

*Justice That Transforms: Restorative
Justice — “Not Enough!”*

**Chapter 14: “A Great Irony of History”: The
Anthropological Significance of the Cross, and
Peace**

This was basis of a presentation in a workshop I did at an annual COV&R¹ Conference.² It was, regrettably, also the last Conference I attended.

I have always delighted in being part of such. Noted Mennonite theologian Willard Swartley³ told me that, while he had attended many professional Conferences during his long career as a biblical scholar, he loved attending COV&R Conferences, for they exhibited minimum rivalry amongst its established and rising star attendees/scholars/activists. This was, he said, attributable to René Girard’s presence — one of the least given to mimetic desire (i.e. *most humble*) of anyone he had ever met.

Unbeknownst initially, I suddenly realized and was a little taken aback, that theologian Paul Nuechterlein,⁴ whom I cited a few times early on in the talk, was in the audience.

Introduction

¹ See bulletin:

https://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/bulletin/archive/bulletin_33.pdf.

² See: <https://violenceandreligion.com/>, accessed August 23, 2024.

³ See: <https://www.ambs.edu/employees/willard-swartley/>, accessed August 23, 2024.

⁴ See: <https://girardianlectionary.net/about-paul-nuechterlein/>, accessed August 23, 2024.

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What do I mean by “violence” in this talk? A very succinct definition is given in Marjorie Suchocki’s *The Fall To Violence*:

*. . . at its base, violence is the destruction of well-being.*⁵

Violence is the destruction of well-being. Shalom is the enormously, semantically rich Hebrew 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 Bible.⁶ *Violence is the destruction of well-being. Violence is the destruction of shalom.*

I can immediately think of several qualifications. So, I will 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 of the Good Creation.*⁷

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

⁵ Suchocki, *Fall to Violence*, 85; emphasis added.

⁶ See Yoder, *Shalom*, for a fuller discussion on its wide semantic range.

⁷ 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 such. In the current war in Iraq, civilians account for 90% of all casualties (See: Alper and Earp, *War Made Easy*).

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Trusts, 2003).⁸ 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.⁹

Hence part of this paper’s title: “A Great Irony of History.” This is grand understatement.

The Cross: Ultimate Revelation of Truth

The Apostle Paul wrote:

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

⁸ An update in 2024: This is a tragically similar percentage to that of those who support Trump. See much more on this in my very long post: *Book Review of: Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. (<https://waynenorthey.com/2023/02/15/book-review-of-jesus-and-john-wayne-how-white-evangelicals-corrupted-a-faith-and-fractured-a-nation/>, accessed August 23, 2024.)

Also notice in that post video links for Beth Allison Barr’s *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*.

⁹ Anderson, “Jesus and Peace,” 104.

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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)

In Christian revelation, 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 Greatest Commandments: — *love of God, love of neighbour* — that summarize the entire ethical sweep of Judeo-Christian revelation according to Jesus.¹⁰

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] Girard,¹¹ 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,

¹⁰ Matthew 22:40.

¹¹ See: <https://waynenorthey.com/?s=ren%C3%A9+girard>, accessed August 23, 2024. The reader is also directed to this newly published (2024) work on situating Girard within the Western philosophical tradition: Dunn and Wilmes: *René Girard*.

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namely, the collective murder of a victim.¹²

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.¹³

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. Paul Nuechterlein again observes:

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.¹⁴

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

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

¹² Nuechterlein, 4.

¹³ *Nuechterlein*, 17.

¹⁴ Nuechterlein, 17.

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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.”¹⁵

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 eyes¹⁶ 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

¹⁵ Nuechterlein, 179.

¹⁶ 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 (Matthew 13:15).

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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.¹⁷

Many here are familiar with Gil Bailie’s book, *Violence Unveiled*,¹⁸ so I shall not say a lot about it for sake of time. Likewise, it is “coals to Newcastle” to say very much about Girard’s work at this conference. But a few brief comments will help.

Bailie’s book posits the centrality of the Cross as *the Universal Truth* that contradicts violence, which in turn is *the Universal Deception*.

Bailie 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.¹⁹

¹⁷ 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 (Nuechterlein, 19).

¹⁸ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*.

¹⁹ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 6.

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Violence is the foundation of human culture. Bailie argues, drawing on 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’.²⁰

“Caiaphas,” explains Bailie, “was invoking a mechanism for preserving culture that is as old as culture itself.”²¹

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.*²²

²⁰ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 6.

