



## Bringing peace through destabilization: A Christian answer to the culture of violence<sup>1</sup>

Trazendo paz através da desestabilização: uma resposta cristã à cultura da violência

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**Abstract:** The reciprocal nature of violence and its importance in maintaining the social and cultural order have been discussed among scholars interested in René Girard’s “mimetic theory” for many years. Along the process more attention has been paid to the way violence escalates than to the possibility of stopping it from spreading. This article aims at discussing the possible way out of the vicious circle of violence. Firstly, on the level of the interdisciplinary theory the topic is systemized and presented. Secondly, the theological accuracy of Girard’s intuitions is analyzed with the help of Raymund Schwager’s pneumatological concepts. The conclusion is that although the mimetic theory seems to lead to a pessimistic conviction about man’s violent nature, it is possible to overcome violence, but it prompts unwelcome destabilization in the world.

**Keywords:** Violence. Peace. Holy Spirit. René Girard. Raymund Schwager.

**Resumo:** A natureza recíproca da violência e a sua importância na manutenção da ordem social e cultural têm sido discutida entre os estudiosos interessados na “teoria mimética” de René Girard durante muitos anos. Ao longo do processo, prestou-se mais atenção à forma como a violência se intensifica do que à possibilidade de impedir que ela se espalhe. O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a possível saída do círculo vicioso da violência. Em primeiro lugar, no nível da teoria interdisciplinar o tema é sistematizado e apresentado. Em segundo lugar, a exatidão teológica das intuições de Girard é analisada com a ajuda dos conceitos pneumatológicos de Raymund Schwager. A conclusão é que embora a teoria mimética pareça levar a uma convicção pessimista sobre a natureza violenta do homem, é possível superar a violência, mas ela inicia uma desestabilização indesejável no mundo.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência. Paz. Espírito Santo. René Girard. Raymund Schwager.

### Introduction

The way things have been changing on the scene of international affairs recently seems to give us a new perspective on what has happened after 9/11. More and more people ask themselves if the path the West took twenty years ago was the best in the given situation. The sober comments on our legacy let us no longer think or talk with the conviction of our righteousness: “America’s

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turn to torture” or “fruitless, costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which only made the terrorists stronger than they were twenty years ago” being just two of them. Why hasn’t it worked the way it ought to?

The aim of this article is not to discuss politics but the reciprocal nature of violence and a possible way out of its vicious circle. Just a quick analysis of what has happened at the very beginning, right after 9/11, indicates patterns of people’s thought and behavior known from the mimetic theory: a belief in violence as the only hope for America expressed by the then-chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Joe Biden; finding an innocent victim, a scapegoat in the person of Virginia Buckingham, who oversaw Logan International Airport in Boston, or a conviction of ordinary people about being in a state of all-out war.<sup>3</sup>

For many years French scholar René Girard has been developing his interdisciplinary theory of mimetic desire, a desire which merges into resentment and violence, which in turn can eventually lead to total destruction. What is riveting about the theory are the modern anthropological terms brought together with biblical categories. Along the development process of the theory, scholars representing a wide range of disciplines, induced by its explanatory potential, have been engaged in a dialog concerning the origins of violence and the phenomenon of the “scapegoat mechanism” constituting cultures and their institutions. It seems though that more attention has been paid to the way violence spreads than to the way one could try to stop this process.

Since the mimetic theory attributes a central role in deconstructing the fabric of violence both on its institutional and personal level to the Judeo-Christian tradition, I would like to spotlight parts of Girard’s work regarding the possibility of peace-making and then turn to the theological legacy of one of the first scholars interested in the dialog with the theory and probably the most important interlocutor of René Girard, Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager SJ, in order to systemize theoretical concepts together with their correlates on a theological level. Both

