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Mimesis and Sacrifice

Applying Girard's Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines

Edited by
Marcia Pally

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Sacrifice amid Covenant

From Abuse to Gift

Marcia Pally

This chapter explores the nature of sacrifice by focusing not on sacrificial types (archaic, Christian) but on the relationships among the persons involved. Among covenantal relationships, sacrifice, as reciprocal giving for the flourishing of the other and the common good, is not only a necessary component of a just society but our ontological proclivity.

The chapter begins by exploring Girard's early assessment of the First Testament as a transition text that retains the archaic understanding of humanity and thus as a text still bound to scapegoating sacrifice. Noting the methodological requirement of reading the Tanach *as a problem set (reading through its metaphors, flawed human characters, and* longue durée *moral lessons), the chapter suggests that Girard's early view of the* Tanach *under-recognizes its perspective of the victim, its prohibitions against scapegoating, insistence on moral responsibility, and care for the downtrodden. The chapter then investigates the* tanachic *covenant (reciprocal bonds between humanity and God and among persons) and the meaning of sacrifice in the covenantal context. As the brutality of the crucifixion becomes divine love in the Christian understanding, sacrifice-amidst-covenant is a symbolic, dialogic act in the conversation that sustains relationship and reciprocal giving. The chapter agrees with Girard that the Second Testament is a book of "non-violent imitation" and suggests that the First is one of nonviolent education grounded in a covenantal ontology and the "ontological peace" that Girard held is universal to religion.*

—editor's note

Introduction

Among the key issues in looking at sacrifice is whether on balance it is societally beneficial. Under what conditions is it abusive and when is it a necessary component

of a flourishing society? Rene Girard holds that sacrifice's valence and usefulness are contingent upon type and purpose (archaic or Christian, scapegoating or donative). Moshe Halbertal (2012) too distinguishes based on type: sacrifice *to* (a deity) and sacrifice *for* (a cause). The latter is productive when its purpose is, for example, the education of children, but dangerous, when terrorism.

This chapter looks at sacrifice not by type/purpose but by the relationship among the persons involved. I follow Girard and others on the social nature of human life that each person becomes who she uniquely is through relations and interactions with others (Pally 2016). But where Girard saw much of that relationality as competitive and violent, I draw on covenantal theology (and evolutionary biology as reviewed in the Introduction to this volume) to suggest that our foundational ontology, prior to the archaic period of Girard's focus, is cooperative, indeed covenantal. Within covenantal relations, sacrifice becomes a mode of reciprocal regard and giving.

Girard in his earlier works distinguishes not only between sacrificial type but also between sacrifice in the First and Second Testaments. While his understanding of non-Christian faiths evolved, I will make some clarifying remarks as his earlier descriptions have been taken to be Girard's consistent position. The First Testament, for instance, has been seen as a transition text retaining archaic sacrifice as a scapegoating ritual to release societal tensions. Thus, it has been understood to offer but harbingers of a world without the sacrifice of innocents. The Second Testament, by contrast, proffers just such a nonviolent vision. "For Girard," Wolfgang Palaver notes, "the only real and nonviolent means to overcoming mimetic rivalry is found in the New Testament. . . . The New Testament shows us another way" (Palaver 2013: 219). That another way is what Girard called "non-violent imitation" (Girard 1987: 430), and I fully support this reading of the later Testament. But I suggest that the First, while not "non-violent *imitation*" is a book of "non-violent *education*" based not on an archaic, competitive view of life but on a covenantal one: the twined covenantal relations with God and among persons. These relations not only are the focus of the prophets, who are often cited as evidence of covenantal tenets, but also run throughout the First Testament or *Tanach*. They are an expression of the "ontology of peace" that Girard held grounds all religions.