²¹ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 6.

²² John 8:44. There has, however, been a tragic history in the West of assigning such a depiction to the “Jews,” and consequent pogroms and generally horrific treatment of them. Whereas:

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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.” Bailie 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.’²³

Ioudaios (Ancient Greek: Ἰουδαῖος; pl. Ἰουδαῖοι *Ioudaioi*) is an Ancient Greek ethnonym used in classical and biblical literature which commonly translates to “Jew” or “Judean.”

The choice of translation is the subject of frequent scholarly debate, given its central importance to passages in the Bible (both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament) as well as works of other writers such as Josephus and Philo. Translating it as *Jews* is seen to imply connotations as to the religious beliefs of the people, whereas translating it as *Judeans* confines the identity within the geopolitical boundaries of Judea. . .

In 2001, the third edition of the *Bauer lexicon*, one of the most highly respected dictionaries of Biblical Greek, supported translation of the term as “Judean”, writing:

Incalculable harm has been caused by simply glossing Ioudaios with ‘Jew,’ for many readers or auditors of Bible translations do not practice the historical judgment necessary to distinguish between circumstances and events of an ancient time and contemporary ethnic-religious-social realities, with the result that anti-Judaism in the modern sense of the term is needlessly fostered through biblical texts. (Wikipedia, “*Ioudaios*,” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ioudaios> (accessed August 23, 2024, emphasis added).

²³ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 33.

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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.²⁴

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.²⁵

Myth ultimately justifies violence by declaring it legitimate if the state through its police and military undertakes it — which entities hold the monopoly on resort to “legitimate” violence. 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* by the New Testament, in exact inversion of Rudolph Bultmann’s project of demythologizing the Gospels.

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.²⁶

The Cross ultimately points to a *desire for a self ever found in the well-being of the other. It is a life of*

²⁴ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 34.

²⁵ Genesis 4:10.

²⁶ Girard, *I See Satan*, 3.

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“embodied forgiveness” according to L. Gregory Jones,²⁷ 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 antidote to violence.²⁸

²⁷ Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*.

²⁸ See on this my post: “Living in Communion: AN INTERVIEW WITH FATHER THOMAS HOPKO 03-04-2015.” (<https://waynenorthey.com/2015/03/04/living-in-communion-an-interview-with-father-thomas-hopko/>, accessed August 23, 2024.) It is quite outstanding.

Father Hopko brilliantly says of forgiveness:

After this I started reading the Church Fathers in this light, and that’s what they all say — “Your brother is your life.” I have no self in myself except the one that is fulfilled by loving the other. The Trinitarian character of God is a metaphysical absolute here, so to speak. God’s own self is another — His Son. The same thing happens on the human level.

So, the minute I don’t feel deeply that my real self is the other, then I’ll have no reason to forgive anyone [or not to do violence to another, such as in criminal justice, or in war]. But if that is my reality, and my only real self is the other, and my own identity and fulfillment emerges only in the act of loving the other, that gives substance to the idea that we are potentially God-like beings. Now, if you add to that that we are all to some degree faulty and weak and so on, that act of love will always be an act of forgiveness. That’s how I find and fulfill myself as a human being made in God’s image.

Otherwise, I cannot. So, the act of forgiveness is the very act by which our humanity is constituted. Deny that, and we kill ourselves. It’s a metaphysical suicide. (Kisly, “Living in Communion.”)

See further on this: “Living in communion: A revisit with Fr. Thomas Hopko, IC70” (<https://incommunion.org/2015/09/11/living-in-communion-interview-with-fr-thomas-hopko/>, accessed August 23, 2024.) We hear Father Hopko say:

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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 corruption and death, and are contradictions to salvation and life; or as John puts it, “grace and truth” brought through the Cross of Jesus Christ.²⁹

According to Girard, Jesus died because he gave the lie to legitimized, *redemptive*³⁰ violence.

The “atonement” (a Christian theory or doctrine about why Christ died) therefore is in fact, the inversion of

By definition, forgiveness is breaking the chain of evil, beginning with recognizing that evil really has been done. People tend to think forgiveness means something bad was not really done, that a person didn’t understand the consequences, or whatever. If that were the case, there would be no need for forgiveness; it could be seen simply as a mistake. Forgiveness has to admit, and rage over, and weep over a real evil, and only then say, “We are going to live in communion one with another. We are going to carry on.” Never forgetting — you can’t, at any rate — but carrying on in a spirit of love without letting the evil poison the future relationship. Certainly, that is what happens theologically. The striking thing in the Gospel is that God refuses to let evil destroy the relationship. *Even if we kill him, he will say, “Forgive them.”* (Emphasis added.)

