

The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

René Girard & Jacques Ellul

Issue 35 Spring 2005

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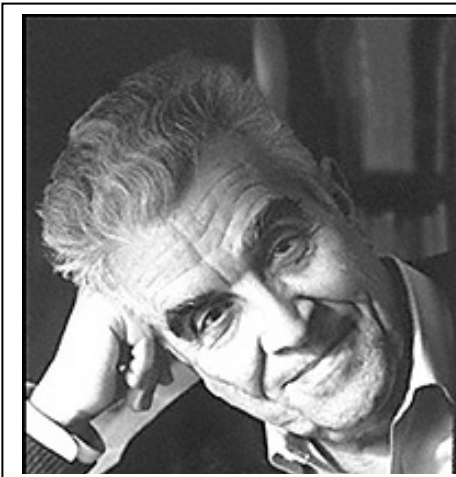
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“In the area of scriptural interpretation we are clearly faced with ideological choices. . . . Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretive grill presented by René Girard Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars.”

Jacques Ellul

in Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology
(1979; ET 1988), p. 86 n2.

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From the Editor

This issue illustrates how *The Ellul Forum* carries out its mission. One purpose is to advance Ellul's "sociological and theological analyses in new directions." In order to accomplish that goal, *The Forum* feeds from a world network of Ellul scholars and friends, even as it nurtures that society in return.

Months ago, contributing editor Carl Mitcham proposed an issue on Ellul and Girard. Jim Grote knows Ellul's work and Rene Girard personally, so he became our point man in moving this good idea forward. In Innsbruck, Jim hears an ambitious and authoritative paper by Matthew Pattillo, a young Ellul scholar, on this very topic. And with this issue, a version of that paper becomes part of the network and invigorates our thinking. Pattillo demonstrates how Girard provides "theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology" while Ellul offers him a "more biblically consistent content" for the life of faith. In the process of establishing these interconnections, the importance of human relationships (and Christians would say "of the Body of Christ") vis-à-vis the global state becomes transparent.

French scholar Michel Hourcade on Sport and Technique, Korean scholar Myung Su Yang on Utopia, and American scholar Dell DeChant on the Sacred and Postmodernism, illustrated the same process in other recent issues of *The Ellul Forum*. The editors will depend on the idea-specialist cycle for enhancing our mission in the future.

In addition to Jim Grote's introduction and Matthew Pattillo's marvelous essay, we have Darrell Fasching's interesting "re-view" of Ellul's *New Demons* and a brief interview of René Girard by David Gill. David also reviews Jim Grote and John McGeeney's Girardian business ethics text, *Clever as Serpents*, and Jacques Ellul's new book on Islam, made available posthumously through the efforts of Jacques Ellul's daughter, Dominique.

The theme for *Ellul Forum* Issue 36 (Fall 2005) is Ellul's biblical interpretation. Ellul published several biblical studies and commentaries---always "edgy" and provocative, sometimes maddening, always valuable and illuminating. We welcome your ideas and input on this and future issues of the *Forum*.

Our back page "News and Notes" reports on two great colloquia on Ellul in France last Fall. We would love to sponsor something similar in North America but must wait for funding, timing, location, and other issues to be resolved.

Clifford G. Christians, Editor

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Introducing René Girard

by Jim Grote

Jim Grote, CFP, a financial writer with over 20 years experience as a development officer, has been an adjunct professor in business ethics and philosophy at several universities. His book on Girardian business ethics (co-authored with John McGeeney), Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics (reviewed on p. 22 below), was recently translated and published in Germany and Indonesia. [jimgrote@hotmail.com]

Born on Christmas Day, 1923, in Avignon, France, René Girard's work has been a blend of history, literature, anthropology and theology with implications for science, technology, and ethics that have only begun to be appreciated. He graduated from the Ecole des Chartes in Paris in 1947 (as a specialist in medieval studies) with a thesis on private life in his hometown of Avignon in the second half of the fifteenth century. A year's trip abroad turned into a Ph.D. in history from Indiana University, after which Girard remained in the United States, where he retired as a professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization from Stanford University in 1995.

Girard's early historiographic publications soon gave way to an avalanche of literary criticism. His first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1966), contrasted the romantic lie of individualism with the novelistic truth of what he called "imitative" or "mimetic desire." Among five major novelists (Cervantes, Stehnhil, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoevsky) Girard discovered a triangular structure to desire where the protagonists struggle with the realization that their deepest aspirations were mere imitations of a model or rival – hence the infamous love triangle. Adultery remains the archetype for this phenomenon as illustrated in Dostoevsky's novella, *The Eternal Husband*. The husband is obsessed by his wife's lovers, who inflame, validate and aggravate his own desire. Girard's

students have likened his discovery of imitation in the social sciences to Newton's discovery of gravity in the physical sciences. The vast secondary literature on mimetic desire now extends these early insights into the diverse fields of economics, sociology, psychology, theology and anthropology.

Violence and the Sacred (1977), an anthropological study, offers a rational explanation for sacrificial rituals (as well as religious myths and prohibitions) in what he terms the "victimage mechanism." Mimetic desire is inevitably conflictual. "Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desires it*" (1977, p. 145). Ancient religion developed as an unconscious method of keeping the peace where the mimetic war of all against all is replaced by the more efficient war of all against one – the community's sacrifice of a scapegoat. Sacrifice acts as a kind of vaccination whose small doses of violence inoculate the community against greater violence.

This sacrificial mechanism is examined in more detail in a work of biblical criticism, *The Scapegoat* (1986). While the mimetic conflict of model and disciple cannot be resolved by sharing the same object of desire (which is a source of the conflict), it may be resolved or at least mitigated by sharing the same object of revulsion – the scapegoat. Nothing unites people like a common enemy. "This is the terrible paradox of human desires. They can never be reconciled in the preservation of their object but only through its destruction; they can only find agreement at the expense of a victim" (1986, p. 146).

Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (1987), a conversation between Girard and two French psychiatrists, explores an anthropological foundation for Girard's theories. The discussion includes a hypothesis of a "founding murder" among mimetically hysterical primates that initiated the long, slow process of hominization as

well as sacrificial mechanisms. Girard sheds new light on the often-discarded speculations on primal murders found in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. He also proposes the controversial thesis that the Judeo-Christian revelation of the victimage mechanism provides the anthropological tools necessary to demythologize pagan religious practices, which for Girard includes much of Western Christianity. According to Girard, Christ's death was not a sacrifice willed by an angry God to atone for an original sin, but simply a revelation of human brutality and violence by a loving God.

The remainder of Girard's major work includes two works of literary criticism, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991) and *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (2004) as well as two works of biblical criticism, *Job: The Victim of His People* (1987) and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (2001). Girard's recent book on Satan may seem worlds removed from his first work on novelistic love triangles. But it was the recurring patterns of seduction in the novel that led Girard to take the idea of Satan seriously – not as a prudish rejection of the world or a projection of childhood fears, but as an explanatory (one is tempted to say, scientific) principle. Throughout his works, Girard contrasts the Hebrew word Satan, the technical term referring to the accuser before a tribunal, with the Greek word for the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos* or defense attorney.

For Girard, modern science and technology are an inevitable consequence of the demythologization of sacrificial violence and magical thought. Magical thought always seeks a social/moral explanation for pain. For example, the Black Plague was often attributed to the Jews poisoning the water supply. As Girard quips, "Those who are suffering are not interested in natural causes" (1986, p. 53). However, with a loosening of magical thought, the search for natural causes slowly becomes a more reasonable path toward the "relief of man's estate" (Francis Bacon). "The invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch hunts, but the fact that there are no longer witch hunts is the reason that science has been invented. The scientific spirit, like the spirit of enterprise in an economy, is a by-product of the profound action of the Gospel text" (1986, p. 204).

Yet Girard's attitude toward science contains a certain Freudian ambivalence. Science is necessarily part of the Christian concern for victims and is a consequence of this charitable impulse. At the same time, modern technology has an apocalyptic edge to it. With the loosening of ancient sacred restraints and prohibitions, modern technology like modern economy, unleashes the phenomenon of mimetic desire in a wave of consumerism, ethnic rivalry, media frenzy and politically correct victimology. For Girard it is no accident that names for nuclear weapons are "taken from the direst divinities in Greek mythology, like Titan, Poseidon, and Saturn, the god who devoured his own children" (1987, p. 256).

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Christianity, Violence, & Anarchy: Girard and Ellul

by Matthew Pattillo

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This essay will examine the personal and social consequences of sin, biblically defined, and will contend that Christian faith necessitates a rejection of the secular political order. Exploring and contrasting the thought of René Girard and Jacques Ellul, we will demonstrate that Girard's mimetic theory supplies crucial theoretical underpinnings for Ellul's theology. Ellul, in turn, sequencing the Biblical narrative somewhat differently, provides Girard the more biblically consistent content of the life of faith.

The ethical content of the life of faith is a continuation of the salvation narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2, incarnated and perpetuated in Israel and later, the universalized community of the Abrahamic blessing. The historical content of this faith demonstrates the incompatibility of political power with freedom in Christ, and the Christian church's ill-fated attempts to maintain an authentic practice of faith while legitimizing the secular order are exposed by the Biblical critique of power. While the growth of the global state has made a total withdrawal from the political order inconceivable, it is precisely its utter domination today that makes critical the continued defiance of the Body of Christ.

Original Sin

Girard observes that when the snake first appears in the Genesis account of the humanity's primal sin, it is already in conflict with God, opposing him as a jealous rival. Eve is enticed by it to covet what belongs to God – the knowledge of good and evil – and to herself become his rival.¹ Her imitation of the serpent's covetousness forms "an alliance of two against one,"² and God is

expelled from the relationship. The contagion of metaphysical desire, or mimesis, soon claims Adam and what began as a relationship of obedience without conflict between God and human beings is forever changed. An acquisitive mimesis turns antagonistic and rivalrous.³ When called to account for her disobedience, Eve blames the serpent. Adam in turn blames Eve, implying that God is himself at least partially culpable: "The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."⁴

In the earliest account of human origins then, rivalry with God produces rivalry between people. Girard argues that although conflict must inevitably lead to violence, here "God takes the violence upon himself and founds humanity by driving Adam and Eve far away from him."⁵ God's banishment of the first humans only mirrors the expulsion implied by human collusion with the snake.

"Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair," Ellul writes, "since sin always depends on it. 'You shall not covet' (Exodus 20:17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes *everything* – all the other sins."⁶ Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve are not required to choose between good and evil. "All that counted was the relation to God and its expression in action."⁷ Here Ellul understands freedom as obedience to God's commandments *within the context of a relationship with God*. Independence from God is mere slavery: "Adam seeks to liberate himself from the limits which God has set for him and in so doing he enters into rivalry with other forces and becomes subject to sin."⁸ The knowledge that Adam and Eve covet and usurp from God is "the power to *decide* on one's own *what is good and what is evil*."⁹ Consequently, human morality is seen as founded on the order of the Fall, and Girard concurs: the ethical always derives from victimary unanimity,¹⁰ in this case the

rejection of God.

