

“A Great Irony of History”: The Anthropological Significance of the Cross, and Peace

By Wayne Northey

Introduction

What do I mean by “violence” in this talk? A very succinct definition is given in Marjorie Suchocki’s *The Fall To Violence* (1994): “... *at its base, violence is the destruction of well-being* (Suchocki, 1994, p. 85, italics added.)” *Violence is the destruction of well-being. Shalom* is the enormously semantically rich word that fundamentally means “well-being” or “peace”, and the polar opposite of violence. It is used 237 times in the Hebrew Bible. *Shalom* that violence destroys is the most commonly appearing word for the joining of justice and peace in the Hebrew Bible¹. *Violence is the destruction of well-being. Violence is the destruction of shalom.*

I can immediately think of several qualifications. So I might have to change the definition to:

*Violence is the purposeful, active destruction of the well-being of fellow humans, and/or the indiscriminate wanton destruction of the well-being of fellow humans and the Good Creation.*²

This too is subject to qualifications, as are all definitions.

According to a Pew Charitable Trusts poll in April, 2003, *87 percent of white American evangelicals supported the president’s decision to invade Iraq* (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2003). What does one make of such a fact? One could find similar statistics about Christians repeated throughout the entire sweep of Western Christendom since the fourth century.

Why have so few voices denounced violence by the state since the era of Constantine in the fourth century? “It is a great irony of history,” writes one commentator, “that the Cross, symbol of the ultimate triumph of peaceful means to peaceful ends, has been used as a standard in battle (Anderson, 1992, p. 104).” Hence part of this paper’s title: “An Irony of History”. This is grand understatement.

The Cross: Ultimate Revelation of Truth

The Apostle Paul wrote:

¹ See Yoder (1987) for a fuller discussion on its wide semantic range.

² All aerial warfare fits under this latter definition. With its advent, *shalom* of civilians has exponentially been shattered with every advance in such technology. During World War I, 10% of all casualties were civilians. During World War II, the number of civilian deaths rose to 50%. During the Vietnam War 70% of all casualties were civilians. In the current war in Iraq, civilians account for 90% of all casualties (Alper and Earp, 2007).

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 1:16)

In II Corinthians he also wrote:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

The Cross is the ultimate demythologizer and deconstructor of religion and philosophy. It is the "Final Unveiler". As such, it also unveils violence as THE grand myth of human interaction, and liberates us towards the Two Great Commandments: *love of God, love of neighbour*.

In this presentation, I propose a very simple thesis: *Violence is The Ultimate Lie, and the Ultimate Contradiction of Truth. The Cross is The Ultimate Truth, and The Ultimate Contradiction of Violence.*

One writer explains:

In short, according to [René] Girard³, the work of the Gospel through the ages has ultimately enabled an anthropology of human origins as rooted in what we are confronted by in the cross, namely, the collective murder of a victim (Nuechterlein, 2002, p. 4⁴).

Legitimate (state) violence is foundational of human culture, claims Girard:

...Girard's proposal is that the logic of accusation and sacrifice has remained at the center of what constitutes human culture (*ibid*, p. 17).

What most legitimizes this human violence is religion, through a "mythologizing" process that hides the horror of the violence, and renders it acceptable to human culture:

If myth veils the nature of human violence behind a cloud of religious mystification, how is it that humankind has ever begun to get out from underneath the cloud? Through lucid thinkers like [Jacques] Derrida and [René] Girard? No, according to Girard: only an extended encounter with the true God over time could begin to blow us free from that cloud. And he contends that such an encounter is testified to most consistently through the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, especially through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*ibid*, p. 17).

The Cross, in other words is the ultimate unveiler of the lie of sanctioned, sacred, sacrificial violence.

³ More is below about the work of literary critic and anthropologist, René Girard.

⁴ Page numbers do not appear in the online version.

Nuechterlein summarizes:

One might be tempted to say that the cross forgives the sin [of human scapegoating violence] at the same time that it reveals it to us. But it may be even more gracious and amazing than that: the cross forgives our sin *so that* it might begin to be revealed in the first place. Human beings have no hope of ever being able to see something so dark about ourselves unless we are first forgiven for it. It is the so-called “original sin,” the sin that goes back to the origins which have generated the very cultures that form us. In Christ Jesus we have a sacrifice that God transforms into self-sacrifice, a life of loving service, which is the founding event of *God’s Culture*, known in the Gospels as the “Kingdom of God” (*ibid*, p. 19).

If violence is seen from the perspective of the accuser, from the state, from organized society, violence is “mythologized”, claims Girard. But if violence is seen through the eyes⁵ of the victim, then violence is demythologized, and culture must be “reinvented” – a point made again below.

Nuechterlein explains:

Unless the Risen Victim can begin to help the apostles to see the cross from the perspective of the victim, the cross and resurrection are simply another myth told from the perspective of the persecutors. But the victim who rises from the dead *as forgiveness* enables the turn-around of being able to demythologize conventional myths by adopting the perspective of the victim. Those whose encounter with the Risen Victim creates faith now have the calling to use the gospels to help humanity read and understand its own myths -- not the opposite tactic so common among biblical literary critics of today, that is to say, to read the gospels in the ‘light’ of mythology. For the ‘light’ of mythology is actually the darkness that would keep us blind (*ibid*, p. 19)⁶.

I shall turn to Gil Baillie’s book, *Violence Unveiled* (1995), to help develop further the centrality of the Cross, *the Universal Truth* that contradicts violence, *the Universal Deception*.

⁵ Jesus, drawing on similar OT images, repeatedly said:

For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them (Matt 13:15).

⁶ The footnote at this point reads:

Girard’s recent book, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* [2001], opens literally on page 1 with this reversal of contemporary biblical method with regards to myth and Gospel; it ends with his faith in the Resurrection as that which begins the unveiling process of Gospel as that which demythologizes myth, on p. 189: “To break the power of mimetic unanimity, we must postulate a power superior to violent contagion. If we have learned one thing in this study, it is that none exists on the earth.... The Resurrection is not only a miracle, a prodigious transgression of natural laws. It is the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power superior to violent contagion (*ibid*, p. 19)” .

Baillie claims that “Human history is the relentless chronicle of violence that it is because when cultures fall apart they fall into violence, and when they revive themselves, they do so violently (*ibid*, p. 6).”

In other words, *violence* is the foundation of human culture. Baillie argues, drawing on the work of René Girard, that *scapegoating violence*, whereby all turn against the one in violent expulsion to preserve the order of society, is the great and fundamental building block of all human culture. Ancient societies derived support for this resort to scapegoating violence from religion, and religious justifications for scapegoating violence were readily available. “ ‘It is better that one man should die,’ said Caiaphas of Jesus, ‘than that the whole nation be destroyed’ (*ibid*, p. 6).”

“Caiaphas,” explains Baillie, “was invoking a mechanism for preserving culture that is as old as culture itself (*ibid*, p. 6)”. This mechanism is sacred, scapegoating violence, at the heart of all human culture, including Western secular culture. At the heart in turn of deconstructing the legitimacy of this ages-old justifying mechanism for violence is the Cross, the very inversion of Caiaphas’ words! The Cross gives the lie to scapegoating violence, the Ultimate Lie of the history of humanity. As Jesus said of the protectors of the religious culture of his day:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

The Cross is about Ultimate Truth. Violence is the Ultimate Lie. And *myth* obfuscates the truth that violence lies (double *entendre*) at the core of all human culture. Myth means to close one’s eyes to, to keep secret. Baillie states:

In the New Testament, *mythos* is juxtaposed to *Logos* – the revelation of that about which myth refuses to speak – and to *aletheia* – the Greek word for truth. *Aletheia* comes from the root *letho*, which is the verb “to forget”. The prefix *a* is the negative. The literal meaning, then, of the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, is ‘to stop forgetting’ (Baillie, *op.cit.*, p. 33).”