²⁹ See on this: “War, Police and Prisons: Cross-Examining State-Sanctioned Violence, Streams of Justice, September 28, 2009,” in Northey, *Justice That Transforms, Volume Three*; and here: <https://waynenorthey.com/2015/03/17/war-police-and-prisons-cross-examining-state-sanctioned-violence/>, accessed August 23, 2024.

³⁰ Walter Wink’s preferred term in *Engaging The Powers*.

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legitimized violence, and therefore again, the very antithesis of all Just War/Just Execution theory. I shall return to the theme of atonement.

“War Made Easy”: State Legitimization of Violence

A 2007 documentary is based upon a book by journalist Norman Solomon.³¹ The book and movie are entitled, *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning us to Death* (Solomon, *War Made Easy* — the book; Alper & Earp, *War Made Easy* — the documentary).

In the documentary, narrator Sean Penn³² 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 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,

³¹ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Solomon, accessed August 23, 2024. See also this interview with the author, and transcript: https://www.democracynow.org/2007/5/29/war_made_easy_how_presidents_pundits, accessed August 23, 2024.

³² See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean_Penn, accessed August 23, 2024.

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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. . . (See: Alper & Earp, 2007).³³

“The first casualty when war comes is truth,” declared U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson³⁴ in 1917 — and many more since.

Jesus declared: “*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,*”³⁵ and: *I am the . . . truth . . .*³⁶ “Christian violence” is ever an oxymoron. I cite James Megivern thus in my book review of *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey*:

³³ The 2022 documentary, *Theaters of War*, by Communication Studies professor Roger Stahl (<https://comm.uga.edu/directory/people/roger-stahl>, accessed August 23, 2024) is powerful indictment of this relationship. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theaters_of_War.

See also: “Military–entertainment complex” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military%E2%80%93entertainment_complex, accessed August 23, 2024.) We read:

The **military–entertainment complex** is the cooperation between militaries and entertainment industries to their mutual benefit, especially in such fields as cinema, multimedia, virtual reality, and multisensory extended reality.

Though the term can be used to describe any military–entertainment complex in any nation, the most prominent complex is between the United States Department of Defense (DoD)

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Defense, accessed August 23, 2024) and the film industry of the United States.

³⁴ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiram_Johnson, accessed August 23, 2024. Many others have also said it.

³⁵ John 8:32

³⁶ John 14:6

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As is evident, the problem being addressed extends far beyond the issue of capital punishment as such, since this practice is symptomatic and only one piece of the much larger puzzle, the puzzle of accounting for the oxymoronic phenomenon of ‘Christian violence’ in its many forms.^{37/38}

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.³⁹

Professor Coates is erudite 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 addiction⁴⁰) at all costs.⁴¹

So this erudite ethicist, without(?) commitment to an overarching narrative of the Cross as symbol of peacemaking to challenge him, adds in step with the best

³⁷ Megivern, *The Death Penalty*, 4.

³⁸ See also, “Book Review of: *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey*,” <https://waynenorthey.com/book-review/the-death-penalty/>, accessed August 23, 2024.

³⁹ Coates, *Ethics*, 36.

⁴⁰ See below for more on “process addiction.”

⁴¹ See Andersen, *Emperor’s New Clothes*.

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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.⁴²

⁴² Coates, *Ethics*, 36. One is reminded in this of the classic statement by Kellyanne Conway (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kellyanne_Conway, accessed August 23, 2024) as we read in *Wikipedia*: “Alternative Facts” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_facts#:~:text=Alternative%20facts?%20...to%20make%20her%20look%20ridiculous, accessed August 23, 2024):

When pressed during the interview with Chuck Todd (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Todd, accessed August 23, 2024) to explain why Spicer would “utter a provable falsehood,” Conway stated that Spicer was giving “alternative facts.”