Girard's intertestamental investigation

On Girard's view, Christianity's exceptional offer of love—what finally stops mimetic competition and scapegoating sacrifice—is rooted in the

crucifixion. Gospel crucifixion narratives, he holds, contain no echo of archaic sacrifice. Their lesson without remainder is God's love and mercy. As Christianity directs human desires toward the divine love shown on the cross, competition-induced aggression is undone since the object of desire, God's love, may be shared by all. There is nothing to compete over. Girard follows Augustine's insight that "if you only love what cannot be snatched out of its lover's hand, you undoubtedly remain unbeaten and are not tormented in any way by jealousy" (*On Christian Belief*, 88, XLVI.86.243). Even Gospel apocalypticism (Matthew 24:1-25, Lukas 17:22-37) reveals no angry deity to be placated by sacrifice, as in archaic myth. Apocalyptic violence, on Girard's view, is the outcome of human violation of God's kingdom (Palaver 2013: 216).

Though on the surface the power of the crucifixion narrative depends on Jesus's literal sacrifice, Girard rightly distinguishes between archaic sacrifice and the crucifixion because the cross is understood as divine donation of love for humanity. As God's loving gift, it fails Girard's criteria for archaic sacrifice: it is neither scapegoating-as-restitution to an angry god nor mob-bonding. Girard, with many contemporary scholars (David Bentley Hart 1993, among others), disallows restitutionary readings of the Passion, where humanity must "pay" God for its sins. Yet his early work finds restitution maintained in the First Testament, which, he holds, makes sacrifices to a vengeful God and does not replace the scapegoating/sacrifice mechanism with *agape* (Girard 1987: 227, 252).

I suggest that this understanding does not encompass the *Tanach*'s vision, about which I'll make a few introductory notes. First is the *Tanach*'s foundation in God's mercy, grace, and covenant with humankind which transcends human law, endures through humanity's breaches, and grounds relations with not only God but also human. In the *Tanach*, giving to neighbor and stranger is situated amid the ritual laws through which the Israelites express bond with God. Thus, the three commitments are not only bound together but bound by giving and mutual care (Leviticus 19:18, 19:34). As Robert Bellah describes, the key features of *tanachic* religion and culture—the centrality of texts and laws independent of reigning elites or monarch, the importance of their interpretation and *critique*, and a conception of a transcendent God against whose ethics of mercy and grace all human acts may be judged—are post-archaic and point to a new conception of God, society, person, and relations among the three (Bellah 2011: Kindle Locations 4239, 4848–49). Sandor Goodhart, among Girard's first graduate students, succinctly writes, "Judaism is nothing if not the exodus from archaic religion" (2014: 245).

Second, the Girardian/Augustinian observation that Christianity undoes competitive violence by directing human desire toward God's ever-available love applies also to the *Tanach*. "The Jewish covenant," Daniel Breslauer (2006) notes, "assumes that monotheism—the God of the covenant—must be accessible to all humanity, not just to Jews." All are invited to God's inexhaustible love that guides humanity to righteousness. The offer is expansively inclusive: observance of ritual is not required nor is conversion (as it is required in Christianity and Islam): one need not accept YHVH as one's savior. All those following the seven basic Noahite morals (against murder, theft, etc.) are held to be righteous and at one with God.

Third, while Girard's archaic sacrifice features mob-bonding and scapegoating-as-restitution, the First Testament repudiates both. The critical binding of Isaac narrative (*Akedah*), like the crucifixion it prefigures, rejects human sacrifice, whether to constitute the Abrahamic line (group bonding) or as restitution to God. Indeed, its point is that such sacrifice—even or especially if the demand appears to come from God—has no part in the covenant with him (Pally 2016: 192–93). Yoram Hazony adds that Abraham knew God does not require this sacrifice as the text twice plainly states and as God, in the text, in fact does not require (2012: 118). Sacrifice of Abraham's other son Ishmael too is impermissible; God makes of him a great nation. The *Akedah* narrative closes with a sacrifice but not of archaic type. The eventual sacrifice of a ram neither expiates sin (restitution)—Abraham has committed no sin—nor does it bond any group. Pointedly, rather than bonding, Abraham's family disperses.

