encroachment of the desert both in terms of a refuge from heat and infiltration by animals and humans.<sup>29</sup> ‘Like birds that fly, even so will the Lord of Hosts shield (נָטַח) Jerusalem, shielding and saving, protecting and rescuing’ (Isa 31:5). The garden here functions similarly to the cordoning off of darkness on day one of Gen. 1:3 and the collecting of the waters to form dry ground (Gen 1:9). Like evening and morning, it is in between desolation and life and it is the critical setting for community confirms Brueggemann (1982:45): ‘The garden exists for community.’

<sup>26</sup> I am asserting here a similar structure to the ‘coming forth’ of light in Genesis 1. In both cases, there is a presence of God, especially in the sense of a movement by God.

<sup>27</sup> BDB 642

<sup>28</sup> BDB 170 Gunkel (1901:7)

<sup>29</sup> Finklestein and Silberman (2001:337) state that the Iron Age 1 witnessed technical innovations that allowed for the terracing of steep hillsides. This led to a considerable extension of the city beyond its fortified walls as well as a growth from a simple village life to a more complex political and economic society. The main ‘trees’ planted were olive trees and vineyards. With both the expansion of planted trees and the community, it is easy to see how the vineyard was a ready-made metaphor for a God ‘planting his people’ (Jer 2:21, Ps 80: 9,16, Isa 5).



Once again, we encounter this in-between space which is the critical focus of God's activity. Brodie (2001:45) considers this perspective as a critical structural and theological perspective in Genesis. Commenting on the two sacred mountains of the book, he states:

The result of having two sacred mountains is not to contradict but to create a sense of space and depth—a variation on the approach that uses diptychs in Genesis. In Mayan tradition...the primary emphasis is on the space between sacred buildings. Likewise with words; the spaces between the words often communicate more than the words themselves.

Brodie (2001:47) also connects this in-between perspective to the chiasmic parallelism so common to ancient Near Eastern poetry in which the center is as important as the end. This between space is also the realm of choice. Specifically, it is place of covenantal decision as to the proper direction of desire.

Once the garden has been planted, there is a sprouting of trees into three kinds (Gen. 2:9). But before this division occurs, God 'sets' *ha'adam* there (Gen. 2:8). Here the peculiar and primary interest of this pericope unfolds, for *ha'adam* is separated from all else by his capacity to *desire*. In fact, all other distinctions to follow have their source from this characteristic. *Adam's* placement—אָדָם carries strong connotations of designation or appointment—in the garden necessarily precedes all separations, and the basis for this task is in direct *imitation* of God's willful intentions in forming him. Before any other distinctions occur, God must establish the necessary correspondent to desire—an object. Thus even though the trees were planted, it is only after *ha'adam* has been appointed for the garden that they are 'caused to grow.' The element of desire is critically accented. As the name Eden suggests, it is a 'land of desire.'<sup>30</sup> The critical concern for desire becomes more evident when he is 'settled' (Gen. 2:15) in the garden.

A second separation occurs with the dividing of the river that flows from the garden.<sup>31</sup> The undifferentiated 'mist' of earth's crisis is reversed. The waters are channeled into a river. That the river is quartered most probably signals the boundaries of the whole earth and corrects the previous undifferentiated state in Gen. 2:5. The naming of each river

<sup>30</sup> Westermann (1974:210) Arnold (2009:58)

<sup>31</sup> To remind, Gen 2:10-14 are intricately connected with 2:6 and should not be viewed as an odd insertion into the text (Westermann 1974:199).

corresponds to its separation, and here as well are strong echoes from the first chapter. Only after a proper separation can designations such as ‘day and night,’ ‘sky and oceans,’ or ‘sea and land’ be made. Here, the cordoning off of water’s limits is done by naming them, and interestingly, none of the characters in the story name the rivers, only the author. It is as if to say that the splitting of water alone constitutes a name. Naming signals the establishment of difference.

Structurally, the dividing of the river may serve as a model for *ha’adam* among the trees.<sup>32</sup> The river, like *ha’adam*, is a primary signifier because it has emerged from a congealed state. Of natural consequence, it now becomes the source for further boundary-setting which extends to the four corners. The source of symbolic thought, i.e. making designations, is for Girard (1972:235) the surrogate victim: ‘The origin of symbolic thought lies in the mechanism of the surrogate victim.’ Girard’s discussion of this entails an in-depth analysis of Freud and Levi-Strauss, and is not easily condensable. For Girard (1972:236) all processes of discrimination, exclusion, classification, conjunction, or prohibition, whether of primitive kinship systems or what we call ‘scientific observation,’ are ‘products of the same generative process.’ Again, Girard (1972:221) casts doubt on the ‘etiological’ concerns of ancients. The fear of reoccurring violence is behind prohibitions and the setting of boundaries:

Prohibitions serve a basic function. They maintain a sort of sanctuary at the heart of the community, an area where that minimum of nonviolence essential to the survival of the children and the community’s cultural heritage—essential to everything that sustains man’s humanity—is jealously guarded.

Curiously, Girard speaks of prohibitions in a similar way as the garden is described above, a buffer or safe zone. It is in this regard that we might find the royal correlation with the garden, since the king was to act as protector and defender of the community. Brueggemann (1982:45) makes the connection clear: ‘The *tree of life* is a motif which may once have belonged to a royal ideology in which the task assigned the king by gods is to guard and nurture the mystery of life.’ Even more telling, Brueggemann (1982:46) asserts that the *prohibition* of Gen 2:15 is more *central* to the narrative than any of the

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<sup>32</sup> Here, we could also revisit what was said in chapter 5 (5.5.3) concerning the creation of the great sea monsters.

trees. *Ha'adam*, as one also expelled from a crisis, should follow a similar pattern. He too must direct desire towards its proper object in order to maintain distinctions.<sup>33</sup>

### 6.3 Third act of separation, the proper object of desire.

The eating command is significantly set up by a second placing of *ha'adam* in the garden (Gen. 2:15). Although *ha'adam* was appointed or designated for the garden (Gen. 2:8), he is now settled or situated in it.<sup>34</sup> There are three sequential separations or divisions that occur after *ha'adam's* emergence (Gen. 2:7), each has to do with the emergence of kinds from a common source and the *naming* of the separated things. First, trees are caused to come forth from the garden (Gen. 2:9). The second was the splitting off of rivers from a river in Eden (Gen. 2:10-14). These first two separations serve as a model of what is to follow with *ha'adam's* more permanent settling in the garden.

**6.3.1 Ha'adam's cooperation with God in the garden.** The last separation signals cooperation by God and *ha'adam* (Gen. 2:19ff). First, God *takes from* a common source and *fashions* a new thing—animals from the ground and woman from man. Then *ha'adam* names the separated thing. This naming of living creatures corresponds to the command in Genesis 1 for man to be blessed and rule over living creatures. It also corresponds to *ha'adam's* calling to 'serve' the garden. Importantly, it is God who separates, but it is *ha'adam* who names. In Genesis 1, God does both.<sup>35</sup> In Genesis 2, it is only *ha'adam* who names. He is 'like god' in this respect. Still, *ha'adam* never separates; he only names what God has separated. In this subtle difference is perhaps

<sup>33</sup> Several of the early Church Father's understood the 'serving' עָבַד in the garden as one of 'guarding' (Louth 2001:60). This would, in fact, be the primary task of one keeping an orchard or vineyard.

<sup>34</sup> נָחַם carries the strong sense of pasturing or rest. The basic sense is of an extended or protracted stay (BDB 628) Ex 20:11.

<sup>35</sup> The significance of these different perspectives is open for debate. From the approach taken here, however, I would venture that in Genesis 1, the sense of prohibitions is placed more in the exclusive jurisdiction of God. The sense in Genesis 2 is that humanity is involved in the creation and maintenance of prohibitions.

more than a subtle theological perspective of the author—true sacrifice is neither generated nor controlled by *ha'adam*; he only maintains it.<sup>36</sup>

This distinction of actions, I suggest, critically sets up the proceeding actions in Genesis 2, for it is the *kind* of rulership that *ha'adam* is to exercise that is at stake.<sup>37</sup> To repeat, it is God who takes from an undifferentiated state and fashions it—light from dark/empty and man from dust. God exercises His exclusive prerogative in this. Only God has the wisdom to separate. Only God knows how to distinguish between a life-giving sacrifice and a death-producing sacrifice. In the vision of Genesis 1 and 2, man is not shown to have such capacity, and this is precisely what is at issue with *ha'adam's* choice over the knowledge tree.<sup>38</sup>

**6.3.2 The triangular shape of the object of desire.** A triangular (or at least a three-fold) structure of the objects of desire is intentionally set before *ha'adam*, for God causes to grow the ‘lusty’<sup>39</sup> trees, the life tree, and the knowledge tree of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). As to the significance of the trees, Westermann (1974:211) humorously concedes that the trees in the garden ‘have produced not only beautiful fruit but a vast assortment of literature.’ Brueggemann (1982:47) asserts that the trees are merely props for the drama which centers on the command. The cautions are granted. The discussion below, however, is focused not so much on the meaning or symbolism but on the function in the narrative. By way of reminder from the introduction, I consider the author to be more than just an archivist or a good storyteller. He has theological concerns as well. So, God’s elusiveness in the story does not necessitate the conclusion that the author is only interested in making assertions about humanity.

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<sup>36</sup> This also speaks of a fundamental aspect of ritual and mythology. The origin of the ritual is generated in the realm of deities. It, like the collective violence toward *the one*, has its birth in something seemingly outside of the community.

<sup>37</sup> Brueggemann (1982:40) asserts that *responsibility* is a key concern of the text.

<sup>38</sup> The idea that the gods control or will sacrifice is common to the sacrificial mechanism. It is ultimately the gods who require or call for sacrifice. The call for sacrifice from the gods is a veiled reference to the communities call for it. In one sense, then, this story here is no different. The emphasis here, however, carefully minimizes and subordinates *ha'adam's* involvement. The distinguishing factor in this story is consistent with my thesis—the uniqueness lies in the peculiar ‘twists’ in the sacrifice. Yahweh’s sacrifice undoes the sacrificial mechanism as it proceeds through it.

<sup>39</sup> *Chamad* carries fully the notion of an object being desirable, coveted, valued, pleasurable, and even lusty (BDB 326).

The author is not haphazard in the peculiar use of the ‘props.’ The ambiguity concerning what exactly is in the middle of the garden and where should the ‘open-throated’ being direct his desires drives the narrative. The syntax here creates some difficulty, for it is not easily discernible whether the two particular trees should also be included in the description of ‘every tree’ that is desirable to the sight and good to eat.<sup>40</sup> We can assume from the woman’s response to the snake (Gen. 3:6) that at least the knowledge tree of good and evil was equally desirable. Caution must be exercised here, however, because the desirability of the knowledge tree is directly pitted in mimetic tension by the snake (Gen. 3:1-3). Only after the snake suggests that *God* covets the tree does it then appear as desirable. Nothing else in the narrative explicitly sets the knowledge tree among the passion trees. Equally unclear is whether there is a triangular relationship to the objects, for only the life tree is *explicitly* designated as *in the midst* of the trees. It is possible to understand this placement as *in between*; the life tree mediates between the lusty trees and the knowledge tree of good and evil.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps even more significant, however, is Westermann’s (1974:213) assertion that the ‘tree of knowledge’ is an imitation of the formula ‘tree of life.’

Of curious question at this point, but one which will become more crucial is: where is *ha’adam* ‘situated’ in the garden (Gen. 2:15)? This is ambivalent, yet as I proceed it remains plausible that *ha’adam* is *in the middle* of the garden as well.<sup>42</sup> In other words, *ha’adam*, like the life tree is *in between* the ‘lusty trees’ and the knowledge tree. He stands in that critical space that is the focal point of God’s activity.<sup>43</sup> As I proceed,

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<sup>40</sup> Both trees are set off by consecutive *waws* and with the definite article placed before *life* and *knowledge* for emphasis (BDB 208). Thus it is primarily or definitively: *and the* life tree *and the* knowledge tree of good and evil. Brueggemann (1982:45) among others has questioned the significance of both trees and speculate that perhaps earlier ‘traditions’ of the story had only one tree. I assert that the ambivalence is deliberate as it is part of the decision of *ha’adam*. Is the object of desire ‘life’ or ‘knowledge’ or both?

<sup>41</sup> BDB 1063

<sup>42</sup> Curiously, *iysh* and *ishah* hide from God *in the midst* of the garden, בְּתוֹךְ-הַגֶּן. Furthermore, a central aspect of *ishah*’s dialogue with the serpent centers around *what exactly* is in the middle of the garden.

<sup>43</sup> Oughourlian (2010:34) explains the significance of this in psychological terms of the self: ‘We have abandoned the “classical” psychology. . . the true psychological reality is not situated within the individual but lies in the mysterious transparency of the relation *between* two persons . . . Our desire, and thus our self, forms in the “between,” in that relation; the self is not something hidden away, sheltered, and fortified within itself, but the product of a continuous process of creation taking place *at the crossroads of our encounters*.’

*ha'adam's* choice as to the *direction* of his desires, that is the *object* of desire, becomes more evident. One object leads to life, the other to death.

**6.3.3 The desirable trees and the life tree.** Strategically, it is the life tree which goes unmentioned until the end of the story (Gen. 3:22). This observation is the impetus behind a flurry of debate as to the literary unity of Genesis 2-3.<sup>44</sup> But here again, perhaps our author is more deliberate than given credit. There is a strategic reason for the apparent cloaking of the life tree. Our author is perhaps more keenly aware than we moderns of the precarious imitative nature of desire. There is, as C.S. Lewis (1955:e) rightly observes an ‘inherent dialectic of desire.’ Truly, God’s desires are expressed, but only periphrastically. God loves life, and he wants *ha'adam* to share that. He wants *ha'adam* to imitate Him and to acquire a desire for life. If, however, *ha'adam* sees God desiring the object, then he will want to ‘posses all that the father has.’<sup>45</sup> *Ha'adam* will assume that he must consume the possessor of the object of desire.<sup>46</sup> There is no explicit, direct call or command to partake of the life tree, yet it holds a central place in the garden as well as in the story. In a sense, it is made more powerfully present by its conspicuous absence, as does an object mimetically desired.

The desirable trees, which *ha'adam* is commanded to consume, are *included* or *subsumed* in the life tree. Partaking of the desirable trees leads to the Life tree. Some of the Patristic interpretation of this passage understood that God fully intended Adam to partake of the life tree. John of Damascus (Louth, 2001:60-61) writes for instance:

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<sup>44</sup> Westerman (1974:212-214) believes that the life tree functions similarly as the ‘plant of life’ in the Gilgamesh Epic. It only serves to remind that all humans cannot escape death. The central tree to the narrative is the one in the middle of the garden and the ‘forbidden tree.’ Van Seters (1992:117-129) opposes viewing the life tree as an addition, and sees its inclusion as essential to viewing Gen 2-3 as a literary unity.

<sup>45</sup> Girard (1972:171ff) discusses Freud’s Oedipal complex at length because he believes Freud was significantly on to a critical aspect of desire. Girard, however, believes Freud did not carry through with the full implications of his ingenious insight. Girard significantly modifies Freud’s formula that the son seeks to acquire all that the father has, and in essence replace him. When the model is thought to have the desired object, the object and the model coalesce and eventually, the object disappears all together. The model becomes the desired object.

<sup>46</sup> Schwager (1978:71) explains: ‘...fundamental human desire, by its very nature, has no proper object. It covets the good that its model designates by its desire. Two desires thus aim at the same good. This causes jealousy. But since the rival remains a model, even his or her jealous feelings are imitated. Under the influence of mimesis, rivalry increases until it ends in violence.’

For God says, “Of every tree of paradise you shall eat,”...by means of all created things you will be drawn up to me, their Creator, and from them reap the one fruit which is myself, who am the true life. Let all things be fruitful life to you, and make participation in me to be the substance of your own existence, for thus you shall be immortal.

Another Father (Louth, 2001:61), Severoam of Gabala, says:

The Tree of Life stood in the middle of paradise like a trophy. The Tree of Knowledge stood as contest. If you keep the commandment of this tree, you will receive a prize. So consider the marvelous thought: Every tree is paradise was in bloom, and fruit was in abundance everywhere. Only in the center are the duo of competition and struggle.

The emphasis of this line of patristic interpretation is that Adam must wait until it is offered; in essence he must master his desires. *Ha'dam*, as a life consumer, must be able to point to the life tree in an imitative void. *Ha'adam* can only desire God via circumlocution. Here I am making a very close connection between the life tree and the Presence of God. It is similar, I suggest, to what I have said in the previous chapter about *light* in Gen. 1:3.<sup>47</sup> This sense of a divine presence in the life tree is something the Church Fathers recognized. The Life tree does point to God, but as I am arguing above, twice removed. There is a metaphorical (indirect) reference to God and only an indirect reference to partaking of it. On the other hand, the Life tree is strategically central and a primary focus of God. At the very least we can affirm that *ha'adam* is to desire life as does God and in this regard. He is to *share* God's desire without directly *acquiring* it by imitated God. The author meticulously places the focus of the *visual* aspect of desire on the trees.

This is accentuated further in that the object of desire is a plurality. Only among a diversity of desirable objects, the 'desirable trees,' can the true object be desired.<sup>48</sup> The plurality of objects further diffuses a singular focus on an object. The text is meticulous in this regard; in no way is God seen as desiring the object. If *ha'adam sees* God desiring

<sup>47</sup> Arnold (2009:58) suggests the same, and discusses the menorah, a *lighted* tree, as having 'enormous iconic power.'

<sup>48</sup> Oughourline (2010:46-47) advocates that humanity's mimetic makeup, the propensity to imitate another, is precisely what makes humans 'like God.' Unlike the animals, Man is 'an unfinished being' in a 'constant state of becoming.'

the object, this would eventually lead to God becoming an *object of desire*, for this would inevitably promote an idolatrous relationship, one in which *ha'adam* would eventually view God as a rival.<sup>49</sup> *Ha'adam* is made to desire and take in life. He is to acquire from and orientate his desires in God's desires, for God also loves life. Indeed, God and Life are identical. *Ha'adam* is to be like God in this respect, but his desire for God must be distinguished from what God possess. When the desired object and the one desiring become identical, then rivalry is sure to follow. Here a distance, indeed a chasm, between the model and the disciple is carefully articulated.

The careful picture here is consistent with the expulsion narratives of Abraham and Exodus discussed in Chapter 4. God and His desires are expressed in the picture, but never pointed to directly. His desires are more exposed to the author and the reader, but not explicitly to *ha'adam*. We are made aware of *ha'adam's* restricted understanding; even so, they are mostly implied by God's actions. Only once does God express what he would want *ha'adam* to desire—the lusty trees. In other words, God's desires are only periphrastically made evident, avoiding an unmediated model/disciple relationship.<sup>50</sup> It is as if God is saying: 'I want you to desire Life as I desire it, but in this respect, you must not acquire this passion from Me, for in the day that you view me as the possessor of life, you will seek to replace me.' *Ha'adam* is to desire what God desires, yet he must not *directly or immediately* imitate God in this respect. Adam must express his desire for the life tree on his own accord, or at least, he must learn about the desire of the Other only from understanding his own desires for the 'lusty trees.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Although this work will not address Gen 3, this, I assert, is exactly what is at issue with the woman's consideration of the fruit.

<sup>50</sup> A critical component to Girard's thinking about desire that leads to rivalry and one that doesn't has to do with the distance between the model and the disciple. If there is a sufficient distance between them, what Girard calls *external mediation*, then no rivalry develops, but if the two find themselves in close proximity and in a closed setting, then an *internal mediation* develops into a rivalry. It is what Hamerton-Kelly (1994:133-134) calls 'pure imitation.' In a sense, there really is no mediation in a rivalry, thus the need for a sacrificial mediation.

<sup>51</sup> C.S. Lewis' (1955:e) contemplation on his own desire for 'joy' lead him to a distinction between the object being contemplated, what he calls the 'true object' and one's own thoughts about the object, which he calls a 'by-product' of one's desire for an object: 'The surest means of disarming an anger or a lust was to turn your attention from the girl or the insult and start examining the passion itself. The surest way of spoiling a pleasure was to start examining your satisfaction. But if so, it followed that all introspection is in one respect misleading.'