The classic response from Todd was:

Look, alternative facts are not facts. They’re falsehoods. (See: Blake, Aaron (January 22, 2017. “Kellyanne Conway says Donald Trump’s team has ‘alternative facts.’ Which pretty much says it all” — <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/22/kellyanne-conway-says-donald-trumps-team-has-alternate-facts-which-pretty-much-says-it-all/>, accessed August 23, 2024)

Which underscores how high intelligence is no match for the overwhelming draw of cult leaders like Trump. . . Conway continues to show she suffers, sadly, from a tragic condition of “HI” — High Intelligence Idiocy.

One might likewise expostulate to Coates:

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Look. Alternative moralities are not (permissible) “moralities,” they are perversions of the Truth — above all by Gospel standards.

In an entire chapter devoted to whether New Testament teaching in any way warrants Christians to support violence to achieve justice, Richard Hays (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_B._Hays, accessed August 23, 2024) concludes:

Our exegetical illustration of Matthew 5:38 - 48 has led to the conclusion that the passage teaches a norm of nonviolent love of enemies. . . . The question that we must now consider is how Matthew’s vision of the peaceful community fits into the larger witness of the canon of the New Testament. Do the other texts in the canon reinforce the Sermon on the Mount’s teaching on nonviolence, or do they provide other options that might allow or require Christians to take up the sword? When the question is posed this way, the immediate result — as [Karl] Barth (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth, accessed August 23, 2024) observed — is to underscore how impressively univocal is the testimony of the New Testament writers on this point (Hays, *Moral Vision*, 329).

There is only one consistent New Testament voice on the theme of violence: *its utter rejection! Why then, one is compelled to ask, if the New Testament is so consistent in its witness for nonviolent peacemaking, should commitment to nonviolence be the overwhelming minority position of the Christian church?* Hays again:

One reason that the world finds the New Testament’s message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless. On the question of violence, the church is deeply compromised and committed to nationalism, violence, and idolatry. (*By comparison, our problems with sexual sin are trivial.*) This indictment applies alike to liberation theologies that justify violence against oppressors and to establishment Christianity that continues to play chaplain to the military-industrial complex, citing just war theory and advocating the defense of a particular nation as though that were somehow a Christian value (Hays, *Moral Vision*, 343; emphasis added).”

Please see on this as well in this book: “Ron Dart and the Multiverse: Reflections.”

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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.*

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

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.

[Reinhold] Niebuhr’s⁴³ Christian and Protestant *realism* takes this form. The political order is seen as naturally resistant to morality, and

⁴³ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhold_Niebuhr, accessed August 23, 2024.

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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,⁴⁴ 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.’⁴⁵ 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’.⁴⁶

Norman 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

⁴⁴ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Morgenthau, accessed August 23, 2024.

⁴⁵ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man*, 203.

⁴⁶ Coates, *Ethics of War*, 33 – 34. Evans, *Social and Political Philosophy*, 320.

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war has to end.⁴⁷

The documentary ends with words of Solomon, then of Martin Luther King Jr. I’ll just cite the former for sake of time:

The independent journalist I.F. Stone⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

Humanity’s Most “Consistent Signature”: Genocide

Jared Diamond⁵⁰ wrote in *The Third Chimpanzee*:

⁴⁷ Soloman, *War Made Easy*.

⁴⁸ See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I. F. Stone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I._F._Stone), accessed August 23, 2024.

⁴⁹ Soloman, *War Made Easy*.

⁵⁰ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jared_Diamond, accessed August 23, 2024.

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*The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*⁵¹ — 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*, 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.⁵²

I will dwell on Smith’s book for a short 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.⁵³

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.”⁵⁴

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

⁵¹ Smith, *Most Dangerous*, 57.

⁵² Smith, *Most Dangerous*, 57.

⁵³ Smith, *Most Dangerous*, xiii.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Most Dangerous*, 6.

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\$78.6 billion.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The latest statistics are here: “Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023 (<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2023>, accessed August 23, 2024).” In it:

World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of \$2443 billion. The 6.8 per cent increase in 2023 was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009 and pushed global spending to the highest level SIPRI has ever recorded. The world military burden—defined as military spending as a percentage of global gross domestic product (GDP)—increased to 2.3 per cent in 2023. Average military expenditure as a share of government expenditure rose by 0.4 percentage points to 6.9 per cent in 2023 and world military spending per person was the highest since 1990, at \$306.

⁵⁶ An Appendix of a “partial list” is reproduced below (Smith, *Most Dangerous Animal*, 217 & 218):

A PARTIAL LIST OF DEMOCIDES COMMITTED DURING THE PAST 100 YEARS

- 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.