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<sup>3</sup> LOZADA, Carlos. 9/11 was a test: The Books of the Last Two Decades Show how America Failed. *The Washington Post*. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/interactive/2021/911-books-american-values/>>. Accessed on: October 8, 2021. See also: SHAFY, Samiha. Aus der Traum. *Die Zeit*. Available at: <<https://www.zeit.de/2021/34/afghanistan-westmaechte-hindukusch-intervention-einsatz-scheitern-taliban>>. Accessed on: October 8, 2021; BARRY, Ellen. After the 9/11 Attacks, Boston Found a Focus for Its Anger. *New York Times*. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/12/us/virginia-buckingham-boston-911.html>>. Accessed on: October 8, 2021; LANDLER, Mark. 20 Years On, the War on Terror Grinds Along, With No End in Sight. *New York Times*. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/world/europe/war-on-terror-bush-biden-qaeda.html>>. Accessed on: October 8, 2021.



perspectives should show us the fruitfulness of Girard’s theory in the context of theological discourse on the one hand and serve as a potential stimulus for all those interested in peace-making on the other.

First, I would like to briefly introduce the concept of mimetic theory paying special attention to those parts of it which would be very important to understand the following parts of the article.

### **The Apocalypse as our fate?**

During his research in literature, Girard starts to notice things which would eventually lead him to the construction and development of a new interdisciplinary theory. The principal idea is that our desires are mimetic, they do not happen spontaneously. By desiring something I, in fact, imitate another who becomes my model – his or her desires become mine. If there is a chance of a direct interaction between my model and myself (Girard calls it an “internal mediation”), we are going to become rivals. The object of our desire becomes more and more desirable for both of us, which in turn leads to an increase of tension between us.<sup>4</sup> Things differ in the case of the so-called “external mediation.” As my model lives out of my reach – far away in space or time – there is virtually no chance for us of becoming rivals. Going back to the first instance – rivalry leads to resentment and eventually to violence. Both my model and I are becoming alike in our desire to destroy each other. The initial object of our desire disappears, because in our minds there is only one thing: retaliation as an answer to violence.<sup>5</sup>

A society where more such violent duels occur starts to suffer a “mimetic crisis”: communal bonds dissolve and the group faces a possibility of being totally destroyed not by some enemy from the outside but by the fever of reciprocal violence within it. (One has to bear in mind that René Girard develops his theory for archaic societies in the first place.)<sup>6</sup> A way out, according to the French scholar, is finding a “scapegoat” in order to blame her or him for being the reason for the whole crisis and eventually murdering them. Those involved in the mimetic duels suddenly feel relief from all the tension and understand themselves now as allies in relation to the murdered

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<sup>4</sup> GIRARD, René. *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014. p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> GIRARD, René; ROCHA, João Cezar de Castro; ANTONELLO, Pierpaolo. *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*. London: Continuum, 2007. p. 56 ff.

<sup>6</sup> GIRARD, René. CHANTRE, Benoît. *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010. p. 198.



victim. In that way the innocent victim brings peace to society, which can go on living its normal life until the next mimetic crisis.<sup>7</sup>

The “scapegoat mechanism,” which Girard surprisingly associates with the biblical term “Satan,” consisted of spontaneous occurrences, which took place at the dawn of humanity. This mechanism is a stabilization factor par excellence: because it worked very well, societies have been turning to it repeatedly, blaming the scapegoats for anything that could threaten the maintenance of peace in the group. More than that, with time innocent victims were sacrificed in advance, in order to protect the group against any possible threat. Murder becomes a ritual and rituals are germs of early religions. Along the process society (unconsciously) covers the fact of the murder and starts to worship its victim as a new deity, who has the power to bring peace to the group in the middle of the mimetic crisis. People repeat telling stories about turbulent events and their resolution from the new perspective which leads to the formation of myths. In a way, these stories are powerful because they make people experience – to some extent – all the emotions of rituals.<sup>8</sup> Even if from an “amiss perspective” of persecutors, these stories play a crucial role in social life, stabilizing it. So, after some time, sacrificing people disappears in favor of myths alone, which are told in a more sophisticated manner, e.g. Greek tragedy with its plot corresponding to the pattern of the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>9</sup>