Myth refuses to see and speak about the underlying violence of human culture. For this reason, “Fundamentally, human history is a struggle between myth and gospel (*ibid*, p. 34).” Myth ultimately mutes the victim’s voice, reversing the biblical message in response to Abel’s murder: “Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. (Gen 4:10).”

Myth ultimately justifies violence by declaring it legitimate if the state through its police and military undertake it. The Gospel ultimately delegitimizes violence, by declaring it violation of love of God and neighbour, especially neighbour at its extreme test case: *the enemy*. This is Gospel. All legitimations of violence are *demythologized* in exact reversal of Rudolph Bultmann’s project of demythologizing the Gospels. As it turns out, the Gospels are the *only* texts to tell the truth about violence.

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, René Girard says:

The Passion accounts reveal a phenomenon that unbeknownst to us generates all human cultures and still warps our human vision in favor of all sorts of exclusions and scapegoating. If this analysis is true, the explanatory power of Jesus' death is much greater than we realize, and Paul's exalted idea of the Cross as the source of all knowledge is anthropologically sound (Girard, 2001, p. 3).

Bailie discusses the 1989 execution of serial killer Theodore Bundy, when hundreds of men, women and children camped outside the Florida prison in a festive spirit one reporter likened to a *Mardi Gras*. The same reporter described the event as "a brutal act... [done] in the name of civilization (Bailie, *op.cit.*, p. 79)." Bailie reflects on that commentary thus:

It would be difficult to think of a more succinct summation of the underlying anthropological dynamic at work: *a brutal act done in the name of civilization*, an expulsion or execution that results in social harmony. Clearly, after the shaky justifications based on deterrence or retribution have fallen away, this is the stubborn fact that remains: a brutal act is done in the name of civilization. If we humans become too morally troubled by the brutality to revel in the glories of the civilization made possible by it, we will simply have to reinvent culture. This is what Nietzsche saw through a glass darkly. This is what Paul sensed when he declared the old order to be a dying one (I Cor. 7:31). This is the central anthropological issue of our age (*ibid*, p. 79).

And this is the grand enterprise of the Gospel impetus: to reinvent culture consonant with the Peaceable Kingdom where:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Baillie points out that scapegoating violence demythologized by the Gospels arises from a human proclivity René Girard calls "mimetic desire", which the Bible calls "covetousness", or James dubs "evil desire".

In Girard, "Desire is mimetic in the sense that it imitates desire, it *copies the other's desire for an object* and not the outward form of the other's actions (Hamerton-Kelly, 1994, p. 132)." When two toddlers are in the nursery surrounded by toys, one child is perfectly content to let a certain toy lie untouched beside him until the other child suddenly wants it. That demonstrated desire by one child suddenly awakens desire in the other, and all hell breaks loose. Violence erupts, violence which is always the outcome of the contagion of a desire whose origins are Satan.

James puts the matter succinctly: “...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:14-15).” This is mimetic desire gone amok, derivative from Satan who is “the personification of the rivalrous mimesis [imitation], the mimesis engendering accusation and violence (Williams, 1996, p. 293).” As Jesus himself says: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).” The same Greek work (*epithumia*) is used in both texts for “desire.”

Girard understands desire ultimately to be metaphysical: it wants *to be* the other, who acts both as a *model* but then as an *obstacle-rival*. But mimetic desire is not inherently bad or destructive, rather it can also be the means whereby we become open to God and others. “If,” one author explains, “it becomes effective in a fundamental change of personality through the imitation of God or Christ, it could be termed ‘conversionary mimesis’ or ‘conversionary imitation’ (Williams, 1996, p. 291).” A classic text is Ephesians 5:1 & 2: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Put slightly differently: *The desire for a self ever found in the well-being of the other, is mimetic desire gone good. It is a life of “embodied forgiveness” according to Gregory Jones (1995), and the true “life craft” of every human. It is a consciousness that Jesus can be discovered, as Mother Teresa used to put it, even “in its most distressing disguise”, and always in everyone. It is the ultimate and only antidote to violence.*

For Girard, good mimetic desire towards God in Christ spells an explicit end to all legitimized scapegoating violence by the state or society, and all illegitimate violence proscribed by law. “Just war” and “just executions” are therefore *direct contradictions of the fundamental revelation of God in Christ*. They are both brutal acts done in the name of civilization, reek of human fallenness and death, and are contradictions to salvation and life; or as John puts it, “grace and truth” brought through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

According to Girard, Jesus died because he gave the lie to legitimized, redemptive⁷ violence. The “atonement” therefore is in fact, the inversion of legitimized violence, and therefore again the very antithesis of all Just War theory. I shall return to the theme of atonement.

A 2007 documentary is based upon a book by journalist Norman Solomon. The book and movie are entitled, *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning us to Death* (Solomon (2005) – the book; Alper & Earp (2007) – the documentary). In the documentary, narrator Sean Penn and commentator Norman Solomon explain:

SEAN PENN: Influencing the nature of this war coverage has been a priority of one administration after another since Vietnam, when conventional wisdom

⁷ Walter Wink’s preferred term in *Engaging The Powers*, 1992.

held that it was negative media coverage that turned the American people against the war and forced US withdrawal. Since that time, and beginning with new urgency during the 1991 Gulf War, the Pentagon has worked with increasing sophistication to shape media coverage of war...

NORMAN SOLOMON: So for the invasion of Grenada and invasion of Panama in '83 and '89, then the Gulf War in early 1991, it was like a produced TV show, and the main producers were at the Pentagon. They decided, in the case of the Gulf War, exactly what footage would be made available to the TV stations... (Alper & Earp, 2007).

"The first casualty when war comes is truth," declared U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson in 1917.

Jesus declared: "*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (John 8:32)."

A. J. Coates in *The Ethics of War* writes:

The moral prohibition of lying, for example, makes good sense in the context of personal relations, but no sense at all in affairs of state. Telling the truth is a moral luxury that politicians and diplomats can rarely afford. More than that, the fulfillment of their public duty will require them not only to conceal the truth but to suppress it and twist it constantly (Coates, 1997, p. 36).

Professor Coates is knowledgeable throughout his book in his discussion of the ethics of war. But the analogy leaps out: *If I were an alcoholic, deeply committed to that substance abuse, I would do all in my power to legitimize my lies so that the addiction could continue! Just like the Emperor and the lords of the bedchamber who went on with the procession (or process addiction⁸) at all costs.⁹*

So this erudite ethicist, without evident commitment to an overarching narrative to challenge him, adds in step with the best of scholastic casuistry:

This is not so much the violation of a single morality as the application of another and different morality, according to which the moral permissibility of any act is determined in the light of its foreseeable consequences rather than of its intrinsic quality. In this way what is morally impermissible in one sphere may become morally obligatory in the other (*ibid*, p. 36).

This truly is the logic of all addiction, no less of all state process addiction. Translated, it means two things:

- *The end justifies the means;*
- *Might makes right.*¹⁰

⁸ See below for more on "process addiction".

⁹ See Andersen (2001).

¹⁰ A. J. Coates goes into greater detail about one form of realism Christians since St. Augustine have often adopted:

Solomon observes more generally:

All a president has to do is start a war, and these arguments kick in that you can't stop it. So it's a real incentive for a president to lie, to deceive, to manipulate sufficiently to get the war started. And then they've got a long way to go without any sort of substantive challenge that says, hey, this war has to end (*ibid*).

The documentary ends with these words of Solomon, then of Martin Luther King Jr.: The independent journalist I.F. Stone says that all governments lie and nothing they say should be believed. Now Stone wasn't conflating all governments, and he wasn't saying that governments lie all the time, but he was saying that we should never trust that something said by a government is automatically true, especially our own, because we have a responsibility to go beneath the surface. Because the human costs of war, the consequences of militaristic policies, what Dr. King called "the madness of militarism," they can't stand the light of day if most people understand the deceptions that lead to the slaughter, and the human consequences of the carnage. If we get that into clear focus, we can change the course of events in this country. But it's not going to be easy and it will require dedication to searching for truth.

MARTIN LUTHER KING: A time comes when silence is betrayal, and that time has come for us. ...

Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. ...