There is a symmetric relationship between the ‘lusty trees’ and the life tree still in view here, but it is a symmetry of harmony rather than rivalry. Model and disciple both desire the object without imitation. The object, Life, is significantly distanced from both model and disciple. Thus, the shared object of desire without imitation becomes the critical ballast or fulcrum that maintains symmetry without rivalry. It also maintains difference that does not degenerate into a ‘monstrous double’ because the desire is disproportionate. There is a hyponymous relationship where the desire of the disciple is *included* in the desire of the model even while the disciple’s desire remains distinct. But significantly, God is never explicitly shown to desire the life tree, not even in the narrative. Even here, God is distanced from directly revealing desire to the disciple lest the model become an obstacle.

The vision here is of shared desire without rivalry. The critical element is the *distance* or gap between model and disciple. It is the arena *in between* the two desires where the crucial turning point lies.

We may also consider it strategic that not even the object of desire, the life tree, can be directly desired. It too must only be desired periphrastically, for it is through the consumption of ‘any or every tree.’ Too much fascination with a shared object just as easily leads to contention. In the eating command of Gen. 2:17, an issue of separation, distinction, or difference still must be addressed. Here still, I suggest, is a triangular relationship of objects. Ha’adam stands between two objects, each having a duality or symmetry to it: one leads to life and the other to death. The first, as mentioned above, is a hyponymous symmetry in which model and disciple can desire the same object without rivalry. The disciple is to discover the true object of desire in a diffused plurality of objects, none of which is remotely viewed to be desired by a model. In this satiation of desire, the disciple enters into a realm where the sharing of the same object is done without imitation.

**6.3.4 The knowledge tree of good and evil.** The other object, which also has a symmetrical quality, is contained within the knowledge tree of good and evil.

Brueggemann (1982:45) correctly observes that the particular phrase here, the knowledge tree of good and evil is peculiar to this passage. The pairing of ‘good and evil,’ however,

is found, and it is here where we once again find the duality of the sacred. Certainly, to be able to discern the good from the bad seems completely necessary and good, especially for governing. After all, Solomon desired it, so why would God not want his earthly ruler to have such an attribute?<sup>52</sup> There is both a good sense of this pairing and a bad sense. It can mean knowing how to choose *between* good and evil (Isa.7:15 and Deut.15). In the bad sense, the pairing together is a return to an undifferentiated state where there is a confusion of categories. It is knowledge of *both* good *and* evil, and it is precisely this congealing of the malevolent and benevolent that constitutes the realm of the ‘savage sacred.’ In Isaiah 5:20, the inability to distinguish between good and evil—calling good evil and evil good, darkness for light, and bitter for sweet—is associated with wickedness and arrogance. It is a false wisdom based on self-deception or at least self-reasoning, being ‘wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight’ (Isa. 5:21). Certainly, something of this view is projected in the text (Gen 3:5).

Compounding the perplexity is the duality of God’s statements. For consuming the fruit of it inevitably produces death, yet God, and the ‘us’, in some way ‘knows good and evil’ (Gen 3:22). This ‘divine’ attribute, however, is not presented as such at this stage in the story. Here, it is presented as strictly a choice *ha’adam* must make. What can be affirmed here is that this choice of objects has everything to do with *ha’adam*’s understanding of the nature of the divine and of the sacred. Similarly, to the discussion in the last chapter, the author has in view an alternative sacred realm. In Genesis 1, the vision is of an uninhibited march away from the savage sacred realm of emptiness and void to a Sabbath sacred realm. In Genesis 2, the sacred realms are presented as a critical choice before the community. One *presumes* a mastery over ‘good and evil,’ but the other *consumes* life in a space of givenness where model and disciple can share the same object without rivalry.

There is plenty of ambiguity in the story, but the best guide is to stick to the details as they are presented. *Ha’adam* is to avoid consuming (fulfilling the desire) the *product* of good and evil—rivalry. The fruit is a symmetry of equals, good and evil. The danger of

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<sup>52</sup> Brueggeman (1982:45) considers the issue of royal power and responsibility to be a central focus of the text, so this question is not a remote curiosity.

good and evil when they are equally perceived means that one must decide, and this inevitably means choosing a scapegoat victim to relieve the terrible equilibrium. It brings in death. It brings in the crisis decision of who will die so others may live.<sup>53</sup> Even more, it will be *ha'adam* on his own who will decide. When a person or group is faced with a crisis, 'borrowing' someone else's choice is extremely tempting. It is here, where we are most vulnerable to acquisitive desire, for to choose on our own, relying on our own insight, is unbearable. The verse in Isa. 5:21, in fact, may hold a key here, for it mentions a discernment based on sight alone. It is a wisdom based on the perceived wisdom *possessed* by another. It is *imitative*.

But the story pits the *sight* of the knowledge tree of good and evil squarely in opposition to the *voice* of God. Ear is pitted against eye. Or perhaps more accurately, the fulfillment of desires which in this story is sight-related is a part of a disproportionate symmetry. Desire of the eyes is *included* in listening to God's voice. This view is persistent throughout the Old Testament and the signature difference between a wisdom that leads to life and one that leads to death. Here again, I suggest that our author/theologian profoundly understands what is at stake with desire and God. It is inherent in Israel's great command: "Hear oh Israel, ... you shall love the Lord..." Israel is to direct all attention, all orientation toward God, but they are not permitted an immediate access to God via a visual object, but only through word. They may not directly imitate or acquire God's desire, for in the day they do, they will seek to replace him. A rivalry of equals begins.

**6.3.5 Dual command.** The command (Gen 2:16) is emphatic<sup>54</sup>: 'surely eat of every tree in the garden.' *Ha'adam*, the open-throated one, is made to take in life, and in this, God 'commands' him to eat.<sup>55</sup> This command is synonymous with the command in

<sup>53</sup> This is the very dilemma set before Solomon and the two prostitutes and one child. In a rivalry of perfect symmetry the only choice is the death of the child or giving up the child by the mother (1Kings 3:10-28).

<sup>54</sup> The infinitive absolute before the verb makes the action emphatic. Most translations, including JPS, read this as *surely* or *freely* eat. Even so, the fact that God commands (*tzawah*) it still carries an imperative sense. Often אכל carries the sense of devour (Num. 26:10). The sense that cannot be lost is God's insistence that *ha'adam* must exercise his desires to the fullest. This, of course, is precisely the vehicle in which man should come to the same desire as God, a shared desire for Life.

<sup>55</sup> Many commentators such as Arnold (2009:59) speak of one command in the garden, but this is simply incorrect. The first command is 'eat,' 'partake,' 'be satisfied.' Or is it the case that just as there is

chapter 1 to ‘be blessed and multiply.’ ‘Take in Life as so you have been made to do.’ *Ha’adam* is invoked to choose a disproportionate or hyponymous symmetry of objects. The life tree is *included* in every desirable tree, but both are included in the ability of *ha’adam* to heed God’s voice.

To eat of every tree does not involve a perfect symmetry, but to eat of the knowledge tree requires taking on a dangerous symmetry, experiencing good and evil equally proportioned. The congealing of good and evil is certainly a part of that undifferentiated state of which Girard calls the place of ambiguity, the savage sacred. It is a dangerous congealing of difference that only finds resolve or true difference in a scapegoat victim. Ironically, God intends for this realm to be the true scapegoat, the object of rejection. It is the knowledge tree of good and evil that is strategically set apart, excluded.

We must notice the emphatic ‘surely eat’ with the emphatic ‘surely die,’ and the key as it is presented in Genesis 2 and 3 is not in the choice of object but in the choice of voice. Which voice will one listen to? The issue is what guides or influences the direction to which desire goes? One points to imitating the desire of the other. The other meticulously avoids it. Desire of the eyes must be tempered by the will to listen. The command is what critically stands in the middle, and here, I suggest, is a periphrastic reference to the life tree. There is an unmistakable allusion to the covenant call to choice similar to Deut 30:19-20. *Ha’adam* stands critically in the middle just like the Israelites stood in the valley between Mt Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, and just like the Israelites, *ha’adam* is called on to choose:

I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land...

Note the symbiotic connection between the choice, heeding the voice, having life, and loving God. In addition, the choice includes the subordination of the good, which is always by sight, to the right, which is always by sound. For even though the Israelites, ‘saw with their own eyes’ (Deut. 29:2) the mighty works of good, it is only by word that

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ambiguity about how many trees are ‘in the middle’ of the garden, so is there the question as to whether there is just one or two commands?

they can ‘cleave’ to both Life and the Lord: ‘...that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life...’ (Deut. 30:20).

In some sense then, *ha’adam* is situated between two objects just as the Life tree is. *Ha’adam* is in some proximity to the Life tree. In a sense, this is an inversion to Girard’s triangle of desire where two people desire one object. Here, it is one ‘person’ deciding between two objects.<sup>56</sup> The two objects—the ‘lustful trees’ and the knowledge tree of good and evil—are at odds. If we peek ahead to chapter 3, the author makes clear what is at stake—acquisitive desire. *Ha’adam* is to partake of the desirable trees, i.e. he can freely and openly express desire for an object and obtain it, within the larger context of heeding the voice of God. The voice is *ha’adam*’s access to the Life tree. Choosing the passion trees tempered by God’s command allows the disciple to desire what the model does without rivalry because the distance between the model and disciple is far enough apart. The disciple has *no direct access* to the model’s desire. *Ha’adam* cannot *see* God, and in particular, he cannot see God desiring an object. Even the object, the Life tree, is not directly visible.

The true ‘death’ is in the other object. It is in desiring an object because one has become convinced that the Other desires it. Only after *ishah* is *told* that God desires the object does the knowledge tree *appear* desirable (Gen 3:5), or since there is ambiguity as to exactly what or who is in the middle of the garden, might we venture to say that the life tree then appears as a different kind of tree, one requiring a certain wisdom. She has acquired the desire through the suggestion of imitation. She still does not see God desiring anything. As the story goes in chapter 3, it is in competing voices, not objects, where the true crisis of life and death lie and to which is addressed in the crisis of *Ha’adam*. For one voice comes from inside the garden community and the other from the outside.

Conferring with Brueggemann (1982:45) then, it is the command that is critically in the midst of the garden, but this does not render the trees of little consequence. The issue as the narrative constructs it is not dependent on how the reader (or exegete) understands the

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<sup>56</sup> If we are willing to view *ha’adam* in a communal sense as I believe we should, then it is a communal decision that is fundamentally at stake.

trees, but how *ha'adam* does. It is how *ha'adam* responds to the command that determines whether that which is in the middle of the garden is a Life tree leading to Wisdom or a knowledge tree of good and evil leading to death. The issue is true Wisdom verses a false wisdom just as it is in Proverbs and with Qohelet; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Perhaps there is really only one tree in the middle and what it is or appears to be depends on the voice *ha'adam* chooses to heed. Westermann (1974:213) concludes similarly:

...this procedure of allowing the narrative of the tree of life to speak through that of the tree of knowledge—a second voice as it were together with the melody—is an ingenious and intelligent resolution.

Even more striking, however, is Westermann's assertion that 'the tree of knowledge...is an imitation of the formula 'the tree of life.'

#### **6.4 The Crisis of *Ha'adam* Gen 2:18-20**

Girard (1985a:44) comments on Racine's tragedy, *Bajazet*:

Atalide brings about the transfiguration of her own suicide into collective murder – or rather, these lines bring out the true meaning of all suicide; the *total absence of a succour*, universal hostility, the dark side of the unanimity of persecution.

Up until this point in the narrative, the emergence of *ha'adam* addresses a sacrificial crisis of the earth, but in the proceeding verses (Gen. 2:18-24), another crisis is addressed. In the 'not good' formula of Gen. 2:18, we are led to the primary 'crisis,' for the earthling is *alone*. As with the earlier statements of negation (Gen. 2:5), the 'not good' statement reveals a severity to the situation, and it is a congealing of difference. Several things accentuate what is at stake.

**6.4.1 Crisis of desire: isolation and insulation.** For one, it comes on the heels of God's dual command to eat of every tree and not to eat from the knowledge tree of good and evil. As mentioned above, when good and evil are congealed, it is deleterious and delusional to be strictly confined within one's own reasoning. One is especially

vulnerable to acquisitive desire. Our own inner thoughts become that undifferentiated place.<sup>57</sup> We become as one prayer at the end of the Divine Liturgy states: ‘enslaved to our own reasoning.’ This statement is placed in opposition to compunction, contrition, and ‘humility of my thoughts.’ In some sense, then, it does not work in favor of heeding God’s command that *ha’adam* is ‘by himself in his separation.’<sup>58</sup> From a mimetic standpoint, Oughourline (2010:34) argues that the mimetic nature of humanity renders meaningless the modern notion of the ‘authentic self’ as ‘. . . an “individual,” conceived as a *self-contained* and *self-enclosed entity* that can find the origin of its identity and freedom with itself.’ It may seem as if the opposite is true here; *ha’adam* is too differentiated, but as Girard (1972:252ff) has pointed out, exaggerated difference or a ‘monopolization of difference,’ such as in coronation rites of kingship, is a way to express the loss thereof. But *ha’adam*’s condition is dangerous on several fronts. It is here where we realize that *ha’adam* is a composite figure of opposites. He represents a sacrificial victim, but also a sacrificial participant, a sacrificing community. Girard (1972:252):

Like incarnations of sacred violence, Oedipus can and does play every part in succession. The sacred king is also a monster. He is simultaneously god, man, and savage beast. . . Moral and physical monstrosities are thus blended and confused. Like Oedipus, the king is at once a stranger and son, the most intimate of insiders and the most bizarre of outsiders; he is an exemplar of enormous tenderness and frightful savagery. As an incestuous criminal, he stands above and beyond all the rules he promulgates and enforces.

From a mimetic perspective, this is a pretty good description of a scapegoat victim, ‘by himself in his separation,’ but even more so, it is the precise condition of a community in

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<sup>57</sup> Lewis (1955: e): ‘The surest means of disarming an anger or a lust was to turn your attention from the girl or the insult and start examining the passion itself. The surest way of spoiling a pleasure was to start examining your satisfaction. But if so, it followed that all introspection is in one respect misleading. In introspection we try to look “inside ourselves” and see what is going on. But nearly everything that was going on a moment before is stopped by the very act of our turning to look at it.’

<sup>58</sup> The *lamed* prefix and the 3<sup>rd</sup> masculine singular suffix provides a compounded emphasis on isolation (לְבַדָּ – strictly ‘to his own separation’ BDB 94). Surprisingly, the isolation of *ha’adam* attracts little to no attention among exegetes. Cassuto (1978: 126) makes clear that the לֹא-הוּבָה construction is emphatically negative and in opposition to something, much more than the mild אֵין. Nonetheless he says nothing about לְבַדָּ. It appears that most commentators assume that loneliness and not *isolation* is the problem and do not consider the content of the ‘not good’ worthy of much consideration. Brueggemann (1982:51) does, however, connect the issue of ‘knowing good and evil’ with the problem of the monarchy, of *single-rule*. See discussion of *bedilah* in chapter 5 (5.5.1).

an irresolvable internal rivalry. It is, of course, the ruler become victim become god syndrome. Extreme isolation is a condition of the scapegoat victim because he so clearly exemplifies the communal crisis. Because the victim can be perceived by the community as completely separate from it, it can become the true objective perspective. Thus, the victim easily becomes divine and the ultimate arbitrator of the community. Repeated a hundred-fold in our day is the suicide killer whose repulsive acts of violence are nurtured in an environment of extreme isolation. Again, the isolated one has nothing but an internal cycle of reasoning that easily seeks a destructive outlet when it cannot find an internal resolve. To reiterate a central aspect to Girard's theory, the sacrificial crisis is *always an internal* one. The extreme isolation of a community gets compounded in individuals.<sup>59</sup>

It is the *return* of the victim to the community that is critically at issue. In one respect as explained above, *ha'adam* emerged from a separation from the ground, but the question is: how does he return to the ground? What is his relationship to the ground post-expulsion? Will he return as the arbitrator of the community, knowing and advocating to the community towards the necessity of the sacrificial resolve, a master of violence, knowing good and evil? *Ha'adam's* isolation is an issue of what becomes of sacrificial victims. Another way to put the issue is this—what relationship will the victim have to the community that expelled it post-expulsion? The sacrificial community needs to retain as much of the beneficiary effects of the expulsion and for as long as possible.

The sacrificial nature of *ha'adam's* situation becomes more evident when considering two critical sacrificial rites in ancient societies: rites of passage and exogamy. Both of which, I suggest, are within the author's purview.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> This also applies to the 'rites of passage' of maturing males as the discussion below will elaborate.

<sup>60</sup> This is most evident in the 'upon thus', על-כן, statement of Gen. 2:24. The particular use of the preposition על instead of ל indicates a statement of fact more than a prediction or proclamation (BDB 487). It simply states the assignment of the origins of a custom and is used throughout Genesis (Gen.10:9, 11:9, 16:14, 19:22, 21:31, 25:30, 26:33, 29:34, 35, 30:6.) In several of these instances, the naming of something is connected to an event there. In this verse, it is connected to the naming of something, but the formula is reversed here. The naming, usually of a place or person, follows the event. Here what follows the 'upon thus' is a custom.



**6.4.2 Dual nature of ha'adam's sacrificial crisis.** Girard (1972:281) has expounded on the extreme danger an isolated individual could potentially reek within a community in his discussion of the sacrificial nature of rites of passage. 'What to us appear to be perfectly normal and predictable transitions, essential to the preservation of the social unit, are regarded by primitive man as portents of apocalyptic upheaval.' The gap between the two stages of identity a young man finds himself in within the community is terrifying because of its resemblance to the undifferentiated state of a sacrificial crisis.<sup>61</sup>

In many ways, *ha'adam's* crisis follows a pattern common to rites of passage where the conventional sacrificial mechanism is reenacted.<sup>62</sup> The initiate enters a dangerous time of undifferentiation. Thus the community actually exacerbates the individual's precarious status, thrusting the initiate into some semblance of the sacrificial crisis, often as an ordeal requiring extreme isolation from the community. In this stage, he is reduced to 'an amorphous state of anonymity' (alone in his isolation) where he assumes the roles of sacrificer and sacrificed simultaneously. In other words, he is made to represent both the disease and the cure. Girard (1972:282) describes this stage:

To be associated with the sacred [in this case, the initiate is in that terrible place of undifferentiated status] is to share in this monstrosity; to be lacking in differences or over-equipped with them comes to the same thing. That is why the initiate can appear both as a *hermaphroditic* aberration and as a creature with no *sexual identity* at all.

At some point in many rites, a surrogate victim is supplied. There is a dismemberment, a *sparagmos*.<sup>63</sup> Often it is an object viewed as extracted from the initiate's body symbolizing the 'final expulsion.' Girard (1972:287) explains: 'The extracted object...plays the part of the actual surrogate victim, whereas the human organism, fully mobilized against the invader, takes the part of the collectivity. Finally, as Girard (1972:286) views ritual, the initiate comes away from the ritual act, having been subjected to the realm of sacred violence, with a sense of 'control' over the violence or at

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<sup>61</sup> Girard (1972:56-79) believes that this repulsion of doubles or mirrored images is behind many of the more baffling prohibitions found in myth and ritual, such as the fear of twins or mirrors.

<sup>62</sup> Girard (1972:281ff)

<sup>63</sup> Girard (1972:131) finds in the *sparagmos*, dismemberment, of the Dionysiac practice two signature acts of the scapegoat mechanism: '1) all the bacchantes participate in the killing. This satisfies the requirements of unanimity...2) no weapon is used; the victim is torn apart by the women's bare hands.'

the least, a sense of awe and respect for it. This ‘control’ or familiarity over the ‘savage sacred’ realm might very well be the kind of ‘knowledge of good and evil’ discussed above.<sup>64</sup> The neophyte is made to relive the community’s past experience of its resolve of internal violent reciprocity in the scapegoat victim. In his discussion of initiation rites for shamans, Girard 1972:82 observes, the sacrificial crisis is accented even more intensely. The shaman must emerge as a master of ‘Supreme Violence,’ that is, the violence of the sacred which belongs to deities. A shaman is a kind of ‘chief commander’ of sacred forces. A sense of *control* over human violence is precisely the illusion behind ‘knowing good and evil’ that lubricates the sacrificial mechanism even to this present day.