The *Akedah* rejects archaic scapegoating as does the crucifixion, which yet lends itself to difficulties. Even as it seeks to end scapegoating, the crucifixion narrative creates a potential for it in identifying some party as Christ's killer to be murdered in vengeance (Halbertal 2017). History notes the millennia of innocent Jewish victims of Christian violence, ironically justified by a narrative to end the sacrifice of innocents. This human history does not remark on the theology of God's donative love on the cross but rather on the human capacity to employ this theology to scapegoat.

Beyond these introductory notes, I'd like to look further at Girard's important idea that the Second Testament is the first book written from the victim's perspective and so the first to reject scapegoating in favor of moral responsibility. For instance, Girard notes that in asking the mob set on stoning an adulteress "Who is free from sin?" Jesus replaces the crowd's contagious rage with the requirement that the crowd takes moral responsibility for its stone-throwing

act—what Girard called "nonviolent contagion" (Girard 2001: 57). This to my mind is correct and draws on Deuteronomy 17:7, which requires anyone stepping forward as witness to a crime to be the first to execute the sentence, to cast the first stone. The moral responsibility for condemning another is not only on those who execute punishment but, earlier, on those who start the rock rolling by giving evidence. Moral self-responsibility is the basis for the Deuteronimic principle as it was for Jesus's later teachings.

The lesson of moral responsibility is found also in the Adam and Eve narrative. This tale—in addition to its concern with leaving one's childhood garden for the responsibilities of childbearing and work—presents a transcendent God and marks the distinction between such a God and humanity. With this distinction, it establishes an epistemological humility that disallows (human) intellectual absolutism. When Adam and Eve are tempted by the unhumble reach for all, absolute knowledge, it loses them nearly everything. The couple and serpent, whose phallic morphology suggests the importance of Adam's role, hide and finger-point (scapegoating each other) to escape moral responsibility, but to no avail. The narrative import—what Goodhart (2014: 112) calls the "heart" of biblical reading—is that one can neither avoid moral responsibility nor scapegoat (111, 113). This, Goodhart continues, is the consistent theme of the *tanachic* and rabbinic oeuvre (114).

Moving from Girard's concern with moral responsibility, we come to a methodological matter. *Tanachic* narratives are neither ideals to be striven for (as portions of the Second Testament are) nor submerged sacrificial violence in the mold of archaic myth. They are problem-sets for the induction of a theology, cosmology, and ethics. They feature metaphor, formulaic (nonliteral) narrative tropes, and flawed human characters through which readers develop a theology and ethics by working out the long-term consequences of multigenerational tales (Alter 1981/2011; Geller 1996: 31). The import of the Noah tale, for instance, is that when humanity's wrongdoings (in this case, sexual) overflow in society (metaphorically speaking), nature responds with overflowing watery emissions of its own. Through metaphor, it remarks on the foundational links between nature and humanity, natural law and ethics. If humanity abuses the workings of the cosmos, the cosmos will no longer work, to the demise of humanity. In another example, the lesson against envy and betrayal that begins with Cain and Abel doesn't end until some forty chapters later, with Joseph forgiving his betraying, envious brothers. This is not archaic myth, where the trace of scapegoating violence is hidden and then "crystallized" for ritual retelling and reenactment (Girard 1987: 142, 275). It is rather the opposite: the envy and scapegoating are

not submerged but patent, and the *tanachic* response is forgiveness. The violence is not crystallized for repetition but replaced with grace.

In sum, *tanachic* law and narrative make self-aggrandizement, claims to intellectual absolutism, escapes from moral responsibility, and competitive rage (Joseph's brothers) explicit to condemn and replace them with moral responsibility and forgiveness (Goodhart 2014: 249). Vanessa Avery (2012) is right to note that as the patriarch Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and makes them leaders alongside Joseph's now-reconciled brothers, Jacob extends the lesson of forgiveness beyond Joseph to the next generation and the Hebrew people as a universal moral principle. David Mitchell (2007) is also right to note a rabbinic *midrash* that works Ephraim into a messianic icon who, prefiguring the Davidic and Christian messiahs, dies as a symbol of reconciliation that redeems humanity. I take issue with Avery, however, where she reads mimetic violence into the Ephraim/Menasseh story. The point of the tale is the *absence* of competitive aggression between the boys, as Avery herself notes. Mimetic violence is also absent from the rabbinic *midrash*, whose point is that sinfulness is overcome not by violence but by giving of oneself and following the Torah given in covenant.