Another form of realism, while still resisting the moral determination of politics (at least from time to time or in extreme circumstances), is far indifferent to moral considerations. What it propounds is a moral paradox, whereby the achievement of political objectives necessitates the use of *immoral* means. What distinguishes this form of realism is its overt moral concern and the sense of moral unease or of moral tragedy with which it accepts the need for actions that other realists regard with equanimity. This form of realism recognizes the claims both of morality and politics, while affirming their potential irreconcilability and, at times, unavoidable conflict. Even normal politics are seen to be clothed in moral ambiguity, and in extreme emergencies no act, however wicked or immoral, can be excluded "realistically". Tragically (and, as it seems to critics, incoherently), the ruler may have a duty to act immorally, with all the moral anguish that entails.

Niebuhr's Christian and Protestant realism takes this form. The political order is seen as naturally resistant to morality, and the structure of power in which it consists as intrinsically flawed. Unlike the more purely moral domain of private life, 'the realm of politics is a twilight zone where ethical and technical issues meet'. It is impossible to act within that realm without incurring sin. Nevertheless, rulers have a duty so to act, while repenting of their actions and falling back ultimately on the mercy and redemptive power of God. This understanding of politics appears in a more secular guise in the thought of Hans Morgenthau, who argues that 'there is no escape from the evil of power' and that 'to know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nonetheless, is moral courage' (Morgenthau 1946, [*Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago], p. 203). On this view the politician – and the soldier – are faced with hard choices or cruel necessities that, in the terms of one analysis, require that they 'stoically immolate their personal morality on the altar of the public good' (Evans and Ward 1956 [*The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, Geoffrey Bles, London], p. 320). (*ibid*, pp. 33 & 34).

And I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government ...

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. ... Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. ...

I speak as one who loves America, to the leaders of our own nation: The great initiative in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours (*ibid*).

King's words were from a speech at Riverside Church, New York, entitled "Beyond Vietnam" April 4, 1967, exactly one year to the day before he was assassinated, April 4, 1968¹¹.

Humanity's Most "Consistent Signature": Genocide

Jared Diamond wrote in *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (1992) – and substantiated his conclusion with long lists of evidence – *that the only consistent signature of the human species is genocide*. David Livingstone Smith in *The Most Dangerous Animal: Human Nature and the Origins of War* (2007) presents humans as biologically "*wired to fight*", and *murderous to the core*. He writes: "The history of humanity is, to a very great extent, a history of violence (*ibid*, p. 57)."

I will dwell on Smith's book for a while.

He begins by writing that "Almost 200 million human beings, mostly civilians, have died in wars over the last century, and there is no end of slaughter in sight (*ibid*, p. xiii)." The 20th century created far more victims of war than any other.

He indicates in the first chapter that humanity is the only animal who kills his fellow species *en masse*. He claims that "War is not", as we might think, "antithetical to civilization, the brotherhood of man, or the great spiritual and cultural traditions of East and West. It is deeply and perhaps inextricably bound up with them (*ibid*, p. 6)."

In 2004 the world spent one thousand thirty-five billion dollars on the armed forces – \$2.8 billion each day – and less than 8 percent of that amount on aid: about \$78.6 billion.

¹¹ Lawyer William F. Pepper presents (2003) a compelling case that King was assassinated by the U.S. government because of his mounting opposition to the Vietnam War, and his participation in organizing a "Poor People's Campaign". The evidence presented secured for Pepper and the King family victory in a wrongful death civil action suit on behalf of the King family. "But the silence following these shocking revelations was deafening. Like the pattern during all the investigations of the assassination throughout the years, no major media outlet would cover the story (Pepper, 2003, front jacket)."

Smith uses the term “democide” to cover *all* forms of politically motivated government-sponsored killing apart from warfare. He adds that “Estimates of the death toll from twentieth-century democides range from 80,000,000 to 170,000,000 lives (*ibid*, p. 21).”¹² Smith writes:

¹² An Appendix of a “partial list” is reproduced below (*ibid*, pp. 217 & 218):

A PARTIAL LIST OF DEMOCIDES COMMITTED DURING THE PAST 100 YEARS

If there were a Last Judgment as Christians believe, how do you think our excuses would sound before that final tribunal? – Bertrand Russell, UNPOPULAR ESSAYS

Eight million residents of the Congo Free State killed by the Belgians between 1877 and 1908.

- Sixty-five thousand Namibian Herero killed by the Germans between 1904 and 1907.
- One and a half million Armenian Christians killed by Muslim Turks in 1915-16.
- Five million Ukrainians killed in 1931-32 by the Soviet Union’s perpetration of famine.
- Over four million Soviet citizens killed by their own government in the Great Terror of 1937-1938.
- Over three hundred thousand Chinese residents of the city of Nanking killed by the Japanese in 1937.
- Eleven million Jews, Roma, Poles, homosexuals, and others killed by the Germans during the 1940s.
- Over two hundred fifty thousand Muslims, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Roma, and others killed in death camps run by the Roman Catholic Ustashi regime in Croatia between 1941 and 1945.
- More than two hundred thousand Muslims killed by the French in the 1954-62 war for Algerian independence.
- Around one million Indonesians killed by their own government in 1965-66.
- One million seven hundred thousand Cambodians killed by the Khmer Rouge during the 1970s.
- Roughly two and a half million people, mainly Hindus, killed by the Muslim Pakistani army in East Bengal in 1971.
- Around one hundred fifty thousand Hutus killed by Tutsis in Burundi in 1972.
- Around two hundred thousand Maya killed by the government of Guatemala between 1970 and 1996.
- Two hundred thousand Muslims killed by Serbian Orthodox Christians in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s.
- Close to one million Tutsi killed by the Hutu majority in Rwanda in 1994.
- Two hundred thousand Roman Catholics in East Timor killed by the Muslim Indonesian occupation force between 1975 and 1999.
- An as yet undetermined number of Muslims killed by Serbian Orthodox Christians during the 1990s.
- Around two million black Sudanese killed in Darfur by the government of Sudan, which is ongoing at the time of writing.
- An undetermined number of Anuak killed by the government of Ethiopia, ongoing at the time of writing.

Other victims of twentieth-century genocides include the Bubi of Equatorial Guinea, the Dinka, Nuba, and Nuer of Sudan, the Isaak of Somalia, the Karimojong of Uganda, the San of Angola and Namibia, the Tuareg of Mali and Niger, the Tyua of Zimbabwe, the Atta of Philippines, the Auyu of West Papua and Indonesia, the Dani of Papua New Guinea, the Hmong of Laos, the Kurds of Iraq, the Nasioi of Papua New Guinea, the Tamil of Sri Lanka, the tribal peoples of Bangladesh, the Ache of Paraguay, the Arara, Ticuna, Nambiquara, and Yanomami of Brazil, the Cuiva, Nunak, and Paez of Colombia, the Mapuche of Chile, the Maya of Guatemala, and the Miskito of Nicaragua. Today’s genocides and ethnocides often take place at the behest of multinational corporations eager to acquire resources, typically by dispossession and environmental degradation. These include oil interests in Ecuador, Burma, Nigeria, copper and gold mining in West Papua, farming in Tanzania, logging in Malaysia, and uranium mining in Australia (*ibid*, pp. 217 & 218, drawing from Totten, S., W.S. Parsons and R.K. Hitchcock, 2002).

Later on I will argue that *self-deception is an indispensable element of war*, and that despite the fact that wars are calculated and planned, there is a sense in which human beings *do not know what they are doing* when they cut one another down on the battlefield. A smoke-screen of self-deception is required to make most human beings capable of such acts of slaughter (*ibid*, p. 8, first italics added).