There is, however, another side to this isolation. As Girard constantly reminds, the sacrificial crisis is always an internal one. It is about keeping the community from imploding, and the prime conditions for this are an internal rivalry that finds no external outlet. The *community* is isolated and insolated.<sup>65</sup> In his discussion about exogamy, Girard (1972:249) maintains that when two groups exchange a woman in marriage, the ultimate goal is not peace between the two groups, but peace *within each group*. It is to prevent internal violence over the women closest to the males from igniting.

Here we must return to Girard’s (1972:164ff) notion of the monstrous double. It is when the rivals become so equal in their desire that the two become mirrored images of each other. And to the community swept along by the contagion of that rivalry, it is the rivalry itself that becomes monstrous. In other words, the rivalry is one terrifying entity, a monster of congealed categories. When this happens, the rivalry (monster) threatens to

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<sup>64</sup> ‘To think religiously is to see violence as something superhuman, to be kept always at a distance and ultimately renounced’ (Girard; 1972: 135). For Girard (1972:138), we, like the tragedies, still dance between the extremes of religious truth, transferring the burden of violence to the gods and the ‘unadorned truth,’ ‘which passes the violence back to man.’ In the dance of good and evil, ‘We enter a universe populated by “good” and “evil” influences—the only universe in which we feel truly at home.’ It is a system that always finds its recourse in arbitrary violence, in misdirected violence.

<sup>65</sup> According to the Violence Policy Center (2009: e), ten murder-suicides occur each week in America. Characteristic of such events is not only the isolation of the individual, but also the immediate family. The compulsion of the ‘family annihilator’ to not limit the destruction to himself speaks loudly to the internal crisis of both the individual and the immediate community. Confoundingly, the killer views his own internal plight as synonymous with the family’s plight.

devour everything. The symmetry of rivals that becomes singular can most certainly happen within a person, and when that occurs, it can just as equally devour the person. A tortured soul is potentially destructive, and the ‘not good’ pronouncement has this in view. Here we can view the isolated individual in a similar way as a community seeking an ‘objective’ ‘outside’ perspective to the community’s internal strife. A marriage exchange, then, is a sacrificial procedure. By the ‘expulsion’ of a woman, internal rivalries are diminished, and the rival, the neighboring tribe, becomes a sacrificial arrangement which deflects internal rivalries to external ones.<sup>66</sup>

To repeat, when unresolved internal conflict, whether individual or corporate, is heightened, the desired object disappears completely. There is a strong sense that the ‘other’ possesses it. The loss of a true direction for desire produces a desperate attempt to recover or find a new focal point to direct desire. One is left with, as Lewis (1952:e) asserts, only the trace or remnant of the *effects* of desiring an object.

**6.4.3 The severity of *ha’adam* and Yahweh’s sacrificial solution.** The severity of *ha’adam*’s crisis is also signaled in the solution, for God must provide an עֵזֶר. There are mild denotations of *ezer*, like an assistant, but often strong denotations such as a rescuer, succor, or exculpate.<sup>67</sup> In other words, the strong possibility exists of one who delivers from disaster or death (Ex 18:4, Ez 12:14). Although Abishai, for instance, was an assistant or attendant to David (2 Sam. 21:17), his ‘aid’ to David in battle is surely one of rescue.<sup>68</sup>

This one to ‘assist’ *ha’adam* is further described as one ‘fit for him.’ This mnemonic word play is in synonymous parallelism with *ha’adam*’s isolation—*ha’adam levaddo* and

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<sup>66</sup> See the discussion of the sacrificial exchange of woman in Chapter 4 (4.3.2).

<sup>67</sup> BDB 740. Common among commentators are concerns of gender equality (Westermann, 1974:227; Cassuto 1978:126; Arnold 2009:60). The discussions center on avoiding a subservient connotation and stressing mutual assistance. Problematic to this view is that it limits the scope to a relationship of a man and woman almost completely devoid of communal implications.

<sup>68</sup> We might also note the names of Assyrian military kings that end in *eser*, Asshur-nasirpal and Shalmaneser, or rulers in Israel such as *Ezra*. So strong are the associations with deliverer or rescuer that we might wonder of a consistent reluctance on the part of male translators to accent these stronger associations, emphasizing instead the less prevalent notion of ‘assistant’ or ‘help-mate.’ Arnold (2009:61) connects the notion with helping the man in cultivation of the ground. This, however, is never alluded to in the story. The curses (Gen 3:16-19) in particular, make no such association, connecting as it does only to the *vertical* (in the sense Westermann and Jay use it: a crisis of descendants) crisis of blessing.

*etzer kenegeddo*. The word, נגיד, carries the basic sense of going out or being out in front of. Hence, a *nagid* is a leader, ruler, or prince.<sup>69</sup> It means to be obvious, conspicuous, or even in the sense of opposite or in opposition to someone.<sup>70</sup> In mimetic terms, *nagad* addresses either a positive parallel model (Ne 12:9, 2 Kings 2:7) or negative polarized one (Gen 31:32, 37; 47:15).

*Ha'adam's* 'cure' must be found in someone who must 'lead him out.' As Girard (1972:306) advocates, the primary educator is the surrogate victim:

All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim...the working basis of human thought, the process of "symbolization" is rooted in the surrogate victim...The surrogate victim, as founder of the rite, appears as the ideal educator of humanity, in the etymological sense of *e-ducatio*, a leading out. The rite gradually leads men away from the sacred; it permits them to escape their own violence, removes them from violence and bestows on them all the institutions and beliefs that define their humanity.

The question of an adequate surrogate victim is in view here, and at first glance, the passage seems to follow the characteristic scapegoat structure. As the narrative proceeds, however, it becomes evident that Yahweh Elohim's notion of an adequate surrogate is not someone who leads him away from the internal violence, but rather confronts him head on with it. The best way to understand it here, especially in light of the major concern of desire, is that *ha'adam* needs a *co-respondent*, someone to not only equally respond to 'life consumption,' but also to confront the imprisoned reasoning toward the sacrificial tendency.<sup>71</sup> Oughourline (2010:50) explains: 'Indeed, what was lacking for the creation of psychological man was an *alter ego*. If God did not create such an alter ego, "in the face of" or "opposite of" the man there would have been no possibility of dialectic, of psychological movement, that is, of desire.' The picture of Moses handing over leadership to Joshua (Deut. 31:1-8) is helpful here. Joshua is to *go with* the Israelites and divide the inheritance, and God will 'walk' with Joshua as Joshua heeds God's commands. The *nagid* is one who is *with ha'adam*, enabling him toward the proper

<sup>69</sup> BDB 617-618

<sup>70</sup> Westermann (1974:227)

<sup>71</sup> Gunkel (1901:11) states: 'סננר means as over against him, corresponding to him, his counterpart.' Westermann (1974:227) also strongly accentuates the notion of correspondence and is correct in placing the crucial concern in what constitutes human community. He (1974:151) concludes similarly in his commentary on Gen 1:26-27. See the discussion of *imago dei* in chapter 5 (5.4.4.).

object of desire, and one whom God is *with*. A fuller picture of what a co-respondent looks like is provided at the end of the chapter in the description of ‘one flesh’ that is ‘naked without shame.’

As discussed in the previous chapters, Yahweh addresses the crisis of humanity in a sacrificial fashion, at least initially. A victim is supplied. But here is where the structure makes a dramatic shift, for it is the kind of victim supplied and the way Yahweh presents the victim that makes it a counter-sacrifice.

The question arises as to whether ‘another’ desiring the same object is simply creating another potential rivalry, i.e. two desires on one object. Interestingly, however, this is not the set up. For one, there is no one clear object; there is a plurality of objects, the desirable trees, periphrastically leading to an object, the Life tree which is both object and subject. Second, the response is to voice, not to imitation, and this requires dialogue, one which in the chapter 3 unfortunately never transpires.

To summarize, God’s implicit desire is for man to desire what He does. God makes man to share His desire in such a way that it does not turn into a rivalry that destroys one or the other. The concern or dilemma, which I submit the author is keenly aware of, is whether desire can be filled or satiated without consuming the one who shares it with you. In sacrificial terms, can there be a sharing of life (participation in the same desire) that does not rely on the destruction of shared life, to the internal destruction of community? Girard (1965:45) paints the picture this way:

...to lay down the principle of a reciprocity without limits, would be to doom men to the most terrible conflict. To love a son as son is to see him a possible rival. To venerate a father as father is already to contemplate his undoing. The system is not conceivable, especially in the beginning, without some form of palliative. There is a need for religious and social institutions capable of dissimulating and moderating the convergence of desires, the fundamental contradiction between father and son.

The author, I believe, rigorously paints a picture of the deleterious extent of *ha’adam’s* situation. Because *ha’adam* does not have a co-respondent, he still is in fact undifferentiated. Like disenfranchised young men, they are potentially lethal unless he finds a way to co-respond with others.

The crisis, I propose, is that the extruded or expelled one, when left completely separate is surely a scapegoat victim, the one completely isolated and separated from the crowd. If one stands in solidarity to that separated state, however, the sacrificial mechanism cannot operate. The isolated one cannot become a victim, nor upon his death a god, an object of veneration, one who is perceived to have ‘IT’, i.e. the power of life.

### 6.5 Yahweh Elohim’s Sacrificial Resolve: Gen. 2:18-24

By way of summary, the narrative sets up a description of a crisis of the earth (Gen 2:5-6). By God’s intervention and design, a ‘living soul’ *emerges* that alleviates the crisis and sets off a series of separations. In other words, distinctions and boundaries (prohibitions) can be established. The emergence of a ‘living soul’ (in other words, a desiring being) provides an interesting theological commentary that is a particular focus of the story. Desire is first presented as the resolve of a crisis, a desiring being (*ha’adam*) emerges from the sacrificial action of a desiring Being (God). Because of the primary distinction, *ha’adam*, the earth’s crisis is reversed. A garden is established in which kinds of trees are cultivated. A river is established and divides into four directions. *Ha’adam*, like the garden and the river, is the source for further differentiation. *Ha’adam*’s task to differentiate is modeled by God’s actions in the garden and the river.<sup>72</sup> He is to imitate the order established by God in the garden and its ability to maintain distinctions, through the primary task of *naming*. In this regard, *ha’adam* ‘serves’ the garden, rules over it, and completes the reversal of the original crisis. *Ha’adam*, however, differs from the garden and the river in one critical way—he desires. In this regard, he is not like the natural elements; he is like God, the original sacrificer. Because of desire, a further crisis within *ha’adam* himself must be addressed.<sup>73</sup> Whereas earlier, desire brought resolution, it is also presented as its own crisis.

<sup>72</sup> In this respect, Genesis 2 follows the pattern of Genesis 1.

<sup>73</sup> Although the garden and the river precede *ha’adam* as models, I remain consistent with Girard’s assertion that the perceived crisis in nature is a projection of the human crisis of desire onto the natural world. Hence, the primary crisis in Genesis 2 revolves around the proper object or direction of desire.

To remind, it is God who ‘brought forth’ the crisis, and it is God who will see it through. The solution (Gen. 2:19-22), of primary emphasis, is of God’s doing and of His own prerogative. It is sacrificial, but of a different kind. In other words, the two separations that follow reveal fundamental issues of distinction common to most rituals and mythology—distinction from animals and of sex. Girard (1972:127-128) points to the Bacchae myth as a prime example of the particularly virulent forms of violent loss of difference: the loss of sexual distinctions, the loss of distinctions between man and animals, and the loss of difference between man and gods. Genesis 2 obviously addresses these same concerns and in the common sacrificial way, but there are critical differences in this scenario which again lead to a challenge or at least a questioning alternative to the common sacrificial solution.

**6.5.1 Insufficiency of Animal sacrifice.** First, God makes animals by forming them from the same substance as *ha’adam*—the ground (Gen. 2:19-20). Certainly there is a kind of rhetorical staging going on in the text. The audience hardly needs to be reminded that animals cannot alleviate the earthling’s isolation.<sup>74</sup> The failure of animals, however, is a critical staging point for what follows. We are curtly marshaled through this sequence to drive home the matter-of-fact point—animals inadequately alleviate *ha’adam*’s crisis of being alone in his isolation.

Again, the scenario works with ambiguity and an unbalancing of symmetry. Who does not understand that animals fail to resolve *ha’adam*’s situation? God? *Ha’adam*? The author/theologian? The audience? Is God experimenting and unsure, or is God orchestrating the sequence on *ha’adam*’s behalf?<sup>75</sup> Is it the earthling who must come to a revelation through the process or God?

In understanding the inadequacy, several things should guide us. For one, no character in the drama pronounces the inadequacy. It may be especially important to reiterate that it is not an issue of whether God found it inadequate. In other words, God is not looking

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<sup>74</sup> Walter Burkert (Mack:1987:22-32) who has been in considerable dialogue with Girard has established a theory as to the origins of Greek sacrifice. Burkert views the origins of Greek sacrifice as going back to the central place the ‘hunt’ had in pre-historic groups.

<sup>75</sup> Gunkel (1901:226) echoes the sentiment of many when he entertains the notion that God attempted a kind of ‘experiment.’

for any satisfaction from animals. The only crisis on God's part is that *ha'adam* must be alleviated from the crisis *in order* that he might rightly direct his desires toward the true object. From God's perspective, it is *ha'adam* who must resolve it within himself. A dominant theme reiterated here is that God *brings* to *ha'adam*, an action which is drastically reversed in Genesis 4. God holds the key to *ha'adam's* dilemma. God's sacrificial solution is the adequate one.

A second point of emphasis is that the animals are formed from the ground in similar fashion as *ha'adam*. In the story, *ha'adam's* formation comes from an act of extrusion (expulsion) from the ground by an act of God. This picture is as Girard believes conventional to all myth. Violence is outside of the community. It is a god who calls for sacrifice. Like the oracle calling Laius to kill his son, Abraham hears God's voice compelling him to do likewise. In this respect, Girard (1965:45) envisions the birth of patriarchal culture. As discussed in the previous chapter, patrilineage is established by sacrifice. Animals imitate the original expulsion; they are *surrogate* victims. They too find their origin in the same sacrificing community as *ha'adam*. Girard (1965:45) explains:

Abraham is not another Laius. It is God, it is the sacred oracle who suggests that he put his son to death. But God, at the last moment, substitutes an animal so that the child will live. To sacrifice an animal is to have recourse to a means of purification that may originally not be simply ritual, since it substitutes, for the fathers and sons pitted against each other, for those guilty parties of whom the interminable pursuit would lead to a terrible familial vendetta, a living creature, a victim still is a 'neutral' one, intermediate between a man and an inanimate object, a victim that can be put to death without aggravating the divisions within the city.

Third, the inadequacy of animals becomes especially evident by *ha'adam's* naming of the animals. It was the *naming* of animals that was ineffectual or at least, most reveals the inadequacy. The breakdown, it appears, comes because *ha'adam* is not able to sufficiently differentiate. Naming in Genesis 1 is reserved for acts of separation. Because God could separate, he names. It is only what is separated that is named. The setting of limits or boundaries, that is prohibitions, is squarely centered on the sacrificial victim. The victim is the archetypal legislator for the community because he represents an authentic objective perspective. The issue of delineating difference is central to the



issue of desire and the proper choice of objects in Genesis 2. Here, God does not even name man and women. It is God who waits to ‘see’ what *ha’adam* would call the animals. God waits on *ha’adam’s* response (Gen. 2:19). It is *ha’adam* who must find an adequate resolution to his ‘not good’ situation.

The declaration of the insufficiency of animals (Gen. 2:20), however, is less than straightforward. It comes as a commentary from the author. The lamed prefix to *adam*, requires the normally active verb, *find*, to be put in a passive voice. ‘For *adam*, לֹא־רָם, there was not found an *ezer kenegddo*.<sup>76</sup> The same verb construct, לֹא־נִצָּא, is found in Gen.8:9 with the dove who could not find dry land. There is likely a quiet sense of desperation or unsettlement. The phrase, however, blurs the distinction as to *who exactly is looking for resolve*. Although less than clear, God also appears anxious or unsettled by *ha’adam’s* unresolved plight.<sup>77</sup>

We can confidently affirm without conjecture one central point from the narrative—the naming of animals is an inadequate resolve to *ha’adam’s* ‘not good’ situation. They do not alleviate the double problem of ‘being alone in his isolation’ and needing someone to ‘lead him out.’ They will not aid him in choosing the desirable trees and avoiding the knowledge tree of good and evil. In the process of naming the animals (establishing prohibitions) *ha’adam* only exacerbates the crisis. He comes to a point where his own actions exhaust him and the resolution is beyond him. Hence, God leads *ha’adam* through a sacrificial self-revelatory process.

In a similar way, Oedipus is taken through the dramatic search for the alleviation of the city’s crisis. There is a keen impiety on Oedipus’s part, for he refuses to resort to the palliative measures of animal sacrifice. He insists on getting to *the real issue* (Girard, 1965:47). The narrative in Genesis 2 also is driving towards the real issue which cannot be revealed through animal sacrifice. This, of course, is a well-known objection of the prophets (Mic 6:6-7, Amos 4:4-5).

<sup>76</sup> Cassuto (1978:133) argues that the construction does not require such a reading; even still, he admits that it is ambiguous.

<sup>77</sup> Westermann (1974:229) views the resolve coming more from God; even so, he reiterates an intensifying of the ‘tension’ begun in 2:18. In this respect, this tension is similar to that of God’s spirit ‘stirring’ just before the expulsion of light (Gen 1:2), and God’s forceful blowing into the nostrils of *ha’adam* (Gen 2:7)

There is an inadequacy to surrogate victims, especially animal substitution. From Girard's perspective, the original victim is human, not an animal.<sup>78</sup> Sacrificial substitution relies on a certain resemblance to the original victim. As Girard argues, humans were the first victims of mob violence, the first to be recognized as scapegoats for the community. The naming of animals—the setting of prohibitions—is the immediate result of a satisfactory victim being found. *Ha'adam* is unable to successfully differentiate because both he and the animals have been expelled from the same source—the ground. *Ha'adam* has a sense of being the expelled one, but not the expelling one. He has no sense of his origins. The community has no sense of its origins in a collective murder. Animals only reiterate the need for scapegoat mechanism, but fail to adequately reveal the reason.

How does the naming of animals fail to address the fundamental issue of desire predominant in the trees? As mentioned earlier, the 'not good' proclamation comes on the heels of *ha'adam* being situated between two symmetries, one is to be fully embraced and the other to be completely avoided. Animals for one play completely passive roles in the narrative. They do not respond to *ha'adam*. Here again, the animals imitate or replicate the original expulsion (that of *ha'adam* from the ground). As a result of Yahweh Elohim's offering, the earthling is able to differentiate in similar fashion to God, especially 'living things.' There is a sense of control or mastery over the endeavor. As discussed above, *ha'adam* would maintain the sense of mastery (knowledge) over good and evil.

The problem (that the author is juggling) is one of *effective* differentiation. Because of a replication of the original expulsion—living things coming out of the ground—*ha'adam* is able to 'imitate' God's discerning characteristics. He is able to differentiate externally, but not internally, and to remind again, the problem of human violence is internal.

Of priority, it is critical to reiterate the key fixed points of the narrative. It is Yahweh Elohim who pronounces the inadequacy, indeed the crisis, of *ha'adam's* situation. The crisis is acute especially because *ha'adam* stands between two objects of desire. At issue

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<sup>78</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the issue of the origins of sacrifice is contentious and unsettled. But to reiterate, priority is given to Girard.

is the direction of the earthling's desire. It is God who 'brings' a 'solution.' Already there is a split with the conventional sacrificial structure. In mythical fashion, it is the god who provides the solution. By extruding animals out of the ground, God is pictured as the sacrificer. In other words, the violence of the community is perceived to be outside the community, coming from gods. But uncharacteristic of the mythical structure, the crisis remains entrenched on the human level. The narrative steadfastly refuses to make this a theological crisis. God is not endangered; *ha'adam* is. Furthermore, it is God who says so. This proclamation of God must take priority since other than the double-sided command over what to eat, it is the only time in chapter 2 where God speaks. For the most part, God is pictured as meticulously going about his business, marshalling through the sequence with ease and deliberation.<sup>79</sup>

The problem of *ha'adam*'s isolation centers on his inability to *perceive* the depth of his own crisis, and it appears that the sacrificial marshaling of animals is first presented as a way to exacerbate *ha'adam*'s awareness of that fact.<sup>80</sup> In the end, the sacrifice of animals cannot adequately address *ha'adam*'s *internal* crisis of differentiation.