As much of the *tanachic* education in nonviolence lies not in narrative but in law, I'll continue with a closer look there. Law, on the *tanachic* and rabbinic understanding, is a means of living covenantally with God and persons. It helps us repair greed and aggression not through ritualized violence/payment to an angry deity but through covenantal living. Importantly, law is not in a binary against grace and love but a way to prepare for grace and to receive and give love. Its three central commandments are love of God, love of neighbor, and love of the stranger. When Jesus repeats the mandate to love God and neighbor and tells the story of the good Samaritan-stranger, he is reprising this triptych (Lukas 10:27-35). "The [Hebrew Bible] law," Terence Fretheim notes, "stands in the service of a stable, flourishing, and life-enhancing community (the community language is important). Sinai law sketches a vocation to which Israel is called for the sake of the neighbor and the creation" (Fretheim 2005: Kindle Locations 2974–75, 3205).

We may begin with the difficult case of laws for the enemy, who is protected by *tanachic* "just war" criteria (Psalms 7:4, 35:7-8) and importantly, by the requirement that a suit for peace be brought *prior* to any aggression (Deuteronomy 20:10). Captives must be properly cared for (2 Kings 6:22-23); civilians of besieged cities must be allowed to leave unharmed; enemy nations may not be oppressed even during war (2 Chronicles 28:8-15); and truces and

peace agreements must be honored even if the enemy breaches them (Joshua 9). From the enemy we may move to the stranger, for whom aid requirements are so extensive that they are cited as a model for treatment of the Hebrew poor (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34, 23:35-39). Ezekiel 47:22-23 grants strangers even land rights, critical in an agrarian society.

Israelites are mandated to provide aid to strangers as witness to their slavery in Egypt—a victim perspective that is among the most persistent of *tanachic* tropes running throughout the texts (and which is found in the later crucifixion). Yet in keeping with love of enemy, even the enslaving Egyptians are integrated into the community of nations after three generations post-Exodus (Deuteronomy 23:7-8). Here again, we have the inversion of the archaic "crystallization" and reenactment of aggression. Rather than preserving scapegoating violence for (unconscious) societal repetition, the *Tanach* preserves the perspective of the victim, the Hebrew slave, so that *it*—the victim's perspective—may be repeated in acts of compassion for the stranger and needy.

From the laws pertaining to aiding the stranger, we may move to laws for the domestic needy, which prodded the emperor Julian to say, "It is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg . . . all men see that our people lack aid from us" (Stern 1980: 549–50, no. 482). A sampling of biblical poor laws includes *shmitah* and Jubilee debt cancellation (Leviticus 25:4-6, Deuteronomy 15:1-2); distribution of food to the poor (Deuteronomy 24:19-22); tithing obligations for all others (Deuteronomy 14:22); prohibitions against the return of runaway servants (Deuteronomy 23:15-16) and against the taking of interest from the poor (Exodus 22:25). Manumission of servants is required after six years of work, when they must be outfitted with livestock, grain, and wine (Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12).

Importantly, in *tanachic* law, the moral life is not in the end fulfilled by ritual but by care of the downtrodden. While the Girardian archaic imagines that things are set right through sacrifice to the gods, Amos notes the importance of compassion over ritual: "I [God] hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. . . . But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (5:21-24). Hosea 6:6 reiterates, "For I desire mercy not sacrifice" as does Proverbs (21:3): "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than [animal] sacrifice."

In sum, if archaic myth ritualizes the scapegoating mechanism, the *tanachic* texts rout it in prioritizing humility, compassion, and care for the needy over ritual. And it does so by highlighting the victim's perspective in the continuing reminder of Israel's plight in Egypt.