The author, from a secular viewpoint, uses an arresting turn of phrase: *human beings do not know what they are doing*, that takes us directly to Jesus' words at the Cross: "Father forgive them, *for they do not know what they are doing*..." (Luke 23:34)." Gil Baillie comments thus: "The moment these words were spoken, the delusion [lie] to which they refer was exposed, and shortly thereafter the paramount power of the delusional system that produced it was undermined (*op.cit.*, p. 265)." Baillie quotes Michael Ignatieff's term of " 'divided consciousness' ... that allows one to switch from the part of the brain where direct experience is both rationally and morally assessed to a 'different part of the brain' where abstract fantasies and foreign policies [lies, *pace* Coates] are formed... (*ibid*, p. 265)." This "different part of the brain", argues Smith, is a form of dissociation that in fact is huge self-deception, when humans kill in war.

Given humanity's enormous capacity to kill *en masse*, to commit genocide and democide, there is nonetheless a major disinclination within humans to kill. In the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, Captain John Miller says: "For every man I kill, the further I get from home." Smith comments:

To perform well in battle without succumbing to malaise, soldiers need a way to blunt the pain of warfare and overcome their natural horror of killing, while at the same time preserving or even enhancing their morale and effectiveness. This sounds like a very tall order, but evolution has endowed us with just this capacity. *For this to happen, the soldier must immerse himself in a special form of self-deception*. Strange as it may sound, his ability to deceive himself can make the difference between survival and extermination, victory and defeat (*op.cit.*, p. 160, italics added).

He quotes retired American Lieutenant David Grossman, who developed a new science of *Killology*:

Looking another human being in the eye, making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form the single most basic, important, and potentially traumatic occurrence of war. If we understand this, then we understand the magnitude of the horror of killing in combat (Grossman, 1995, p. 181).

In the new James Bond movie *Casino Royale*, Bond completes the sentence of the first man he kills, saying together with his victim something like "The first kill is the hardest." Bond in fact earns his "double 0 status", his license to kill, by crossing the threshold into killing in cold blood.

With the advent of aerial bombing in World War I, modern warfare increasingly mediates self-deception, since real enemies are simply never seen, except as figures like in a war

video game. Combine this with a quiescent corporate media that will not broadcast images of humans torn apart by bombings, the virus of self-deception spreads to an entire nation such as the United States. This was the great lesson of Vietnam: do not allow images to be shown of killing or its aftermath. Ever since, the Pentagon has exercised total censorship – of course, in the interests of “homeland security”.

Smith makes a compelling case that species *homo sapiens* is indeed far and away “the most dangerous animal”, while simultaneously endowed with a deep aversion to killing.

If we have been hard-wired to be self-deceitful through our evolutionary past, or in, as Christians affirm, the post-resurrection doctrine of original sin¹³, neither of which Raymund Schwager (2006) argues need contradict the other, then it is precisely the preaching of the Cross that *contradicts* and *deconstructs* this profound human self-deception, and points us to the truth of the Cross that sets us free.

Before continuing on that theme, I shall cite two scriptures, then delve into the horror of war as seen through the eyes of Christian journalist Chris Hedges. As you hear these scriptures and descriptions, please search your hearts for your own self-deceptions about “Christian lethal violence”, the Ultimate Oxymoron I suggest, in light of the revelation of the Cross. This utter contradiction of terms is sustained by self-deceit, namely, by the rejection of Truth as revealed in the Cross.

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:37-40)

The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:9 & 10)

War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning: Humanity’s “Process Addiction” To Violence¹⁴

Process addiction is defined as: “Addiction to certain mood-altering behaviors, such as eating disorders, gambling, sexual activity, overwork, and shopping.” Such addictions are benign in comparison to the Ultimate Process Addiction of all humanity: violence, in particular lethal violence, to resolve interpersonal and international conflict arising from intransigent desires. Again, the Apostle James wrote:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill

¹³ See Alison (1997) on original sin as “the joy of being wrong”.

¹⁴ Please note: some of this material derives from other writings by the author. Please see Northey (2007 & 2008a, b).

and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:1 & 2).

The modern Western state – Canada, the U.S., all members of NATO – are *process addicts*, consequence of which is indescribable mass murder, crime, and environmental devastation. Yet we clutch the “process bottle” of this addiction immediately to the chest the moment there is even a hint of taking away the substance responsible for the addiction; the moment there is breathed a hint of the only cure for violence: *total abstinence; consistent nonviolence*.

Perhaps one of the most poignant moments in the history of war last century was a letter sent by President Roosevelt on the very day the Germans began their *blitzkrieg* against Poland, to appeal to the nations of the world at least to protect civilians. On September 1, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent an appeal to Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Poland that read:

THE ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centres of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth in the past few years, which have resulted in the maiming and death of thousands of defenseless women and children, has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this sort of *inhuman barbarism* during the period of tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings, who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have broken out, now will lose their lives.

I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every Government, which may be engaged in hostilities, publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event and under no circumstances undertake bombardment from the air of civilian populations or unfortified cities, upon the understanding that the same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all their opponents.

I request an immediate reply (Roosevelt, 1939, italics added).

The French and British in response jointly announced that they would spare civilian populations and government property. The Germans claimed to affirm Roosevelt's call, but contradicted that in their attack on Warsaw that same day. By 1945, both Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and all other Allied leadership, had rejected this 1939 appeal *utterly*. All Western Allies returned to the bottle of violent process addiction: they *recommitted to massive and increasingly deliberate indiscriminate deployment of the most advanced and devastating weapons of mass destruction in their arsenals*.

St. Augustine, fifth-century guardian as it were of the gate to subsequent developments of Western Christian theology both Catholic and Protestant, envisioned an ideal state in which the entire army was made up only of Christians: which in fact became the case under Emperor Theodosius, Constantine's grandson. Such an army, he argued, would kill compassionately, with love in the soldiers' hearts for the enemy. That is, as they would thrust spears through the gut, hack off heads and other appendages, shoot arrows through the heart, and do whatever other horrific acts of lethal violence to their enemies that weapons of war at that time facilitated, they would burn with the love of the Lord for their (soon-to-be) fallen enemies.

Augustine countenanced war waged in the spirit of love. One commentator remarks on this revealingly, in light of the thesis that war is always about self-deceit and deception:

At the same time, if war is waged in the spirit of love, no particular course of action is ruled out for Augustine. Ruses and ambushes, for example, may be appropriate. The only "act" that Augustine appears to have denied altogether to loving in war is one that is intimately connected with one's inward disposition: *lying* (Stevenson, 1987, p. 109, italics added).

Yet *lying* is of the essence in all state warfare. It is the entry ethic as it were in all warfare, after which follows, since World War I, the cold-blooded morality of *mass murder*, civilians as indiscriminately as soldiers.

Concerning one's "inward disposition":

War and its consequent physical death and injury may result from right love for Augustine, because love is primarily a matter of inward disposition, not one's outward action... However, the true moral content of the specific action always resides in the inward disposition, the motivation, of the one who acts. Hence, objectively speaking, anything is permitted as long as it results from an attitude of right love (*ibid*, p.105)

A scholar on just war theory wrote:

St. Augustine, a major contributor to the just war tradition, argued that, despite the horror of war and the pain and suffering that soldiers inflict on one another, war can be fought without violating the law of charity: to fight without hatred and with compassion is a basic moral imperative¹⁵. According to realism, however, the imperatives of combat are altogether different. In the first place, military training, or the preparation for combat, is designed to generate in the soldier feelings, dispositions, states of mind that undermine any moral capacity or inclination to fight "justly" or "compassionately", let alone "lovingly". The military trainee is to be divested of his civilian and pacific responses and turned into an efficient "killing machine". Not only is he to be taught how to kill, but the ardent desire to kill is to be implanted in him. In this way behaviour and attitudes that in peacetime would be regarded as beyond the pale become in war the moral or professional norm. As Field Marshall Montgomery advised: "The troops must be brought to a state of wild enthusiasm before the operation begins... They must enter the fight with the

¹⁵ And without *lying*, claimed the good Saint! One wonders in just what world Augustine actually lived!

light of battle in their eyes and definitely wanting to kill the enemy” (Montgomery, [B. L. (1958), *Memoirs*, Collins, London], pp. 88 – 9) (Coates, 1997, p. 29).