As in Genesis 1, the text here cannot envision anything other than a sacrificial solution. Nevertheless, it understands all too well its weakness. At issue is an adequate surrogate victim to alleviate a life and death internal crisis. But what also appears at stake, is whether the victim will as Girard (1972:306) asserts 'lead men away from the sacred;

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<sup>79</sup> Girard (1982:190) speaks of the superiority of the Gospels in revealing the sacrificial mechanism by meticulously going through the sequence. It is God who leads one into the crisis, in order to lead one out. Thus, the depiction of God is similar to Genesis 1.

<sup>80</sup> Of question is whether the listing of animals is a veiled reference to animal sacrifice. Girard (1972:9) makes clear that it is the animals closest to the community, or internal to the community that is almost universally used as sacrificial substitutions. With the reference to 'all living things of the field and every bird of the heavens' in Gen. 2:19, it would seem to move away from such a reading. Gen. 2:20, however, does more strongly suggest that restricted sense. Here, *bahemah*, is restricted almost exclusively to domesticated animals and rarely to wild animals (BDB 97). In fact, *behemah* is a preferred word to distinguish between domesticated and wild animals, a distinction especially acute in Genesis (Gen. 1:24-26, 2:20, 3:14, 9:16). See also Middleton, (2005:51). In Gen. 2:20, the specific and prioritizing list of potential sacrificial animals, going from the most sacrificial to the least, is perhaps meant to exhaust the inadequacy of any animal sacrifice. All animals are inadequate, domestic or not.

permit them to escape their own violence, remove them from violence, and bestows on them all the institutions and beliefs that define their humanity.’ Or, will the victim lead them toward an alternative reality? Of secondary importance is what will constitute the community to differentiate in a way that does not eventually lead to yet another crisis requiring yet another victim.

In the coming forth of the woman, God once again takes the initiative and provides the right solution, and it is sacrificial. A life must be taken out of something else.

In God’s act of bringing forth the woman, several structural features are reiterated. There is a crisis of a symmetrical loss of difference and a new thing emerges or is expelled, resolving the crisis of *ha’adam* and ushering in difference or distinctions. Most importantly, God is master of the whole structure. He brings on the crisis, but rapidly moves through the sequence. That a god brings on a crisis in order to resolve it is a common feature to mythological narratives. Girard observes (1972:134): ‘He claims legitimacy not from his ability to disturb the peace but from his ability to restore the peace he has himself disturbed—thereby justifying, a posteriori, having disturbed it in the first place.’ This feature, which is prominent in both Genesis 1 and 2, is significantly altered, however, for a powerful movement of God himself is critically implied. God is in and with the one expelled, and it is in this expulsion engineered by God that God jettisons the expelled one in a different direction than a return to that place of indifference, of symmetrical reciprocity. The sacrifice that God provides is the key difference. This *kind of sacrifice* is envisioned in the coming forth of the woman.

The uniqueness of a sacrifice initiated by God is demonstrated in the scenario that follows (Gen. 2:25), for there is a duality to the sacrifice. To reiterate, two rituals common to almost all cultures, especially ancient ones, are in view here and significantly, Girard (1972:239ff, 281ff) features both of them as models of the ‘unity’ of ritual in the scapegoat mechanism. The first ritual is readily recognizable since this passage is the paradigmatic expression of sacred marriage—exogamy, the exchange of women. The second, rite of passage, perhaps is less obvious, but it too is expressed here. These two rituals in view here explain how *ha’adam* is both a sacrifice and a participant in the sacrifice. It also, in my view, explains the ritualistic (sacrificial) necessity of both, with

the result being a picture of rest similar to the end of Genesis 1—both of them were naked and not ashamed.

**6.4.2 *Ha'adam's sacrifice.*** In one sense, *ha'adam* is a victim ready for slaughter similar to the neophyte in a rite of passage. This becomes clear in the initial act of God (Gen. 2:21) where *ha'adam* is caused to fall into a deep sleep. The few biblical references to **רָדָם** discussed below are consistent in two ways. For one, it is a deep sleep. One is 'stopped up,' 'stupefied,' or 'deaf' to all that is around him.<sup>81</sup> The dormant posture of the victim is a key characteristic of sacrificial victims. More pertinent, the one falling into such a sleep is facing eminent death. For example, while hiding in Jael's tent from Barak's pursuit, Sisera falls into a *radam*, whereupon Jael drives a tent stake into his head (Jdg. 4:21). A revealing feature of this story is that Jael still had to approach her victim 'stealthily.' In other words, it was the kind of covert operation characteristic to scapegoat murders. In a similar scene, David and his men, 'stealthily' approach Saul's camp at night where Saul is in a deep sleep (1 Sam. 26:12). This story is especially significant because it is the only other biblical reference to God causing a *radam* to fall upon Saul. When finding Saul and his army asleep, David's assistant, Abishai, offers to kill Saul with Saul's own spear. David intercedes and forbids Abishai from the murder. Significant to the story here, David takes from Saul two items which symbolize his vital force—his spear, which only moments earlier was the instrument of Saul's intended death and his water bag. As the story goes, these items also symbolize the *sparing of Saul's life*. Saul's life was spared, but significantly altered none the same, for David holds up Saul's spear before Saul's own army. There is a defeat of the persecutor, yet the life of the persecutor is spared.

The other significant example of a victim falling into a *radam* is Jonah, who is said to have fallen into a deep sleep just before he is thrown over-board (Jon. 1:5). Girard (1972:312-13) points to this story as a text-book case of structural scapegoating, yet fails to mention the significance of Jonah's sleep as singling him out as a scapegoat because

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<sup>81</sup> BDB 922. Gunkel (1901:12) reads *radam* in a 'beautiful' and 'wonderous' way. Yet he relates the deep sleep to magical notions and also reminds of its secretive process. Coincidentally, *radam* is similar in meaning to *damah* discussed in the previous chapter (5.4.4) were it related to the silencing of the victim and bloodshed.

he appears oblivious to the crisis. Jonah's deep sleep has separated and isolated him from the community. His apparent 'dumbness' to the community's crisis raises the suspicion that he is a co-conspirator of it. He is the cause of the crisis.

The few remaining references to *radam* curiously but indirectly relate not only to the story here, but also to the exodus story.<sup>82</sup> Revelations come to men in a 'deep sleep' (Job 4:13), but ironically, the complete absence of revelation is also considered a 'deep sleep' coming over men. In almost every instance, the notion of stealth and impending dread accompany a *radam*.

Westermann (1974:230) unwittingly reveals something of the sacrificial mechanism in his commentary on this verse. He begins by asserting that 'an actual event accessible to us' is not possible. This is, however, also true of the original murder; it is no longer directly accessible.<sup>83</sup> Westermann concludes the section with a strong certainty that this kind of 'sleep' is critically essential to effective completion of God's creative act. Thus Westermann describes precisely what Girard identifies as a key element in the effectiveness of the sacrificial mechanism—its ability to conceal and reveal simultaneously. It reveals to the initiate the sacrificial resolve of the community all the while concealing the most critical factor—the collective stupor to its operation.

From the structural perspective, then, these stories indicate that *ha'adam* is an entity destined to destruction brought on by his own internal crisis, but finding its resolve in a surgical expulsion. It is one that must be performed without the victim's awareness. Just as in a rite of passage, the initiate is made to *represent the community* in a sacrificial crisis. He (they) is destined to self-destruction unless a substitute is supplied. The initiate internalizes the community's sacrificial crisis so as to also comprehend the community's sacrificial solution. In the moment a surrogate victim is 'discovered,' the once potential victim transforms into a member of the sacrificing community. The sacrifice becomes the sacrificer.

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<sup>82</sup> The deep sleep in these stories may function similarly to the Lord 'hardening Pharaoh's heart'.

<sup>83</sup> Says Girard (1972:269): 'Ritual sacrifice is defined as an inexact imitation of the generative act.'

The community is ‘relieved’ because an expulsion has occurred from its midst. This is standard sacrificial fair, but what follows takes a decidedly different tack. In the peculiar sacrifice of Yahweh Elohim, the victim experiences a transformation that diverges from acquiescence to the sacrificial mechanism. Yes, the community is spared by a sacrifice, but in a similar way as Saul, he is humbled or humiliated in the process. By the taking of his ‘vital force,’ his ‘side,’ he survives becoming a sacrificial victim. His very survival, however, now *reminds* him of rather than *camouflages* the precarious nature of sacrificial resolve. This kind of sacrifice *reveals* the community’s inability to resolve its own violent resolutions.

God takes from *ha’adam*’s side. The word צַלֵּעַ in its feminine form is often translated side or rib, and it is used in reference to the supporting side elements of a structure (1 Kings 6:15). Of significance, however, is the verb form which means to stumble or limp.<sup>84</sup> Thus, Jacob is incapacitated by a dislocated hip. Girard (1968:69) considers the limp of Oedipus significant in scapegoat terms: ‘The symbolism of limping...introduces mediation between the symmetry and the dissymmetry.’ Essentially, the limp becomes a prime signifier of something ‘out of place’ or ‘out of wack,’ a cause for suspicion that something or someone does not belong. The male noun form, *tzela*, denotes calamity, stumbling, or ruin.<sup>85</sup>

This sense that a radical surgical operation is further accentuated in that after the ‘side’ of *ha’adam* is removed, ‘flesh closed up underneath it.’ Several features of this phrase bear on the discussion so far. For one, since no preposition is attached to flesh, *basar*, it is best to understand flesh as the subject of the ‘closing’ action. It is flesh that ‘shuts in.’<sup>86</sup>

Second, the adverbial expression plays a dual function. *Tachtenu*, from תַּחַת, is a loaded sacrificial term, for in Genesis it is used in a clear surrogate sense. Seth is born ‘in the place of’ Abel (Gen. 4:25), and a ram is used ‘instead of Isaac’ (Gen. 22:19). We should

<sup>84</sup> BDB (854) considers a possible root idea of ‘deviate’ or ‘curve’.

<sup>85</sup> Westermann (1974:230) suggests that an ancient practice of making figurines began with the use of a bone or piece of wood in which to form a clay figure around.

<sup>86</sup> BDB 688 Cassuto (1978:134) suggests that the subject of the action could go either way. What probably should be more noticed is the ambiguity in the subject of the action. This speaks more to the mysterious congealing of the crowd, its unanimous acquiescence with the will of the sacred and the ability of the community to quickly close back up after the expulsion of the victim.

not fail to notice that it is instead of a son. The same surrogate sense is carried over into the legal codes as recompense for injury (Deut. 21:23ff).<sup>87</sup> The closed up flesh substitutes for the loss of ‘side,’ and spares *ha’adam* in the same way as the ram spared Isaac. In a broader sense within the Genesis narrative, Adam’s life is spared by Seth and Abraham’s by the ram.<sup>88</sup> But also, if we venture to stick to the most fundamental meaning of *tachat*, as underneath,<sup>89</sup> then it also points to the emergence of the male genitals. One of several denotations of *basar* has euphemistic references to the ‘male organ of generation.’<sup>90</sup> A periphrastic reference to circumcision may be in view since fruit is the primary metaphoric exchange with it. Both the partaking of fruit and circumcision speak of the uncovering (peeling) back of flesh in order to get at the ‘flesh’ or seed.<sup>91</sup>

The thrice repeated ‘flesh,’ *בשר*, in this tight pericope (Gen. 2:21-24) plays a critical role and is operating on several levels. For one, from the loss of side, *ha’adam* becomes distinctly male. The crisis of *ha’adam* finds its resolve in the splitting off of ‘side,’ whereupon distinctions, such as sexual identity, immediately form ‘in its place.’

Here, in my view, is a radical alteration to the conventional sacrificial procedure, for the body to which the victim is expelled does not come away unscathed. Goodhart (2007:61) argues from rabbinic tradition that *ha’adam* was hermaphroditic, a uni-gendered, two-sided being. The emphasis being that *ha’adam* was literally split in two and both sides significantly altered. Cassuto (1978:134) also stress that it was both flesh and bone that was taken from *ha’adam*. It was not a mild operation. Unlike the mythical stories, such as *Enuma Elish*, where the new part of the natural world emerges from the excarnated corpse, here two significant differences are pronounced. The sacrificial victim survives,

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<sup>87</sup> Gen 44:33, Joshua 2:14

<sup>88</sup> Girard (1972:102) provides a definitive picture of the original ritual surrogate victim who ‘passes unperceived, as the substitution of one member of the community for all, brought about through the operation of the surrogate victim, and...comes from inside the community.’

<sup>89</sup> BDB 1065

<sup>90</sup> BDB 142, Gen. 17:11, 14, Ex. 28:42

<sup>91</sup> Lev 19:23-25 calls newly planted trees as ‘uncircumcised’ *’r/*. It is clear that it means that the seed of the tree (fruit) is not eaten. This could mean that it is ‘unpeeled.’ NJB calls it ‘forbidden.’ But a ‘uncircumcised’ tree is one which one cannot satisfy one’s hunger, indulge.



and the body carries the ‘wound’ of its own sacrificial necessity.<sup>92</sup> In Gen. 2:21, the first of three mentions of ‘flesh,’ בֶּשָׂר, in rapid succession act in the same way as the description here—it closes in on itself. The flesh that was taken out returns or ‘closes in on itself’ in Gen. 2:24 as ‘one flesh.’ In exogamic exchange, this is precisely what each tribe is able to do after the exchange, close in on itself.<sup>93</sup> It is a picture of the sacrificial resolve. The thrice repetition of ‘flesh,’ however, reminds the audience of the sacrificial cost, for *basar* is the preferred word in sacrificial description and in reminders of the frailty of human existence (Gen 6:3, Ps 56:5).

*Ha’adam’s* internal crisis destined him to his own destruction unless an intervention occurred. This crisis is relieved in classic sacrificial terms by the expulsion of a victim. In one sense, then, this narrative is structured along Girard’s (1972:131) notion of the mythical structure. Primarily, a god clandestinely dismembers the victim without instruments or weaponry, with his bare hands as it were. The community is spared in the process and distinctions, which if maintained can prevent a future crisis, are established. But already, something is amiss. The community is confronted with the ‘price’ of its own sacrificial necessity. *Ha’adam* now lives with the reminder in his flesh of the frailty of his own existence and of his own inability to resolve a core problem of his own being. The community is made keenly aware of its own violent resolve; *Ha’adam* is victimized by it. There is a duality to the sacrifice, and in this regard, there is a significant difference from the typical (in a Girardian sense) scapegoat mechanism. The sacrificial community is victimized and yet survives, significantly altered albeit. As in the story of David’s clandestine mission with Saul, a piece of the victim is ‘taken,’ but the victim survives with a much more humble posture than before *because* the elements of his vital force are presented to him. The community has been scandalized by its own sacrificial act because it carries the reminder ‘in the flesh.’

**6.5.3 The sacrifice of *ishah*.** The true radical turn, however, occurs when the victim emerging from the sacrifice, the side, is also significantly altered. It is not permanently

<sup>92</sup> Hence the structure is similar to the expulsion narratives of Exodus and Abraham discussed in chapter 4 above. There is a sparing of both the sacrificial community and the victim.

<sup>93</sup> Agreeing with Levi-Strauss, Girard (1972:230) asserts that the exchange of women is primarily to ward of the internal male rivalries within each community by exchanging (expelling) the women closest to them. Thus, upon exchange, each community ‘always closes itself’ having resolved an internal tension.

discarded; in fact, it never leaves the community. It becomes a co-respondent. Unlike the animals, she is a ‘desiring being.’ The victim does not function as either being previously malevolent, and now completely benevolent. It does not stand over or outside the sacrificial scene, but *returns* to the now wounded community. The two become one flesh because both have experienced victimization and survived.

God now builds the side (Gen 2:22) that he had taken from the critically altered earthling. Significantly, none of the previous verbs such as fashion, make, or create are chosen to describe God’s action. The verb, בנה, best denotes construction or rebuilding of structures but is commonly used to describe the creation of humans in the Ancient Near East (Cassuto, 1978:134). God restructures the side, which *He* had *taken* from *ha’adam*, into *ishah*, woman. At first glance there is nothing too telling of such actions. After all, it is classic mythic fair that the dismembered portions of a victim transform into common objects of the natural world. The proceeding verse, however, indicates that in this act, the departure from conventional mythic resolve becomes even more pronounced. For not only has the community been altered by the sacrifice provided by Yahweh, the expelled victim assumes a different role.

Coming from the basic verb, אָנַח, *ishah* has a variety of interrelated meanings. At its root, it appears to have something to do with being chronically weak, sick, or critically wounded, but it may have milder denotations such as to be soft, delicate, or congenial.<sup>94</sup> The masculine form, *enosh*, refers to humanity, humankind, or the commoner. The feminine noun can refer to a woman, a wife, or simply the female gender. Goodhart (2007:65) argues that the critical factor of *ishah* is that she is taken from *ha’adam*, and that she *precedes iysh*, man or husband. *Ha’adam* exclaims that *ishah* was taken from *iysh*, but these names come from different roots. Cassuto (1978:136) explains the man’s confusion of origins is a simple play on words, but again, the ambiguity intentionally emphasizes a struggle to understand something profound.

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<sup>94</sup> BDB 60-61 Severe wounds, of course, must be treated tenderly.

What was taken out was now *brought to ha'adam*,<sup>95</sup> this time meeting with his seeming approval. It is *ha'adam* who finds *ishah* adequate. *Ha'adam's* response, however, indicates deep ambiguity, perhaps even shock, as we might imagine a victim of a sacrificial act returning to those who eliminated it. Conventionally, victims return to the community as gods or goddesses who mediate between the community and the sacred realm, but not as *bone and flesh*, in other words not *confronting* the community with the reality that the victim was in all ways one of them, a *nagid* who stands *in front* of the other. The thrice repeated demonstrative in Gen 2:23, *this* or *this one*, emphasizes a singling out especially in a contemptuous or derogatory way<sup>96</sup> as if to question, doubt, or even spurn it. This sense may be in regard to the elongated process,<sup>97</sup> rather than directly at *ishah*; even so, it would reflect a kind of exasperation towards God. In a sense, *ha'adam's* response is something like: *This is it? This will save me?* One thing for certain, however, the author places total emphasis on *ha'adam's* response. As the narrative goes, this is the critical point. Only *ha'adam* can come to a resolution to his state of being alone in his isolation.

In sacrificial terms, however, the 'return' of the victim, not as a deity and a master of the sacred, one of the sacred community who knows good and evil would be shocking. It would truly represent a threat to the sacrificial system itself. It is the community being confronted with its own violent resolve. Confrontation with the victim undermines the ability for the sacrificial mechanism to operate, so *ha'adam's* response is to doubt it completely. A living victim returning to the community would destroy community, not save it! But *ha'adam* has also been illumined, for now he sees clearly that the victim is

<sup>95</sup> The interchange of the verbs *taken*, לָקַח, and *brought*, בָּרָא, plays critical roles in Exodus. Although Pharaoh expels the Israelites (oddly against his will), it is God who 'brought them out of Egypt.' In this passage, the emphasis should be on returned and presented. That which has been taken out has been returned.

<sup>96</sup> See BDB 260—the contemptuous connotation is especially prominent with אֵל—Gen 5:29, 12:12, 1 Sam 10:27, 16:9, 21:16. My reading here is admittedly against the grain. Gunkel, Von Rad, and Westermann see the אֵל as a near euphoric affirmation, but even Westerman (1974:232) resists the notion that sexual love is the overriding concern. He provides the examples of the more positive connotations to אֵל; nonetheless, I see nothing in the passage that requires that kind of connotation to be assumed here. Cassuto (1978:135) correctly asserts that in Hebrew, it is simply 'this—the female.' All are in agreement, however, that the thrice repeated demonstrative heightens the climax of the story.

<sup>97</sup> The noun, בַּעֲנָה, especially with the definite article expresses a certain exasperation over a process that has difficulty finding a satisfactory conclusion, as in the story of Rachael and Leah (Gen 29:34,35).

not *substantially* different from him, proclaiming instead ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.’ Indeed, he carries the reminder underneath him.