Sacrifice in the *Tanachic* covenant

So, what is sacrifice in the covenantal context and among covenantal relations? To answer, we return to our methodological matter and note that the literary forms of the *Tanach* are not the sort of logical presentation the West has inherited from the Greeks. Neither argued syllogistically nor presented in declarative statements, meaning and intent are understood from multigenerational narratives, repeating symbols, intertextual references and importantly, from the cosmological and theology context (Alter 1981; Geller 1996; Geller 2005: 12; Hazony 2012; Whybray 1987). That context is, among other things, covenantal. In a period and region where sacrifice was a predominant expression of feeding, flattering, and/or placating inscrutable, volatile gods, sacrifice in the *Tanach* is a dialogic act, symbolic communication that sustains the reciprocal giving and commitment with a God who *seeks* covenant with humanity and who provides understandable guides for sustaining that relationship between persons and God and among persons. That is, archaic sacrifice and covenantal sacrifice differ because notions of the divine and relations with him differ. To explore this, a few preliminaries about covenant are needed.

To begin, in cosmogonic myth, gods are mythopoetic and unchanging: "A cosmogonic myth is beyond discussion," Henri Frankfort writes. "It describes a sequence of sacred events, which one can either accept or reject. But no cosmogony can become part of a progressive and cumulative increase of knowledge" (Frankfort and Frankfort 1959: 251). Covenant, by contrast, is an evolving relationship between a covenant-seeking God and humanity and among persons (Pally 2016: 183–86, 233–36). The *tanahic* God, Stephen Geller writes, is not so much a concept, an "ism," as a relation: "Monotheism involves not just God but also the personality of the believer. The two unities proceed hand in hand" (Geller 2000: 295–96). Humanity is taken to be covenant-responsive and covenant-responsible. Each party is responsible for giving for the flourishing of the other, yet none are subsumed by the bond.

Contra archaic sacrifice, no one in covenant, as seen in the *Akedah*, is sacrifice-able for the group or God. Rather, covenant—unlike contract, which protects interests—protects all involved and their relationship. This is irrevocable, also unlike contract, where breach voids the obligation. Moreover, reciprocal giving and giving of oneself—sacrifice for the care of others—are necessary to the thriving of a covenantal world. It is the principle or foundational law "whose force is of a universal nature, because it derives from the way the world itself was made, and therefore from the natures of the men and nations in this world"

(Hazony 2012: 22, 249). Covenant is understood as for the "blessing of all the nations," said thrice, once to each patriarch (Genesis 12:3, 26:4, 28:14).

Covenants of reciprocal giving among equals are easily imagined as are covenants with asymmetric terms between unequal parties. The *tanachic* innovation is reciprocity among unequals, a direct bond between God and humanity and among persons of different status. So integral is reciprocity that humanity is understood as God's cocreator in the world's development. Positive law, insofar as it develops love of God, neighbor, and stranger, is humanity's contribution to this co-covenantal effort.

This conception of divine-human relations distinguishes covenant from archaic religio-politics where the king is seen as god, god's son, or sole mediator between the gods and the people. The innovation of the ancient Israelites and *Tanach*, Michael Walzer writes (1985), is a vision of society grounded not in a godlike monarch but in a covenant directly between the people and a transcendent God, whose ethics of forgiveness and grace are the standard by which all human acts, including those of kings, are judged. Even Moses, who brings the tablets of covenant to the people, is no king but a flawed, human teacher and prophet, who errs, loses his temper and whose grave, *contra* the Assyrian and Egyptian kings, is unknown. The book of Judges and the "kingly" books, recounting the reigns from Saul through the destruction of Israel and Judah, are *critiques* of monarchy and political power (Noort 2018: 2).