Retired U.S. Lt. Colonel David Grossman, founder as mentioned of the science of *Killology*, indicates that no institution pays more attention to dehumanization of its recruits than the military:

Brutalization, or “values inculcation,” is what happens at boot camp. Your head is shaved, you are herded together naked, and dressed alike, losing all vestiges of individuality. You are trained relentlessly in a total immersion environment. In the end you embrace violence and discipline and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world (Grossman, 2000, p. 1)¹⁶.

He says again:

This brutalization is designed to break down your existing mores and norms and to accept a new set of values that embrace destruction, violence, and death as a way of life. In the end, you are desensitized to violence and accept it as a normal and essential survival skill in your brutal new world (Grossman, 1999, p. 1).

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges, a Harvard Divinity School graduate, gives an explanation for war in the very title of a recent book: *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (2003). He has also written *What Every Person Should Know About War* (2003) and *American Fascists: the Christian Right and the War on America* (2006), amongst others.

He writes:

I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers-historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state-all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversities of smut and death. Fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our place on the planet are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface within all of us. And this is why for many war is so hard to discuss once it is over.

The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living (Hedges, 2003, *War...*, p. 3).

¹⁶ Please see my reflection on the movie *Jarhead*, a movie that depicts brilliantly this brutalization (Northey, 2006).

World War II U. S. Marine and War Correspondent, Edgar Jones wrote:

WE Americans have the dangerous tendency in our international thinking to take a holier-than-thou attitude toward other nations. We consider ourselves to be more noble and decent than other peoples, and consequently in a better position to decide what is right and wrong in the world. What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway? We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers. We topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an alltime record for instantaneous mass slaughter.

As victors we are privileged to try our defeated opponents for their crimes against humanity; but we should be realistic enough to appreciate that if we were on trial for breaking international laws, we should be found guilty on a dozen counts. We fought a dishonorable war, because morality had a low priority in battle. The tougher the fighting, the less room for decency; and in Pacific contests we saw mankind reach the blackest depths of bestiality. Not every American soldier, or even one per cent of our troops, deliberately committed unwarranted atrocities, and the same might be said for the Germans and Japanese. The exigencies of war necessitated many so-called crimes, and the bulk of the rest could be blamed on the mental distortion which war produced. But we publicized every inhuman act of our opponents and censored any recognition of our own moral frailty in moments of desperation.

(Jones, 1946, p. 4)

In a *New York Times* article, former presidential hopeful John Kerry, also a Vietnam War veteran, delivered an impassioned speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1971:

American troops in Vietnam, he said, had “raped, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.”

Mr. Kerry’s account came from his own experience, as well as from a three-day conference of the fledgling Vietnam Veterans Against the War. At the conference, he said, “over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.”

A transcript of that meeting makes for hair-raising reading. The returned troops told of the slaughter of civilians; “reconnaissance by fire,” or soldiers shooting blindly; “harassment and interdiction fire,” with artillery being used to shell villages; captives thrown from helicopters; severed ears drying in the sun or being swapped for beers; and “Zippo inspections” of cigarette lighters in preparation for burning villages. (Kifner, 2003, pp. 2 & 3)

The Toledo Blade won a Pulitzer Prize for its investigation of Vietnam War atrocities. The report, published in October 2003 and titled “Rogue G.I.’s Unleashed Wave of Terror in Central Highlands,” “said that in 1967, an elite unit [known as Tiger Force], a reconnaissance platoon in the 101st Airborne Division, went on a rampage that the newspaper described as ‘the longest series of atrocities in the Vietnam War’ (*ibid*, p. 1).”

The New York Times discovered that it was in fact nothing of the sort. Rather, routine orders were issued throughout the Vietnam War by top military leaders all down the line, that eventuated in hundreds of such atrocities throughout the War. The newspaper continues its report:

While [former Tiger Force members] became deeply troubled after they returned from Vietnam, Mr. Doyle, a sergeant who was a section leader in the unit, seemed unrepentant in a long, profanity-laced telephone conversation.

“I’ve seen atrocities in Vietnam that make Tiger Force look like Sunday school,” said Mr. Doyle, who joined the Army at 17 when a judge gave him, a young street gang leader, a chance to escape punishment.

“If you’re walking down a jungle trail, those that hesitate die,” said Mr. Doyle, who lives in Missouri. “Everybody I killed, I killed to survive. They make Tiger Force out to be an atrocity. Well, that’s almost a compliment. Because nobody will understand the evil I’ve seen.”

The American public was shocked in November 1969 when the reporter Seymour M. Hersh broke the news of the My Lai massacre...

“My Lai was a shock to everyone except people in Vietnam,” recalled Kevin Buckley, who covered the war for *Newsweek* from 1968 to 1972 and reported on an operation called Speedy Express, in which nearly 11,000 were killed but only 748 weapons were recovered.

At his court-martial in the My Lai massacre, Lt. William L. Calley Jr., the only person convicted in the case, said: “I felt then - and I still do - that I acted as directed, I carried out my orders, and I did not feel wrong in doing so.” He was paroled in 1975 after serving three and a half years under house arrest.

...

David H. Hackworth, a retired colonel and much-decorated veteran of the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam who later became a journalist and author, said that he created the Tiger Force unit in 1965 to fight guerrillas using guerrilla tactics. Mr. Hackworth was not in command of the unit during the period covered by the *Blade* articles because he had rotated out of Vietnam.

“Vietnam was an atrocity from the get-go,” Mr. Hackworth said in a recent telephone interview. “It was that kind of war, a frontless war of great frustration. There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted (Kifner, *op.cit.*, 2003).”

Numerous accounts of atrocities from the Abu Grahیب prison, the downfall of Fallujah, and routine horror committed by Allied troops are readily available in the current “War on Terror”. One is *The Deserter’s Tale* (2007) by Joshua Key, who sought asylum in Canada.¹⁷ Would one expect differently?

Covenant of Peace: The New Testament and “Violence in Defense of Justice”

Two years ago, noted Mennonite theologian Willard Swartley published his *magnum opus* – his great work of a lifetime: *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (2006). It is a meticulous work of New Testament scholarship.

Swartley asks how is it that major volumes on NT or Pauline theology would have only one or two references to peace, even though that word and associated motifs are throughout – over one hundred times in NT literature, and in every NT book except I John. Twenty-five major works of theology and ethics over the last half-century are listed in Appendix I. *In only two do peace and peacemaking shape the material; in all others it is neglected or even missing.*

At the end of his last chapter, Swartley quotes Richard Hays at length, commenting: “I affirm Hays’s nonviolence manifesto and call for the complement of positive peacemaking teaching and action as revealed to us by NT Scripture (Swartley, 2006, p. 429).” Hays wrote in part:

¹⁷ “In the first ever memoir from a young soldier who deserted from the war in Iraq, Joshua Key offers a vivid and damning indictment of what we are doing there and how the war itself is being waged. Key, a young husband and father from a conservative background, enlisted in the Army in 2002 to get training as a welder and lift his family out of poverty. A year later, Key was sent to Ramadi where he found himself participating in a war that was not the campaign against terrorists and evildoers he had expected. He saw Iraqi civilians beaten, shot, and killed for little or no provocation. Nearly every other night, he participated in raids on homes that found only terrified families and no evidence of terrorist activity. On leave, Key knew he could not return so he took his family underground, finally seeking asylum in Canada. *The Deserter’s Tale* is the story of a patriotic family man who went to war believing unquestioningly in his government’s commitment to integrity and justice, and how what he saw in Iraq transformed him into someone who could no longer serve his country (Amazon.com, 2007).”

One reason that the world finds the New Testament's message of peacekeeping and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless... Only when the church renounces the way of violence, will people see what the Gospel means... The meaning of the New Testament's teaching on violence will become evident only in communities of Jesus' followers who embody the costly way of peace (Hays, 1996, p. 429).

This quote is from Hays' likewise masterful study, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Chapter Seven, entitled: "Violence in Defense of Justice".