For Ellul "covetousness is equivalent to the spirit of power or domination,"¹¹ and "no society is possible among people who compete for power or who covet and find themselves coveting the same thing."¹² Civil order between rivals in the Genesis prehistory can only be founded on blood. All the elements of the violent origin of civilization are present in this text. Cain murders his brother and rival, Abel, becoming the founder of the first city. The threat of contagious violence is described by the multiplication of Cain's murder into a seven-fold revenge, which becomes his descendant Lamech's seventy-seven-fold revenge, so that by the time of Noah violence engulfs the world. The acceptability of Abel's blood sacrifice is read by Girard as an adumbration of the sacrificial protection on which all social order will be founded: the violence of all against all will be kept in check by the ritualized violence of all against one. For Girard, Cain represents the chaotic mob in the grip of a violent frenzy, uniting against a single victim, a scapegoat. This unity achieves a real peace and allows for the development of all that is collectively termed civilization.¹³ In the emergent order legal codes address that which must be prohibited to maintain that peace, and ritual describes the action by which it was first secured.¹⁴ For Girard the fundamental character of ritual is re-enactment of the immolation of the victim,¹⁵ as it is this act that first brought concord out of chaos. Culture in all its expressions, the arts and sciences, every mode of communication, is seen as having as its *fons et origo* the same ritualized coaxing of order from disorder.¹⁶

Arguing in a similar fashion, Ellul represents the first city as founded on Cain's rejection of God, specifically his offer of protection against vengeance,¹⁷ and his choosing instead to create his own protection – the city. The city "expresses the attempt to exclude God, to shut oneself off from him, to fabricate a world which is purely and exclusively human."¹⁸ Such an exclusively human world is necessarily founded and maintained through force,¹⁹ which is legalized and ritualized:

In its origin law is religious. This is confirmed by almost all sociological findings. Law is the expression of the will of a god; it is formulated by the priest: it is given religious sanction, it is accompanied by magic ritual. Reciprocally, religious precepts are presented in juridical garb. The relationship with the god is established by man in the form of a contract.

The priest guarantees religion with the occult authority of law.²⁰

The civil or secular order is understood as founded on violence and maintained by force.²¹ The clear implication is that what humans esteem as "law and order" is established by a crime, and is therefore fundamentally *unjust*. Inasmuch as the founding murder is *arbitrary* violence, there can be no authentic *justice* in the city.²² The victim upon whom the city is founded is innocent, and what is believed just is itself only the legitimization of an unjust order, the illusion of justice serving to suppress all consciousness of its criminal origins. In the city "justice" can only mean that the victim of arbitrary violence is also given credit for the establishment of (temporary) peace.²³ Justice comes too late for the victim, but is timely enough for the consciences of the perpetrators, for whom the ensuing peace confirms the correctness of the original division. Still, the memory of the victim is never effaced and he becomes with time a sort of god, a sacred being who is simultaneously, mysteriously malevolent *and* benevolent. The deification of the victim and the ritualized re-enactment of the crime establishing peace serve to suppress from memory the malevolence of the perpetrators and the victim's innocence. The legal system is thus revealed as a religious phenomenon and its charter becomes the seal of our bondage to the secular order.²⁴ Ellul writes:

Why, after all, does one obey the state? Beyond factors that may be understood and analyzed, not everything can be accounted for, as in the case of the soul that the scalpel cannot find no matter how close the analysis. The residue is a spiritual power, an exousia, that inhabits the body of the state.²⁵

Society of Technique & the Sacrificial Order

The Biblical narrative confirms the necessity of law in a fallen world – social laws, moral laws, physical laws that govern every aspect of life but which are all forms of the same necessity. "From the moment when Adam separated himself from God," Ellul writes, "when his freedom was no longer love but the choice between two possibilities, from that moment Adam moved from the realm of freedom into the realm of necessity."²⁶

The immediate relationship of the Garden is broken in the Fall, disrupting the relation between humans and God, between man and woman, and between man and nature. No longer in the fellowship of love with God, humans are subjected

to the laws of necessity, and begin to learn and master them, altering their world according to these laws. They adopt means of mediation in their approach to one another, to nature, and to God. Cain's descendants are read by Ellul as inventors of these mediating techniques – the domestication of animals, music-making, and the fashioning of tools. These means are derivative of the first successful technique mentioned in the Genesis account, Abel's blood sacrifice, which serves as both a screen between humanity and God and an approach.²⁷ Girard, too, sees that the sciences and arts, and every form of human communication have their origins in ritual violence.²⁸ Once the connection between ritual and culture becomes clear, the truly religious nature of all human civilization is made plain. The denial of sacrificial origins for the arts and sciences is an indication of the veiled and veiling character of ritual violence. Suppression of the knowledge of its origins enables human culture to flourish.

The Biblical revelation, then, by unveiling the sacred violence at the heart of religion, poses a threat to human society. The demythologizing effect of revelation undermines the sacred structures of our world. Girard sees the progressive influence of the Biblical revelation in the now universal concern for victims and the growing inability of persecutors to impose their own perspectives on others by fiat. "Centuries were needed to demystify medieval persecutors," he writes, "a few years suffice to discredit contemporary persecutors."²⁹ This does not mean that our world knows less persecution or violence, only that the myths that once protected the persecutors and blinded people to the innocence of their victims have been eroded by the demythologizing power of the Biblical revelation. The world becomes "increasingly apocalyptic,"³⁰ as time wears on, for without "sacrificial protections," without a means of limiting it, humans are faced with the unhappy prospect of a global deluge of violence. By unveiling the violent foundations of human society, the Biblical revelation robs it of the only means it has ever known for maintaining order. After the proclamation of the innocence of sacrificial victims the violent order can only be maintained by the naked will to power. Girard observes that because of the Biblical revelation, we save and, paradoxically, produce more victims than ever before. This latter result is the meaning of Christ's warning, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."³¹ Both are evidence of the "unrelenting

historical advance" of Christian truth in our world.³²

Ellul also traces the historical desacralization of religious forms accomplished by the Biblical revelation – including the desacralization of "Christian religion."³³ But he contends that the primitive sacred has been replaced by a modern sacred, a secular religion whose myths are Progress, Work, and Happiness, and whose ideologies include Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy, and Capitalism.³⁴

For Ellul, this "desacralization permitted the development of technology and the unlimited exploitation of the world."³⁵ In *The Technological Society*,³⁶ he argues that the modern world is increasingly dominated by Technique: not merely technology, but the collection of means – political, economic, scientific, etc. – by which humans utilize and master nature and one another. The Society of Technique is concerned above all with efficiency, and elevates means above ends. The magical nature of primitive ritual has been replaced by the conscious design of social engineering.³⁷ The worldwide domination of the State, which centralizes and integrates all of the various techniques, is creating a kind of global concentration camp in which individuals are valued only for the "role" each plays in the proper functioning of society. Humans no longer control the means but are controlled by them. When technical developments become possible, people are no longer able to ask whether these developments ought or ought not be pursued. If it can be done, it will be done, and if, for example, the development of nuclear energy and weaponry creates unforeseen environmental and human consequences, the hope is always expressed that future technical progress will at last propose a remedy. Technique always advances according to its own irreversible logic.

Where Ellul saw Efficiency as the defining goal and characteristic of the global society, Girard argues that it is precisely the "the concern for victims...[that] dominates the total planetary culture in which we live...The world becoming one culture is the fruit of this concern and not the reverse."³⁸ The ineluctable advance of the Biblical revelation renders "new" myths incapable of survival.³⁹ He considers the principle challenge to the Biblical revelation today to be a kind of "false concern for the victim," the political appropriation of concern for the victims that turns the accusation of victimization against Christians and against the Biblical revelation itself.⁴⁰ The result is that the

status of victim is eagerly sought, since it is deemed a position of power and a source of political capital. Consider, for example, the debate over abortion rights framed on both sides as concern for the victim, or the American capitalization of its victim-status in the wake of terrorist attacks on its World Trade Center since the turn of the century.

Ellul, too, saw that the great secular metanarratives since the Enlightenment had been largely discredited. Of Kant and Hegel, he writes:

It was wonderful to set forth an attractive outline of history and its development, but what a fraud, what a swindle, when the only decisive result was the relentless strengthening of the State, the very place where man should have concentrated all his forces to prevent such a thing.⁴¹

The same could be said, of course, for Marx, and a host of utopian dreamers since, Christian and otherwise. The history of the twentieth century is an especially cluttered graveyard of capsized myths of progress and new world ideologies run aground. Most of those that made serious claims on the age in which Ellul lived and wrote are little more than historical curiosities today. But even today, in the global-capitalist aftermath of the last century's ideology wars, Ellul's analysis tolls true:

Capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life – individual and collective – to money. Money has become the sole criterion for judging man and his activity...money, the source of power and freedom, must take priority over everything else. This belief is well supported on the one hand by a general loss of spiritual sensitivity (if not of faith itself) and on the other by the incredible growth of technology. Money, which allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature desires), is no longer merely an economic value. It has become a moral value and an ethical standard.⁴²

Recent years have witnessed the rise and fall of the "Information Age," with its promise of decentralized power and freedom for individuals through the supposed egalitarianism of the Internet. The vastly increased technical power of the State to house and reference information on the lives of individual citizens, the rabid proliferation

of electronic surveillance and identification systems since the early nineties, to name just a couple of recent "advances," have made such short work of this craze that it was scarcely uttered before it was dead in the water. Ellul is again prophetic: "Technical aggrandizement of the state...is the only condition under which a contract between state and individual is possible."⁴³

Genesis 1-2, Contingency and Chaos

The seeming inevitability of a world dominated by political power has left humanity very little room to hope for a different social reality. In a world where freedom is limited to "freedom of choice" between good and evil, law or chaos, "the true is a moment of the false."⁴⁴ The exigencies of life within the Society of the Spectacle make it difficult to imagine any action one might take that would not merely strengthen the present order.

We have demonstrated the close connection between the Fall and the foundation of the state. In the same sense that justice within the secular order is strictly relative, so virtue within the state, too, has use-value only as the personal legitimization of secular power. The personal and the social consequences of the Fall cannot be abstracted from one another: the external secular power is maintained by those who have internalized its constraints and its justifications, while secular power "reinforces human sinfulness and conceals our fallen character from view."⁴⁵

The Genesis narrative places the birth of secular morality (the knowledge of good and evil) before the violent foundation of the civil order, implying that political domination or sovereignty is an external manifestation of the internal rejection of God. Rivalry with God leads to rivalry among people, which leads to the violent contagion of all against all checked only by the violence of all against one. It is thus the civil order emerges.