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- 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

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Smith writes:

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.⁵⁷

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*. . .⁵⁸

Gil Bailie comments thus:

The moment these words were spoken, the delusion [*– the lie! –*] to which they refer was exposed, and shortly thereafter the paramount

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).

⁵⁷ Smith, *Most Dangerous*, 8, first italics added.

⁵⁸ Luke 23:34.

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power of the delusional system that produced it was undermined.⁵⁹

Bailie 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 — *Ethics of War*] are formed. . .⁶⁰

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 within the human species a *likewise major disinclination to kill*.

In the movie *Saving Private Ryan*,⁶¹ 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*

⁵⁹ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 265.

⁶⁰ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 265.

⁶¹ See:

<https://duckduckgo.com/?q=Saving+Private+Ryan&t=newext&atb=v388-1&ia=web>, accessed August 23, 2024.

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as it may sound, his ability to deceive himself can make the difference between survival and extermination, victory and defeat.⁶²

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.⁶³

In the 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. . . [bang! — his opponent is murdered by Bond in cold blood] is the hardest.” *Bond in fact earns his “double O 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 (often in the U.S. Pentagon-blackmailed) corporate/“militainment” media that will not broadcast images of humans torn apart by bombings, the virus of self-deception spreads to an entire society. 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

⁶² Smith, *Most Dangerous*, 160.

We humans have enormous capacity for self-deceit!

⁶³ Grossman, *On Killing*, 181.

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ensorship — of course, all 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, however, we have been hard-wired to be self-deceitful⁶⁴ through our evolutionary past, or in, as Christians affirm, the post-resurrection doctrine of original sin,⁶⁵ neither of which Raymund Schwager⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁴ There is significant Judeo-Christian discernment of humanity’s great capacity for self-deceit. Doug Frank in *Less Than Conquerors* writes, with reference to Evangelicals’ inclination towards such:

We are the Pharisees of our time, if anyone is. . .

He yearns nonetheless for,
. . . a church that awakens to the Stranger, Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ of the biblical witness; not the denatured, ideologically and morally useful Jesus Christ of Evangelicalism
. . . (Frank, *Less Than Conquerors*, 277.)

The Epilogue’s penultimate paragraph reads:

Whether in auspicious or declining times, as we have seen, we display a tenacious commitment to self-deceit. It is true that we are those who like to think we heed Jeremiah’s words, ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.’ Our history, however, gives evidence of Jeremiah’s wisdom in adding these words: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?’ (Jeremiah 17:7, 9). In our very protests of trust in the Lord, we find occasion for our deepest self-deceits (Frank, *Less Than Conquerors*, 278; emphasis added).

⁶⁵ See Alison, *The Joy*, on original sin as “the joy of being wrong.”

⁶⁶ Schwager, *Banished From Eden*.

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I shall now turn to the horror of war as seen through the eyes of Christian journalist Chris Hedges. The Ultimate Oxymoron, I suggest, in light of the revelation of the Cross, is “Christian violence.”⁶⁷ This utter contradiction of terms is sustained by self-deceit, namely, by the rejection of Truth as revealed in the Cross.

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

We read:

Process addiction, or behavioral addiction as it’s also called, refers to compulsive behaviors that an individual engages in and continues to do despite harmful consequences. Process addictions are like substance addictions in that the individual is unable to stop or cut down on the behavior even though negative outcomes are occurring. It is unlike a substance addiction in that the desirable high from dopamine and other hormones is not from drugs or alcohol but from the behavior. Engaging in the behaviors produces an emotional ‘high’ that drives the individual to keep repeating the

⁶⁷ I cite James Megivern thus in my book review of *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey*:

As is evident, the problem being addressed extends far beyond the issue of capital punishment as such, since this practice is symptomatic and only one piece of the much larger puzzle, the puzzle of accounting for the oxymoronic phenomenon of ‘Christian violence’ in its many forms (Megivern, *The Death Penalty*, 4). See also, Northey, “Book Review of: *The Death Penalty*.”