Both *bone*, עצם, and *flesh*, בשר, denote the whole person including the whole physical body. Both are referenced as the seat of human emotional and physical pain (Ps 6:3), and this may also be significant since, as I advocate below, *iysh* and *ishah* bear the reminders of a sacrificial act.<sup>98</sup> Bone can denote more the strength, substance, and energy of a person whereas flesh denotes more the personal expression of a person and is a way to refer reflexively to oneself.<sup>99</sup> When *bone and flesh* are found in the same phrase (always in that order) it commonly references consanguinity.<sup>100</sup> Here is a return to the same concern as Genesis 1 for creatures ‘of the same kind.’ The same sense is retained even when *bone* is dropped. The emphasis lies in that the woman is of the same *substance* as the man. This declaration, then, works against the community’s fundamental ability to expel the victim since it relies on the distortion of the victim. The victim must be viewed as a monster, a goddess, an alien, a terrorist, demon, or hero. It must appear *substantially different* than the community; otherwise, it cannot be successfully expelled. It must not appear human.

This victim of *ha’adam*’s crisis who ‘faces’ him as one alive and of the same substance and displaying the same wound of sacrificial necessity as him, is called *ishah* by *ha’adam*. In the pronouncement, however, *ha’adam* also significantly alters his own identity. He is now *iysh*, man or husband. Goodhart (2007:67) is incorrect in his assessment that *ha’adam*’s pronouncement is misguided and misleading, for *ishah*, he asserts, came from *ha’adam* not *iysh*. For one, Genesis 3 does not sufficiently maintain a distinction between *ha’adam* and *iysh*. More importantly, however, Goodhart underestimates the profound revelation coming upon a once conflicted entity. In a sense, *iysh* has no recollection of the sacrificial resolve. He was after all in a stupor. He can

<sup>98</sup> Flesh is the preferred word to speak of sacrificial victims in the Pentateuch (TWOT 136).

<sup>99</sup> Again, the correspondence between the ‘building’ of the woman and the making of figurines may be more than casual. Westermann (1974:30) reminds that these figurines so commonplace in the Lavant were often formed around a solid piece of bone or wood.

<sup>100</sup> Cassuto (1978:135). Even though ‘blood relations’ is the emphasis with this phrase, the idea of full humanness is always present. Certainly, all of us experience the fullest range of human encounter, both good and bad, in the context of familial community. Many intentional Christian communities incorporate the family as a dominant metaphor to define who they are. This, of course, derives from the words of Jesus and the New Testament.

now only speak from his known condition as flesh and bone, as one who carries in his flesh the wound of his own violent resolve.

In the above scenario there are several characteristics common in rites of male passage which according to Girard (1972:286ff) indicate an origin in a scapegoat murder. In this, it becomes clear the kind of duality of *ha'adam* in sacrificial terms. The initiated enters a dangerous time of undifferentiation reflecting his real ambiguous status in the community. Often, they are sent alone into the place of desolation and exposed to danger often times preceded by an act of disorientation. In essence, he experiences the dangerous environment of undifferentiation, the savage realm of the sacred and of unresolved rivalry. He acts as a victim prepared for slaughter whereupon a surrogate victim is supplied. There is dismemberment, a *diasparagmos*. Often this can be a symbolic object appearing to be surgically removed from the victim. This surrogate object becomes the 'final expulsion.' Of significance, the initiate plays all the roles at once. Girard (1972:287) states: 'The extracted object...plays the part of the actual surrogate victim, whereas the human organism, fully mobilized against the invader, takes the part of the collectivity.' Finally, the neophyte returns to the community significantly altered. His identity is no longer dangerously ambiguous, and he now understands in an experiential way the toxic realm of rivalry, where good and evil are congealed and violent death is its only resolve. Most of all, he is educated as to the fundamental necessity of the sacrificial mechanism.

There are intriguing differences from the ritual pattern described above as it is presented in Genesis 2. Of paramount importance is that the surrogate victim is not destroyed; there is no 'final expulsion.' Instead, the man is confronted by a victim who not only survives the collective violence against her but also unveils one of the fundamental misconceptions of a sacrificial victim, that of being foreign or outside the group. No, it is the man (community) who in a moment of appalling revelation pronounces, 'She is one of us.'<sup>101</sup> 'We exposed one of our own to our own violence.' In this way, the victim does bring resolve to the community, but now with an unsettling knowledge of its own

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<sup>101</sup> To reference the narratives from Chapter 4 above, recall the shock of Pharaoh (Gen 12:18-19) and Abimelech (Gen 20:9) upon founding out that Sarah was the wife of Abraham.

violence. The process, which Girard reminds is built on misconception, is exposed. The community discovers that the demand for the expulsion of a victim comes from its own inability to resolve its own crisis and that the sacrificial resolve is injurious to all. Finally, it is Yahweh Elohim who leads them to that discovery by His unique sacrificial offering.

Not only is there a revelation of both victim and sacrificial community, there is also a revelation of a different kind of god. As mentioned above, in some ways Yahweh Elohim acts similarly to stereotypical sacrificing deities. But in Genesis 2, there is not the slightest trace of spontaneity, chance, ambiguity or destiny to God's act. There is no trickery or magic involved, all of which are often characteristic features in a mythical sacrificial structure.<sup>102</sup> *The will of the collective is diffused.* God moves through the sequences with meticulous and deliberate force. All involved in the narrative—*iysh*, *ishah*, the author/theologian, and the listening community—are caused to understand that the choice of the victim was not arbitrary. It was not by chance, happenstance, or destiny. No, the intentional sacrificial provision of Yahweh Elohim powerfully confronts the community with stinging reminders. For one, this sacrificial sequence does not coincide with an act of revenge that will appease an angry god. The closest implied passion displayed by *Yahweh Elohim* is for *ha'adam* to desire Life. The sacrificial crisis is not a crisis on God's part; it's a product of mankind.<sup>103</sup> Also, only in the sacrifice that God provides can one hope to find a true resolve to human violence. Critically, in the sacrificial intervention of Yahweh, no one dies, the sacrificial resolve and the misconception that makes it operate are exposed, and it is completely out of the hands of men. *Ha'adam* is involved in the sacrificial sequence but *sacrifices nothing*.

**6.5.4 The outcome of the 'counter-sacrifice'—one flesh: Gen 2:24.** This last point sheds light on the baffling statement of Gen 2:24. As mentioned earlier this statement is presented as a matter of fact, a custom, but whose?<sup>104</sup> The logic, it seems, is reversed, for

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<sup>102</sup> Girard (1972: 310ff)

<sup>103</sup> Something similar may be in play in Exodus, where God is said to have only 'taken notice' of Israelite suffering well into the crisis (Ex 2:25). God's apparent aloofness is employed to emphasize that the crisis does not originate in God.

<sup>104</sup> Westermann (1974:233) opposes an 'institutional' reading here, but mainly in response to arguments for an original matriarchal society advocated by Robinson Smith.

it should establish why a woman leaves her family in typical exogamic exchange. But this is not the case. It is *iysh*, and not the women who leaves.

Certainly in the context of Genesis, the pattern of the man leaving his father and mother is played out with each patriarch, but leavings also provide critical junctures in the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, and Babel.<sup>105</sup> This, of course, may simply be a way to explain the peculiar practice of the Hebrews. The man's leaving, however, has clear expulsion overtones. *Azav*, עֲזַב, conveys the sense of abandon, forsake, desert or even apostasize.<sup>106</sup> It speaks of a master abandoning (to die) a slave (1 Sam 30:13), soldiers deserting the ranks (Josh 22:3), children and wives being abandoned (Jer 49:11, Isa. 54:7), and even Yahweh abandoning Zion (Isa 54:7). It speaks of a complete reversal of natural relationships. In this case, the mentioning of father and mother indicates the collective nature of his action. *Iysh* must abandon the community and embrace the expelled one. Yet again, there is a departure from a typical rite of passage. The initiate does not go out to taste the sacred realm only to return to the sacrificial community, having accepted the surrogate victim in his stead. The man does not return to the sacrificial community understanding sacrificial necessity and embracing its misconception. There is a double-sidedness to this action, for *azav* can refer to the community who abandons its victim or it can refer to the victim being abandoned. But the fundamental issue is that of return. How does the expelled one return? In what state is he transformed?

Man's leaving imitates an expulsion of a victim, as is typical of rites of passage. The man must enter into the same experience as *ishah*, but here is a radical departure from the structural pattern—he now clings or clutches on to her. He embraces or identifies with her as one who was expelled from the community in crisis, and yet survives. He attaches himself to the expelled one, not the expelling one. He abandons the old or original *ha'adam*, the one caught up in reciprocal rivalries and requiring sacrificial resolve. This verse, then, speaks far beyond a commitment to marriage fidelity. It speaks fundamentally of a vision of Israel. Israel is one who by profoundly understanding the

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<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 4 above.

<sup>106</sup> BDB 736

cost of sacrificial resolve has abandoned ‘father and mother.’ Israel has apostacized from the ways of the nations and is clinging to a different version of humanity based on a profound insight into humanity’s long-held notions of violent peacemaking.<sup>107</sup>

This verse critically structures the narratives in Genesis that are set in motion by departures, for Genesis presents the question repeatedly—what becomes of a man once he leaves?<sup>108</sup> Does he return only as a mirrored image of what he deserted? To play the opposite role, one of a rival, is essential to maintaining the symmetry of the mythical structure. Most of the narratives in Genesis are first launched by a departure, Adam and Eve from the garden, Cain from the ‘Presence of the Lord,’ Noah from the people, Shem, Ham and Japheth from Noah, the people from Babel, Abram from Haran and his father, and so forth. In each case, the author presents the question: What will he do? Will he do as Girard (1965: 28) says Oedipus does? ‘Driven by the *same* desire, the two men [Oedipus and his father, Laius] are constantly headed toward the *same* violence.’ Does his leaving only signal the beginning of his return, like the initiate in a rite of passage? Does it signal the beginning of incorporation into the sacrificial community? Or will the man’s leaving lead him to a revelation of who he is, the fundamental flaw in sacrifice, and a different understanding of human and divine relations? Perhaps the rite of circumcision signals precisely such a notion.

Leavings are typical of mythic structures as well, but the leaving only sets in motion a powerful drive *to return from whence it came*. Again, the effectiveness of the sacrificial mechanism is in its efficient ability to *close itself up* after an expulsion. For instance, Oedipus’ flight from his second father and mother in Corinth, only drives him toward a direct encounter on the road with his first father, Laius. Girard (1965:30) comments: ‘Every man, when he leaves his father and mother, goes towards his father whom he will kill and towards his mother whom he will marry.’ Girard (1965:31) argues that Oedipus’ leaving signals the circularity of myth. To use the language of our text here, it closes itself up. ‘The structure reverses itself at the moment the son flees. The circularity of the myth turns on perpetual reversals.’ A similar scenario is played out in the case of Cain.

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<sup>107</sup> The concluding chapter elaborates on the insipient historical situations that probably nurtured such an alternative vision.

<sup>108</sup> Refer to Chapter 4 above.



Rather than embrace the mark of Yahweh's protection he seeks to return to a sense of landedness. He builds a city, and from there, the cycle of violence flourishes. The 'leave and cleave' formula of Gen 2:24 is a direct rebuttal to the mythical sacrificial structure. It abruptly derails myth's sacrificial circularity, by calling on the man to not return to the community who thrives on the scapegoat mechanism. It calls him to forge a new community, 'one flesh.'

The closing lines of Genesis 2 impose a theological commentary on this question of leaving.<sup>109</sup> It is not only a question, but an assertion, a vision. It addresses both the expelling community and the one being expelled, and assuredly, Genesis is constantly concerned with both. It calls on the man to 'cleave' to the rejected one, the one who caused him to realize that the violent resolve of his own desires is grievous. It calls on the man to abandon the sacrificial community and not return to it. Instead, the man must embrace the reality that the victim of his own internal conflict is substantially like himself, and therefore cannot be discarded. In this leaving and cleaving, a new flesh, *one flesh* jettisons a different order altogether.

### 6.5 Naked without Shame – the precarious vision of a covenant community

The closing statement (Gen 2:25) pictures a paradisiacal resolve similar to the Sabbath day that closes off Genesis 1. It envisions a sense of completeness, wholeness, and rest.<sup>110</sup> A new reciprocity is established, one that carries the reminder of the violent resolve of *ha'adam*. This is what is radically altered and is acknowledged. The two—the crowd who because of a sacrificial crisis needed a sacrificial solution, and the victim who returns—now become *one flesh*. One flesh is a restored, but radically altered *ha'adam*. *Ha'adam* is now *iysh* (the one who carries in his body the wound of his own sacrificial necessity) and *ishah* (the one expelled but now returned, not as divine but one revealing

<sup>109</sup> Contra Westermann's (1974:233, Arnold (2009:61) contends that Gen 2:25 is not an addendum, but a culminating statement functioning similarly as the Sabbath statement of Gen 2:1-3.

<sup>110</sup> Westermann (1974:234-236) devotes a considerable amount of space to this verse and concludes of its idyllic nature. He does, however, stress that its main function is to set up the crime/punishment scenario of Gen 3:7.

true humanness). Together they live out the faultiness of the sacrificial system and choose life instead of death. They are ‘naked without shame.’

There is a surprising lack of investigation from commentaries into the phrase ‘naked without shame,’ most of which focuses on a childlike innocence driven by inquiries into guilt and its connection with sexuality.<sup>111</sup> There are several key concerns from the text that must bear on the understanding here. The set up of the ‘lusty trees,’ as expounded above, demonstrates that desire is a key concern of this passage. What Girard (1965:30) says of the Oedipus myth could easily apply here as well: ‘There is nothing in the myth that is not governed by it [the dialectic of desire].’ Correspondingly, this verse is intended in some sense to not only resolve the fundamental crisis of *ha’adam*’s ‘not good’ isolation especially as it relates to the direction of desire, but also complete the setting of distinctions set in motion by Yahweh’s initial sacrificial act (Gen 2:7). It is as if it were the good situation. In this respect, chapter 2 ends similarly to chapter 1, with a picture of completion, wholeness, rest, and resolve. It imagines a new, covenantal community based on a profound shift in sacrificial structures.

**6.6.1 Naked: the dual nature of desire.** The verse also sets up the scenario of Chapter 3. There is a loosely chiasmic arrangement to chapters 2 and 3 and this verse stands as the ballast or fulcrum.<sup>112</sup> The critical elements in chapter two are reversed in chapter three, returning *ha’adam*, as it were, to a crisis with the ground once more. Several connections with nakedness and shame elaborated in chapter 3 come into play. The ‘shrewdness,’ ערום, of the snake in 3:1 and the word play with the naked, ערומים, state of the couple is one of several connections with chapter 3, along with the relationship of nakedness with ‘open eyes,’ the ‘clothing’ or covering of their nakedness, the hiding from Yahweh, the acquisitive desire to be like God in knowing good and evil, and the return of enmity. All of this, of course, is entwined with shame, בוש, and interestingly, an investigation into both *naked* and *shame* reveal close associations with most of these variables in the scenario. As with ritual and sacrifice, the text is functioning on multiple levels.

<sup>111</sup> Arnold 2009:61

<sup>112</sup> Even though Westermann (1974:234-236) asserts this, he exemplifies the surprising lack of attention to the words ‘naked without shame’ typical of commentators.

The word naked, *arummim* is derived from the root עור to which there are three basic denotations.<sup>113</sup> Each one creates a possible connection with this passage and with each other. In the piel, *‘awar*, means to make blind.<sup>114</sup> This has a ready association with gouging out the eye, a common punishment for conquered kings. It may otherwise be connected with another denotation, skin. Hence one becomes blind from skin covering the eyes, cataracts. Another derivative means to arouse, awaken, incite, or agitate. It is associated with the full expression of passions both good (love) and bad (enmity, strife, anger). As has been the case with many words examined, the duality of the word carries vestigial traces of the sacred. The final denotation is apparently related to the idea of arousal or agitation. It is to be exposed or laid bare, stripped. Here too is a connection with skin, and it has horrific reminders from the exile in which the *golah*, גולה, are stripped and shorn in an act of utter humiliation.

Most surprising in this is what little associations עור and its denotations have with references to sexuality, especially compared to the vast majority of references to war, strife, enmity, humiliation, and poverty. It has strong covenantal connotations, for Israel should be aroused and awakened to responsiveness to God (Isa. 64:7, Ps 57:8). In final gasps of exasperation due to Israel's despondency, Yahweh is provoked into *stirring up* the nations against Israel and Jerusalem (1 Chron. 5:26, Ez. 23:22), yet He also *inspired* Cyrus to return the exiles (2 Chron. 36:22) and *stirred* the exiles up for the endeavor (Joel 3:7). It is also a preferred word in personal appeals on the part of the pious for God to *awaken* and *respond* to the penitents cry. In this regard, the pious especially appeal for Yahweh to deliver from disaster (Ps.44:23, 59:4). עור is the preferred word for expected *responsiveness* in a covenant relationship. Significantly, it is mostly an exilic word, reflecting on the disaster at Zion.

The word *‘ur* used in Gen. 2:25 derives from the basic denotation to lay bare or to expose.<sup>115</sup> Even when the more literal understanding of being unclothed is present in biblical use, figurative associations are still often present, such as in the case of Noah's nakedness and the response of his sons (Gen. 9:20-26). Again, it bears strong covenant

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<sup>113</sup> BDB 734

<sup>114</sup> BDB 734 conjectures from the Arabic that it is connected with digging or a cave.

<sup>115</sup> BDB 735

associations especially where a breach of the covenant exposes one to open accusation. In this sense, to be naked means to stand before an accuser with no defense. It is a preferred word to speak of Judah's wanton breach of the covenant (Ez. 16:7ff, 23:29ff). Similarly literal nakedness still has close associations with being stripped of privilege, wealth, security, and even life. Thus its interplay with the literal stripping of exiles is strong indeed (Isa. 20:1ff). Exiles or 'the stripped ones' (*golah*), are nearly synonymous with 'ur in this sense.

In the more priestly codes, nakedness is nearly equivalent to the marriage union.<sup>116</sup> Here is the curious construction that to have an incestuous sexual relationship is to 'uncover' (*golah*) the nakedness ('ur) of *both* partners. Lev. 18:6ff is significant because uncovering nakedness *of his flesh* is the equivalent of saying incestuous sexual relationships. Along with Lev. 20:11, this phrase *only* refers to incestuous relationships (Lev. 20:10 does not use the phrase when speaking of committing adultery). In this sense, then, I would venture to agree with Girard (1972:219ff) that the marriage is itself a sacrificial entity. It barely legitimizes sexual relationships, and at its core is still 'covered' or hidden from the community. At the core of the marriage, then, is conceded a fundamental weakness, one that is held together by sacrifice. Kinship marriage arrangements are keenly aware of the potential for violent rivalries to erupt, both within a group and between groups, if the exchange of women is not meticulously arranged. Contrary to much contemporary myth, I agree with Girard that sexuality and violence are inextricably linked.

A final denotation, 'or, refers to literal skin. Here, oddly enough, it prominently references skin as a covering or clothing of the body (flesh). To remind, skin covers the flesh as dust covers the earth. Violation of the skin (Mic 3:2 and perhaps the concern in Leviticus to 'atone' for skin disease and mold in a house) is indicative of a violation to the person. The hides of animals are one of the primary materials to cover items. It clothes the flesh, so in a sense, the couples nakedness means that they were 'covered' in skin. It is this covering that allows the bone and flesh, the substance of the body, to *be expressed*.

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<sup>116</sup> BDB 163

There is, then, a double meaning to nakedness here, for in one clear sense, it means ‘to be skinned’—stripped, exposed, or uncovered. In another sense, it means ‘to be skinned’—having a covering for the flesh. This double play is remarkably similar to the precarious nature of desire, both revealing and hiding or covering. This double sense is at play here especially because of the placement next to *shame*.

**6.6.2 Absence of Shame: the end of scapegoating.** In every way, בּוֹשׁ carries the primary idea of being targeted by a community. It is a scapegoat term. Found mainly in Isaiah and Jeremiah, it is ‘often in parallel with *kalam* ‘to be humiliated,’ and less frequently with *hataat* ‘to be shattered or dismayed.’ The direction of the word rarely is used in an internal sense of feeling guilty or remorseful, but rather as an *external reality* of being publicly or openly disgraced.<sup>117</sup> Its primary reference is of a targeted individual or group who has been singled out for communal retribution.<sup>118</sup> The internal emotions associated with shame or being ashamed such as confusion, shock, horror, surprise, consternation, remorse, awkwardness, and so forth are connotations from *bosh*, but all of these are derived from the primary sense of the external reality of being publicly humiliated. In other words, it is a loaded scapegoat term and signals victimization in every way.