According to Girard, the turning point in history, when it comes to the recurring sequence of scapegoat-resolution in myths and in religious texts, is the Bible. Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition, as the first source that has a substantial impact on cultures, tells the stories of communities in crisis and their victims, not from the persecutors’ point of view though. What is different in the Bible is the recurrent proclamation of the innocence of the victim. Because of the influence which Judeo-Christian tradition has on the world, the scapegoat mechanism cannot work properly anymore –in this way Judeo-Christian tradition brings a destabilization factor into human history. This is a very uncomfortable fact for this world, because institutional and social life has the scapegoat resolution at its core:

Christianity speaks unceasingly of the “powers of this world,” which are the institutions born of the sacrificial system. [...] The Powers and Principalities are always presented as united against Christ: in my opinion this isn’t some historical indication, it’s a definition.

<sup>7</sup> GIRARD, René; OUGHOURLIAN, Jean-Michel; LEFORT, Guy. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987. p. 23 ff.

<sup>8</sup> GIRARD, 2014, p. 19ff.

<sup>9</sup> GIRARD; CHANTRE, 2010, p. 62.



These institutions are based on the victimary mechanism. The theory of the Powers and Principalities is part of the earthly order and the violence that constitutes it.<sup>10</sup>

Once the institutional suppressing power is gone, an uncontrolled violence threatens to get unleashed. Unfortunately, people don't want to give up violence. Instead, they would stick to the old methods deluding themselves that violence can fix our problems. The French scholar understands apocalyptic biblical visions as an image of the escalation of not divine but human violence which leads to total destruction. Destabilization is not the only thing the Judeo-Christian tradition has to offer though; it aims rather at a peaceful resolution. (Which should be presented in the following parts of this article.) In that sense, there is a substantial difference between the destabilization brought by the Bible and an anarchistic rebellion against any established order or ruling power.<sup>11</sup>

Are humans doomed to steady violent confrontation? Girard feels rather pessimistic about human ability to avoid conflicts altogether, nevertheless he claims that there is a hope for us, and it is linked with the person of Paraclete. In the following, the scholar's take on the problem shall be presented.

### **“Paráklētos” by Girard**

After having read the first three hundred pages of “Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde” (one of the most important works of René Girard, which became a national bestseller in France)<sup>12</sup>, Raymund Schwager sent a letter to the French author, where he expresses his disappointment for finding nothing about the Holy Spirit: “You never mention the Spirit in your analysis. But I think this theme is very important from the perspective that you have opened up.”<sup>13</sup> It is true that in the whole mimetic theory – and especially in the first few works of Girard – there are not so many places altogether where the person of the Holy Spirit is directly mentioned.

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<sup>10</sup> GIRARD, 2014, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> GIRARD, 2010, p. 197 ff.

<sup>12</sup> GIRARD, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> COWDELL, Scott; FLEMING, Chris; HODGE, Joel; MOOSBRUGGER, Mathias (Eds.). *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence 1974-1991*. Transl. Chris Fleming, Sheelah Treflé Hidden. New York: Bloomsbury Academic USA, 2018. p. 52. Originally, the correspondence between Girard and Schwager was edited in a French-German version and is a part of Schwager's collected papers, which were published as a book series: SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Józef Niewiadomski. Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder Verlag, 2014-2018.



However, it would be a huge mistake to claim that the Holy Spirit plays only a secondary role in the mimetic theory.<sup>14</sup>

When the theme of the Holy Spirit occurs in Girard, it most commonly happens while talking about the Paraclete. In the Christian tradition the Greek word “paráklētos” normally refers to the Holy Spirit. But for Girard it is Jesus who always comes first. And so, Jesus would be for him the first and the Holy Spirit the “second Paraclete.”<sup>15</sup> In John 14:16 Jesus says that the Father would give the disciples “another Advocate,” the Spirit of truth. Girard asks the question: If the Spirit is “the another,” then who would be the first Advocate? He concludes that it is obviously Jesus. This idea harmonizes with Girard’s way of argumentation from the etymological point of view. He often refers to the meaning of the word “paráklētos,” which is “lawyer” or “advocate for the defense.”<sup>16</sup> That leads him to the conclusion that the Paraclete is the one who takes the victims’ side. But since there are two periods in this process, and two different persons who take up the role of the defender, Girard applies the title “paráklētos” to both of them, to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