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behavior.⁶⁸

*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.*

The modern Western states — Canada, the U.S., Israel, all members of NATO — are *process addicts*,⁶⁹ 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, that is: consistent nonviolence.*

Perhaps one of the most poignant — *and, in light of Hamas against Israel, and Israel against Gaza in 2024* (not to mention all human history), *overwhelmingly naïve!* — 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. He appealed to the nations of the world to *at least protect civilians.*

On September 1, 1939, the President sent an appeal to Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Poland that read:

⁶⁸ See: <https://www.caron.org/addiction-101/process-addictions/what-is-a-process-addiction>, accessed August 23, 2024.

⁶⁹ The focus in this paper is on the West. Of course, all nations in world history have participated in such. See more on this in my book reviews of *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* and *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* — both books by Catholic historian/theologian William T. Cavanaugh. (<https://waynenorthey.com/book-review/the-myth-of-religious-violence-and-migrations-of-the-holy/>, accessed August 23, 2024.)

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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. . . [and so on] (Roosevelt, 1939, emphasis added).

The French and British in response jointly announced that they would spare civilian populations from such “*inhuman barbarism*,” and destruction of state government property.⁷⁰ The Germans claimed to affirm

⁷⁰ An interesting similitude. The West is, after all, *rapaciously capitalistic!* Journalist Jake Johnson captures the horror and banality of this in: “Empire’s Religion: Arundhati Roy Confronts the Tyranny of the Free Market.”

(<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/09/15/empires-religion-arundhati-roy-confronts-tyranny-free-market>, accessed August 23, 2024.) We read:

Perhaps the most revealing words on the topic of globalization in recent years came not from the pen of Thomas Piketty, nor were they written by Robert Reich or Joseph Stiglitz or Paul Krugman — rather, they can be found in the pages of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, written by the notorious *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman.

“The hidden hand of the market,” Friedman notes in a particularly telling fragment, “will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell

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Roosevelt’s call, but contradicted that in their attack on Warsaw the 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.

Besides carpet bombing into the millions of civilians in Germany and Japan, the “Good Guys” *committed the Ultimate War Crimes of all history: not one but two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima’s and Nagasaki’s civilian populations!*

So what was going on?

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

Douglass, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.”

Friedman isn’t known for his subtlety or sincerity, but the above passage strikes at a crucial truth. So much so, in fact, that Arundhati Roy (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arundhati_Roy, accessed August 23, 2024 — and more in Johnson’s article) christened it “the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read.”

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and with compassion is a basic moral imperative.⁷¹

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 Marshal Montgomery advised:

The troops must be brought to a state of wild enthusiasm before the operation begins. . . They must enter the fight with the light of battle in their eyes and definitely wanting to kill the enemy” (Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 88 - 89).⁷²

Retired U.S. Lt. Colonel David Grossman,⁷³ 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

⁷¹ And without *lying*, claimed the good Saint! One wonders in just what world Augustine actually had lived!

⁷² Coates, *Ethics of War*, 29.

⁷³ See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Grossman_\(author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Grossman_(author)), accessed August 23, 2024.

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what happens at boot camp. . .⁷⁴

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.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Grossman, *On Killing*, 1. Please also see my reflection on the movie *Jarhead*, a movie that depicts brilliantly this brutalization (Northey, “Jarhead”).

⁷⁵ Grossman, *On Killing*, 1.

As historian Margaret MacMillan wrote in: *War, How Conflict Shaped Us*:

In 1943, 40,000 died in the German city of Hamburg, many in the firestorm that swept the city as a result of Allied bombing, and in 1945 perhaps a further 35,000 in Dresden. (The figure for the latter, like the choice of the target itself, remains highly controversial.) The American bombing of Tokyo that same year with incendiary bombs (a weapon chosen deliberately because so many structures in the city were made of wood) destroyed sixteen square miles and left 80,000 to 100,000 dead and 1 million homeless. Major-General Curtis LeMay (see:

https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Curtis_LeMay, accessed August 23, 2024), whose responsibility the raid was, said the Japanese were ‘scorched and boiled and baked to death.’

It was no oversight that mass bombings were not included in the Allied indictment of Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg trials (see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_trials, accessed August 23, 2024). (MacMillan, *War*, 189.)