Using a phrase similar to Gen 2:25, Mic 1:8, 11 speak of being ‘naked in shame.’ It directly references the exile, literally being stripped, humiliated, and violated. This passage is significant because it is also in connection with the land being ‘stripped’ and bare;<sup>119</sup> that is, it returns to a land of barrenness, the desert.<sup>120</sup> It is a return to the savage sacred realm, the land of desolation. The literal stripping of exiles becomes the paramount symbol for the prophets (Mic.1:8, Isa 20:2ff, Ez 16). It becomes evident that the lines between the literal and the figurative use of nakedness are blurred.

As with nakedness, shame also has a double sense as in the common construction of being ‘clothed’ or ‘covered’ in shame. In Ps 44:16, a covering of shame equates to being

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<sup>117</sup> TWOT 97

<sup>118</sup> For Westermann (1974:235, 193), crime and punishment is the main thrust of this narrative. The only significance he gives to ‘naked without shame’ is simply to set up the violation in Gen 3:7.

<sup>119</sup> This significance becomes more evident when exploring the nature of the serpent’s ‘crafty’ quality explained below.

<sup>120</sup> See the discussions of *tohu wabohu* in the Gen 1:2 in Chapter 5.

a lone individual in the face of a taunting crowd. This sense, as Schwager (1978:92-93) reminds is a dominant theme in the Psalms where 100 out of the 150 Psalms address the torment of enemies. Oddly then, the duplicity in the words signals the duplicity of the sacrificial mechanism, for to be naked, bare, uncovered, or exposed is to be clothed or covered in shame. Daniel 9:7, 8 speak of ‘faces of shame’ implying a kind of mask that is worn. Importantly, the shame that is put on the face is directly associated with a complete lack of covenant response and in contrast to Yahweh’s righteousness. In this case, to have a ‘face of shame’ is to visibly acknowledge the truthfulness of the accusation. It is to be found out, exposed.

*Bosh* carries a strong causative sense to it, to be put to shame or to bring shame upon oneself, which again points back to the origin of shame—the crowd.<sup>121</sup> Gen 2:25 is the only time it is found in the *hithpolel*, making it both causative and reflective; hence, they did not *cause* shame *to each other*. Thrice within this line is the emphasis on reciprocity. ‘*Both* of them were naked, the *man and the woman*, and they did not cause shame *to each other*.’ Acquisitive desire that leads to rivalry appears to be addressed here. It is in their open, unveiled responsiveness to each other that enables them to ‘eat of every desirable tree’ and avoid the fruit of knowing good and evil. In other words, they can partake of life and not death. They can openly express and direct their desire toward Life and be co-respondents without rivalry. They can mutually express and fulfill desire *without imitating* or looking for clues from the other.

This is quite significant in terms of mimetic desire. One would be hard pressed to find a better way to emphatically negate the ‘circularity of myth’ or the scapegoat mechanism. It is as it were a picture of paradise—full expression of desire, open without accusation, without rivalry, without viewing the other as possessing or being the object of one’s own desire. The violent reciprocity is replaced by a reciprocity of humility mainly because both parties bear in the flesh the wound or reminder of sacrifice. Both carry the reminder of the community’s inability to resolve its own conflicting desires without resorting to sacrificial victims.

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<sup>121</sup> I often use community and crowd interchangeably, but the ‘crowd’ is a community with a heightened sense of reciprocal violence. It is more mobilized toward sacrificial action.

**6.6.3 Wisdom and the precarious nature of nakedness.** A final consideration is the word play between the nakedness of the couple, ערומים in Gen 2:25 and the ‘craftiness,’ ערום, of the serpent in Gen 3:1. As far as the latter, it comes from the root ערם, and it primarily means to be stripped. *Aram* mainly references a stripped or barkless tree (Gen 30:37, Ez. 31:8), but in 2 Chron 28:16, it refers to stripped exiles.<sup>122</sup> It is only once found in the verb form referring to *heaping up* of the waters at the Reed Sea (Ex 15:8); otherwise, its noun form refers to a pile or heap. It does have some connection to ‘strip’ in that the mound is considered exposed. In other words, it is a bare, uncovered heap like a mound of grain (Ruth 3:7), a ruined city (Jer 50:26), or a trash pile. Nehemiah 3:34 speaks of the ruined temple. Interestingly, the taunter calls it a heap of ‘dust’ עפר.

The pertinent point to the above is its relatedness to naked. As far as its use in Gen 3:1, it of course means shrewd or crafty. It is mostly found in wisdom literature where it holds a double sense. Similar to the sense in Gen 3:1 is the notion of crafty, wily, clever, or shrewd (Jb 5:12; 15:5). It is viewed negatively in the sense of the common psalmist complaint about people plotting one’s demise, conspiring. The positive sense is restricted to the use in Proverbs where it conveys the idea of prudent or sensible. Curiously, it is mentioned in Proverbs 12:23 with covering (*kasha*) or concealing and always in connection with knowledge and understanding (Prov 13:16, 14:8). The non-wisdom uses are rare. It can mean premeditated murder (Ex 21:14) or to connive as in the case of the Gibeonites who tricked Joshua into thinking they were foreigners and not inhabitants of the land in order to avoid annihilation (Josh 9:4). As with our two words, naked and shame, so the craftiness of the serpent holds a double sense. Its primary sense is to expose or strip away the essence of something from the non-essential, yet simultaneously, it strongly suggests a kind of toying with what is concealed and what is exposed. If wisdom is associated with the snake’s ability to shed its skin and skin is associated with the expression of the human body, we may surmise that wisdom and its counter-part, conspire, can connote a sense of hiding and concealing simultaneously. Like a slick salesman, wisdom can turn on and off its persona as the situation deems necessary. It

<sup>122</sup> BDB 790 surmises from the Arabic that it describes the stripping of meat off of bones or of leaves or bark from a tree by animals. Westermann (1974:238) connects the snake’s ability to shed its skin with craftiness.

strongly implies a sense of command over the dynamics of a situation. It suggests a hubristic knowledge that confidently controls what is exposed and what remains hidden, and this especially applies to desire. Once again the symmetry of the sacred is found in the duality of meaning.

Cassuto's (1978:142) explanation of Gen 3:1 further lends to the notion of duality, for he argues that in the end, the voice of the snake is simply the alternative voice of the woman herself. The difference between the nakedness of Gen 2:25 and 3:1 is a deliberate misspelling. It perfectly sets up the scenario of Genesis 3, for the precarious nature of the community is dependent on what one will or will not presume about the prohibition. To what extent will one presume to 'understand' the operation of violence within the community? The delicate symmetry hangs on a *daghesh*.

The word play points to the precarious nature of nakedness without shame, for it can easily turn towards acquisitive desire, a calculated preoccupation with the dynamics of desire. When there is mutual nakedness without shame, desire is openly expressed because the object of desire is viewed as being *external* to the one desiring it. Neither party can be viewed as possessing the object. The latter already signals a suspicion that the object is *internal* or intrinsic to the one desiring it, and it presumes an ability to ferret that out. It assumes a mastery over the dynamics of desire. Like the Israelites choosing Life or Death in between the two mountains, so here the 'one flesh' is situated between the 'desirable trees' and Life or the knowledge tree of good and evil, i.e. of acquisitive desire and the belief that one can manage its volatile force. One relies on mutual vulnerability based on an experience of the violence of sacrificial resolve. The other relies on a sense of control over it.

## 6.5 Summary

The phrase עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ is as loaded a statement as the Shabbat statement closing off Genesis 1. It is a multi-nuanced yet calculated phrase of *resolution*. Several pertinent streams converge here. There is a double-play to the phrase because it speaks of a kind of exposure and a kind of covering simultaneously. In a sense, it should



be read: ‘both of them were covered in skin and not covered in shame.’ It speaks of a bold openness that is sufficient in and of itself. It requires no further covering, i.e. no further sacrifice. To be naked without shame is the definition of ‘one flesh.’ It rounds out the picture of wholeness, unity, and sacrificial resolve.

The framing of the sacrificial crisis is within a broader context of a covenant relationship. In this respect, one of the primary meanings of the passage has to do with the ‘garden community’ being a *co-respondent* to the consumption of life. In this respect, the connection of nakedness and being openly expressive of desire reflects a covenantal responsiveness that is devoid of rivalry and reciprocal violence. Rather than reciprocal violence it is based on reciprocal responsiveness. The special emphasis is that the two were open to full expression of desire without shame *toward each other*. Since shame is a victimization word, nakedness means they did not victimize each other. There is an affirmation that victimization does not occur because desire has its proper object, direction and focus. Ultimately, it is a desire (life consumption) that is directed towards and moves towards Life itself.

This ‘good’ situation is expressly and exclusively generated by a unique sacrificial resolve on the part of *Yahweh Elohim*.<sup>123</sup> As in Genesis 1, the necessity of sacrifice is presumed, yet intentionally and radically altered. It is as Girard has proposed; the scapegoat mechanism can only truly be dismantled via the scapegoat mechanism. The sacrifice prepared and offered by *Yahweh Elohim* propels the community in a decisively different direction. It dismantles the sacrificial system as it moves through the sequence.

The listening community encounters a departure from the mythical cycle. Although there is a crisis constituting a sacrificial resolve (i.e. the earth has no growth and man is alone), God is not viewed as the one requiring the resolve. God’s desire is not openly displayed even though it is strongly and periphrastically suggested in the Life tree. God desires Life and indeed is the source of it. Other than this, *Yahweh Elohim* acts apathetically but

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<sup>123</sup> There is much discussion of this binary designation for God as Westermann (1974:198) summarizes. Perhaps, a very reconciliation between the ‘crowds’ view of God and the view of a God who identifies with victims is also intended.

deliberately<sup>124</sup> through the sequence. Importantly, neither the crisis of the ground that *ha'adam* was taken out of nor the crisis of *ha'adam* in which *ishah* emerged is viewed as an appeasement of an angry deity. The crisis is restricted to the earth, but the earth cannot resolve it on its own.

Most significantly, the sacrificial resolve of God seriously moves the community away from a preoccupation with sacrifice. It challenges the very notion that death (and to remind, we are talking about any kind of violent resolve whether actual shedding of blood or expulsion. It is the notion that something must be jettisoned away from the community) is the only viable response to where desire inevitably goes. This is revealed in several ways.

For one, the expulsion of *ha'adam* from the ground immediately leads him to being situated among ‘every desirable tree.’ He is called on, commanded even, to fulfill desire, to take in life. The consuming of ‘every desirable tree’ will inevitably lead to its source, Life itself. Nowhere in this idyllic picture is there a sense of reversal. *Ha'adam* has no need to return to the ground, to close in on himself. On the contrary, he is free to let his desire propel him toward ever greater openness to Life.

The garden community is further pulled away from sacrificial inclination by the dual sacrifice of man (*iysh*) and woman (*ishah*) offered by *Yahweh Elohim*. In a real sense, in fact, the emergence of man and woman negates sacrifice as it moves through it, for both survive the experience, return to the community in a humble state, not as deities who are masters of the savage sacred realm, but as humans who out of their heightened awareness of the sacrificial system’s deleterious effect can now mutually and openly respond to (desire) Life as it is offered. Viewed from the perspective of the reflecting author, *ha'adam*’s capacity to respond to Life is critically jeopardized by his ‘being alone in his isolation.’ In mimetic terms, this simply means the prime condition for a sacrificial

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<sup>124</sup> In notion of *apatheia* is well-developed in Eastern monasticism. According to Chryssavgis (2003:303): ‘*Apatheia* is neither aloofness nor insensitivity. Rather, it is freedom from misdirected passions and the suffering they cause. It involves, as Abba Abraham says, not the elimination of the passions but their control...*Apatheia*, then, has nothing to do with apathy; on the contrary, it is the ultimate expression of empathy for others. . Along with this is of course the strong notion of chastity. Chastity primarily references a singleness of heart, in other words, a characteristic tendency, virtue, to remain undeterred and undistracted from one’s purpose. It is to singularly channel all desire in one direction.’

crisis, for it is always internal in nature. Because the community is *closed in on itself*, it cannot see through its own rivalries besides expelling something to the outside. It is the expelled one that generates an objective, third party perspective. Indeed, as Girard insists, the expelled one becomes the object.

Initially, *Yahweh Elohim* provides such a sacrifice in the removal of *ha'adam's* side. But with a surprising jolt, the victim not only returns, but *stands in front* of the very one who just expelled her. She does not return as a quasi-deified being who now arbitrates for the community as part of a sacred court (i.e. the voice of the crowd). She stands as bone and flesh boldly confronting the community with a stark reality. They have expelled one of their own. The sacrificial victim was not substantially different than the one's expelling her.

*Iysh* has also passed through a sacrificial sequence. At first glance, it appears standard fare for a male rite of passage. The initiate already stands in a precarious position of isolation within the community. He is sort of in but sort of not. While in a deep sleep (a ritual act in which the initiate is partially aware, but must be dangerously open to the will of the community), he is marshaled through a sacrificial sequence as if a victim ready for slaughter. A surrogate victim is extracted from him sparing his own demise. At this point, however, the neophyte does not return to the community understanding now how dangerous the loss of difference is and how the scapegoat mechanism operates. In other words, he does not return as a devoted participant in the crowd. For one, the sacrifice *in his place* took it out of him as it were. It left permanent and deep scares, reminders of the grievous cost of his isolation, his 'not good' crisis and the consequences of his own resolution. He carries in his body 'flesh closed in on itself.' In a sense, the initial *ha'adam* is no more. The community that relied on sacrificial resolve died in the process of a sacrifice provided by God. He does not return to his initial state. Instead, he cleaves to the victim of his own sacrificial resolve. In this act, he generates a different *ha'adam*, man and woman, one flesh. The one flesh of mutual woundedness, of profound awareness of the cost of violent resolve creates a new community, one that can mutually, correspond to life and can never go back to the old *adam*.

Most powerfully, Yahweh's unique sacrificial resolution no longer requires sacrificial resolution. It is not maintained by sacrificial repetition, but by choice. Mutual responsiveness to Life, i.e. reciprocal fulfillment of desire towards a true object, must heed the voice of God. Unlike the 'stupor' of reciprocal violence and its resolve, Life is not dumb. It has a voice. Heeding the voice is the critical avenue to direct passions away from mimetic, acquisitive desire. God's passion, which the community can be led into if it heeds the voice, is for *ha'adam* to have 'all that the father has' but *without replacing him*.

The garden community is situated by God in such a way that they can acquire that. They can consume life from a state of nakedness without shame. That is, they can be fully expressive of desire without acquiring desire from the other and without viewing the other as *possessing or being* the object. They can mutually respond to Life when they are acutely aware of their mutual vulnerability. They understand the deleterious effect of *their own crisis* and *their own means to resolve it*. They are keenly aware of God's unique sacrificial intervention that not only spares both community and victim, but unites them in such a way as to 'expose' the folly of believing that the other holds the key to desire and actually possess what is desired. To be 'one flesh,' 'naked without shame,' destroys model/disciple relationships. Rivalry itself is banished from the community.

In this way, the community can consume life that leads to the Life tree, to the source of Life. But here too, this desire for Life cannot be acquired by imitation. The One who actually does possess what is desired cannot be seen. His desires cannot be directly accessed. It is only through the mutual, humble responsiveness to both the goodness of life and the commanding voice that the community will find its ultimate satiation.



## 7 CONCLUSION

The challenge of this thesis was to inquire into the viability of Girard's mimetic theory of generative violence as a valid and perhaps even essential tool, method, insight, model or even criticism for the ongoing work of biblical exegesis and interpretation. The fundamental objective was to test the extent mimetic theory offers a viable and compelling explanatory model of the anthropological origins of the sacred.

If confession be acceptable even in academic work, I have through the course of this work often felt a bit bifarious. The work of Girard over the last half century is enough for one thesis,<sup>1</sup> and of course, the book of Genesis continues to provoke a library of ongoing inquiry. If one is somewhat amiable with Girard's thought and assumptions to begin with, as I was, one can become quite comfortable with working within this paradigm and vocabulary. The most recent publication from *Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*<sup>2</sup> in honor of René Girard's work repeatedly affirms a conversion type quality to those who have encountered Girard and his work, and they have fully integrated mimetic theory into their various academic domains. In fact, the more one delves into Girard's thought, the harder it is to come away unscathed from the encounter. It becomes a point of no return. Even if one rejects the fundamental assumptions and opts for a different or modified explanatory model, one would sense an obligation to engage mimetic theory if only to neutralize its assertions.

That mimetic theory so easily weaves into nearly any domain is a tremendous strength. Admittedly, it also provokes the sharpest attacks for the same reason. Simultaneously, if one sticks within the more conventional historical critical methodologies of Old Testament studies, one's reasoning and concerns can take off into an array of different directions. The biggest challenge, however, exists when the reader is not familiar with one or the other. This has prompted at times the need for digression and additional explanation that may feel tedious and cumbersome. Even worse, I may have done a disservice to both sides.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008, Girard received the MLA Lifetime Achievement Award (The Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, No. 34 May 2009)

<sup>2</sup> SVMC 2009

## 7.1 Verification of Thesis, Validation of Mimetic Theory

The exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 above affirm the basic contours of Girard's structure of myth. They share in common with what Girard (1999:182) calls the 'founding paradox of archaic societies' encapsulating a 'generative violence' at the inception of its community. The expulsion of a victim at the height of a mimetic crisis of indifferentiation converts the bad violence, mimetic rivalry, into a good violence that saves the community.

The opening lines of the Bible incorporates the 'crisis' state of all ritual as its starting point. Gen 2:5 cannot conceive of generative human life coming from any other situation other than that of utter negation, a complete absence of difference and distinction. Human community is assumed to play out in a context of symmetry, dissymmetry and re-symmetry. Both accounts follow suit in the structural sequence, a central figure must come out or emerge from the 'terrible equilibrium' and it is this figure who becomes the arbiter of difference. It restores balance and provides for communal orientation. Distinctions, difference, and boundaries are established all of which reflect in some way the founder of difference, the expelled one. Despite a long held insistence on the Bible's divergence from myth, its paradigmic worldview is still mythical at least from a mimetic point of view.

The Bible shares the common anthropological truth of myth—humanity seeks to cure its violence by violence. And Girard (1999:190-192) insists that without acknowledging this, the radical difference of the Judeo-Christian tradition does not transcend other religious perspectives. Only through its comparison with other mythological narratives does a radical juncture become evident. Since the very emergence of human culture, humanity has only figured out one way to successfully curtail its own all-consuming reciprocal violence—human sacrifice. This Girard (1999:174) argues is precisely the point Nietzsche came to: 'To elude his own discovery and to defend mythological violence, Nietzsche is obliged to justify *human sacrifice*.'

Someone must go or we all will perish. This is the foundational anthropological truth, but our awareness of this does not necessarily lead us to a viable alternative. To be 'anti-sacrificial' in effect only leads to an exchange of victims. The victimizer now becomes the victim, and as a result, the mythical structure is restored. Those who rid themselves of the victimizer have successfully diverted *their own violence* away from themselves. As Girard (1999:164) argues:

‘From now on we have our anti-sacrificial rituals of victimization, and they unfold in an order as unchangeable as properly religious rituals.’

Girard (1999:183) proposes that if we were to become aware to some extent of the ‘problem’ with our solution, we are still faced with a *false* or a *true* alternative. It can never come by denying the ‘sequence of a mimetic crisis and its violent resolution.’ The radical difference is in *how we tell the story*:

1. We don’t detect the mimetic snowballing because we participate in it without realizing it. In this case we are condemned to a lie we cannot rectify, for we believe sincerely in the guilt of our scapegoats.
2. We detect the mimetic snowballing in which we do not participate, and then we can describe it as it actually is. We restore the scapegoats unjustly condemned.

Girard (1999:183) concludes only the Bible and especially the Gospels do the latter, and the exploration of Genesis 1 and 2 in this work confirm this.