Hay's review of Swartley's book states:

Swartley describes the book as a study of a single neglected theme in scripture and offers it as "a companion volume to texts in New Testament theology and ethics." But this volume is something much more. Not just an overgrown dictionary article on *eirene* [peace] in the New Testament, it is nothing less than a comprehensive theology of the New Testament presenting peace as the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament's unity (Hays, 2007).

He adds:

Swartley makes a strong case that previous studies of New Testament theology and ethics have neglected or underestimated the pervasiveness of the theme of peace—including this reviewer's own work, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, which takes nonviolence as a central motif in the New Testament. Swartley's point is an important one: *avoidance of violence is not the same thing as proactive peacemaking*. It is the latter imperative that Swartley finds throughout the pages of scripture (*ibid*, italics added).

*"How Could a Public Execution Have Liberated the Human Race?": Stricken By God?*¹⁸

Gil Baillie writes:

Both Christianity's scriptural sources and its creedal formulae pivot around a public execution, an act of official violence regarded as legally righteous by the political authorities and as a sacred duty by the religionists. This simple and obvious fact is the most overlooked aspect of the colossal historical phenomenon we call Christianity. The Christian Scriptures and creeds make the outlandish assertion that because of this public execution the grip of sin has been broken, the human race has been offered a new lease on life and, at the same time, placed in grave peril if it refuses the offer. The Christian movement has pondered these weighty claims for two millennia with mixed results. How could a public execution have liberated the human race? Why was a public execution the necessary form that this liberation had to take? In answering this question, Christian doctrine has sometimes turned itself inside out. The most familiar form of the atonement doctrine, for instance, supposes that a wrathful God demanded that a victim pay in blood for human sin—like the animals that

¹⁸ Some of this material is taken from Northey (2007).

died in the atonement sacrifices at the Jewish Temple—and that God chose to take a human form and pay for the sin “Himself.” It is an understandable doctrine, given the religious and cultic backdrop against which early Christian thought was first forming. But the doctrine is not only logically incoherent; it is morally and theologically inadequate as well (Baillie, *op.cit.*, p. 37).”

About two years ago, Pastor Brad Jersak of Fresh Wind Community Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia invited me to lunch. We discussed an idea he and Professor Ron Dart had already tossed around on a local mountain hike: to do an anthology on the atonement from a nonviolent/peacemaking perspective. The book’s title is: *Stricken By God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (Jersak, 2007).

Within two weeks of the book’s appearance, William Eerdmans of Wm Eerdmans Publishing phoned Brad for permission to issue the book as well. Within six weeks, that publisher had the book in the stores. With internationally known writers as Archbishop Rowan Williams, CFD Moule, NT Wright, Marcus Borg, Miroslav Volf, Richard Rohr, and writers from across the breadth of the ecumenical spectrum, the publication of twenty essays, two of which are introductory, besides a Foreword from Willard Swartley, has created a lot of interest.

Co-editor Brad Jersak writes of the overall message of the twenty essays in the publication: “Sacrificial, co-suffering love truly is a more powerful force [than violence]. The Cross was not God’s violent solution to sin—it was an act of love in which God destroyed the power of violence by refusing to be drawn into it (*ibid*, p. 53).”

Co-editor Michael Hardin writes:

The most current defense of a sacrificial theory of atonement belongs to Hans Boersma whose 2004 publication *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* brought to the fore many of the problems when discussing violence in relation to God. Many authors in this volume respectfully engage Boersma but demur from his conclusions... If this book seems overly preoccupied with Boersma, it is because he has set the problem of a sacrificial theory of the atonement clearly before us and it cannot be ignored. We look forward to further conversations with Dr. Boersma (Jersak and Hardin, *op.cit.*, p. 15).

Dr. Boersma writes in that publication:

This [the Reformed tradition] comes to the fore in my re-evaluation of violence as something that is not inherently negative; in my insistence that boundaries can function in wholesome ways and need at times to be defended; as well as in my argument that restorative justice can only function if we are willing to include the notion of punishment (*ibid*, p. 10).

Boersma asserts: “The limitation of Eucharistic hospitality to those who are baptised indicates again that the Church has boundaries that the Church’s hospitality cannot be absolute if the Church wants to remain the Church (*ibid*, footnote 37, p. 220).” True, as far as it goes. And one must rejoin: Nor can its violence (in warfare or criminal justice) be absolute/terminal. While the Church practises discerning discipline, it is ever

restorative in intent, this side of the Age to Come. This can be seen in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13; his teaching about conflict resolution in Matthew 18; Paul's call for restoration in Galatians 6, etc. Boersma himself writes correctly: "Confession and penance... constitute one of the ways in which the Church safeguards and protects its character as a hospitable community (*ibid*, p. 228)." Vengeance is God's purview, which in itself is God's wrath in an agony of restorative covenant love (Romans 12:19 and context; compare the book of Hosea, especially 11:8)¹⁹. The Church is tasked to offer endless invitation to the sinner, carry out incessant evangelism.

I conclude with three considerations.

First, the author affirms a sophisticated *realpolitik* and ahistorical eschatological consummation that says we cannot escape, this side of the *eschaton*, violence endemic to the human condition. This is patently and painfully true. But to say we must therefore embrace "boundary violence", whether directed and blessed by the Church as in past centuries, or endorsed by the Church today for the state to perform in war and penal justice, is another matter. We may attempt as far as we can to deny the state such power. We may refuse to participate directly in endorsing or performing its violence. We may, in other words follow the Pauline admonition: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom 12:18)." And again, we may commit to "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21)."

Concrete examples of alternative responses to crime are found in Restorative Justice literature worldwide²⁰. There is also the compelling story of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed up by Archbishop Desmond Tutu²¹. I write this despite the pessimism of political scientist Jean Bethke Elshtain, who says:

The value of this approach in dealing with not just one state's internal efforts to build constitutional order but with relations between states is untested; political restorative justice seems likely, however, to fall prey to the classic dilemmas of international politics (Elshtain, 2003, p. 130).²²

¹⁹ John Driver argues thus:

God's response to the unfaithfulness of humanity... is wrath. However, in the biblical perspective the wrath of God is not an abstract law of cause and effect in a moral universe to which somehow even God must subject himself. Biblical wrath is an intensely personal response of God to the unfaithfulness of his people with a view to protecting the salvific covenant relationship which he has established in the Old Testament and the New....

Inasmuch as God's wrath is his wounded covenant love, it is in reality more salvific than punitive in its intention (Driver, . 1986, p. 183).

²⁰ For several papers from the Sixth International Restorative Justice Conference, view: <http://www.sfu.ca/cfrj/cresources.html>; for a general website on worldwide developments, see: www.justicefellowship.org/. See also Johnstone (2002); Johnstone (2003); Weitekamp and Kerner (2003); Elliott and Gordon (2005); Johnstone and Van Ness (2007).

²¹ Tutu (1999).

²² I say in my review of Elshtain's book, and specifically of the above quote, using her very own language in critique of non-violence: "This represents reprehensible *realpolitik* copout, sheer ignorance of contrary evidence, and nihilistic pessimism." See my full review at Northey (2006).

As to international politics: see any of the following books for challenge to Boersma and Elshstain:

- Duane Friesen *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective*, Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1986;
- Vern Neufeld Redekop *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-Rooted Conflict Can Open Paths to Reconciliation*, Ottawa: Novalis, 2002;
- Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995;
- Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992;
- Glen Stassen, Editor, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press.1998.

Second, and related, though Dr. Boersma is a very gifted scholar and theologian, in the end, in particular in his treatment of violence, he seems to simply float above the ground of historical reality. Ironically, his book is impervious to the *realpolitik* of invariably vast numbers of “innocent” victims of state violence in executions and warfare, as already discussed. If one understands Jesus as the Ultimate Innocent Victim who was sacrificed once for all so that all ever after, no matter their actual sin and guilt, could be declared just, then the circle of God’s embrace this side of the *eschaton* is without boundary at all. And one has inklings that it just might be that way in the Age to Come, unless there is obstinate refusal, itself the defining boundary. In this case God’s rejection is actually not a *violence* but an *endorsement* of choice. God “gave them over” in the chilling words of Romans 1:24. C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Great Divorce*:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened (Lewis, (1946), pp.66 & 67).