In *The Fog of War* (see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fog_of_War, accessed August 23, 2024), Robert McNamara (see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_McNamara, accessed August 23,

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Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges,⁷⁶ a Harvard Divinity School⁷⁷ graduate, gives an explanation for war in the very title of his book: *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. 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

2024) readily acknowledged he and LeMay could have been tried for war crimes. We read:

In 1945, LeMay was in charge of a massive firebombing offensive in Japan that resulted in the deaths of nearly 1 million Japanese citizens, including 100,000 in Tokyo during a single night. LeMay’s B-29 bombers raked 67 Japanese cities, sometimes killing more than 50% of the population. *McNamara points out that, had the United States lost the war, he and LeMay would have been tried as war criminals. But, of course, it’s the victors who write the rules and determine what is justified.* Nevertheless, it’s clear that McNamara has wrestled with this issue for decades. (Berardinelli, “Movie Review”; emphasis added).

⁷⁶ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Hedges, accessed August 23, 2024.

⁷⁷ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_Divinity_School, accessed August 23, 2024.

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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.⁷⁸

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 all-time record for instantaneous mass slaughter. . .⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Hedges, *War is a Force*, 3.

⁷⁹ Jones, "One War is Enough," 4.

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He continues in similar vein, pointing out that the Allies and their enemies were identical mirror images, mutual imitators in fact.⁸⁰

The literature on Western government war crimes and atrocities (*we Westerners the “good guys”, right?!*) abounds, and is a litany of horror and terror.

Numerous accounts of atrocities from the Abu Grahیب⁸¹ 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*, by Joshua Key, who eventually sought asylum in Canada.⁸²

⁸⁰ See much about this on my website (<https://waynenorthey.com/?s=ren%C3%A9+girard>, accessed August 23, 2024), in the brilliant work of René Girard, who says to the core, we are mimetic creatures (imitators), and scapegoating in the fundamental structure of our societies.

⁸¹ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ghraib, accessed August 23, 2024.

⁸² In the first ever memoir from a young soldier who deserted from the war in Iraq, Joshua Key ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Key_\(soldier\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Key_(soldier)), accessed August 23, 2024) 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

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Would one expect differently?

There is a growing abundance of superb biblical studies that posit *peace* and *just peacemaking* as the central organizing motifs of the New Testament literature. There is no space to cite any of it.

In *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, author Lee Griffith takes us to the heart of this reading of the Gospels. He in fact opened his first book with this 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.⁸³

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.⁸⁴

Griffith further decries co-opting God to the service of carnage, and to One

transformed him into someone who could no longer serve his country.
(From the cover, Key, *Deserter's Tale*.)

⁸³ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 3. Please see also “René Girard on *Skandalon*” (<https://girardianlectionary.net/learn/girard-on-skandalon/>, accessed August 23, 2024); Kierkegaard and McCracken, *Scandal*.

⁸⁴ Though horribly and wrongly applied to Jews in Western history, Jesus said in John 8:44:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. *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.*

Please see an earlier footnote in this chapter for more on use of this passage.

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. . . who intervenes in history through warfare rather than. . . through resurrection and the renunciation of death.⁸⁵

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.⁸⁶

*All violence is an attack upon community. All violence by Christians is also an attack upon the memory of Jesus,*⁸⁷ 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.”⁸⁸

Griffith quotes Abraham Heschel⁸⁹ 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

⁸⁵ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, xii.

⁸⁶ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, xiii.

⁸⁷ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 48.

⁸⁸ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 68. Walter Wink writes:

Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 13.)

⁸⁹ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Joshua_Heschel, accessed August 23, 2024.

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for me unless it is also possible for the most demonic of my adversaries.⁹⁰

Theologian Walter Wink similarly asserts that Jesus’ teaching is: *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. Failure to love the enemy creates a dominoes effect in similar response to neighbour and God. Wink writes:

I submit that the ultimate religious question today is no longer the Reformation’s “How can I find a gracious God?” It is instead, “How can I find God in my enemy?” What guilt was for Luther, the enemy has become for us: the goad that can drive us to God. What has formerly been a purely private affair — justification by faith through grace — has now, in our age, grown to embrace the world. As John Stoner comments, we can no more save ourselves from our enemies than we can save ourselves from sin, but God’s amazing grace offers to save us from both. There is, in fact, no other way to God for our time but through the enemy, for loving the enemy has become the key both to human survival in the age of terror and to personal transformation. Either we find the God who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, or we may have no more sunrises.⁹¹

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 all the thugs and Hitlers and terrorists, we will have expressed nothing so much as our total confidence

⁹⁰ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 125.

⁹¹ Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*.

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in the death of God?⁹²

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.⁹³

He says at the end:

In effect, the resurrection is God’s war on the terrorism of both guerrilla bands and nation states.⁹⁴

Conclusion: How Should We Then Live?