What is the specific role of the Paraclete? As men do not want to recognize the Revelation brought by Jesus, humanity remains under the authority of the mimetic mechanism, which is Satan. Therefore, it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to come.<sup>18</sup> His task is to disclose to every single human being what has already been revealed by Jesus and, therefore, lead to a further destabilization of the archaic social structures based on the scapegoat resolution. Girard expresses this with the words: “When Christ has gone, the Spirit of Truth, the second Paraclete, will make the light that is already in the world shine for all men, though man will do everything in his power not to see it.”<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, Girard speaks about the Holy Spirit who – along with Jesus – stands in opposition to Satan. The Spirit is the second Paraclete that is the “defender of the victim.” His task is to continue the work of Jesus by disclosing the truth about the victim mechanism to every single human person.

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<sup>14</sup> COWDELL, 2018, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> GIRARD, René. *The Scapegoat*. Transl. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> COWDELL, 2018, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> GIRARD, 2014, p. 124.

<sup>18</sup> GIRARD, René. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Transl. James Williams. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001. p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> GIRARD, 1986, p. 208.



## The way out of the culture of violence

Ironically, the revelation brought by the Judeo-Christian tradition led to an escalation of the scapegoat resolution because of the lack of the victimization's efficiency on the one hand and of the stubborn human attachment to it on the other. Because of the new capabilities of men in terms of all-out war, further progress of the scapegoat resolution leads humankind to total destruction. According to Girard, biblical apocalyptic visions depict just that. Nevertheless, the battle between the Accuser and the Paraclete is going on and is still not settled. The French scholar says that we have to keep warning all of humanity that total destruction is nowadays a real possibility. There is no excuse for not undertaking that preventive action. Is this all we can do in order to change our fate? Can we consciously choose to avoid violence in a consistent manner?<sup>20</sup>

From Girard's point of view, the only way to escape violence is through the positive mimesis – imitating our models in what is good.<sup>21</sup> Now, for the purpose of this article I would like to distinguish three different modes of it, two of them coming directly from Girard, the third one found in Mark Anspach. This analysis of how the positive mimesis can occur in our lives is going to serve as a basis for an attempt at an identification of the work of the Holy Spirit on the theological level.

In his interview to Michel Treguer, René Girard interprets the biblical scene about the woman caught in adultery, Luke 7:36-50. People do not stone the woman because there was someone at the beginning (it was the eldest) who chose not to. So, the good thing, which in that case is not stoning a woman, happens through mimetic behavior. This mode – it can be called the “unconscious positive mimesis” – consists in doing good things just because others do them, without any internal conscious motivation for doing that. Everybody in the group behaves in the same manner, even the first ones are not special – all they do is just imitate Jesus:

All the people who would have thrown stones if there had been someone to throw the first one are mimetically induced not to throw any. For most of them, the real reason for nonviolence isn't stern self-examination or renunciation of violence: it's mimetic desire, as usual. There is always mimetic escalation in one direction or another.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> GIRARD, 2010, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> GIRARD, 2007, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> GIRARD, 2014, p. 125.





