

Three Sides of the Cross:

Reflections on Theology and Violence

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I *Crucifix*: The Cross We Can't See

The Source Code of Our Nature: Mimesis and the Roots of Violence

1. The Good News in Mimetic Theory

- a. The breakthrough of imitation: the origin of culture

Baby on the counter top

- b. The breakthrough of religion

Transcendent models

....and the Bad News in Mimetic Theory

- a. Acquisitive imitation: the threat to culture

Children in the play room

- b. Social crisis: destructive contagion

[The Garden and the Flood]

2. The Fall of Religion: Sacrificial Crisis and the Scapegoating Solution

The intersection of individual violence and collective violence

“May we hate with a single soul” –Aeschylus, *Eumenides*

[Job]

3. The God of Victims

These are obviously troubled texts, but what troubles them is the truth.”

–Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*

[Joseph, the Psalms, Jonah]

II *Christ in Glory*: The Cross We Can't Forget

1. Paradox of the Passion Narratives: Saved by What Shouldn't Happen

- a. Sacrifice—the good bad thing

Mark 14:21 on Judas “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.”

- b. Paradox in the criticism of Christianity: a bad myth

2. Atonement and Redemptive Violence in the Passion

- a. Jesus' persecutors affirm the reconciling value of his death
 - 1. Caiaphas (John 11:50)
 - 2. Herod and Pilate (Luke 23:12)
- 3. Double Vision in the Gospels
 - a. Sacrifice Revealed
 - 1. Role of the crowd, abandonment of the disciples, falseness of accusations, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," the centurion at the cross, disciples at the Last Supper ("Surely not I, Lord?" Matthew 26:22)
 - b. Sacrificed Reversed
 - 1. Resurrection as vindication of the victim
 - 2. Sacrifice to End Sacrifice

III *Empty Cross: The Cross the Faith Keeps Empty*

- 1. Early Christian Understanding
 - a. The Conversion of Paul: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"
 - b. Holy Spirit—Paraclete
 - c. Images to Interpret the Cross: stories of those delivered from death and violence
 - 1. Isaac and Abraham
 - 2. Susanna
 - 3. Daniel
 - 4. Jonah
 - 5. Job
- 2. Positive Mimesis
 - a. Lord's Supper-- "This is my body" "This is my blood"
 - b. "Do This in Remembrance of Me"
 - 1. An example: Uncle Tom's Cabin
- 4. No More of This
 - a. Summary by Hymn

Further Reference: S. Mark Heim *Saved From Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*; Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*; James Williams ed., *The Girard Reader*; Dennis Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*; Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross-Examinations*