However, morality or civic virtue is *also* the internalization of the coercive peace of the secular city. As the sacrifice of a scapegoat stills the chaos of unrestrained social violence, so morality is the (violent) inhibition of the supposed chaos of the passions. Ellul writes, "The more complex and refined civilization becomes the greater is the 'interiorizing' of determinations. These become less and less visible, external, constricting and offensive. They are instead invisible, interior, benevolent, and insidious."⁴⁶ This interiorization of the political order manifests itself in asceticism, a heroic self-restraint of the passions, and personal

enforcement of moral law. As with the "exchange-relations of arbitrary power," freedom is granted only as a concession of power, and a certain mechanical and repetitive peace is imposed; self-denial and the repression of desire produce an artificial calm but never succeed in uprooting the unruly passions.⁴⁷

On both the social and individual levels, then, fallen humanity *seems* constrained by only two options: "law and order," or chaos; morality, or depravity. Girard writes, "We cannot postulate the existence in man of a desire radically disruptive of human relations without simultaneously postulating the means of keeping this desire in check."⁴⁸ John Milbank argues instead that "desire" is not *necessarily* "radically disruptive of human relations." Primeval chaos is an element of the myth that sustains the civil order. Equally tenable, he argues, is the postulation of an already existing hierarchical order justified and maintained with the help of the myth of a chaos always threatening resurgence. The mythical chaos is feared, yet idolized and celebrated in violent spectacles, e. g. the ultra-violence of Hollywood films, or the public spectacle of American football.⁴⁹

Following Milbank's argument, if the passions are thought to be an interior disorder brought to order by the interiorized sacrificial order of "fighting virtue," then the notion of a chaos of desire might be just a "mythic" element of the internal coercive order. This is not to say that people are naturally "good" and that removal of personal and social restraint will produce an ideal society. We merely point out that the absence of alternatives to "law and order, or anarchy" is precisely the enslavement of humanity to the "knowledge of good and evil" described in the Bible. We are concerned in this essay to demonstrate that the Biblical narrative insists on a "third" way beyond law, beyond morality, and beyond chaos.

Girard convincingly traces the violent origins of the secular political order, but what seems less clear is the shape the way out of this order might take. We contend that by ignoring the narrative priorities of the Biblical text Girard makes it difficult to recover the form anti-sacrificial practice takes. Girard privileges the Fall-Cain narrative over the Genesis 1-2 narrative, so that the sacrificial order he so clearly identifies takes on a predetermined quality. Given the covetous nature of humanity, the resulting sacrificial order of Cain is inevitable. However, the Biblical sequencing is the more ontologically correct. Adam's Fall

obviously implies a fall *from* something, and the prior condition is described in Genesis 1-2.

Ellul, too, contends the creation story describes an origin fundamentally different than foundational violence. Genesis 1-2 illustrate "no relationship of exploitation, utilization, or subordination," but rather a "directing which nevertheless leaves the other intact."⁵⁰ God's word, the power of creation, is not an intellectual analysis that divides and separates, but the language of union and love. Adam's naming of the animals is no mere technique in the Ellulian sense, but "the continuation of the word of God."⁵¹ Christian tradition often places the expulsion of Satan from heaven between days one and two in the creation account, but such an expulsion is not in the Hebrew text. Creation emerges from what is "formless and void," not by violence but by the word of God.⁵² The later insertion of Satan's expulsion into the creation narrative may be the result of a "sacrificial reading" of the Hebrew Scriptures⁵³ via a sacrificial reading of the Gospels – the work of Christian exegetes who fundamentally misunderstood the Gospel revelation.⁵⁴

Genesis 1-2 describe an "immediate relationship of love and knowledge"⁵⁵ among those who are different: God and humans, man and woman, humankind and nature. Adam and Eve "needed to follow no method, to apply no technique, because there was no force to exert, no need to fulfill, no necessity to overcome."⁵⁶ There was "no protocol or sacrifices"⁵⁷ because there was no disorder, only order. Genesis 1-2 argue that the sacrificial mechanisms Girard identifies as maintaining law and order do not *necessitate* a primeval chaos from which order emerged. The hypothesis of an original, divine order prior to the Fall de-naturalizes the sacrificial order of Cain; the creation story insists "it didn't have to be this way," and announces, *from the beginning*, the existence of a different way of life. Moreover, the seventh-day creation of the Sabbath marking Jewish practice signals that the Jew-Gentile distinction is not incidental but *inherent* to the "other way of life" embodied in Israel and later, the Church.⁵⁸ The record of God's original intentions for humanity and creation contextualizes all of the Biblical narratives, up to and including the Gospel revelation. Biblical salvation is not a *return* to Eden, but rather the *inclusion* of the individual into the narrative inaugurated in Genesis 1-2.

Narrative and Idiom

No mere hypothesis of freedom, the Scriptures insert the individual into the narrative itself – the continuing historical embodiment of the divine revelation in time and space. The Gospel revelation is then first received by members of a community not unfamiliar with its themes. We have mentioned the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. The authors of these "have recast a preexistent mythology, adapting it in the spirit of their special concerns...inverting the relationship between the victim and the persecuting community." In fact the Hebrew Bible brims with demythologizing reversals of sacred narrative. The book of Job, perhaps the oldest of the Hebrew texts, depicts persecution from the perspective of a victim who protests his innocence, refusing the accusations of his interlocutors, and is at last vindicated by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers previews the self-sacrifice of Christ and the Father's forgiveness in Judah's offer to substitute himself for Benjamin and Joseph's compassion for the brothers who once victimized and expelled him. The Exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt identifies the community of faith as those who have been set free from bondage to the pagan political order and not merely as those who are free by nature or divine right. The story of Solomon's judgment between two prostitutes depicts the judgment of God in favor of she who would sacrifice herself to save another, and against the one who preferred the violent sacrifice productive of victims. The binding of Isaac, David's penitential Psalms, Isaiah's songs of the Suffering Servant, the story of Jonah – each in its own way contravenes and reverses the mythic pattern of the secular order.

The revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures is then numerously recapitulated by the Gospels. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," Jesus tells those gathered for the Sermon on the Mount. Conversion implies a concomitant break with the pagan narrative, and the reaffirmation of Hebrew Scriptural revelation. Jesus is called "the second Adam," and is represented as taking up the cause of immemorial victims, beginning with "righteous Abel." The creation story begins with a social order radically differentiated from that later inaugurated by Cain, an order historically preserved through the descendants of Adam. Cain kills Abel, but Seth replaces Abel. Violence floods the earth, but Noah and his family escape. Abraham is called out of a pagan culture to become the father of faith for all the world. As a

consequence, Gentile converts to the Christian faith are deemed "grafted in" to the historical embodiment of the Biblical revelation, forming an organic unity with Israel and not merely as having superseded it. The Jewish followers of Jesus are not called out of Israel as from a pagan political order, but to a restoration of a way of life consistent with Torah and with the counter-sacrificial practice established by Abraham.

Akedah and the Counter-Sacrificial Gospel

The counter-sacrificial revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures begins in the Genesis prehistory but takes a radical turn when God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself. The epidemic consequences of the Fall are here opposed by an act of divine and world-historical conciliation. Where Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden, Abraham is led by God to a promised land.⁵⁹ Flouting the one, modest prohibition in paradise the first humans seize for themselves the right to decide good and evil. Abraham is found on Mount Moriah submitting to God's demand of something monstrous, an obedience beyond morality. Abraham will inaugurate the historical reversal of the Fall, with the promise in Genesis 12:1-3 that this "other way of life" would be offered to all the world.

Abraham's obedience to God's demand for the sacrifice of his son Isaac (the Akedah, or "binding" of Isaac) stands at once for the reversal of human rivalry with God and of God's expulsion of humankind from his presence. Abraham reestablishes a relationship with God based on obedience and submission. His descendants are the continuing incarnation of this relationship. God gives a son to Abraham with the promise that Isaac will be the vehicle of blessing to Israel and the nations. Abraham's future and the fulfillment of God's promises to him turn on Isaac, so that his offering of Isaac is an offering of his own very hope and life, a return to God who initiated the gift.⁶⁰ Obeying God *for no other reason than simply to obey*, Abraham repudiates the pride of usurpation and Adam's grasping after divinity. He renounces the rivalry of Adam and Eve and refounds submission as the model for human relationship with God. For his part God recapitulates the avowal of Genesis 12:1-3, enlarging it to incorporate Abraham's obedience.⁶¹

The prohibition against murder in the Noachide laws and the condemnation of Cain's fratricide argue against the view that the Akedah is a mere polemic against murder or human sacrifice.

Furthermore, the tacit approval of animal sacrifice earlier in the Genesis text by Abraham, Noah, Abel and even God himself when he covers the man and woman with animal skins in the Garden renders the deflection of violence from human to animal victims inessential to the meaning of the Akedah. Similarly, Torah's prohibition of child sacrifice⁶² makes the Akedah superfluous as a condemnation of the practice.

Neither Abraham nor Isaac was divinized in Israel, nor were they found guilty of any crime, arguing against the Akedah as an instance of the ubiquitous sacred violence. Although God intervenes at the last moment to prevent Abraham from immolating his beloved son, it is not because God is himself bound to a higher moral law. The Hebrew Scriptures know nothing of "natural law" or a set of universally valid ethical claims independent of God's command. Isaac is liberated from his bondage and rescued from death by the offering "God will provide for Himself,"⁶³ the self-offering of God in response to Abraham's obedience. Abraham and Isaac are rescued from obligation to the sacrificial order of Cain and freed from the slavery of sin. All future sacrifice in Israel will recall both their forgiveness and the high cost of liberation.⁶⁴

Abraham's obedience to God is mirrored and magnified in Isaac's obedience to Abraham. Isaac takes the form of the victim in the Akedah. Israel is identified with Abraham in his radical obedience to the commandment of God, but is further identified with Isaac as the innocent victim. Even though Abraham's hand was stayed against Isaac, Jewish tradition credits Abraham for the sacrifice of his son. Similarly, although Isaac is spared, it is as though he had been immolated, and he becomes a "resurrected" sacrifice. Where Israel is described as a priestly nation in identification with Abraham, the high priest of the human race, it is likewise a nation of living sacrifices through Isaac.⁶⁵ After the Akedah, God incorporates identification with the victim into the divine promise of Genesis 12:1-3.

We see then that "all social structure, the entire scapegoating machinery, is revealed as delusional, a delusional quality we are not permitted to see fully unless we observe the victim 'after death' so to speak."⁶⁶ It is the resurrection of Isaac that converts Abraham. Isaac's "apparent resurrection is the subjective correlative of something most objective and real, (Abraham's) renunciation of (Adam's) bad desire."⁶⁷ The innocence of the victim upon which Cain founded the first city is

forever revealed *for Israel* in the resurrection of Isaac, and the people of Israel become the incarnation of the Akedah revelation.