The second mode of positive mimesis, which I would like to call the “conscious positive mimesis,” consists basically in trying to adopt a “paracletian” way of life. This conscious way of becoming an obstacle to Satan understood as the whole “mimetic mechanism” rests on three steps we have to make. At first, we have to realize that the scapegoat mechanism is real and understand that we are a part of it. The second step is to recognize our role not as a victim but as a persecutor. As uncomfortable as it is, this part of the process is essential. Having to choose between being a victim or a persecutor presupposes a mimetic conflict which must have already begun. If we are in position to understand the reality of a scapegoat mechanism, we realize that we have to be embroiled in mimetic conflicts. The problem is that each party involved in a mimetic duel differently identifies the nature of individual terms in the sequence of retaliations. There is no agreement on the beginning and, consequently, there cannot be an agreement on whether my current reprisal is a retribution or an offensive provocation. The only way to step out of this cursed cycle is to “turn the other cheek” – recognize our role as a persecutor. The final step, which naturally results from the previous two, would be choosing the first Paraclete, Jesus, as our ultimate model of imitation. Girard argues:

It is not due to inflated self-love that he asks us to imitate him; it is to turn us away from mimetic rivalries. [...] Why does Jesus regard the Father and himself as the best model for all humans? Because neither the Father nor the Son desires greedily, egotistically.<sup>23</sup>

In my view, there is also another distinctive, third mode of positive mimesis. Explaining the way in which a negative reciprocity can be transformed into a “positive reciprocity of gift-giving,” Mark Anspach shows an example of Diomedes and Glaucus from the “Iliad.” These two warriors decide on the battlefield not to fight. The key role in making the decision is played by the vision of their peaceful future depicted by Diomedes:

Rather than proclaiming “the battle between us will not take place,” or urging his adversary to choose peace, he *shows* him what their peaceful relationship will look like. The more real he can make this future seem to the other, the more likely it is to become a reality.<sup>24</sup>

At first glance, the decision made by Glaucus – to lay down his spear just like Diomedes wants to do – is nothing else but mimetic behavior aiming at possessing the same thing as my

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<sup>23</sup> GIRARD, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> ANSPACH, Mark. *Vengeance in Reverse: The Tangled Loops of Violence, Myth, and Madness*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017. p. 36.





model has or would like to have. The difference in this case, however, consists in switching perspectives – from “me against you” to “me and you together.” This mode of mimesis aims at participation, which makes it dramatically different from mimesis aiming at taking the place of the model. Since, as Anspach notes, the announcement of a peaceful exchange functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy, I would like to call this mode of mimesis a “prophetic positive mimesis.”<sup>25</sup>

Having categorized the main instances of positive mimesis, let us now change our perspective and see the problem of stepping out of the circle of violence from a theological point of view.

### **A new awareness and the clash of cultures**

Historically speaking, Schwager formed a great deal of his theology of the Holy Spirit before 1980. Some of the main thoughts of his pneumatology are found in his book “Must There be Scapegoats?” originally published in German in 1978.<sup>26</sup> In it, the Innsbruck theologian tried to shed light on the Bible texts from the angle of “Violence and the Sacred,” one of Girard’s first works concerning mimetic desire. René Girard says about Schwager at that time: “He was writing a book that runs parallel to ‘Things Hidden’, and, as a matter of fact, it was published a little before ‘Things Hidden.’ He created a theology which is tied to mimetic desire, and which he developed independently.”<sup>27</sup>

In order to present Schwager’s pneumatology one would have to dedicate to it a separate monography. A modest aim of this article is rather to take a look at it from the perspective of mimetic theory in order to spot those ideas in it which correspond on a theological level to Girard’s understanding of the Paraclete and – what follows – the possibility of disarming the mimetic mechanism. I am going to start from the last mode of positive mimesis and then move backwards to the first one.

The “prophetic positive mimesis” switches perspectives of parties involved in a probable future duel from “me against you” to “me and you together.” Does this very fact say something on the theological level which could indicate a possible activity of the Holy Spirit through this mode of mimetism? Looking at the nature of the Holy Spirit, the Swiss theologian stresses in his

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<sup>25</sup> ANSPACH, 2017, p. 34-39.

