

The Sickness of America, The Sickness of Humanity

This was sent to me over the Internet:

All Time Best Quote

In a recent interview, General Norman Schwarzkopf was asked if he thought there was room for forgiveness toward the people who have harbored and abetted the terrorists who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks on America.

His answer was classic Schwarzkopf.

The General said, "I believe that forgiving them is God's function. OUR job is to arrange the meeting."

AMEN!

The good General apparently never read the Lord's Prayer: "*This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.***" *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" (Matt 6:9-15) Please see too a posting on this website entitled "The Craft of Forgiveness".

Western civilization inclines repeatedly towards fascism.

My second-year French professor in 1968 digressed delightfully in his classes. His favourite theme that fall was not Proust, Pascal, or Prudhomme. It was the prospective fascist state under Richard Nixon, should he be elected. He was, and the rest, as they say, is history, repeated history at that...

Time magazine privileges history's unfolding as function of *great players*, not *great events*. Two instances were 1990's front-page photos, one captioned, "The Face of a Hero", the other, "The Face of Evil". General Norman Schwarzkopf was the former, Timothy McVeigh the latter.

My French prof taught that perspective is everything. Timothy McVeigh killed 168 innocents, and was executed. Yet he is martyr and hero amongst white supremacists and similar ilk crackpots. General Schwarzkopf, celebrated American hero, was contrarily hated in Iraq in the first Gulf War, responsible in fact for the death of as many as 100,000 combatants and civilians, most infamously on "the highway to hell", when thousands of retreating Iraqi troops, mostly teenagers, were relentlessly slaughtered "like a turkey shoot".

When it comes to violence resort, one person's hero is ineluctably another's killer. The most startling and least followed ethical insight of humanity is, *end and means are one*. ***Resort to violence, reap violence; in violent response to resort to violence, reap violence.*** There is no nonviolent outcome to violence.

The above is borne out in the research of arguably the greatest contemporary theorist on violence: René Girard. From Charles Bellinger's discussion in *The Genealogy of Violence*, Girard's theory begins with the experience in all cultures known to history of existential lack or ontological sickness, which lack leads to endless societal cycles of imitation or mimesis of others, which invariably elicits violence. Society consequently seizes upon a victim and kills him/her to meet its own psychological needs. Humanity historically prevented itself from descending into a chaos of self-destruction by choosing a scapegoat whose death would create a new sense of social unanimity and cohesion. This may be routine sacrifice of victims in ancient Incan and Mayan "civilizations" to secure blessings from the gods; mob lynching of Blacks to protect "righteous" white folk; immolation of Jews in Nazi Holocaust to excuse collective German guilt; prosecution of a minority of "criminals" through imprisonment and the death penalty to let the "law-abiding" off the hook; Allied saturation bombing of two million civilians in Germany and Japan to make the world "safe for democracy". There is fundamental moral and psychological falsity to, endless recycling of, all scapegoating violence.

Girard applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to foundational social phenomena, claims Bellinger. The ubiquitous scapegoat mechanism is one side of the great either/or of human existence: either our civilization (and any other) will continue sacrificing victims to meet the psychological needs arising out of universal "ontological sickness", or humans will learn to follow the way of "love" of neighbour and enemy at its most broadly political and social application. "Civilized" society invariably acts throughout history the exact opposite to the way of nonviolence, which summation is "love your neighbour/enemy as yourself".

For Girard, the spiritual immaturity of modern Western civilization creates an inability to recognize and love its "victims" (which all civilizations known to history invariably generate) as neighbours. At the heart of violence is mimetic desire that results from a *failure of individuality*. The person who has become an individual (truly human) is a person responsive to the charge: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Such receptiveness opens up the way to a new kind of society, quite simply a community of love and respect for all people, including for those who perpetrate and harbour those who perpetrate, terrorism, *without exception*.

There are increasingly open comparisons between President Bush in his "War Against Terror" and various fascist leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini. (See another posting by me on this site: "Emperor Bush, Pirate Bin Laden, Calvin College and the Gospel".) But the cancer goes far deeper. "The Face of Fascism" in fact is "Everyman" who ultimately endorses sacrifice of "others" for self-preservation (though it invariably be whitewashed as "democracy" and "freedom" in the West).

Here are the chilling words of CIA operative “Anonymous” concerning potential civilian casualties in an interview about his 2004 book, *Imperial Hubris*: “That’s the way war is. I’ve never really understood the idea that any American government, any American elected official is responsible for protecting civilians who are not Americans.”

What he’s also never really understood is the Gospel. The tragedy is, most American Evangelical leadership, possibly most other American church leadership, from Billy Graham to whomever, would/do say the same. **That is the nub of America’s idolatry; of America’s sickness unto death.**

This is scapegoating violence at its most pragmatic. This is Fox News host Bill O’Reilly’s “final solution” to fighting the Muslims: “What we can do is bomb the living daylight out of them, just like we did in the Balkans.” This is Hitler towards the Jews and six millions liquidated; with six millions more non-desirables wiped out. This is also the all-time most decorated American war hero General Curtis LeMay, more celebrated even than Schwarzkopf, who boasted that “we scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo on that night of March 9-10 [1945] than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.” He also admitted that had America lost that war, he and many other American leaders would have been executed as war criminals. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara acknowledged the same in Errol Morris’ 2004 documentary, *The Fog of War*.

The “clash of civilizations” (Samuel Huntington) is in truth the “clash of barbarisms” (Gilbert Achcar), as René Girard so compellingly presents.

The “face of fascism” turns out to be *my face and your face*, unless we turn our faces individually and collectively towards the neighbour and enemy in relentlessly creative new embrace.

The “how” begins with the “why”. My second-year French prof was right: *it is the only way of becoming human*.