The Levitical sacrifices prescribed by the Torah have meaning to the extent that they participate in the meaning of Isaac's self-offering, and are offered in the spirit of Abraham's self-sacrificial obedience. The nature of the Levitical sacrifices – innocent animals, kosher and unblemished – strengthens the identification with Isaac as innocent victim. The insistence that the sacrifices be offered only on Mount Moriah, the present day Temple Mount, underscores the physical connection between the Akedah and the Levitical sacrifices. The Temple sacrificial system contemporizes the Akedah in Israel's history. God's revelation is thereby preserved until the coming of the Messiah when revelation is proclaimed to the entire world. The Levitical sacrifices are of a qualitatively different nature than those practiced among the nations for the temporary expulsion of violence, pointing back in time to the Akedah and forward to the Messiah's sacrifice.

Careful analysis of the later prophetic critique of sacrifice reveals they were directed at sacrifices without repentance and not at sacrifices as such. The prophetic critique condemns sacrifice that has renounced the spirit of the Akedah and has become instead a mere imitation of what mimetic theory terms the single victim mechanism. However, alongside the many prophetic passages condemning sacrifices⁶⁸ stand many extolling the virtue of obedient sacrifice and predicting the triumphant return of faithful sacrifice in Israel.⁶⁹ The prophets are here seen to condemn sacrifice to the extent that it does not partake of the meaning of the Akedah revelation.

The Gospel revelation is that Jesus entered and brought to light that dark place in our culture where we accuse and execute innocent victims to relieve our own confusion, violence and sin. The heart of the single victim mechanism is dark because its true nature is concealed, as it must be in order to be effective. The veiled reality of this mechanism finds a parallel in the holiest place of the Temple, set apart by a veil, and the Gospels record the rending of the veil at the moment of Jesus' death, and the revelation of that dark place by the light of truth. Israel, of course, always knew what was going on behind the veil in the Temple, even if the revelation remained mysterious in its effects: when the veil was finally removed, the mystery of the Akedah was exposed to all the world. The Gospel revelation is a mystery, but it,

too, is a mystery patified. The once-secret knowledge of the single victim mechanism is now forever brought to light: the Akedah was the Gospel announced to Israel; the Gospel is the Akedah for the nations.

In his life, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ echoes and confirms all of the great realities of the Akedah: self-offering, obedience, identification with victims, and salvation from the sacrificial order of Cain. In his perfect submission to the will of God and self-sacrificial love towards all Jesus embodies positive mimesis, mirroring and magnifying Abraham's, and amplifying the blessings of the Akedah from Israel to the nations, as promised in Genesis 12:1-3. Christ's resurrection fulfills the meaning of the Akedah and announces the counter-sacrificial revelation to all the world.

The relationship of interdependence between Israel and the nations is ultimately intrinsic to God's revelation to the world. God's invitation goes out from Israel to all the families of the earth to embrace the self-sacrificial character of the innocent victim and to join the family of God in submission and obedience to God. The differentiated unity of the Akedah and the Gospel mirrors the divinely intended and enduring relationship between Israel and the nations. The localized Temple sacrifice is universalized in Christ. The temporary sacrifices of Israel are made eternal in Christ. It is in this sense that Christ has come to *complete* the Torah, by the universal extension in time and space of the Biblical revelation and the inclusion of all people across history in the family of God.

Torah and Law

Israel is the continuing incarnation of the salvation of Abraham out of the existing political order and his passage from the compulsory morality of the Fall to the freedom of obedience to God's commandment. The story of Joseph marks the transition from Abraham to Israel in the Biblical narrative. Here the elements of the divine revelation are all clearly discernible. Joseph's brothers covet his favored status and conspire against him, selling him into slavery. The brothers are then forced by famine many years later to seek aid from the Egyptian government, of which Joseph is now second in command. Joseph insists that the brothers bring Benjamin, the youngest son and now his father's favorite, in exchange for assistance, at which point his brother Judah volunteers to take Benjamin's place. Joseph,

moved by his brother's offer, forgives his brothers and the family is reconciled. Even so, his brothers' initial jealousy and their expulsion of Joseph result in their descendants' eventual enslavement in Egypt. Giving in to covetousness and rivalry brings the family into the bondage of the pagan political order of Cain. Self-offering and forgiveness mark the way of redemption.

Israel is the community then of the Exodus from Egyptian captivity. The Passover lamb refers to the lamb of the Akedah "which God will provide for Himself." It signals redemption from slavery and forgiveness for sin. Having been liberated, the Israelites are able to respond to the Torah given by God, not as to a legal document, but as to the commandment spoken by God to a people who freely answer.⁷⁰

Their liberation exposes the sacrificial order of Cain as well as the content of the "other way of life" God intends for Adam, Abraham, and his descendants. God does not deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt only to obligate them again under a contractual serfdom. The heart of the Torah is the Levitical sacrificial system that incarnates the salvation and conversion of Abraham and Isaac. The Levitical sacrifices describe God's forgiveness of sins not in the simple stroke of an accountant's pen, but at the cost of bearing one another's burdens. The Ten Commandments define a way of life free from rivalry with God: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me"; and free of conflict among people: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."⁷¹

Girard points out that the Torah contains prohibitions that subvert prohibition. The Torah offers prohibitions like those resulting from sacred violence, yet also contain prohibitions that controvert ritual prohibition, e. g. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"⁷² which precludes covetousness, interrupts rivalry, and obviates prohibition. In fact the Torah regularly upsets the secular order of exchange relations: the seventh day Sabbath depreciates the brutal necessity of work; the seventh year redemption of slaves and rest from cultivation of fields undermines the compulsion to exhaust nature and other people as if they had only utilitarian value; the prescriptions for fasting and tithing challenge the determination to consume and to possess.

Salvation in Christ, the "living Torah," is salvation out of the pagan political order into the Jewish familial order, conversion from the coercive legalism of the Fall into the freedom of obedience to God. Again, Jesus did not come to destroy the Torah and the Prophets, but to fulfill. St. Paul's "all things are lawful" does not contradict the correct practice of the Torah.⁷³ Rather, the same freedom beyond morality originally attributed to Adam before the Fall is reestablished by Abraham, offered to Israel in the Torah, and extended through Christ to all the world. The offer of grace has been extended from Israel to the nations, and those who respond are grafted onto the tree, Israel.

Fallen humanity by long habit and a stubborn blindness garbles the radical nature of this liberation, inverting it to fit the sacrificial pattern inherited from Cain. It is precisely this misapplication of the Torah Jesus condemns in his scathing indictments of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others who make "the commandment of God of no effect."⁷⁴ The individual is not set free by God only to submit to slavery under the political order. "Legalism" is a common term in American evangelical circles referring to a kind of sham obedience that seeks to appease an unforgiving god. Unfortunately, legalism is often attributed to the Torah, from which, it is argued, Christ has set us free. The perversity of this reasoning is exposed by putative "Christian Values" that erect a new legality while suppressing their pagan origins by scapegoating the Torah. Compelling Jewish converts to eat pork as proof of their renunciation of "the Law" provides us an especially egregious and risible instance of this tendency from early church history. No less uncomprehending are modern American efforts to legislate Christian morality (prayer in schools, abortion, the debate over posting the Ten Commandments in courtrooms), as if the Christian revelation consisted, like the secular order it oppugns and reverses, in the "restraint of beasts," those afoot in society at large and lurking in oneself.

Salvation and Conversion

The concealed and concealing nature of the secular order is its strength. The innocence of the victims of arbitrary violence is denied and the unjust foundation of law and order suppressed. A godless and self-righteous morality is masked by the appearance of false gods of violence whose anger must be continuously appeased.⁷⁵ The individual is deceived and self-deceiving, both a

victim of and a participant in the structures that enslave him. Salvation for the individual consists then in the overcoming of personal "legalism" and his deliverance from secular power,⁷⁶ but emerging from the obfuscations of the sacrificial order requires the intervention of something or someone from outside of its closed system.⁷⁷

The Biblical stories are mythic in form yet subvert myth. From Abel onwards, they reveal the innocence of the victims of sacred violence and take their side, disrupting the victimary unanimity upon which the proper functioning of the sacrificial mechanisms depend. In the Gospels, God himself takes the form of the victim and suffers the predictable and fatal outcome of his encounter with the secular order. By unveiling the complicity of myth and ritual in the maintenance of an unjust order, the Biblical narrative decodes mythology and desecralizes the gods and rituals of the violent sacred.⁷⁸ It is only in terms of its own truth that the Bible can be interpreted, while at the same time it deconstructs all other mythologies. Milbank observes:

The relationship of the Biblical narratives to the pagan myths is necessarily asymmetric: the former could not be critically read through the latter because it belongs to the mythic grammar to conceal and not to expose arbitrary and fundamental violence. The latter can be critically read through the former because the Biblical narratives constitute and renew themselves through a breaking with sacrificial violence which exposes its social reality.⁷⁹

Both the political order and the legalistic consciousness of the individual are the result of the original sin, rejection of God. The Biblical narrative represents a break with and an exposure of the secular order. It then invites the individual to make that same break.⁸⁰ This break, or conversion, involves an identification with the victim and the simultaneous disavowal of complicity with the murderous mob.⁸¹ The individual emerges from the mob when he takes the side of the victim *against* the violence of the political order⁸² and *against* the coercive morality of the Fall. "The proclamation of the Gospel implies, for the liberation of the person to whom it is proclaimed, the indictment of that which holds him captive."⁸³ In the encounter with the Gospel revelation, the individual is persuaded to take the side of Jesus, the innocent victim, and to admit his own participation in the persecution of innocents. Jesus' forgiveness of his persecutors

enables the individual to forgive others, and to be forgiven for his own complicity. The fatal necessity of the pagan order is set aside in the witness of the Biblical narrative that invites the individual, liberated from the political order and from a sinful consciousness, to participate in that witness.⁸⁴

Positive Content of the Life of Faith

The crucifixion of Jesus unmasks the violent nature of the political order, and this revelation sets the individual free from the necessity of that order. The individual may decline the "way of the Cross," and still the offer is made. He is presented with another option and may respond to God's love made manifest in the suffering atonement of Christ, or continue as best as he can to "sleep peacefully in his religious dream."⁸⁵ God's forgiveness in Christ interrupts the "pagan sacrificial chain of offense and revenge"⁸⁶ binding individuals to the legal requirements of the city of Cain and its vindictive gods. Christ is the incarnation of a love that cannot be integrated into the Society of Technique. He opposes to its means and ends a perfectly 'useless' truth, something fatal to its order, *ipso facto*.⁸⁷

The Gospels are the record of a small minority who disassociated themselves from the social order that executed Christ and instead proclaimed his innocence, his cancellation of the fatal necessity of that order, and his victory over the finality of death. The Gospels and other New Testament writings bear witness to a community who participate in Christ's crucifixion through a penitential way of life and a forgiving practice that liberates and preserves freedom in opposition to the political order.⁸⁸ The imitation of Christ in his refusal of violence, his concern for victims, and his suffering endurance of evil constitute the freedom of life "in Christ."⁸⁹

Given the divine unveiling of the secular legal system, the followers of Christ understand the contradiction inherent to Christian participation in the legal order.⁹⁰ Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul asks, "Dare any of you, having a matter against one another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?"⁹¹ Paul harbored no illusions about the nature of secular power or its "convertibility."⁹² All surveys of the Biblical critique of power, however, come up against Paul because Romans 13:1-7 seems to challenge all that the Bible, including Paul, has to say on the matter.