Genesis 1 retells the mythical story but permanently severs its ties to the structure as it meticulously moves through the sequence. From the emergence of light as the precursor of all generative acts to the seventh day of Sabbath rest, neither God, nor light, nor anything that follows ever returns to that ‘savage sacred’ realm where light and darkness and heaven and earth, congeal into a ‘conglomeration of difference.’ As was identified in this work, the ‘theme’ of going out or leaving and *not returning* structures a good deal of the narratives in Genesis and Exodus. This peculiar biblical feature that the thesis here emphasized could more than anything signal the beginnings of a ‘historical perspective.’ In the beginning (*urzeit*), God cut down the old heavens and earth, and even to this day all human and cosmological history is marching to its Sabbath day (*endzeit*). *It does not return from whence it came.*

Genesis 2 relates the sequence similarly to Genesis 1. It can only start from a condition of utter negation, an utter barren waste land, the antithesis to human community. The emergence of a ‘living being’ immediately reverses the deleterious effect of non-difference. Distinctions can be established, boundaries set, and names given. Genesis 2 delves even deeper than the previous one and frays the layers of protection around the sacrificial community. The core issue is exposed, but not as a cancer to be removed, but as a question to be answered: ‘what will you do with your desire.’ Or it is as God puts it: ‘Where are you?’ It doesn’t negate imitative desire nor



portray it as evil. It postulates the possibility that a true Object of desire exists that can be shared without seizing possession of it. It envisions a shared Life without the destruction of it.

Genesis 2 unfurls the very heart of the structure and places it ‘in front of him.’ What will you do with the victim? Why do we expel victims? What the Gospels do, Girard (1999:184) insists, is problematize our ‘solution.’ It forces us to ask: ‘Why do we do this madness.’ Only through a revelation of the victim as human is the community jolted into questioning its own violent resolve.

In our relativistic late modern world, Girard (1999:177) persists that the influence of the Gospel has infiltrated human culture on a global scale—the concern for the victim is our absolute. The concern for the victim is ‘the one rubric that gathers together everything I am summarizing...’ proclaims Girard (1999:167). This ‘rubric’ is laid out in Genesis 2 setting in motion a nagging vision that works its way into Israel’s narrative from Genesis onward. The God of the Hebrews, it appears, favors or ‘smiles upon’ the victim. This seems anything but radical to us now, but in a world dominated by the ‘founding paradox,’ it must have been ‘unbelievable.’

But the vision of Genesis 2 of a community of reciprocal humility, of ‘naked without shame,’ of ‘one flesh,’ and co-responsiveness toward a true Object is still, I suggest a radical notion. Contrary to our contemporary ‘victim advocacy,’ the ultimate goal of Genesis 2 is the redemption of *the entire community*, not just the victim. That the sacrificing community would carry the ‘wound of its own sacrificial necessity’ is Yahweh’s alternative sacrifice which effectively moves each one of us away from the desire to possess being by seizing it from another. That ‘wound’ I suggest is the clear ownership of one’s own participation in the ‘sacrificial mechanism.’ It is to realize that everyone participates in the mob. Thus, in the case of Abraham and Pharaoh, Abraham, Isaac, and Abimelech, Joseph and his brothers, and Moses and Pharaoh, God not only resuscitates the victim, but He also returns the victim from whence it came, and by so doing, redeems the sacrificing and sacralizing community.<sup>3</sup> This God proves by such action that there is ‘none like you among the mighty...majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor,

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<sup>3</sup> It would take a considerable amount of space to fully explain the redemption of the whole community in the case of the exodus story. The gist is as follows: the narrative consistently plays out as an *internal* crisis. *Both* Hebrew and Egyptian boys were to be thrown into the river. *Both* Egyptians and Hebrews experienced the plagues. *Both* experienced the death of the firstborn sons—the Pascal lamb was a surrogate victim for the Israelites. *Both* experienced the pillar of cloud and fire, and *both* experienced the utter fright of the Reed Sea (both experienced the threat of annihilation from a sacrificial crisis, being overtaken by the waters).

working wonders!’ (Ex 15:11). It is as Isaiah proclaims: ‘apart from me, there is no God (Isa 44:6). This vision, I suggest, still has not fully taken hold.

The most salient feature in both Genesis 1 and 2 is surely theological. It is only God who sees through the structure and orchestrates the sequence in such a way as to dismantle it as it goes. Both accounts emphatically affirm God’s sole prerogative and authentic transcendence from humanity’s contrived sacred realm. They depict a God who cannot leave *‘ha’adam’* ‘alone in his separation.’ It is a non-violent God willing to engage our own violence. It is a non-sacrificial God offering our sacrifice, and it is a truthful God willing to don the mask we all hide behind.

## **7.2 The Historical/literary Context of Israel’s Primeval Narrative from a Mimetic Perspective**

Based on the exegetical results of Genesis 1 and 2 in this work, I venture some suggestions as how the mimetic reading of Genesis 1 and 2 might contribute to the more conventional Old Testament historical criticisms. Collins (2005:2) defines historical criticism as: ‘...any method or approach that attempts to interpret the biblical text first of all in its historical context, in light of the literary and cultural conventions of the time.’

For one, Girard challenges us to rethink categories of historical and non-historical. Similarly to Middleton’s (2005:192-193) discussion of ‘nature/history’ or Westermann’s (1968:1ff) discussion of ‘salvation history,’ mimetic theory cautions us to be weary of discounting the historical relevance of seemingly less historically flavored texts, especially mythological texts which appear an-historical. Girard’s insight allows us not so much to ‘get behind the text’ but to trace the historical transformation of a narrative away from its generative beginnings. Girard (1985b:110) reminds that the more ‘mythical’ a narrative, the more graphic its violent resolve in a victim, and the more guilty the community views its victim, the more centered it is in an actual event, the closer we are to its beginnings. The closer the narrative is to its ‘original’ version.

In another way, however, Girard relativizes some of the past concern for historical/sociological context because the same fundamental problem of how we deal with violence is concurrent

throughout human history. There is infinite variety on the same structure.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the historical data of all kinds doesn't contribute to our understanding of the text. It certainly does, and it is a necessary endeavor for any serious exegete. What it does mean, however, is that if one accepts a mimetic reading of a biblical text, then the narrative could fit a variety of sociopolitical historical contexts. The implication here is that many of the reasons for dating a text pre-, post-, or exilic become less compelling. It also means that a perspective presented in the text at one point and addressing a particular situation can be re-applied to another situation. Thus, we have a kind of 'retrospective theology' as Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:249) put it. Thus we can have gradual shifts in adaption of the narrative in a similar fashion as how ritual can shift emphasis and meaning over time, even when the structural sequence remains relatively constant.

Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:318) sound similar to Girard in this regard:

The Bible's integrity and in fact, its historicity, do not depend on dutiful historical "proof" of any of its particular events or personalities...The power of the biblical saga stems from its being a compelling and coherent narrative expression of the timeless themes of a people's liberation, continuing resistance to oppression, and *quest for social equality*. It eloquently expresses the *deeply rooted sense of shared origins, experiences, and destiny that every human community needs in order to survive*. (Emphasis mine)

Israel is no different than its neighbors when it comes to the paradigmatic or 'ideological'<sup>5</sup> framework for articulating origins. They are fundamentally after the same thing—how did human community come to be? What generated our ability to come and stay together? Agreeing with Middleton (2005:194), the ancient Israelites forged a unique perspective precisely in answering this question. Simply put, the Hebrew Scriptures reflect a nagging sense that something is *wrong* with the storyline.

In this respect, there is an added bent to 'retrospective theology,' for even in our day we only detect scapegoating at work, *we when are not directly involved in it*. It is only in retrospect—and the very fact of reflection means that one has already been sensitized to scapegoating—that we

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<sup>4</sup> Honestly, a jazz musician would have no problem understanding such a concept. For 'left brain' thinkers, who require a high degree of sequential thinking structures, this may seem nearly impossible to grasp. I conjecture that most modern biblical criticism has been dominated by 'left brain' thinking.

<sup>5</sup> See Middleton (2005:191) and Janzen (2004:35) for the particular use of 'ideology.'

understand our own involvement in it. It is only then, that we see it. Post-Third Reich Germany should be ample exemplification.

Several things lead to a possible and plausible scenario for the writing of Genesis 1 and 2 (and possible all of Genesis).

**7.2.1 Weight of current archeological data.** First, there is the debate around the ‘origins of Israel’ based on the current weight of archeological data.<sup>6</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2004:23) aptly summarize: ‘From the analysis of the archaeological evidence, there is no sign whatsoever of extensive literacy or any other attributes of full statehood in Judah—and in particular, in Jerusalem—until more than two and a half centuries later, toward the end of the eighth century BCE.’ Perdue (1994) and Davies (1992) present scenarios pushing the data to a seemingly logical end, arguing that ‘Israel’ and the literature that tells its story is a post-exilic ‘invention’ of a new aristocracy commissioned by Persia to ‘colonize’ Palestine. The Bible was a way to legitimize their ‘claim’ to inheritance by giving it a sense of heritage. This view is oft labeled ‘minimalist’ mainly by its detractors.

The collection and interpretation of archeological data is, of course, politically charged in its own right. Even so, Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:14) offer a more moderate hypothesis: ‘Archaeology has provided enough evidence to support a new contention that the historical core of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History was substantially shaped in the seventh century BCE.’ Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:21) advocate a shift away from using archeology to simply ‘illustrate’ the text, and more toward viewing the Bible as a ‘characteristic artifact’ that reveals the ‘anthropology of Ancient Israel.’ Thus Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:23) share a critical characteristic with a mimetic approach to the text. The text itself is a participant in revealing something about humanity: ‘...the biblical narratives are themselves part of the story.’ Critical to my discussion here is what Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:23-24) advocate along these lines:

It is a story not of one, but *two* chosen kingdoms, which together comprise the historical roots of the people of Israel...These two kingdoms represent two sides of ancient Israel’s experience, two quite different societies with different attitudes and national identities.

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<sup>6</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:21) remind that it is not just an acceleration of the amount of new artifacts, but a major shift in methodology.

It is the radical attempt to *resolve a rivalry* between two kingdoms with different hopes, attitudes, history, memories, and ‘ideologies’ into a ‘new community’ and a new telling of the story that ‘more than any other document ever written, shaped—and continues to shape—the face of Western society’ (Finklestein and Silberman, 2001:24).

It must be noted that this rivalry between two paltry societies was nothing new, nor was the attempt at ‘unification’ anything extraordinary.<sup>7</sup> There must have been *something* at the core, however, that profoundly shaped the unrelenting drive towards this. In that respect, the resolution envisioned, but never fully realized in this body of literature called the Old Testament jettisoned an obscure political agenda into an unstoppable force. In Genesis 1, there is a vision of a light emerging from an undifferentiated ‘heaven and earth’ that steadfastly marches toward a Sabbath day. Genesis 2 presses in even further by envisioning a new being, a new humanity that is ‘one flesh’ and ‘naked without shame’ because it has come to understand how deleterious the ‘unanimity minus one’ communal operation is.

That something, which I can only suggest here by way of conclusion that encourages further investigation, is grounded in a profound experience of having survived the ‘death’ of being a sacrificial victim. To put another way, both sides of this rivalry have a profound sense of having survived being the expendable ones in a political ‘unification’ agenda. This comes from two different and distant nagging memories.<sup>8</sup> Each memory works its way into the consciousness of the community’s sense of identity. The first was from a migrant community who was expelled from Egypt under a very weird sequence of frightful circumstances. I will call this the Moses tradition; the second was from the miraculous survival of a petty little kingdom in southern Palestine who ‘miraculously’ survived the onslaught of an over-whelming and merciless invasion of ‘sea peoples.’<sup>9</sup> This we can call the Davidic tradition. At the core of these narratives, regardless of how colored or distorted the retelling of the story becomes, is an alternative experience of the sacred. A god rescues and defends a sacrificial victim contrary to the will of the ‘gods,’ the logic of the crowd or the size of the enemy’s army. The mutual bond between

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Israel had longstanding relationships with Damascus, Tyre, and various Canaanite city/states. Judah, likewise, was closely tied to Edom and Moab.

<sup>8</sup> There are, of course, multiple strands or streams of tradition that are woven into the Biblical record. I address the two here because of their pivotal force and historical plausibility.

<sup>9</sup> Finklestein and Silberman (2001:87-89) aptly point the frightful picture of the ‘Sea Peoples’ expansion into the Levant.

these two ‘survivor’ kingdoms, obligated them to be responsive and responsible toward their ‘brother’ even when he is a ‘rival.’ Perhaps equally at the core is the memory of a community who oddly ‘didn’t eat their king,’ ruler, father, or brother.<sup>10</sup> There is an understanding of human community and its relationship to those who rule over them that is clearly desacralizing and moving toward what Middleton (2005:207) calls the ‘democratization of the image.’<sup>11</sup>

**7.2.2 Neglect of Internal Context.** Another contribution to a possible scenario for a plausible sociopolitical context for Genesis 1 and 2 is cued by Middleton’s (2005:186-193) discussion as to the extent in which exegetes consider the broader Ancient Near Eastern cultural and ideological context. This discussion rehearses one of the longest standing debates within modern biblical scholarship. Simply put, it is the question as to what extent Israel should be *compared* to its neighbors in ideology, social and political patterns, religious formulation and such, or to what extent should it be contrasted. Here, Middleton (2005:190) returns us to the ‘contextual’ solution discussed at length with Janzen in Chapter 3 above (Chapter 3.2.1). Middleton (2005:192) echoes the general position of Mendenhall and Gottwald,<sup>12</sup> who see the early egalitarian formation of Israel as a ‘sociopolitical and ideological rebellion against the oppressive hegemony of Egypt and the Canaanite city-states.’ Middleton (2005:190) reasons that it is a broad ‘contextual’ approach which can accommodate both a comparison and contrast with Israel’s situation within the Ancient Near Eastern milieu.

I suggest, however, that a key element is critically absent. This ‘contextual’ rubric fails to adequately consider what was going on *internally within* Israel. The broad contours of this history are indisputable.<sup>13</sup> A ‘community’ (for now we will call it ‘Israel’) came together rather inauspiciously, haphazardly, and ‘amazingly’ (Genesis through Deuteronomy). After some struggles in a formative period (Joshua through 1 Samuel), Israel enjoyed a brief period of quasi-

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase is borrowed from a recent movie adaption of a children’s book, *Where the Wild Things Are*. A boy, who is angry at his world, journeys in a dreamlike state to an island of monsters who make him ‘king of the monsters.’ After becoming disappointed in the king, the monsters expel him, but proudly proclaim in a way that says they learned something from the experience: ‘You’re the first king we haven’t eaten.’

<sup>11</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:110) conclude from archeological evidence in the hills of northern Israel that a strong egalitarian socioeconomic system must have flourished in the early Iron Age.

<sup>12</sup> Middleton cites several works by these two scholars. The seminal works are Mendenhall (1973) and Gottwald (1979). He also brings in the contributions of Brueggemann (1978), Hanson (1986), and Hallo (1980).

<sup>13</sup> This is true even for radical views of Davies and Perdue. However, ‘invented’ the history of Israel is, those ‘inventors’ clearly envisioned a protracted internal conflict as an integral element of their past. Be that as it may, it does not seem plausible for an aristocracy seeking to establish control or ‘possession’ of the land to so thoroughly place the failure of a rivalry at its core.

unity and prosperity (2 Samuel through 1 Kings 11)<sup>14</sup> Communal tensions, however, arose and there was a dividing into two communities (1 Kings 12 through 1 Kings). This internal rivalry preoccupies most of this divided community's history, and ultimately the rivalry itself destroys 'Israel' (2 Kings and all the prophets). Then, I would suggest, the process begins again come the exilic period onward. When one thinks of it, in fact, this same scenario applies to almost any communal formation.<sup>15</sup> It is infinitely repeatable.

One finds a remarkable similarity with the above sequence and Girard's (1985a:167) interpretation of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:25). Girard calls, not his theory, but the revelation in the Gospels a 'radical criticism' of mythology. Girard believes it is paradigmatic of a community who is coming to a realization of the mythical structure:

*Two disciples are leaving Jerusalem after the Passion and are talking on the way about the collapse of their hope. Here again is the same attitude of skeptical and suspicious discouragement with regard to a revelation that has clearly failed. The discouragement even brings about its own reversal: at the destructive moment of suspicious criticism, suddenly Christ is walking with the disciples and explaining to them the Scriptures [retrospective theology]. (Emphasis mine)*

Girard (1985a:167) goes on to proclaim: 'We may one day understand that the entire history of Western thought conforms to the mode of these two stories and to a third similar one, also found in Luke: that of the Prodigal Son.'

It is possible to conceive of a version of Genesis 1 and 2 as well as the Pentateuch being inscribed during the seventh century BCE in Jerusalem as advocated by Finkelstein and Silberman. It is written within the ideological, symbolic matrix of the Ancient Near East during the Iron Age I.<sup>16</sup> It accurately 'remembers' its beginnings in the same structural pattern of all communities, yet having odd hiccups on the way. The hiccups have one remarkable similarity—they all had to do with a victim who survived and even thrived post-expulsion. Because of this,

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<sup>14</sup> We will leave for now the dispute over how significant David, Solomon, and Jerusalem might have been. Despite the probable over-estimations of the Bible, I think it highly probable that Jerusalem played a key iconic role for Israel.

<sup>15</sup> Having been a part of an intentional Christian community and a greater 'communal' movement in America over the past forty years, I can attest to the predictable similarities.

<sup>16</sup> I agree with Middleton (2005) that Genesis 1 is heavily influenced by Mesopotamian royal mythology. Assyrian, Egyptian, and Greek influences, however, had already made inroads into Palestine by the seventh century BCE. (Van Seters, 1992:78ff). Mesopotamian influence does not require an exilic situation.

Israel cannot shake its egalitarian tendency and its suspicion of kings, temples, idols and sacrifices.<sup>17</sup> Most of all, it is obsessed with a nagging question: ‘Can’t we all get along.’<sup>18</sup>

It is intriguing at times, how the probing into rivalry and internal strife in the Bible has eluded much of Old Testament theological focus. Girard’s focus on oft neglected narratives in the Old Testament such as Joseph, Job, and Jonah remind us of the intensity the issue of rivalry and jealous desire are in the Bible. The terse mythical versions of Israel’s origins in Genesis 1 and 2 with their vision of an alternative community find an expanded narrative counterpart in the story of Joseph. Even though Girard (1985b:111) finds striking similarities with the Oedipus and Joseph stories, he notes that: ‘It is only the Joseph story in the Bible that repudiates the deceptions and violence of myth. I could go to other biblical stories and show every time the absolutely essential difference... They expose the belief on which mythology relies as a coherent and cruel system of representation. The mythical hero is guilty and punished rightly even if he is a god and even if he later restores order, whereas the biblical figure is punished wrongly; he is innocent.’ This portrayal is not just one between Israel and its neighbors. It is equally focused on an internal reconciliation that sees the folly of expelling the ‘brother.’

Girard’s (1985b:107ff) comparison and contrast of the Oedipus myth and the Joseph story serves as a starting point for evaluating the historical data. Both are ‘heroes’ who were rejected, ‘cast out,’ by their families. They had experienced profound and painful ‘leavings.’ Both were ‘highly successful immigrants’ who were known for solving riddles and applied that wisdom to a communal natural disaster. Both were accused of incestuous relationships.<sup>19</sup> Here the narratives diverge. Nothing in the narrative shakes Oedipus of possible guilt; the ‘truth’ of the accusation is never dispelled. The Joseph narrative goes to extra measures to demonstrate the ridiculous nature of the accusation, always pointing to the same fundamental cause—the envy of the rival. In the Oedipus myth, nothing is said of the natural disaster that prompted the communal crisis. The narrative simply ends with the expulsion of the victim, only suggesting an alleviation of the crisis. Joseph, on the other hand, wisely responds to the famine, alleviating the crisis without an

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<sup>17</sup> Girard (1985b:111) is emphatic that kings are simply the next scapegoat in line. Thus, Israel’s skepticism about kings and sacrifices may in fact originate from an inherent sense of its origins grounded more in being the victim than creating victims.

<sup>18</sup> In America, this is a rather infamous quote. In 1993, a video was taken of Rodney King being mercilessly beaten by Los Angeles police. This video set off a wave of rioting and violent protest which threatened to engulf the whole city. In an interview a few days into the riots, Rodney King appealed for a secession of reciprocal violence.