C.F.D. Moule, upon a close reading of the New Testament witness, writes:

If God has willed the dire consequences that ensue on sin, it does not necessarily follow that he has willed them retributively, punitively. It may be that he has willed them as the only way of doing justice to the freedom and responsibility of the human personality, as he has created it (Moule, 2007, p. 256).

Walter Wink in his fascinating study *Engaging the Powers* (1992), beginning on page 244 presents a select list of politically impactful nonviolent interventions. He cites Gene Sharp’s *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) and other publications as examples. James William McClendon Jr.’s *Ethics* (1986) adduces three biographies of Christians attempting to live out this ethic faithfully. Co-authors Nancey Murphy and Geroge F.R. Ellis present a strong case for an applied ethic of non-violence in *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* (1996). They argue “from below” in the social sciences, and “from above” theologically, for a “kenotic ethic” that centres on self-sacrifice and non-violence. When

asked why so few Christians align with this kenotic nonviolent “grain of the universe”²³, Ellis responded simply: “It is just too hard.”

Finally, Dr. Boersma does not mention or discuss *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Griffith, 2002). The book stands in striking counterpoint to Boersma’s thesis on violence.

Griffith opened his first book with the memorable challenge: “The gospel is profoundly scandalous, and until we hear at least a whisper of its scandal, we risk not hearing any part of it (Griffith, 1993, p. 1)”. He lays out the contours of this *scandalous offence* in his second book with reference to violence and war. He too confronts us with our profound addictions to lies and violence as presented in this talk, lies and violence fundamentally opposed to the Truth of the Cross, the Truth that sets us free.

Griffith further decries co-opting God to the service of carnage, and to One “who intervenes in history through warfare rather than... through resurrection and the renunciation of death (Griffith, *op.cit.*, p. xii).” In “testing out God’s perfect will”, Griffith states: “Violence is inevitably a renunciation rather than an affirmation of the will and freedom of God (*ibid*, p. xiii).” “All violence is an attack upon community. All violence by Christians is also an attack upon the memory of Jesus (*ibid*, p. 48).”, Griffith contends in Section II. Likewise, Griffith asserts:

Violence is a form of proselytism which preaches that there is no God. The preachments of violence are more effective than televangelists, more zealous in winning converts than those who sell religion door to door. As we wait for God, terror surrounds us with a message offered as holy writ: “God is not.” (*ibid*, p. 68).

Griffith quotes Abraham Heschel that humanity’s greatest problem is not that of evil but of our relationship to God. And in that relationship, the “enemy” is the gatekeeper:

Though it is maddening, what I owe to God is intertwined with what I owe to my enemy. And the hope too is intertwined. Hope is not possible for me unless it is also possible for the most demonic of my adversaries (*ibid*, p. 125).

Walter Wink similarly asserts that Jesus’ teaching is clear: If we do not find God in the enemy, we have not found God at all. The litmus test for love of God is love of neighbour. The litmus test for love of neighbour is love of enemy. Fail to love the enemy creates a dominoes effect in similar response to neighbour and God.

Near the end of the book, Griffith asks:

What would this mean if it were true that we love God only as much as the person we love least? Would it not mean that, when we have finally won the victory in our war on terrorism, when we have finally managed to exterminate

²³ This is John Howard Yoder’s expression; almost title of Stanley Hauerwas’ 2001 Gifford Lectures and book, *With the Grain of the Universe* (2001). Yoder wrote: “... people who bear [non-violent] crosses are working with the grain of the universe (quoted by Hauerwas, *ibid*, p. 6).”

all the thugs and Hitlers and terrorists, we will have expressed nothing so much as our total confidence in the death of God? (*ibid*, p. 263)

This is the heart of Griffith's sustained thesis that "the biblical concept of 'the terror of God' stands as a renunciation of all violence – and of death itself (inside front jacket cover)." He says at the end: "In effect, the resurrection is God's war on the terrorism of both guerrilla bands and nation states (*ibid*, p. 269).

Conclusion: How Should We Then Live?

The short answer to this question is in the already quoted scripture: "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and **live a life of love**, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1 & 2).*" This is the succinct biblical ethical summation of consequence of the atonement.

Glen Stassen and David Gushee published *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* in 2003.

The authors challenge all forms of ethical dualism arising from Plato. They write:

It is this incipient Platonic dualism, combined with the desire to please the powers and authorities of this world – whether they be political rulers, concentrations of wealth, racist power structures, or habits, customs and self-interested practices – that creates in subsequent church history the devilish dualism in which whole swaths of life are moved out from under God's authority and placed under the authorities of the world (Stassen and Gushee, 2003, p. 129).

Point Seven of "The Pattern Continues Throughout the Sermon" concludes:

It shows that Jesus' teachings engage us in transforming initiatives that participate in the reign of God, the presence of the gracious God who acts in Jesus-who reconciles us with enemies, who is present with us in secret, who is faithful and trustworthy, and who brings deliverance from the vicious cycles that cause violations of the traditional righteousness. The second member [of a chart, p. 142, on the triadic structure of the Sermon on the Mount] consistently names vicious cycles; the Sermon is by no means based on an idealistic assumption that we do not get stuck in vicious cycles of sin. And the third member points the way of deliverance in the midst of this real world of sin. This corrects the idealism that sought to hallow Jesus' teachings by making them simply calls for hard, strenuous, even impossible human effort. Instead it suggests a hermeneutic (a way of interpretation) of grace-based, active participation in eschatological deliverance that begins now. The split between attitudes and actions, in which Jesus allegedly emphasized intentions and not actual practices, falls away. Legalism falls away too; Jesus is pointing to participation in the grace of the deliverance that characterizes the inbreaking of the reign of God. Jesus is indeed the prophetic Messiah who proclaims the inbreaking reign of God and points to specific ways of participation in the kingdom (*ibid*, p. 143).

As I said at the outset, I propose a very simple thesis: *Violence is The Ultimate Lie, and the Final Contradiction of Truth. The Cross is the Ultimate Truth, and the Final Contradiction of Violence.*

In a chapter of *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* entitled “The Triumph of the Cross”, René Girard argues that the Cross enables the truth to triumph. He quotes Colossians 2:14-15 thus:

[Christ has] cancelled the accusation that stands against us with its legal claims. He set it aside, nailing it to the cross. He thus disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, drawing them along in his triumph (quoted in Girard, *op.cit.*, 2001, p. 137).

The “accusation”, according to Girard, is collective violence against a victim, no matter what the justification: War on Terror, legal state execution, any form of nonrestorative retributive punishment, etc. The accusation is the Grand Lie that leads to a scapegoating victim mechanism²⁴ that authorizes violence against another. This is in direct contradiction to the Truth of the Cross – a truth that sets the individual, the “interdividual”²⁵, and all of human culture free!

Girard writes:

The Cross enables the truth to triumph because the Gospels disclose the falseness of the accusation; they unmask Satan as an imposter. Or to say it another way, they discredit once and for all the untruth of the principalities in the wake of the Cross. The Cross of Christ restores all the victims of the single victim mechanism, whether it goes under the label of legal accusation²⁶, Satan, or principalities and powers (*ibid*, p. 138).

Or, to say it yet another way, the Cross discredits all resort to violence – by legally constituted state government as much as by the individual criminal or “organized crime” – an apt description of many (most? all?) states in the history of the world²⁷.

²⁴ Girard dubs it a “single victim mechanism” in the chapter just quoted.

²⁵ This is the only neologism of Girard, one that roughly means, in the spirit of African *ubuntu*, “a person is a person through other persons”. This is also the best way to understand the Trinity with reference to our having been created in God’s image. As God is One in relation to imitation of the Divine Other persons of the Trinity in their love, so we humans are constituted by imitation of the other – and supremely of the Divine Other Trinity. Our freedom depends upon this “mimesis” (to use Girard’s preferred word), a freedom that derives from knowing the Truth of the Cross about the founding violence of all human culture, that in turn sets us and society free (John 8:32).