Some exegetes have reasoned that Paul's comments in 13:1-7 are too radical a departure from the subject matter surrounding the verses, so that these verses must be a later insertion by redactors. If these verses are deleted, 13:8 seems to follow reasonably from 12:21. Others attribute the traditional interpretation of the verses to Paul, but add counsel concerning extreme cases of political evil not accounted for in Paul's apparently absolute consecration of the powers. Ellul agrees that the verses do come from Paul, but must be properly contextualized both within the epistle and within Paul's other writings. The discussion prior to Romans 13 concerns loving and being at peace with others, both friend and enemy. The last verse of chapter twelve, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,"⁹³ leads into the discussion of political power, which is an evil that must be endured. Paul is far from advocating revolution or violent resistance, counseling submission instead. If we owe taxes, we pay them, nothing more. We recognize that these *exousia*, or powers are ultimately subject to God alone, but we know, too, that as Christians we have been called to struggle against these *exousia*.⁹⁴ While these powers are already defeated by Christ, for the time being we experience and admit their necessity, but never their legitimacy.

Mark D. Nanos has recently suggested Paul's epistle has to do with the ordering of the community of faith at Rome, which at the time was a synagogue community consisting of Gentile Christians along with both believing and non-believing Jews. In the context of the letter, then, Romans 13:1-7 is "not concerned with the state, empire, or any other such organization of secular government."⁹⁵ Instead, Paul's concern is "to address the obligation of Christians, particularly Christian *Gentiles*...to subordinate themselves to the leaders of the synagogues and to the customary 'rules of behavior' that had been developed in Diaspora synagogues for defining the appropriate behavior of 'righteous Gentiles' seeking association with Jews and their God."⁹⁶ Paul's advice is based not on arguments for the legitimacy of power, but rather on his previous arguments in chapters 9-11 concerning the historical, present, and future relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is concerned to insure that the community in Rome continues to maintain a "different way of doing things," that the witness of the reconciled community against the secular order is not undermined by a failure to demonstrate the present

reality of its eschatological hope.

In any case, Paul does not suggest that the community of faith will or should seek to overthrow secular government, or that the Kingdom of God will either suddenly or by steady advance appear as the inevitable progression of earthly affairs. His imagery in the letter to the Romans suggests instead the Church as a remnant, a minority whose encounter with the political order will inevitably produce results in "the way of the cross."⁹⁷ These seven verses in Romans have become *the* text on secular power and the conduct of the church toward it, in spite of the overwhelming witness of the Biblical record *against* political power. It is unsettling to speculate on the sociological and psychological reasons that lead exegetes to value a few verses more highly than the vast collection of contradictory passages, and allow one brief passage to neutralize the entire thrust of the Scriptures on this matter. In light of our arguments in this essay, the traditional interpretation of the passage results from internalization of the violent order of the state and a secret reflection and validation of secular power. Christian statism is correlative to the "sacrificial reading" of the Gospels. Although they never advocate a fugitive or criminal practice toward the state, both Jesus and Paul consider the state to be neither legitimate nor divinely constituted. Paul was arrested, tried, and executed by the same court system that condemned and crucified Jesus. Their witness attests that the exigencies of secular power are to be suffered rather than sanctioned.⁹⁸

Conclusion

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them," Jesus says, "*Yet it shall not be so among you.*"⁹⁹ Jesus' refusal of power resulted in his crucifixion, a signal of his failure to overturn the secular order. Paradoxically, it is this failure which is also the victory over the powers,¹⁰⁰ and the Church is called to participate in that failure. Ellul writes:

It is truly a *fight*...against a power that can be changed only by means which are the opposite of its own. Jesus overcame the powers – of the state, the authorities, the rulers, the law, etc. – not by being more powerful than they but by surrendering himself even unto death.¹⁰¹

The Biblical revelation calls the Church to be the continuing incarnation of God's atonement, to endure the powers rather than sanctify them,¹⁰² and

to bear the burdens of those who inevitably suffer under secular power: "In every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian – who cannot deal with it by violence – must make himself completely a part of it as *representative of the victims.*"¹⁰³ Apart from God resistance to the powers amounts to mere Stoic self-denial and masochistic self-sacrifice. Our confrontation of the powers instead proceeds from *concern for the victims* of secular dominion:

Freedom can be obtained only when we strive for it; no power can give freedom to people. Challenging power is the only way to make freedom a reality. Freedom exists if the negation of political power is strong enough, and when people refuse to be taken in by the idea that freedom will surely come tomorrow, if only...No, there is no tomorrow. Freedom exists today or not at all. When we shake the edifice, we produce a crack, a gap in the structure, in which a human being can briefly find his freedom, which is always threatened. In order to bring this bit of play into the system, however, we must bring to it a radical, total refusal. Any concession to power enables the totality of power to rush into the small space we have opened.¹⁰⁴

Political power cannot self-limit and tends in every case to expand beyond all bounds. The *myth* of its necessity clears the way by paralyzing all resistance. Into this world of fatal necessity, Christ comes announcing liberty to captives: deliverance from the harsh supervision of unmerciful morality and freedom to refuse power's exchange of happiness for servitude. Christ's resurrection defeated death, the true end of all necessity. In Christ we know that *our lives will not always be this way*, and the present hope of our resurrection enables the Church (Jew *and* Gentile) to insinuate freedom into an otherwise ironclad system. We proclaim by our words and demonstrate in our action that another path exists beyond the constraints of the illusory "freedom" purchased or wrested by force from the hand of power. Freedom is realized only when we create it by our radical negation of power and our absolute refusal to submit again to a yoke of slavery under the state.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil."¹⁰⁵ Life beyond morality and beyond the narrow choice that passes for freedom is no simple *idea*. The radical transformation of conversion in Christ holds the promise of a

different way of life, not tomorrow, not in heaven, but here in the present world. Today, men and women around us will be set free, or continue to wither under a pitiless master. If we refuse to rescue those for whom Christ suffered and died, we surrender again to the forces of death. Today, brothers and sisters, we are either free men, or slaves.

An abridged form of the essay under the title "Restraint of Beasts: Christianity, Violence and Anarchy," appeared in Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture, vol. 11 (Spring 2005).

¹ "Every victim of metaphysical desire...covets his mediator's divinity." René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Johns Hopkins, 1965), 182.

² René Girard, "From Ritual to Science," *Configurations* 8 (2000): 171-185.

³ René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University, 1978), 95.

⁴ Gen. 3:12 (NKJV unless otherwise noted); emphasis mine.

⁵ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 142

⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), 101; see also René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (Orbis, 1999), pp. 7-12.

⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), 51.

⁸ Ellul, *Ethics*, 49.

⁹ Ellul, *Humiliation*, 96n (emphasis Ellul's).

¹⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 236.

¹¹ Ellul, *Humiliation*, 101; cf also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20: "Sin is a break with God and all that this entails. When I say that people are not good, I am not adopting a Christian or a moral standpoint. I am saying that their two great characteristics, no matter what their society or education, are covetousness and the desire for power...René Girard has fully shown what the implications of covetousness are." Note Ellul's humble confession, p. 7: "I do not pretend to be able to unveil things hidden from the beginning of the world."

¹² Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1991), 20.

¹³ Jacques Ellul, *What I Believe* (Eerdmans, 1989), 59: "For years now we have been playing the scapegoat game. It has a profound source, as Girard has recalled...the possibility of universalizing it is the exclusive work of television, the radio, and the press. These attach the label and thereby justify whole nations and each and every individual."

¹⁴ René Girard, *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard & Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford University, 1987), 93.

¹⁵ Girard, *Violent Origins*, 107; compare Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (Seabury, 1975), 9: "We all know, obviously, the close link between religion and violence...The psychological reasons for this have been a matter of question...The fact that Christianity, the revelation of the God of love, could have so changed...sets one thinking...Religion *always* produces violence. When violence comes first, it requires the appearance of a religion."

¹⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 246: "Human society is based on the creative violence which has engendered individual consciousness as well as social order."

¹⁷ Ellul's is the more literal reading of Gen 4:15: "And the Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."

¹⁸ Ellul, *Ethics*, 39.

¹⁹ Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (Seabury, 1969), 84: "Every state is founded on violence and cannot maintain itself save by and through violence."

²⁰ Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (Doubleday, 1960), 18.

²¹ No distinction can be made between force and violence. Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom* (Seabury, 1971), 151: "It is shortsighted, both politically and spiritually, to say that there is a violence which liberates and another which subjugates. All violence is a crime before the eternal." Compare Girard, *Things Hidden*, 266: "The illusion that there is difference within the heart of violence is the key to the sacrificial way of thinking."

²² Legal execution, for example, is only ritualized violence (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 173).

²³ Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 185.

²⁴ René Girard, "How Can Satan Cast out Satan?" In *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. Fuer Norbert Lohfink, SJ*, ed. Braulik, G., Gross, W., and McEvenue, S., (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 137.

²⁵ Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1986), 175.

²⁶ Jacques Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in *Theology and Technology*, ed. Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1984), 134.

²⁷ Ellul, "Technique," 132. Compare Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 86n: "Recently we have witnessed the appearance of a new interpretation grill presented by René Girard...Rather than presenting merely another interpretation, Girard gives us a genuine method. Since it fits no ideological canon, I feel certain it will never attract notice or be taken into account by biblical scholars." Also, p. 87n: "Concerning the contrast of two themes, pollution and debt, I must underline, as a point of comparison, Girard's much more profound interpretation...with respect to the sacrificial and nonsacrificial reading of biblical texts. But Girard's approach involves no socioeconomic infrastructure that would permit a Marxist interpretation. The sacrificial interpretation springs from more fundamental facts about human beings and society!"

²⁸ Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185.

²⁹ Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 201.

³⁰ Girard, *The Girard Reader* (Crossroad, 1996), 274.

³¹ Matthew 10:34

³² Girard, *I See Satan*, 174.

³³ Ellul, *The New Demons*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112: "The myth of progress as man's seizure of history in order to make it serve him is probably the greatest success ever brought off by a myth. The myth of work as an affirmation of man's transcendence and everlastingness in the face of, and in relation to, history; the myth of happiness as the joy of participating in a glorious time, which is outside the time in which we now participate, hence both a reality and a promise at the same time - all that appears to be at the very heart of these creations of the modern consciousness. In truth, it is all simply the mythical response to the person in the new situation."