<sup>19</sup> The wife of the Egyptian master is said to have treated Joseph like a son.



expulsion. ‘Do the communities to which Oedipus and Joseph belong act justly when they expel these heroes from their midst?’ asks Girard (1985b:108). For Oedipus, the answer is *yes*, but for Joseph it is a resounding *no*.

**7.2.3 Emerging sensitivity of ‘sacrificial arrangements’ in the Pentateuch’s formation.** Let me postulate that emphatic *no* to a brief assessment of the formative years of Judah’s prominence and of the Pentateuch. To remind, I am only postulating a scenario based on the explorations of my thesis. The intent is to invite or suggest further inquiry, not to fully develop and defend the suggestions below. By way of outcome, I briefly want to demonstrate how mimetic and conventional criticisms could work together to achieve a clarity to textural interpretation. I am working here with Finkelstein and Silberman’s (2001:149-318) historical rehearsal. Their proposition is not definitive, but it offers a high degree of probability based on the current collection of data. Some of the conclusions from the mimetic exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 lend themselves to a plausible scenario of the ‘reformation’ movement in seventh century BCE Palestine centered in Jerusalem.

As mentioned above, sensitivity to surviving sacrificial expulsion was already instilled in the distant memories of certain inhabitants of the Levant during the early Iron Age. This sensitivity was aggravated by key events within Israel’s history in the land where the problem of ‘sacrificial arrangements’ reared its head. These seminal events were generated by a combination of external and internal events. In mimetic fashion, the internal factors are more critical.

Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:230, 235, 238) cast doubt that a golden age of a united Israelite kingdom under Solomon existed to the extent portrayed in the biblical record. There is plenty of evidence that an extensive kingdom did flourish in Northern Palestine in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE that were distinctively ‘Israelite.’ If this be accepted, then Judah had also been a ‘younger brother’ for a long time. Judah was for centuries placed in a similar situation as we have in the stories of Abraham and Abimelech—having to negotiate sacrificial arrangements from a more precarious position. Thus, in many ways the story of the patriarchs and the Hebrews in Egypt is not just (and maybe not predominantly) an issue between a community and foreigners, but an issue between rival brothers. This is, to remind, the way Genesis sets up the scenario. There are the descendants of Abel and those of Cain. They definitively collide on Paschal night and at the Reed Sea.

At the height of Israelite dominance during the Omride dynasty (876-843 BCE), Judah (or at least the Davidic line in Jerusalem) had a near death experience.<sup>20</sup> It started with the sacrificial marriage arrangement between Jehoshaphat's son and a daughter of the Omride dynasty. The effects proved disastrous. Judah relinquished their most prosperous territories, and the worship of Baal was instilled in Jerusalem. When Jehu's coup massacred the line of Omri, Athaliah took measures to ensure her own survival by having the Davidic line massacred (2 Kings 11:1). A sole survivor, Joash, clandestinely escaped the purge and later was installed as king.<sup>21</sup>

Several critical sensitivities were heightened through this. For one, sacrificial marriage arrangements proved disastrous, and could have easily spawned a vision for an alternative. Also, the ruthless internal violence involved in the sacrificial arrangements of kings and coups, and its associations with 'sacrificial ideologies' or theologies were seriously questioned. The associations of royal cults with bloody exchanges of rivalry were being fused.<sup>22</sup> Hence, prophets arose who began to preach the folly of sacrifice to 'gods' as in the infamous showdown with Elijah and the priests of Baal.

The land of Israel enjoyed a brief period of relative prosperity and independence during the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II before the storm clouds of Assyria began to loom heavily upon the land. The sacrificial sensitivities against sacrificial abuse and its accompanying social oppression intensified prophetic activity, Amos and Hosea in the north and Micah and Isaiah in the south. The sacrificial arrangements of the royal cult only seemed to exacerbate mimetic violence, not alleviate it. In particular, this awareness was emerging from *within* the community.

The fall of Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians further heightened a sense of futility with the scapegoat mechanism. The 'sacrificial arrangements' of royal authority based on the massacre of bloodlines and its accompanying hubris accelerated a sacrificial crisis that went unrestrained. The frightful destruction of Samaria sent shockwaves through the land. It is in the shadows of Israel's catastrophic end that our current Bible takes its unique shape (Finkelstein and Silberman, 2001:229). It takes on a Judeo-centric flavor from the start.

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<sup>20</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:232)

<sup>21</sup> The story has remarkable similarities to Miriam and Moses.

<sup>22</sup> This correlation between idolatry and violence is commonly overlooked.

After two stormy centuries the kingdom of Israel had come to a catastrophic end. Finklestein and Silberman (2001:222) assert that a significant population of Israelites still inhabited the region after the fall of Samaria while others migrated south. This new population of survivors ‘played a major role in the foreign policy of Judah and in the development of the biblical ideology of the seventh century BCE.’ Assyria was clearly a ruthless aggressor, but amazingly enough, many in the land only asked an *internal* question. How did we cause this? Girard (1982:99-101) points out that this is the beginning of religious thought. It is intermediary because it begins to question the logic of the crowd and assigns a collective guilt or responsibility for violence. Certainly, the acceleration of bloody rivalries that enveloped Samaria toward its demise was cause for a profound interrogation of conventional structures for establishing communal stability.

This event instantly transformed Judah and Jerusalem into a unifying force in the region. It proved a powerful impetus for a reformation fueled by those who in various ways had *come out of a sacrificial crisis* where the usual mechanisms for restoration of peace had collapsed. The conventional systems for restraining an all out exchange of reciprocal violence had proved ineffectual. Fueled by the collective experience of surviving a sacrificial meltdown, visions of an alternative society with an alternative sacrificial view of their God was gaining momentum. At the foundation of this vision was a profound sense of having ‘come out’ from the disaster of the past. Along with this came great hopes of a messiah king, Hezekiah, who would usher in a revolutionary kingdom. The associations of bloody coups and many gods who fed off such carnage fueled a vision of a single god who transcended the violent and jealous rivalries that engulfed communities (both heavenly and earthly). Thus a ‘Yahweh only’ movement gained momentum. The prophet Isaiah (Isa 1-12) was probably a major advocate.

Despite the rather myopic version presented in the Bible, Finklestein and Silberman (2001:262-263) assert that the Hezekiah’s resistance to Assyria was thoroughly disastrous. The destruction of the land by Sennacherib’s campaign was horrific in its thoroughness and veracity.<sup>23</sup> Once again, this emerging people had a frightful experienced of complete devastation. The hope of a

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<sup>23</sup> Destruction of Lachish bears ample witness with a mass burial of over 1500 men, women , and children discovered in a cave west of the city (Finklestein and Silberman, 2001:263).

ruler who could lead a people toward an alternative set of premises for addressing the problem of reciprocal violence was dashed by royal hubris.

More than likely, the disaster caused the already skeptical rural communities to return to ‘ole time religion,’ and this is what is behind the idolatrous relapse of Manasseh’s reign. The ‘Yahweh only’ experiment failed, so it was time to go back to what had always worked. The long and prosperous reign of Manasseh appeared to validate that claim. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:271-273) suggest that a kind of pre-monarchical less centralized movement surged during this time as evidenced by the ‘problem’ of high places. In other words, there was a return to a more localized ritual, based more on territorial occupation of clans. Equally prominent was skepticism over the ‘wisdom’ of kings that somehow seemed to escalate rather than alleviate violence. Most certainly, there was a return to the kind of ‘sacrificial arrangements’ between neighboring clans. This quite possibly included sacrificing children.

At the death of Manasseh and because of the decline of the Assyrian domination, the ‘Yahweh only’ ideology once again came to prominence in Jerusalem with the coronation of Josiah. The attempt to eradicate the ‘ole time religion’ only superficially seemed successful as the prophets Jeremiah (Jer 5:19) and Ezekiel (Ez 8) bear witness. The Yahweh only movement itself seemed fractious. The vision was split between those who envisioned the glorious triumph of Yahweh and equated it with empire building. Others like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, all victims of the community’s sacrificial resolution envisioned a God and a people who understood by experience that the ‘solution’ of reciprocal violence was itself a problem.

Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:284) believe much of the Pentateuch was written within the time span of Hezekiah to Josiah and believe it is not possible to pinpoint exactly which parts. Much of the image of ‘heroes’ of the past are painted in a Hezekiahesque or Josiahesque fashion. Both of these heroes, however, suffered bitter failure. We can return here for a moment to Girard’s (1985a:167) phases of sacrificial revelation: ‘collapse of hope,’ ‘skeptical and suspicious discouragement,’ a ‘revelation that clearly failed,’ and ‘the destructive moment of suspicious criticism.’

The Deuteronomistic emphasis on law demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to ‘sacrificial reform’ during Josiah’s reform.<sup>24</sup> Again, this development had a long background, and from where? Where were these sensitivities developed? Law was beginning to be viewed as a way to mitigate rival tensions and move away from sacrifice as a way to restrain violence. A late seventh century potshard was found with Hebrew writing demanding justice and an appeal to law. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:286) suggest from this: ‘A demand of rights by one individual against another is a revolutionary step away from the traditional Near Eastern reliance solely on the power of the clan to ensure its members’ communal rights.’

From a mimetic standpoint, this sensitivity must have come from a growing awareness of the victim of sacrifice, one that grew in questioning the sacrificial logic of the community.

In Finkelstein and Silberman’s (2001:271) rehearsal of the seventh century, they paint a nearly opposite version of events than the Bible, making the Deuteronomistic perspective or Yahweh alone movement appear extreme. They never venture, however, into what motivated the Yahweh only movement. This I suggest is a critical question. Why is the biblical perspective so adamantly opposed to other sacrificial cultic systems, both royal and rural? It may be that it comes from a collective consciousness of having been the surviving victims of the ‘mythical structure.’ Survival is a key word. It is as the Psalmist sometimes appeals; who can proclaim the mighty works of God from *Sheol*? It is the survivors of expulsion who most profoundly and critically contemplate the meaning of ritualistic expulsion. It is this kind of ‘retrospective thinking’ that begins to question the ‘utility’ of social structures of cohesion.

Finkelstein and Silberman do not and as archeologists cannot get to the underlying causes for a group, the Yahweh only group, to so steadfastly stick to their agenda, despite all setbacks. As many late modern commentators do, they suggest that the central issue is the classic culprit of control and power. This argument makes sense when the Yahweh only group is at the height of its power and control. Ironically, the insistence of Yahweh’s supremacy only intensifies when they are not in power and in control. Something else or at least alongside this must be at work.

The objection here might be to insist that exploring underlying motivations is a speculative enterprise. In a sense, however, we revert into mythical thinking (and sacrificial arrangements)

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<sup>24</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:285-286).

when we refuse to explore the ‘why’ question. This is precisely what we do with our violence. We never question its origins. The genesis of our violent communal behavior must be spoken of in mythical terms. We don’t explore what is generating our violence both individually and corporately. We only develop more and more sophisticated techniques for policing it and containing it, all the while and always regressing to its uncomfortable necessity. We send our violent males to ‘anger management’ classes and refuse to make the obvious connection that victims inevitably become victimizers. From there, they can easily become scapegoats, always keeping the collective violence from exposure.

### **7.3 Implications of Mimetic Theory on Old Testament Theology and Exegesis**

The current consensus on the nature and role of Old Testament theology and the historical-critical task is clear—there is no consensus. Collins (2005:4) defines it as ‘non-foundationalism,’ and views Brueggemann as one who has most successfully attempted a ‘sweeping formulation’ of a promising approach. For Brueggemann (1997:62): ‘The great interpretive reality is that there is no court of appeal behind these many different readings. There is no court of appeal beyond the text itself...The postmodern situation is signified precisely by the disappearance of any common universal assumption at the outset of reading.’ Collins’ (2005:11) assessment declares the decline of biblical theology—defined as a descriptive enterprise to explain the meaning of a text to the present (Collins, 2005:3)—precisely because of its inability to reconcile the ‘perennial tension’ between theology and the historical method. He concedes that the current trend is toward literary criticism.

Middleton (2005:36) reiterates the interpretive problems involved when certain Old Testament texts are weighted down by a long history of interpretations and doctrinal formulations. Similar to the discussion of theory and method in Chapter 3, Middleton (2005:36) confirms that subjectivity is an ‘undeniable’ reality. There is no more ‘viable hermeneutical alternative waiting in the wings.’

Middleton (2005:37) concedes that the search for a more ‘objective’ hermeneutical approach still tempts the scholarly community: ‘This aspiration, though now widely recognized as unattainable (and illegitimate), still exercises a profoundly unsettling influence over the sense of epistemic

security among many across a wide spectrum of disciplines in the contemporary academy.’ Middleton (2005:37) suggests that the lack of objectivity should not be resisted; instead, subjectivity should be viewed as a positive asset to the interpretive enterprise. Our predilections enable us to set perimeters around what an interpreter considers.

I echo Middleton’s (2005:36) assessment of millennial exegesis that it is still ‘in massive ferment, with a plurality of conflicting paradigms in evidence, where much is up for grabs.’ This is equally acute to attempts at finding the ‘context’ for texts such as Genesis 1 and 2. The current exegetical work attempted to broadly ‘cast the net’ within Ancient Near Eastern parallels similarly to Middleton (2005:36). In other words, the tendency is swinging back to a neo-comparative methodology. This interpretive paradigm is still fraught with difficulties, requiring ‘hypothetical reconstruction of the sociohistorical context.’

Middleton (2005:38) speaks of the ‘dialogical character’ of interpretation where ‘the meaning of a text does not strictly speaking reside in the text at all, but is always a product of an encounter between the text and an interpretive community.’ Most certainly, mimetic interpretation should be included as one of many interpretive communities who ‘work with preconceptions and paradigms that both limit and enable what meanings they see.’

This ends up similarly to the discussion of ritual. It is similar to saying the meaning of a ritual does not reside in the ritual, but only in the encounter with the ritual. Thus we are back to the problem of who exactly is determining the meaning of the ritual. If this be the posture of many, it is curious why Girard is accused of reading our modernity on the ancient world. Surely, this would be acceptable, and in a real sense, Girard ought to be applauded for it. This kind of thinking is a regress into mythological thinking which ultimately dodges the issue of what creates or generates the ritual or text in the first place.

Part of the way forward, Middleton (2005:39) suggests, is the ability to ‘cross current disciplinary boundaries.’ Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:21) reiterate the need for a more collegial approach to historical and literary inquiries and the end of ‘living in separate intellectual worlds.’ One need only look at a current addition of *Contagion* to see how effective Girard’s theory is in this regard. It has a broad academic appeal.

I agree with Middleton (2005:40). Not all hermeneutical approaches are equally valid. Hopefully, this work has demonstrated care in respecting the ‘alterity of the text.’ I did not recklessly abandon the careful scholarship built up over the last century, nor would Girard.

Middleton (2005:41) suggests that any interpreter must be willing to listen to the text and be impacted by its message. Perhaps the uncomfortable assertion of Girard which demands a decision on the part of the interpreter is that the text itself, like ritual, is not ‘above board’ in all respects. I can conceal just as easily as it can reveal, and part of the hermeneutical task is to be vigilante in this regard. Mimetic theory challenges any interpretive reading to be keenly aware of what the text or the ritual wants us to understand or embrace and what it *does not* want us to see. A mimetic approach presents an irony to those who assert the unquestioned givenness of the text or ritual as the only viable interpretive foundation. It lends itself to a ‘mythical’ reading of the text. For one, we become obligated to affirm the text or ritual above all else. We in effect become theatre critics, only focused on the mastery of the presentation. Even more so, the more disturbing aspects of overt expressions of human violence are ignored or explained away as rhetorical devices. Meyers’ (2005:38) interpretation of the slaughter of Hebrew children in Exodus 1 reveals the kind of ‘theological conundrum’ Levinson (1993:6) insists scholars get into when dealing with the hideous violence so prevalent in the Bible and myth. Meyers, following Greenberg, reduces the veracity of the verse on infanticide to a ‘literary and not literal’ understanding. It is just added for affect. Such interpretations fail by presuming that the primary purpose of the writers is to be good novelists. Even more so, however, this is the kind of reading we are compelled to offer when we can’t reconcile or don’t understand how the violent impulses found in ancient literature are operating. Levinson is not a Girardian, but he forces the reading of disturbing violent biblical passages, such as Ez 20:25-26, to be dealt with straight away without imposing a theory of ‘double causality’ on the text. It is now those who have little to do with the Bible or who are antagonistic towards it who most readily notice the sheer amount of violent episodes (and oft times grotesque justifications of it) within it.

Levinson shares with Girard a central interpretive premise. The biblical narratives are full of violent depictions because at a fundamental level it is attempting to deal with the most profoundly disturbing effects of rivalry and reciprocal violence. Habakkuk’s (Hab 1:1-4) lament reverberates throughout the Bible:



How long O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

Now is the time to ask how it is that modern interpreters of ancient literature have so systematically glossed over its violent depictions especially when it comes to narratives of origins? How is it that Mesopotamians, for example, were compelled to depict the origins of their culture and king in terms of a grotesque dismemberment? To put it in modern terms, why is it that in a culture which repeatedly negates universal ‘foundations’ universally accepts the necessity of violence?

As discussed in this thesis, one objection to Girard is that he projects the condition of the late modern dilemma on the ancient world.

I suggest, however, that we consider the proposition in reverse (which is how I believe Girard is looking at it). The late modern world is reverting back into mythological thinking. The fault lies with modernism itself, asserts Girard (1999:160), for erroneously seeking ‘the absolute separation of the archaic and the modern.’<sup>25</sup> Our violence is diverted away from our detection by a new god of the collective—technology.

Ellul (1990:xvi) postulates that the onslaught of technique in the late modern era essentially functions to ‘bluff’ us into systematic participation without critical awareness of the implications of such involvement. Ellul asserts that there is no true ‘discourse on technique’ that envelops us and beckons our unanimous involvement. Ellul’s (1990:xvi) description of the technological bluff sounds remarkably similar to the discussion of ritual in Chapter 3 of this work:

Why do I say bluff?...It is because technique is regarded in advance as the only solution to collective problems or individual problems, and because at the same time it is seen as the only chance for progress and development in every society. There is bluff here because the effective possibilities are multiplied a hundredfold in such discussions and the *negative aspects are radically concealed*. But the bluff is the *unavowed* last resort into a technique of *explicit and avowed* last resort. It also causes us to live in a world of diversion and illusion which goes far beyond that of ten years ago. It finally sucks us into this world by banishing all our ancient reservations and fears.

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<sup>25</sup> Wallace (1989:322) concludes something similar.

Like ritual, technique beckons our unanimous acquiescence by sheer participation in it. There is no need for critical discourse on the subject. There is no such thing as ‘technology,’ a critical discourse on technique. As Eagleton (2003:72) has remarked, we are ironically moving towards our greatest universal foundation all in the name of no universal foundation.

There will always be those who will find mimetic interpretation intriguing, yet are uncomfortable with fully embracing it. Girard’s theory will not find broad acceptance. Perhaps this is the way it needs to be. The effectiveness of Girard’s insight will probably be more in the way it seeps into an array of disciplines and domains without being labeled as such and even in emphatic negations of it.

To what extent am I or am becoming a ‘Girardian?’ It is quite easy to be absorbed in Girardian thinking. In fact, the more one is willing to contemplate the full force of his ideas, the easier it is to see how much makes sense.

The true and radical dividing line is simply this—who is responsible for human violence? Girard’s emphatic answer is ‘us.’ And to this, I would say that I am a ‘Girardian’ regardless of what aspects of his theory I find difficult.

The true struggle over our violent nature as a species only happens when we cannot find or produce a convincing scapegoat. If one has already experienced the process as a victim, one is not terribly inclined to willingly succumb to the group think again. Besides we are running out of room to expel someone to the outside. We don’t have acquiescing victims or places to expel them.

My home in Denver Colorado was once considered the ‘Wild West.’ Here individuals, many of whom were rejects of society on the established eastern coast of America, could escape the logic of the crowd and forge a ‘to each his own’ identity. Now, however, that ‘rugged individualism’ is convulsing under the looming cloud of the encroaching ‘crowd.’ There is nowhere to go now. There is no place to fly away.

My suspicion is that ‘Ancient Israel’ for various reasons and circumstance came to a similar situation. They came to a point where there was nowhere else to turn. There were no more scapegoats. They had successfully victimized each other and consequently were victimized by

others. They came to a point where they were forced to explore the very fundamental aspects of ‘getting along’ in order to survive.

We are coming to that same point.

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