²⁶ Vern Redekop wrote a fascinating paper (1993) that argues that a modern democracy’s criminal justice system is in fact a grand “scapegoating mechanism”, if restoration is not the goal and outcome (which theological point Chris Marshall argues lucidly in *Beyond Retribution*, 2001). It is widely understood that Western democratic criminal justice systems are not largely about *truth*-finding and absolution, but about *guilt*-finding and retribution.

²⁷ Saint Augustine tells this story to illustrate the point he himself was profoundly inconsistent with: “The king asked the fellow, ‘What is your idea, in infesting the sea?’ And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, ‘The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I’m called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you’re called an emperor.’ (Augustine, 1984, p. 139).”

Evangelical scholars Stassen and Gushee (2003) write, with reference to the oft-cited passage, Rom. 13:4 in defence of legitimized (by Christians) state violence:

Girard argues that to understand the Cross as “God’s weakness” (I Corinthians 1) that subverts all Untruth, all Lies, is to understand the Cross as supreme source of all knowledge – about the world, humans, and God. This is not anti-intellectualism, rather the Ultimate “Science” (Knowledge), so that humanity can know its violent origins, and potentially be set free from all violence.

A team of New Testament scholars in Germany has studied Romans 13 and its historical context (Friedrich et al., “Zur historischen Situation”, [1976,] 131 ff.) These scholars have concluded that Paul was not teaching about the death penalty but was urging his readers to pay the taxes and not to participate in a rebellion against Nero’s new tax. An insurrection against taxes had recently occurred and had led to Christians, including Priscilla and Aquila, being expelled from Rome. Another insurrection was brewing. The Greek word for “sword” (*machaira*) in Romans 13:4 refers to the symbol of authority carried by the police who accompanied tax collectors. Paul was urging Christians to make peace, pay Nero’s new tax and not rebel. He was not arguing for the death penalty, as he so often has been interpreted as doing. He was arguing *against* the violence of insurrection (Stassen and Gushee, 2003, p. 207).

Whether this is the exact historical background and explanation or not (there are obviously others – see for example Herrick (1997), it is very questionable that Paul, in a brief pericope, in the midst of a parenetic, hortatory section on how Christians in Rome should live, set out to give a full-blown doctrine of the state! One must add: Paul was also *in no way* arguing for the legitimacy of a state military!

Further, in the context of early, pre-Constantinian Christian understandings of the state as *Public Enemy Number One*, Paul called on believers to overcome that evil power, not with a show of revolutionary fervour, equally evil, but with good (Romans 12:21). Thus, taught Paul, the Gospel would totally subvert the evil of the Roman or any Empire/government.

This early Christian “good” response to evil, as Jean Lasserre points out (1974), was most likely a reflection of their understanding of the Ten Commandments, or Old Testament Law. Jesus sweepingly summarized this law as LOVE for God, neighbour, and enemy. Paul and other writers took up this theme, often dropping love for God because it was so obviously assumed. Paul’s teaching accurately reflected the words and example of Jesus. Biblical writers stressed love for one’s neighbor as fulfillment of the law. Love was the overarching theme of Paul’s entire understanding of ethics in Romans 12 to 15. Christians who love intend no harm to neighbour, and overcome enmity by doing good, not evil.

As recorded in Romans 8:37, Paul exulted, that “... in all these things ...”, things such as trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword, Christians are “more than conquerors”. For him the source of evils over which Christians were more than conquerors was largely the Roman state. It was the state that “bore the sword” (Romans 13:4). Paul used the same words as in Romans 8:37, “overcoming evil”, again in chapter 12.

Paul understood such conquering over evil in a manner that was a far cry from the revolutionary spirit of some early Christians. Influenced by the Jewish Zealots, they were ready to incite armed insurrection against the hated Roman state. To these Peter likewise wrote about the need for submission to the enemy-state. “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or as a *revolutionist* (I Peter 4:15).”

To my awareness, the term “revolutionist” was never used in English translations of the Bible even though, I suggest, it accurately reflects the meaning Peter intended in the above text (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 39). Certainly in the context of first century Christianity the term “revolutionist” was used to describe grievous crimes against the Roman state; something a Zealot, such as Barabbas, would be proud to commit. Paul taught that Christians are more than conquerors over angels and demons. He used the term “*archai*” translated “demons”; the same *archai* of whom Paul wrote in Titus 3:1. “Remind people to be subject to rulers [*archai*] and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good”. Both Peter and Paul, even as Jesus did, said NO to all revolutionary violence against the state, and any other “fallen” powers under which Christians were obliged to exist.

This is why all theories of atonement that turn on violence in God's response to sin, especially the original sin of violence, are, in Girard's understanding, *mythological*: they *promote* and *authorize* the perpetuation of humanity's violence, rather than *prevent* and *cure* it. The most violent of these are likewise the most dominant in Western theology: *satisfaction* and *penal substitution* theories. Even Hans Boersma's embrace of the recapitulation theory of the atonement as propounded by Church Father Irenaeus retains legitimized violence "at the boundaries"; it still embraces a dynamic of "satisfaction" and "penal substitution".

Girard writes:

Medieval and modern theories of redemption all look in the direction of God for the causes of the Crucifixion: God's honor, God's justice, even God's anger, must be satisfied. These theories don't succeed because they don't seriously look in the direction where the answer must lie: sinful humanity, human relations, mimetic contagion, which is the same thing as Satan (*ibid*, p. 150).

Andrew Klager (2007) challenges Boersma's reading of Irenaeus as inadequate and claims that personal *and* sociopolitical nonviolence are central to his recapitulation theory. Otherwise,

Essentially, if Irenaeus were to anachronistically submit to the claims of penal substitutionary atonement, the rescuing model would include God violently killing his own nonviolent self in an effort to demonstrate the importance of nonviolence to the humanity he wishes to redeem – through violence (Klager, 2007, pp. 445 & 446).

Boersma on the other hand, as earlier mentioned, wants to retain violent punishment towards criminals and state enemies. Klager comments in footnote 206:

... Boersma's endorsement of penal or juridical measures to restore peace fails to account for the subsistence of violence, or the Cain instinct. Instead of redeeming or transforming violence into the pursuit of *shalom*, Boersma seems content to allow the Church to participate in punitive, and therefore retributive, actions that create a winning and a losing side, the former of which invites violent imitation based on its success, which of course creates a proportionate number of losing sides (*ibid*, p. 476).

He also says in the main text that gave rise to the footnote:

Regrettably, Boersma's vindication of penal functionality obscures the restorative characteristics inherent in Christ's identification *with* humanity, but also *for* the Cain instinct redeemed through the alternative Abel nonviolent resolve... Irenaeus' emphasis on Christ's nonviolence demonstrates his propensity for restorative justice in opposition to penal impetuosity. Christ's two primary initiatives, that of instruction and empowerment, implies an invitation to reclaim the divine, and an invitation to nonviolence. It also insinuates the requirement that the Church *be* the Church first and foremost,

which includes uncompromising nonviolence, while allowing the rest of humanity to *be* the same (*ibid*, p. 476).

He concludes his essay thus:

Irenaeus, therefore, understands the atonement for humanity's apostasy to consist of restoration rather than penal retribution. Atonement is humanity's comprehensive identification with Christ whose objective is the reinstatement of *shalom*, and this through his own identification with humanity by means of incarnational instruction, nonviolent obedience and victory over death (*ibid*, p. 480).

Violence is The Ultimate Lie, and the Ultimate Contradiction of Truth. The Cross is The Ultimate Truth, and The Ultimate Contradiction of Violence.

The Cross and Peace stand in complete solidarity. There is no Cross without Peace. There is no ultimate Peace without the Cross. It is not only a great irony of history that the Cross became symbol of legitimized, redemptive violence. It is tragic inversion of the Gospel. "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength* (1 Corinthians 1:18 & 25)." Amen.

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