How should we then live? The short answer to this question is in this 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.⁹⁵

This is the most succinct biblical ethical summation of consequence of the death of Christ on the Cross (the atonement⁹⁶).

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*

⁹² Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 263.

⁹³ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, inside front jacket cover.

⁹⁴ Griffith, *War on Terrorism*, 269.

⁹⁵ Ephesians 5:1 - 2.

⁹⁶ See: “Salvation in Christianity,”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvation_in_Christianity, accessed August 23, 2024.

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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.⁹⁷

The “accusation,”⁹⁸ 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 mechanism⁹⁹ that authorizes violence against another. This is in direct contradiction to the Truth of the Cross — a truth that sets the individual, the “interindividual,”¹⁰⁰ and all of human culture free!

Girard writes:

The Cross enables the truth to triumph

⁹⁷ Quoted in Girard, *Satan Fall*, 137.

⁹⁸ By the Satan/Accuser — Girard.

⁹⁹ Girard dubs it a “single victim mechanism” in the chapter just quoted.

¹⁰⁰ 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 mutual 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) of the Triune God, 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).

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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 accusation,¹⁰¹ Satan, or

¹⁰¹ Vern Redekop wrote a fascinating paper (*Scapegoats*) 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*).

It is widely understood that Western democratic criminal justice systems are not largely about *truth*-finding and absolution, but about *guilt*-finding and retribution.

[See more on this in this essay by James G. Williams, “René Girard without the Cross?”](#)

We read:

If we turn to Girard’s “interindividual” psychology and focus on the development of the self, we see that he likewise conceives the individual, who is always inherently social or intersubjective (thus “interindividual”), as in a predicament analogous to the predicament of the social-cultural order. ^[Footnote 5] Except that the individual has a potential for liberation from the mimetic predicament which is much greater than societies and traditions, whose unconscious scapegoat mechanisms are precisely what binds them and makes them cohere in a system. This will be taken up below.]

The child has no inherent, biogenetic mechanism for distinguishing between good and bad forms of behavior. The behaviors and rules he learns are basically imitations of what adults do and say, although what other children say and do, both older children and peers, undoubtedly has considerable influence. The child has no innate way of knowing that you can go too far with imitation: if it gets too acquisitive it begins

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principalities and powers.¹⁰²

Or, to say it yet another way, the Cross discredits all resort to violence — by legally constituted state governments as much as by the individual criminal, or the Mob — “organized crime,” which in turn is an apt description of many (most? all?) states¹⁰³ in the history of the world.¹⁰⁴

to interfere with the model and the repercussions are not pleasant. But one of the most important functions of culture and religion is to furnish differences—roles, rules, institutions, etc. — which will alleviate this potential harm to relationships. In modern Western, as contrasted to archaic societies, these functions have become increasingly weakened, so the child has no sure way of knowing that the imitative behavior applauded on one occasion may be discouraged or even rejected on another. [^{Footnote 6} Girard, *Things Hidden*, 291.]

¹⁰² Girard, *Satan Fall*, 138.

¹⁰³ See Charles Tilly who claims this in: Cavanaugh, “FIRE.”

¹⁰⁴ 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, *City of God*, 139.)

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

A team of New Testament scholars in Germany has studied Romans 13 and its historical context (Friedrich et al., “Zur historischen Situation,” 131 and following.) 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

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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, *Kingdom Ethics*, 207).

Whether this is the exact historical background and explanation or not, it is very questionable that Paul, in a brief pericope, in the midst of a parenetic, hortatory section of his major theological Letter, 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 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Lasserre, accessed August 23, 2024) points out (*War and the Gospel*), 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

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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

“. . . in all these things. . .” — things such as trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword — Christians are “more than conquerors.”

For him the primary source of evil over which Christians were “more than conquerors,” was 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/revolutionary” 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, 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 the author 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.

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violent origins, and potentially be set free from all violence.

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.

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.¹⁰⁵

The anthology, *Stricken By God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*¹⁰⁶ extends this discussion powerfully.

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

¹⁰⁵ Girard, *Satan Fall*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Jersak and Hardin, *Stricken?*

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*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.*¹⁰⁷

So what must we also do?:

*Shout this from the housetops!*¹⁰⁸ And act on it!
Amen!

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¹⁰⁸ Matthew 10:27.

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