Robert Bellah notes that certain archaic societies (Mesopotamia in the Code of Hammurabi, for one) developed a proto-covenantality in understanding god(s) not only as responsible for life's unpredictabilities but as the people's caretaker. However even here, justice remained closely dependent on the king's decrees and whims (2011: Kindle Locations 3422, 3426). The idea of a reciprocal commitment between a covenant-seeking God and humanity and among persons—an enduring, ethical commitment abstracted from the human personalities involved—evolved along with the evolution of the Hebraic covenant "as a charter for a new kind of people, a people under God, not under a king, an idea parallel to Athenian democracy though longer lasting . . . a people ruled by divine law, not the arbitrary rule of the state, and of a people composed of *responsible individuals*" (2011: Kindle Locations 4700–01, 4864, emphasis mine).

The responsible individuals of covenant have substantial role in sustaining covenant through reciprocity and giving, both to persons in need and to those in symbolic reciprocity with God, who is committed to them. And here we come to sacrifice-within-covenant and its distinction from the archaic. As the meaning

of sacrifice is neither argued for nor declared but must be understood within the covenantal premises of the *Tanach*, covenantal sacrifice, like covenant itself, is dialogic. It is a symbolic gesture of giving to God (who has given and committed to humanity) in sustenance of the reciprocal bond. As Marcel Mauss elaborated in *The Gift* (1990/1923), gift is freely given and *given up* as a symbol of one's own spirit granted in covenantal commitment to the other. In the *Tanach*, gift begins bilaterally. God in trust and commitment gives of his Being to create Adam, breathing into humanity God's "spirit" (*nishmat cha'im*, Genesis 2:7). God gives Noah life and covenant; his children give in return in performing the Noahite moral law. God in covenant gives land and Torah to the Hebrews. In reciprocity, they perform the moral and ritual law that sustain covenant. They develop them in cocreation and bring symbolic gifts from the land in reciprocal giving.

Yet this reciprocity and giving does not remain bilateral, between person and God, but triangulates to human relations: persons give to God *by giving* to persons in need, called *hekhdesh*, made holy. Through this triangulation, covenantal giving to others builds covenant with God, and covenant with God sustains persons in giving to others. As covenant extends from bilateral to larger human associations, reciprocal giving becomes giving or gift-exchange networks that sustain intra- and intersocietal relations (Mauss 1990/1923; Godbout and Caille´ 1988; Hyde 1983). That is, they sustain human living.

The triangulation of covenantal giving with God and among persons is reflected not first in the prophets (often cited to illustrate it) but throughout the Pentateuch, notably in the Ten Commandments: three pertain to person-God and the rest, seamlessly, to persons in community (see Palaver's thoughtful passage on Jewish tradition, 2015: 158–60). Leviticus 6:2-3 holds: "If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving a neighbor . . . ." Harm to persons breaks covenant with God. Numbers 5:6 repeats the idea: "Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way *and so is unfaithful to the Lord* is guilty." And it is reprised in the frequent biblical formulation, "behave righteously to others; I am the Lord." Rather than a non-sequitur, this refrain is an expression of the linked covenants with God and among persons: righteousness and giving to one entails righteousness and giving to the other. We find a similar linkage in the biblical poor laws: "Leave them [the field corners] for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 23:22).

Finally, the triangulated covenant with God and among persons grounds the biblical episodes, such as the Golden Calf, where Israel breaks covenant with God and violence among persons follows or where the natural world erupts in disaster. The narrative import—what Goodhart calls the "heart" of biblical

reading (2014: 112)—is this: as covenant with God is broken, the covenantal fabric of society is rent as well. The triangulated covenant is the nature of the cosmos, and a breach in one part breaches all parts. Girard's idea of Gospel apocalypticism resulting from human sin (Palaver 2013: 216) is consistent with the *tanachic* principle of the triangulated covenant: if humanity sins by failing covenant with God and persons, the social and natural worlds themselves fail.