³⁵ Ellul, *Subversion*, 143

³⁶ *The Technological Society* (Knopf, 1965) was first published in French in 1954, the same year that Heidegger's 1949 lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" was first published. The two reach many of the same conclusions.

³⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (Knopf, 1971), 259.

³⁸ Girard, *I See Satan*, 178; Compare Jean Baudrillard, "The Violence of the Global," available from http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=385; Internet; accessed 23 May 2003: "The analogy between the terms 'global' and 'universal' is misleading. Universalization has to do with human rights, liberty, culture, and democracy. By contrast, globalization is about technology, the market, tourism, and

information. Globalization appears to be irreversible whereas universalization is likely to be on its way out. At least, it appears to be retreating as a value system which developed in the context of Western modernity and was unmatched by any other culture."

³⁹ Girard, *Scapgoat*, 201: "Even if some totalitarian system were to control the entire planet tomorrow, it would not succeed in making its own myth, or the magical aspect of its persecution, prevail."

⁴⁰ Girard, *I See Satan*, 180: "The other totalitarianism...does not oppose Judeo-Christian aspirations but claims them as its own and questions the concern for victims on the part of Christians...(It) does not openly oppose Christianity but outflanks it on its left wing"(emphasis Girard's).

⁴¹ Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*(Seabury, 1973), 278.

⁴² Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 20.

⁴³ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 309.

⁴⁴ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), 9; Ellul, *Anarchy*, 3: "In 1964 I was attracted by a movement very close to anarchism, that is, situationism. I had very friendly contacts with Guy Debord, and one day I asked him bluntly whether I could join his movement and work with him. He said that he would ask his comrades. Their answer was frank. Since I was a Christian I could not belong to their movement. For my part, I could not renounce my faith."

⁴⁵ John Milbank, "An Essay against Secular Order," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 15/2 (1987): 209.

⁴⁶ Ellul, *Ethics*, 41

⁴⁷ Milbank, "Essay," 221; cf. 208-9: "Augustine is then able to show that all Roman virtue is a merely relative matter because it is only possible within a circle bounded by arbitrary violence: a circle however, which more and more recedes from view as time goes on and political coercion assumes more and more 'commuted' and legally regular forms."

⁴⁸ René Girard, *Violence & the Sacred* (Johns Hopkins, 1977), 218.

⁴⁹ Milbank, "Essay," 208-9; *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell, 1991), 394-5.

⁵⁰ Ellul, "Technique," 131.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Girard, "From Ritual," 183-4: Following Michel Serres, Girard traces in the distinction between void and matter the violence of expulsion, or purge.

⁵³ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 268: "The Old Testament is...far from being dominated by sacred violence. It actually moves away from violence, although in its most primitive sections it still remains sufficiently wedded to violence for people to be able to brand it as violent without appearing totally implausible."

⁵⁴ Girard, "From Ritual to Science," 171-185; compare Jacques Ellul, *Subversion of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1986), 159: "Grace excludes sacrifice. Girard is quite right when he shows how basic sacrifice is to humanity. There can be no accepted life or social relation without sacrifice. But gracious grace rejects the validity of all human sacrifice. It ruins a basic element in human psychology."

⁵⁵ Ellul, "Technique," 128.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1996), 118.

⁵⁹ Cf. Gen. 12:3.

⁶⁰ The New Testament confirms that Abraham's offering was not a *disinterested* sacrifice, but that he also expected a return of Isaac; Heb 11:19: "(Abraham) considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." The idea of return can also be seen in God's offering Christ in response to Abraham's offering of Isaac.

⁶¹ Gen. 22:15-18: "And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a

second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because your have obeyed my voice.'

⁶² Lev 20:1-5: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech.'"

⁶³ Gen 22:8.

⁶⁴ One tradition puts Isaac's age at 37 at the time of the Akedah. The reasoning is as follows: Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth, 127 years old at her death. When Abraham told Sarah what he had been commanded to do, Sarah dropped dead at the thought. 127-90=37.

⁶⁵ Paul may also allude to Isaac in Rom 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

⁶⁶ Sandor Goodhart, "Response to Willard Swartley's Book," paper presented at 2001 COV&R Conference, available from http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/Sandor_Goodhart.doc; Internet; accessed 31 October 2001.

⁶⁷ René Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*," *Religion & Literature* 22/2-3 (1990): 218.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Mic 6:6-8; Is 1:10-17; Jer 6:20; Hos 5:6, 6:6, 9:11-13; Amos 5:21-25.

⁶⁹ See Mic 4:1-2; Is 56:6-7; Jer 17:24-26; Jer 33:17-18.

⁷⁰ The well-known tradition that God offered the Torah to all peoples, but the Israelites were the only ones who responded and accepted, indicates that obedience to the Law was not *imposed* upon Israel, but rather freely given.

⁷¹ Ex 20:1-2, 17.

⁷² Lv 19:18; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 155.

⁷³ The ongoing formation of halakhah testifies to the Jewish understanding of Torah not as a disembodied and absolute document, but as a living word from God to be constantly re-appropriated and renewed. Halakhah corresponds to the relative Christian ethics Jacques Ellul ceaselessly championed that would prevent examples of relative ethics or halakhah from the New Testament from becoming ossified into absolute law. An example would be Paul's instructions concerning female headdress and behavior in the church, which were apparently important issues in certain early congregations but have little relevance today beyond a general need for order within the community. Like Christian morality, halakhah had a propensity to become legalistic, and it is this legalistic misinterpretation, not Torah itself, that Jesus condemns.

⁷⁴ Mt 15:6; Girard, *Girard Reader*, 281: "The mythical mentality can take (the Gospels) and construe them mythically, but quintessentially they are the destruction of myth." The complicity in the condemnation of Jesus on the part of the Jewish people, who were in possession of the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures, indicates that the Biblical narratives, including the Gospels, can be misconstrued.

⁷⁵ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 255: "Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols - that is to say, of human violence in sacralized form."

⁷⁶ Milbank, "Essay," 220: "Salvation is precisely, out of this political domain which constantly reproduces 'original' sin."

⁷⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 153: "Rehabilitating the victim has a desacralizing effect." Also, René Girard, "Is There Anti-Semitism in the Gospels?" *Biblical Interpretation* 1/3 (1993): 350: "If the first Christians managed to secede from the mimetic consensus, it was not their own strength that did it, according to the Gospels, but God's own Spirit . . . he dismantles the consensus against the victims."

⁷⁸ Ellul, *New Demons*, 121: "Behind and beyond the myths one discerns the sacred of which they are an expression. It is by a kind of geography of the myths that one can discover the axes of the sacral world."

⁷⁹ Milbank, "Essay," 213; compare Girard, *Things Hidden*: "The three great pillars of primitive religion - myth, sacrifice, and prohibitions - are subverted by the thought of the Prophets." And Ellul, *False Presence*, 206: "How can we fail to realize that scripture, in precisely the same way in which the myths contained in scripture itself are treated, is the true destroyer of myths?"

⁸⁰ Ellul, *Subversion*, 133: "Just as conversion always means a break in individual life, so the intervention of revelation means a break in the whole group, in all society, and it unavoidably challenges the institution and established power, no matter what form this may take."

⁸¹ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 279: "Faith emerges when individuals come out of the mob."

⁸² Ellul, *Violence*, 86: "Masked violence is found at all levels of society. Economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else."

⁸³ Ellul, *False Presence*, 208.

⁸⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 397: "Knowing the shape of sin, and the shape of its refusal, we can at last be radically changed."

⁸⁵ Ellul, *New Demons*, 207-8; compare Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "The Gospels cannot guarantee that people will act the right way; they are not some kind of recipe for the good society. What the Gospels do is to offer more freedom and to set the example."

⁸⁶ Milbank, "Essay," 215.

⁸⁷ Ellul, *What I Believe*, 182.

⁸⁸ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 278: "What are the prescriptions of the Kingdom of God? Basically, give up a dispute when mimetic rivalry is taking over. Provide help to victims and refuse all violence."

⁸⁹ Ellul, *Ethics*, 15: "In Jesus Christ, who is fully obedient and also fully free, the will of God is freedom...The action of Christ takes effect in daily life through the mediation of our freedom."

⁹⁰ Ellul, *Subversion*, 158: "(Christian faith) does not change either the structure or the functioning of the state or politics. It sets up a relationship of conflict."

⁹¹ I Cor 6:1; compare René Girard, "To Double Business Bound": *Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Johns Hopkins, 1978), 228: "'Violent excess' on the one hand, 'law and order' on the other have always fed on each other. What else could they feed upon? If they did not, we would be rid, by now, of both of them."

⁹² Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 172-3: "There is no given Christian form of power...the only Christian political position consistent with revelation is the negation of power: the radical, total refusal of its existence, a fundamental questioning of it, no matter what form it may take."

⁹³ Rm 12:21.

⁹⁴ Eph 6:12.

⁹⁵ Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Fortress, 1996), 291.

⁹⁶ Ibid.; It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail Nanos' recontextualization of Paul's letter, but it is worth noting that Nanos is principally concerned with a coherent reading of Paul's letter, not a polemic against the state. Even so, Nanos concurs that "the call to subordination in Judaism carries an implicit, if not always explicit, judgment against foreign governments, even if God was somehow using their evil intentions to accomplish his ultimate goals." (Nanos, *Mystery*, 299).

⁹⁷ Ellul, *False Presence*, 209: "The church should always be the breach in an enclosed world: in the world of Sartre's private individual as well as in the world of the perfection of technology, the totalism of politics or the strongbox of the kingdom of money."

⁹⁸ Ellul, *New Demons*, 177: "If Christianity remains faithful to its inspiration and object, the God of love, it is incompatible with the exercise of political power. The combination of the two came about by accident."

⁹⁹ Mt 20:25-6, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 166: "The Passion is first and foremost the consequence of an intolerable revelation, while being proof of that revelation."

¹⁰¹ Ellul, *Violence*, 166.

¹⁰² Ellul, *False Presence*, 36: "The works of the world remain works of darkness, but darkness into which a light has come, which does not validate or justify the darkness."

¹⁰³ Ellul, *Violence*, 151-2.

¹⁰⁴ Ellul, *Jesus and Marx*, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Deut 30:15.

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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A Conversation With René Girard

David W. Gill made the pilgrimage from Berkeley to Stanford on April 12, 2005, to interview Professor Girard at his home.

David W. Gill: Professor Girard, you and Jacques Ellul have been two of our most creative and penetrating analysts of contemporary society with all of its religion, technology, conflict and ferment. And you were both Christian in a deep way. This is not a normal situation among French intellectuals. Did you and Ellul ever meet each other?

René Girard: In 1970 I sat next to him at a dinner party organized by some friends. We had a nice interaction then and at several other brief contacts over the years but always in circumstances where we were interrupted a lot. So I never had a real, serious conversation with him.