<sup>26</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Must There be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*. 2. ed. Transl. Maria Assad. New York: The Crossroad Publishing, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> GIRARD, 2007, p. 43.



trinitarian reflections that the Holy Spirit is a spirit of “both” – God the Father and the Son – and calls him “*We* in a person.” This is a reason why an integral experience of the Holy Spirit is not an isolated one (me-experience). A good example of it are the letters of St. Paul: Schwager points out that the Apostle always uses the word “we” when he speaks about a faith experience. So, from the Christian perspective the “we” is at the core of the faith:

According to the New Testament’s evidence, following Jesus leads not to an extreme “me-awareness” of a faithful one, but to a new “we-awareness.” A criterion for recognizing an activity of some megalomaniacal spirit vs. the Spirit of Jesus and the Father is the answer to the question, if this activity leads to an excessive “me-experience” or to a new “we-awareness.”<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, the Holy Spirit drives people to some sort of new awareness of belonging to a group or community. That fact alone, however, does not give us any significant criterion in order to distinguish the Paraclete from Satan in the context of mimetic theory, because Satan does virtually the same: by sacrificing an innocent victim a new “we-awareness” in the group is established.

Going deeper, the Swiss theologian indicates a path on which the Holy Spirit leads us to the situation corresponding to the climax of positive mimesis. Unlike the “me against you” experience of negative mimesis leading to a mimetic crisis and ending up in the “we against you” of the scapegoat resolution, the Holy Spirit enables the transition from “me against you” to “me and you together” and further to “we together with you.” Schwager calls the Holy Spirit “the principle of the unity” among men and stresses that Jesus’ preaching has inevitably led to the formation of a “negative gathering.” These people, being manipulated by the mimetic mechanism, came together against the scapegoat, that is Jesus:

Thus the efforts of Jesus to form a new gathering ended in yet another scattering. Even the innermost circle of his friends was broken up. Instead, a gathering took place with a complete reversal of the premises. [...] Jesus’ attempt at a new gathering provoked a general gathering and conspiracy against him.<sup>29</sup>

The Innsbruck theologian contrasts this negative gathering with a positive one, of which the Holy Spirit is the principle, and which does act not in the mode of “against” but in the mode of “for.” Whereas the gathering provoked by Jesus led to his death on the Cross and scattering,

<sup>28</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Selbstbewusstsein Jesu: Kern seiner Botschaft und Bedeutung für die Nachfolge*. Frauenfeld. 29. Mai 1976. Raymund-Schwager-Archives, v. 8/3.dd/RSA10.

<sup>29</sup> SCHWAGER, 2000, p. 182. See also: GIRARD, René. *Sacrifice*. Transl. Matthew Patillo; David Dawson. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011. p. 67-71.



the gathering brought about by the Holy Spirit leads to the foundation of the Kingdom of Peace and to real unity. The “gathering against” characterizes the uniformity – nobody really stands out from all the rest. As opposed to this, the “gathering for” consists of the people whose diversity remains a value of great importance.<sup>30</sup>

All those who are gathered by the Holy Spirit are not an unconscious mob anymore. Instead, the new group is the community of God’s children, aware of their uniqueness, endeavoring to broaden the circles of peace around them. For Schwager, the vivid unity among believers based on the principle of love is a self-evident sign of the Spirit’s presence in the world. Without him, relying only on themselves, men can create either dispersal, which can eventually lead to anarchy, or uniformity, which can end in totalitarianism. This new gathering is nothing else than the community of the people whose hearts are changed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Without him the unconscious mob must remain the unconscious mob. Only the Spirit can take the wrongdoers’ blindness away from them, says Schwager.<sup>31</sup>

Gathering new people aware of their uniqueness, living their life based on the principle of love, as lovely as it may sound, does not provide at first a real peace for the rest of this world. Using biblical nomenclature: the Kingdom of Satan simply does not match the Kingdom of God. The new gathering brought by the Holy Spirit causes destabilization of the old structures upon which the Kingdom of Satan is founded. Since there is a huge gap between both kingdoms, in order to change an affiliation from one to another a big effort is required. Raymund Schwager outlines it as a process – which I consider to be a theological insight about the “paracletian way of life” – where humans’ attitude towards their neighbors is changed. The theologian starts with an observation that there are a lot of places in the Old Testament where one can find remarks regarding how problematic the moral condition of humans is. Every single time when men gave up on forging their relationship with God, gradually they became enslaved by violence. The mimetic desire paralyzed social bonds, which eventually could fall apart.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, God promised through the prophets to gather the Israelites anew together and to establish his Kingdom of Peace. So, in a

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<sup>30</sup> SCHWAGER, 2000, p. 221 f.