I am mostly interested in his views as a sociologist of religion in the modern world. By contrast, I am an anthropologist of religion interested in the contact and opposition between archaic religious phenomena and Christianity. But I find in Ellul many ideas that I share with him completely. In some ways I am trying to do something similar to what he has done.

Gill: Is it true that you became a Christian as an adult?

Girard: My mother raised me as a Catholic but I abandoned it when I was about thirteen. She was quite liberal and didn't force her children to go to church. I didn't return until about 1961 at age thirty-five and then it was because of my work. But I am now a fairly active member of the St. Thomas Aquinas parish here at Stanford.

About the time I returned to the church is when I also encountered Ellul's work. So I'm a little rusty but I have re-read some of his work recently, including *Ce Que Je Crois [What I Believe]*, a powerful book which hasn't lost any of its relevance since it was first written.

Gill: Your work places a central emphasis on sacrifice and the scapegoat---whereas Ellul places a central emphasis on Scripture and the word.

Could this be because Ellul was Reformed while you are Catholic?

Girard: I don't think so. The reason is that the relationship between archaic religions and the biblical religion is fundamental in my view. I am very interested in religious anthropology and I believe that there is an enormous break that comes with the Bible and Christianity. I believe in the basic unity of all religions. Religion is always oriented towards peace. Archaic religious phenomena are primarily scapegoat phenomena, a kind of mimetic gathering against victims that are fundamentally random. The killing of the initial scapegoat reconciles the disrupted, divided community. Sacrifice is fundamentally, deliberately reenacting that pattern, with carefully chosen victims, in order to make peace.

Christianity begins fundamentally with that same phenomenon. Jesus is the innocent victim, the scapegoat. But in archaic religion, the victim is believed to be powerful because he too is guilty and violent. Christianity tells us that it's not true. God is totally different from what we think. He is nonviolent. Fundamentally he is himself the innocent victim who dies for us. So Christianity is both the same and radically different from archaic religion.

Gill: Does this ultimate sacrificial act liberate us to make peace without finding another scapegoat to blame?

Girard: That's what Christianity should be.

Gill: Do we recapitulate that sacrifice by forgiving and bearing the pain of a conflict rather than blaming others (like the Muslims are often blamed today for all that is wrong)?

Girard: Not only the Bible but all of human religion is prophetic in somewhat the same sense---the victim is innocent, whether Joseph, or Job, or the innocent victim of a lynching. It is always prophetic of Christ.

Gill: With this long and continuing story of sacrifice, blame, violence, and threats, and with a contemporary culture that evades responsibility and searches for scapegoats, what do you say?

Girard: We are always practicing some kind of expulsion and victimization and this is becoming increasingly violent because of technology, bringing us closer and closer to total destruction. But the Bible and Christianity direct us against victimization, against viewing the enemy as less than ourselves. Those faced with conflict have to face the truth. There is no shortcut. We

cannot be satisfied with half measures and compromises and not looking at the oneness of the world.

Gill: So authentic Christianity should unmask the reality of life so that we can face the truth and cease scapegoating others, especially the innocent?

Girard: Authentic Christianity explicates this truth. Much of the anti-Christian feeling of our own era is because of the way today's church often replicates archaic religious practices. We must see the similarity—as well as the difference---in Christianity. Christianity must denounce its own scapegoating and say it is people who act this way, not God.

Gill: Regarding technology, you have suggested that it only became possible when people stopped looking for scapegoats (for disease and other misfortunes of life) and developed science and technology.

Girard: In an archaic community, if a roof falls in there must be a culprit somewhere. But as long as you think that way you will not improve your building and construction techniques. Magical explanations are always scapegoating phenomena. The old anthropologists like Fraser often made this point. Christianity preconditioned the type of rationality required by technology. Far from being anti-scientific or anti-technology, Christianity made them possible.

Gill: In *The New Demons* Jacques Ellul argues that Technique has become our new sacred, at the center of our culture. The old religious demons have been exorcised but there are new ones. People look to technology as they used to look to God. Questioning technology is treated as profaning God's name used to be. Ellul would say we must desacralize technology.

Girard: *The New Demons* was very prophetic. Religion is back in a big way. All the cliches of the Enlightenment are collapsing. Our technology is like the sorcerer's apprentice. It threatens us and must be controlled or restrained in some way.

Gill: How would you describe the "sacred" in today's society?

Girard: The sacred always has aspects of violence mixed up in it. The shift in Christianity was from a violent sacred to love. The great mystery and paradox is that religions begin with a violent sacred in order to suppress violence. If we stay in an archaic atmosphere we sacralize technology, we sacralize power, which means that

ultimately we sacralize violence. So to worship technology today, rather than being modern, is really to return to the archaic. The danger from our technology is becoming very obvious.

Gill: What do you make of the rise of Islam? This was something that concerned Ellul.

Girard: For Islam, God is essentially power. There is a great distance between the people and the omnipotent God. With Ellul, I would argue that Christianity shows us a God of non-power, something very different even from nonviolence. God chooses not to use the power he has but instead to leave humanity free. The question is whether people will be capable of exercising this freedom. I think the great mistake of Christianity today is to try to reassure people, to make things more palatable. They think that people want to be reassured. No. They want the truth!

Re-View *The New Demons*

Ellul's Genius: Unmasking the New Demons of Postmodernity

by Darrell J. Fasching

The New Demons by Jacques Ellul. Translated by C. Edward Hopkin. Crossroad Book, The Seabury Press (NY: Crossroad Books, Seabury Press, 1975.) *Les Nouveaux Possedes* (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1973).

Twenty four years ago, when I first published my book on *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*. I footnoted my first citation of *The New Demons* with this comment: "This book contains Ellul's sociological analysis of the religiosity of the technological society. It is, I believe, the key to unlocking and understanding the relationship between his sociology and his theology and in that sense his most important work." I still hold that view. And it certainly has been the book that has had the most impact on my own publishing career. If there is one work of Ellul's that has formed the backbone of virtually every one of the seven books I have written it is Ellul's *The New Demons*.

When Ellul's work first began to be published in United States in the sixties and seventies, his readers were grouped into two camps – his sociological fans

and his theological fans, each often unaware of Ellul's "other side". This was especially true of those who followed Ellul's sociological works. They were typically unaware of his theological writings and many would not have known what to make of them if they had been aware. For Ellul, the separation was deliberate. Science should not be confused with theology and vice versa.

Ellul explained his dual authorship identities by saying that in his sociological works he was simply analyzing the challenges of the new technological society that had emerged since Marx. Ellul's analysis was typically branded deterministic and hopelessly pessimistic. But for Ellul, human beings do not live by science alone. The business of science is to analyze the causal chains that determine our lives. This, however, does not mean that there can be no constructive response to such determinisms. But the response is not something that can be accounted for in terms of sociological causal interactions. Human freedom is not rooted in necessities but the apocalyptic eruption of the Wholly Other in Christian freedom through faith and hope. Necessity is the product of the sacralization of society which seduces humans into placing all their hope in technique and so makes them unable to challenge its necessities. The eruption of the holy, he argued, challenges and desacralizes the human social world. Freedom occurs when hope becomes apocalyptic. This is a hope that breaks with this world and places its hope in the Wholly Other, manifesting itself in a life of holiness that invites the transgression and desacralization of the supposed necessities of a technological society.

To the best of my knowledge it was in *The New Demons* that Ellul, for the first time brought his two identities together. The book is a sociological analysis of the religiosity of a technological society but at the end he added a postscript entitled "Coda for Christians." I have often called *The New Demons* the Rosetta Stone of Ellul's work because it offered the key to understanding Ellul's total strategy by finally directly interfacing his sociology and his theology. Up until I read *The New Demons* I had not really grasped the significance to the constant references to the sacred in his book *The Technological Society*. I had noted them in passing as if they were "just metaphors." Now it was as if the lights were turned on and I could really see what he was doing. Ellul was a revolutionary who understood the power of the word made flesh.

For some time now I have been puzzling over what relationship there may be between Ellul's work and postmodernism. I have finally come to the conclusion that Ellul's work is even more revolutionary than I gave him credit for. Ellul's analysis of the religiosity of technological civilization is a description of the shift from a modern to a postmodern society. Postmodernity is defined, says Jean-Francois Lyotard

by the collapse of metanarratives (*The Postmodern Condition*, University of Minnesota Press, 1979)..

The emergence of a mass media technological consumer society has inundated all civilizations with an acute and intimate awareness of the pluralism of cultures, values and religions. This awareness results in a sociological relativizing of every culture's metanarratives, so that the grand public stories of a Christian civilization, a Hindu civilization, or an Islamic civilization, and even modern secular civilization, are reduced to the private stories that individuals embrace at their option. As a result every culture is threatened with the loss of its normative center, including the modern cultures integrated around the Enlightenment myths of science and progress.

This realization in its Western cultural form has often been expressed in terms of "the death of God" and the resurgence of a kind of polytheism of values in its place. This is a key theme of *The New Demons*. When Ellul analyzes a technological civilization by comparing into to ancient polytheistic civilizations he is really mapping the new terrain of postmodern civilization created by the emergence of a consumerist technological society. The response to the powers of technology is analogized to the sacral awe attributed to the powers of nature in polytheism. The function of politics is analogized to the function of ritual in polytheistic societies and the function of mass media is analogized to the materialist/consumerist elements of polytheistic myths that invoke the gods to bring prosperity and the acquisition of the goods of life.

By drawing these analogies, Ellul shows that modern secular technological civilization really leads back into the "sacred heart" of the kind of society once found in ancient polytheism – a decentered, pluralistic and relativistic society. These qualities in turn provoke the reactionary ascendancies of various forms of absolutism -- of dominance through the will to power. So we vacillate between vicious political absolutism (today often taking the form of fundamentalism and even terrorism) and vacuous relativistic consumerism. The fear of relativism breeds absolutism as a reaction and the fear of absolutism breeds the counter-reaction of relativism. This is the unending dialectic of the sacred and the profane, Ellul argues, from which only the way of holiness can liberate us.

This leads us into the second way in which *The New Demons* might be considered postmodern – a postmodern critique of postmodern relativism and the propensities to absolutism that it feeds. I can only be suggestive here. I am still working out the details in my new book which I am currently writing on sabbatical – tentatively entitled: *Deconstructing Terrorism*. Ellul's theology and ethics interfaces the sacred and the holy whose dynamics are first detailed with clarity in *The New Demons*. The defining quality of the sacred is that it always generates its opposite the profane. The sacred divides the world into polar opposites and by polarizing

society invites violence. The holy desecrates the sacred in order to protect and welcome the alien and the stranger who are rendered profane in a sacralized society. The holy undermines the dialectics of necessity (the dialectic of the sacred and profane) leading to the apocalypse of freedom and introduces a justice that escapes this dialectic and makes all things new.

This is where I see Ellul's work, predicated on the distinctions made in *The New Demons*, intersecting with the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. A recent book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) by Giovanna Borradori publishes interviews with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, followed by her own commentary on each. Borradori summarizes Derrida's deconstructive project as involving four steps: (1) identify the dualisms operative in the text and in society (the one leads to the other), (2) identify the hierarchy of the dualisms in the text and in society, (3) invert or subvert the dualistic hierarchies by showing what would happen if the negative and positive sides of each dualism were reversed as a way of exposing the ideology of the will to power involved in the dualistic classifications, and finally (4) produce a third term "which complicates the original load-bearing structure beyond recognition" and so deforms and reforms into a new a liberating configuration. To make my case as briefly as possible – steps one and two are what Ellul accomplishes when he analyzes the sacred sociologically, steps three and four are accomplished when he responds theologically and ethically and transgresses the sacred in the name of the holy, introducing transcendence, freedom and justice.

Now justice is not a word that immediately comes to mind when I think of postmodernism. For years I have dismissed deconstruction as irresponsible relativism. In the hands of many of its practitioners it probably is. But I have changed my mind on this with respect to Derrida after I began reading some of his later work, which is deeply indebted to Immanuel Levinas. Derrida's later work is dominated by the themes of grace (the gift), hospitality, the messianic – and also the surprising insistence that justice is the one thing that cannot be deconstructed (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, (Routledge, 1992), Chp. 1). The law can be deconstructed but only in the name of the demand for justice. In fact Derrida insists that justice is the driving force of deconstruction – that they are one and the same. For Derrida, justice, like Ellul's apocalypse of the holy, comes from the outside, as a gift – a gift that subverts all dualisms and makes new beginnings possible. In the concluding chapter of *Deconstructing Terrorism* I hope to make the case that Ellul is a religious postmodernist and that religious postmodernism is able to deconstruct the endless dialectic of absolutism and relativism that plagues secular postmodernism and so exorcise the "new demons" of the postmodern world.

In Review

Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics

by Jim Grote & John McGeeney.

Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1997.viii, 149 pp.

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Clever as Serpents was first published eight years ago but it deserves review in this issue of *The Ellul Forum* as an insightful, "Girardian" approach to business ethics.

In Part One of *Clever as Serpents*, "Theory," Grote and McGeeney use René Girard's insights to analyze workplace dynamics. At almost every turn the authors challenge the conventional wisdom and propose a different way of looking at things. Rather than a market that thrives on freedom and is inhibited by regulation, today's markets exist only because of various regulations. Governments are not disinterested spectators but active participants in markets. Like "freedom," "competition" is also a myth. In reality, cooperation is at least as productive as competition (business reality as well as ecological reality).

If not free competition, what is the secret of market economics? Grote and McGeeney propose Girard's concept of "borrowed desire" or "mimetic desire." It is envy and covetousness, exacerbated by marketing and advertising. We are motivated by desire to keep up with the Joneses and have what someone else has, or thinks desirable. Internally, the secret of management is to assign blame or even to find a scapegoat who can be sacrificed.

In Part Two, Grote and McGeeney turn to "Practice" and provide a great deal of practical counsel on how to survive and perhaps even find happiness in this toxic environment. The "currency of blame and credit" is gossip. The authors counsel detachment "from the fear of blame and the craving for credit" to "avoid being swallowed up (p. 80). They teach the "ethics of survival" (dealing with the boss and the mob) through "low visibility and high utility." Don't crave anything too much (wages, credit, visibility) but be sure you are of significant value to others.

The "ethics of success" (dealing with competitors) revolves around pursuing your true goals rather than being sidetracked by craving for others' goals. Grote and McGeeney give lots of practical "political" advice here. A bit too calculating and even cynical for my taste but maybe they are right. The "ethics of service" (dealing with customers) requires

true leadership and the meeting of the needs of others, especially the need to be free; now this I like!

Survival, success, and service: this three-fold practical ethics culminates in a reflection on “the wisdom of tradition: work.” The purpose of work is not just to transform the earth but to transform the self. The authors provide great discussion questions to go with each chapter, which makes this not just a good individual read but a great choice for a group study---maybe by your nearest or your favorite executive team. The power of Rene Girard’s insights to illuminate our daily reality is certainly made clear in *Clever as Serpents*. This is not about a literary theory but about life.

Islam et judéo-christianisme

by Jacques Ellul.

Paris: Presses universitaires de France (6, avenue Reille, 75014 Paris), 2004. 108 pages

Reviewed by David W. Gill

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Dominique Ellul, a new book by her late father has recently appeared in France. *Islam et judéo-christianisme* [*Islam and Judeo-Christianity*] contains a 20-page Preface by Alain Besançon, an 8-page Foreword by Dominique Ellul, a previously unpublished 50-page essay on Islam by Jacques Ellul, “The Three Pillars of Conformism,” and a 15-page reprint of Ellul’s introduction to a 1985 book on the Dhimmi (non-Muslims living in Muslim countries). In discussions of a possible publication of an English translation (no contract just yet!), some of us have urged that Ellul’s 20-page chapter on “The Influence of Islam” in *The Subversion of Christianity* be reprinted as part of any English-language edition. We’ll see.

During the 1980s Ellul often spoke of a book he was preparing on Islam but found publishers reluctant to publish the sort of critical perspective he felt essential. Events also moved rapidly and his manuscript needed substantial updating after these publishers’ delays. In the end the chapter in *Subversion* (and the rather obscure introduction to the book on the Dhimmi) was all we had on Islam from Ellul. The new book is therefore a great help in more fully understanding Ellul’s take on Islam.

Ellul’s essay addresses three common assertions about Islam and its relations with Christianity and Judaism. First, Ellul disputes the value of the assertion that “we are all the children of Abraham.” The three “Abrahamic religions” are often claimed to share an affinity. Ellul insists that Isaac alone of Abraham’s children received the divine and paternal blessing---not Ishmael or the other children. Moreover, according to Jesus, it is not blood lineage but living faith that renders one a true child of Abraham.

Second, Ellul disagrees that avowing “monotheism” brings Christianity, Judaism, and Islam into a close and positive relationship. To begin with, Muslims and Jews often dispute that trinitarian Christians are monotheists. More importantly, it is not the fact of having one god that unites people (other religions and even secular “religions” sometimes have one sacred center, one object of worship and center of meaning). No, it is the *identity* of that God that decides everything. Ellul shows how the Muslim Allah is dissimilar to the God known in Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Third, Ellul rejects the idea that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are united in being “religions of the book.” It is partly about the nature of the holy writing and how it is viewed that establishes big differences; it is supremely about the content of the books---including the ways the Koran contradicts the teaching of the Bible.

Ellul’s Introduction to Bat Ye’or’s *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (1985) reviews and defends the author’s research which carefully examined a long history and found that Jews and Christians had a varied experience under Islam, some good, some bad situations. It is not correct to say that they were always protected and flourishing under Islam (today’s politically-correct viewpoint), nor were they always persecuted.

Ellul’s writings on Islam display his usual passion and intensity. He is taking an unpopular position in a French intellectual milieu that, partly out of guilt over a colonial past and the presence of large numbers of impoverished Muslim immigrants, tended to go to extremes to glorify Islam in an uncritical way. Ellul, on the other hand, fought to protect Jews during the Nazi occupation and for biblical and theological reasons saw a special place for Israel in history. This is a context in which straight talk and candid opinions can be difficult. To have Ellul’s views on Islam in this new book is a welcome addition.

What new readers of Ellul need to be aware of is that he was by nature and choice very dialectical in thought and expression. He felt free to express in extreme form either pole in a given controversy. Thus, his criticism of Islam is harsh. But remember that Ellul wrote ten times as much in harsh criticism of the subversion of Christianity, of its mediocrity, conformism, and guilt. And his critique of the religion of Technique is even stronger. In any case, Ellul had no use for violence or nationalism (common reactions to fears of Islam or Christianity in today’s world).

Islam et judeo-christianisme is a challenge to re-think Islam (and Judaism and Christianity), to cast off political correctness and comforting myths we may hold, to face the truth with courage, to speak with candor, and then to move forward toward a genuine peace and understanding.

News & Notes

INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON ELLUL: POITIERS, 21-22 OCTOBER 2004

More than 150 scholars gathered at the University of Poitiers for a colloquium on Jacques Ellul's thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death. Organized by our sister society, the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, led by Poitiers Professor of Political Science, Patrick Chastenet, the Poitiers colloquium was characterized by excellent papers and animated discussion. Randall Marlin (Ontario), David Gill (California), and Jean Robert (Mexico) were among the program participants. Veteran scholars such as Ellul's friend and colleague, Prof. Etienne Dravasa, were side-by-side with a number of younger scholars now finishing graduate studies in various universities. Sociologists, political scientists, and communications theorists interacted with pastors, ethicists, and theologians. The papers from the colloquium are now being edited for publication in book form. Bravo to Patrick and our AIJE friends.

CONFERENCE AT BÈGLES

Just a few weeks after the Poitiers colloquium, the regional Ellul-Charbonneau Association sponsored a colloquium in Bègles, a town near Bordeaux. IJES member Joyce Hanks (University of Scranton) reports that the Bègles meeting was also attended by more than 150 people and was "absolutely terrific." Plans are underway to publish the colloquium papers.

CHRISTIANITY & ANARCHISM CONFERENCE AUGUST 5-6, 2005, CHICAGO

IJES member Andy Baker invites IJES members and friends to a two-day conference "Practically Speaking: Anarchism and Christianity in Word and Deed" to be held August 5-6 at the International Conference Center, 4750 North Sheridan Road, Chicago IL. For information visit: www.JesusRadicals.com

CAHIERS JACQUES ELLUL

Pour Une Critique de la Société Technicienne

The third issue of *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, an annual journal edited by Patrick Chastenet and published by our sister society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul, is now off the press. It is available for 20 euros (postage included) to individuals outside France, and for 25 euros to libraries. Further information at www.jacques-ellul.org. Write: *Cahiers Ellul*, 21, rue Brun, 33800 Bordeaux.

SPECIAL ISSUE OF REFORMÉ

A special issue of the French publication *Reformé* was devoted to Jacques Ellul in December 2004. The first half (20 pages or so) is devoted to biography, bibliography, and recollections of Ellul by Patrick Chastenet and others. The second half is a reprint of various short articles Ellul published in *Reformé* between 1945 and 1989. A fascinating collection. Web site: www.reforme.net E-mail: reforme@reforme.net. Write: Reforme, 53-55, avenue du Maine, 75014 Paris, France. Six euros plus postage and handling.

Resources for Ellul Studies

www.ellul.org

& www.jacques-ellul.org

Two indispensable web sites

The IJES/AIJE web site at www.ellul.org contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at www.jacques-ellul.org offers a French language supplement.

The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the most valuable. Visit www.elsevier.com for ordering information.