<sup>31</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*. In: *Beiträge zur Schöpfungslehre, Erbsündenlehre und zur Pneumatologie*. Raymund Schwager gesammelte Schriften – Band 7. Ed. Nikolaus Wandinger). Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2018. p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden*. In: *Kirchliche, politische und theologische Zeitempfindung*. Raymund Schwager gesammelte Schriften – Band 8. Ed. Mathias Moosbrugger. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2017. p. 75-78.



situation where the people know nothing else but rivalry, there should be gathered a new community and a perfect peace should reign. Schwager stresses that man is unable to do that by himself. A radical conversion is required here, which man is not capable of.<sup>33</sup> The theologian finds the ultimate solution to this problem in the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezek. 32:36 ff; 11:19 f; Jer. 31:33 f). The solution is founded on “the change of the heart of human beings,” which would take place through the power of the Holy Spirit:

Only when God himself changes the hearts of human beings can they become capable of observing the laws. Then they will indeed become truly a people of God and be able to live in peace. Yahweh promises this change by proclaiming the coming of his Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Schwager perceives the text of Jeremiah as one of great importance. God promises to give the understanding of the Law to every human’s heart directly. It means: From that moment on, nobody would need to be taught by anybody, which again means that there would be no model required anymore, no master and no disciple, that is, no “double bind” problem. Schwager has no doubt about the role of the Holy Spirit in this process:

Only when human beings find fulfillment of their most intimate and most personal strivings in the spirit of God, will they be free of the spell of imitation and the jealousy that springs from it. Then they become capable of the one act that Cain could not do: gain mastery over the sin lurking everywhere.<sup>35</sup>

The same topic is found in Schwager’s correspondence with Girard. In the discussion, which developed from his lecture of “Things Hidden,” Schwager stresses that the only person who is able to change the human heart is the Holy Spirit himself: “But the question remains: how are men able to renounce violence? The answer is: the Spirit slowly transforms the hearts of men and renders them capable of this renunciation.”<sup>36</sup> The human’s will and freedom are not stiffened in any way by this process. We are not forced to forgo violence. In fact, it becomes possible for us to do so thanks to the Holy Spirit. So, what we can see here is a situation opposite to that of the scapegoat resolution. In the midst of the mimetic crisis, man resorts to violence, his action is for the most part unconscious, whereas the Holy Spirit gives us a real option: We are not forced to do

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<sup>33</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. Jesus im Heilsdrama: Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre. In: *Heilsdrama: Systematische und narrative Zugänge*. Raymund Schwager gesammelte Schriften – Band 4. Ed. Józef Niewiadomski. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2015. p. 286.

<sup>34</sup> SCHWAGER, 2000, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> SCHWAGER, 2000, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> COWDELL, 2018, p. 52.



anything, but if we want, we can choose to escape from the circle of violence and thus start to build the Kingdom of Peace.<sup>37</sup>

What we have to bear in mind, reminds Schwager, is that the change of the heart of human beings is a long process rather than a “flash act.” During this process, we remain exposed to the Kingdom of Satan. The situation which we are in is really demanding: on the one hand, because we start exposing the truth about the scapegoat mechanism, we are unwelcome in the Kingdom of Satan, on the other, Satan knows that his days are numbered and there is no real alternative for him other than either forcing new sacrifices (which after the Revelation plunges his Kingdom into self-exposure and further destabilization of its structures) or trying to impersonate the Spirit of Peace. The Innsbruck theologian talks about the great ability of violence to pretend to be something really good:

The world of the evil is a world of the lie and perversion of the truth. It is very easy to become enslaved by this world because of its external appearances. Therefore, men constantly need help from the Holy Spirit. Only in this way he would be able to uncover the sin and its mechanism of perversion of the truth.<sup>38</sup>

For Schwager, it is obvious that without the Paraclete we are unable to identify what is good and what is bad in us (which, as we could see earlier, is the reason why we should assume that we are not the innocent victims but persecutors in our mimetic relations with others). Not only the founder of Innsbruck’s Dramatic Theology recognizes the problem, but he also searches for the adequate instruments, which would be helpful to everyone for the sake of a practical distinction between good and bad. According to Schwager, the most helpful seems to be “The Spiritual Exercises” developed by Ignatius Loyola.<sup>39</sup>

The first mode of positive mimesis, the unconscious one, is the most problematic to be grasped on the theological level. It hinges on the premise of imitation alone, which is the core of Girard’s theory. What could be mentioned though is the fact that the “unconscious positive

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<sup>37</sup> GIRARD, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Transl. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. p. 258 f.

<sup>38</sup> SCHWAGER, Raymund. Erlöser des Menschen: Soteriologie in der Verkündigung von Johannes Paul II. und die Herausforderungen unserer Zeit. In: SIEBENROCK, Roman; SANDLER, Willibald (Eds.). *Kirche als universales Zeichen*: In memoriam Raymund Schwager SJ. Wien & Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005. p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> SCHWAGER, 2018, p. 79 ff. Schwager wrote his dissertation on the ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of Ignatius of Loyola: SCHWAGER, Raymund. *Das dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola: Historisch-pastoraltheologische Studie über die Stellung der Kirche in den Exerzitien und im Leben des Ignatius*. In: *Frühe Hauptwerke*. Raymund Schwager gesammelte Schriften – Band 1. Ed. Mathias Moosbrugger. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2016. p. 37-256.



mimesis” reassures us on the theological level of human nature as not being restricted by the original sin to the extent that doing good would be impeded. It reassures us also of the importance of true leaders who don’t fear to “move the masses in the right direction.” Self-transcendence and conversion are possible, as an active life dedicated to the Kingdom of Peace is. However, it has its price: displeasing all those who believe in the structures the Paraclete destabilizes. But then again it is the Holy Spirit who gives people sincerity both in their belief and in acting according to their faith, who empowers them to bear witness to the innocence of Jesus and thus expose the scapegoat mechanism, says Schwager.<sup>40</sup>

## Final considerations

In her comment on the post-9/11 politics, Michelle Goldberg asserts: “We inflated the stature of our enemies to match our need for retribution.”<sup>41</sup> Observations like this one – using categories of mimetic theory – on the one hand show the explanatory power of Judeo-Christian tradition and its impact on our culture regarding the mechanism of violence, and on the other the importance of self-transcendence (or conversion). Unfortunately, violence has always been an ongoing topic as it is also today. (Nowadays it confronts us with an apocalyptic perspective because of the atomic weapons and therefore the scale on which it can affect our world.) In my view, Girard’s theory and Schwager’s contribution to it constitute a legacy much needed by people around the world, no matter of what culture or religion. They not only urge Christians to reexamine the understanding of their own tradition and their engagement in the practices of virtuous life. They seem to have also a capability of bringing seeds of peaceful revolution into the life of those who can accept Jesus (only) as a prophet. At the end of the day, the “paracletian way of life” is for all of us, but we have to be ready to destabilize all we know about this world.

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<sup>40</sup> SCHWAGER, 2000, p. 222 ff.

<sup>41</sup> GOLDBERG, Michelle. How 9/11 Turned America Into a Half-Crazed, Fading Power. *New York Times*. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/09/opinion/how-9-11-turned-america-into-a-half-crazed-fading-power.html>>. Accessed on: October 8, 2021.



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