While sacrifice was a predominant approach to the gods in the cultures surrounding the ancient Hebrews, the meaning given to it in the *Tanach* was unusual because it was understood as expression of a covenantal relationship. This is true as well for the crucifixion, which was ubiquitous at the time of Jesus but which—though it involves the tough case of human sacrifice—was given new meaning as God's donative love and new covenant with humanity (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8, 9:15, 12:24). In the context of covenant, sacrifice, as dialogic, is symbolic expression by morally accountable persons of giving and gift, which sustain reciprocal commitment with a God who is not unknowable and inscrutable but seeks covenant with humanity. Symbolically, it reflects humanity's acceptance of reciprocal responsibility: God maintains covenant and gives to us as we maintain covenant and give to God and other persons, so sustaining human living. It is part of humanity's role and voice in this covenantal exchange, as prayer later became.

Celebratory sacrifice at the harvest, Sabbath, and other festivals (Numbers 28) is a symbolic return gesture for this life that God, in covenant, sustains. The ritual "offer" of the first son into the priesthood (Levenson 1993) too is a symbolic gesture for the gift of children and emphasizes the *Akedah* point that covenant never demands the sacrifice of a child. The point of the ritual is that God does not take children, not even for priestly worship (as in some archaic religions and with child oblates and monks), but gives children in covenant with humanity. Sacrifice is also a public expression of repentance, a pledge of oneself to community and God that one atones for wrongdoing and will act with righteousness (Leviticus 4, 16). Persons bring atonement sacrifice "when they *realize* their guilt and the sin they have committed becomes known" to the community (Leviticus 4:27-28). Its aim is not to appease the gods, who then will cease their destructive acts against society. Rather, it seeks moral reflection among accountable persons, who are—with God, as his cocreators—responsible for society. The offerings that atone for sin (*hatat*) and guilt (*asham*) as well as the original scapegoat (*se'ir l'azazel*, Leviticus 16: 8-10) do not placate inscrutable gods nor in themselves expiate sin but rather express moral intent and are symbols of accountability to community and God, who seeks covenant.

Unlike archaic sacrifice, the dialogic act of covenantal sacrifice depends on moral responsibility and reinforces reciprocally responsible relationship.

Indeed, sacrifice absent intent is void (see Blanchard, this volume). Thus, covenantal sacrifice fails Girard's criteria for archaic scapegoating. Rather than paying off a distant, angry divine, it is an expression of responsibility *with* the divine for the sustenance of covenant, for reciprocity, giving, and moral living. Moreover, the *tanachic* writings about sacrifice fail Girard's criteria for sacrificial myth. Those criteria are reference (1) to a primordial threat, (2) to a wrongdoing that brought the threat about, and (3) to an *other* who is the perpetrator of the wrong and who thus may be sacrificed. Yet *tanachic* texts about harvest and celebration sacrifices are grounded not in sin or wrongdoing but in relationship and reciprocal giving that sustain the cosmos and human life. *Tanachic* texts about atonement sacrifices do not refer to a primordial threat and wrongdoing. They point to the ever present, quotidian injustices that we ourselves—not an other—commit in failing covenant with God and persons. They aim at sustaining these relationships. They look not at a mythologized past but at moral responsibility and reflection about the way we live in the present and future.

In sum, the shift from archaic person-in-mimetic-competition to person-in-covenant repositions sacrifice from lynch mob to moral responsibility and reciprocal giving with God and other persons. It unites society not by scapegoating and mob frenzy but by grounding personal and public life in an ethics of giving and reciprocal commitment with community and God, who seeks this very reciprocity and giving.

Sacrifice's meaning and valence has changed from abusive to constructive because the understanding of the divine has gone from cosmogonic to covenantal and the understanding of humanity has gone from agonistic to relational.

Conclusion: Covenant as premise for agapic sacrifice

A covenantal worldview may have something to offer us in the way we understand present society and our obligations to give—give up, sacrifice—for each other and the group, what we now call the common good. Just how useful it is hangs on one's notion of human nature as competitive or covenantal with foundational affinities for reciprocity and giving.

The Christian debate, where Girard weighs in, is bookended on one end by Thomist optimism. In Aquinas's *analogia entis*, humanity continues to "analogously" partake of divine goodness—the goodness present at creation—

even given the foundational differences between humanity and God and even after the Fall. "In all things," Aquinas writes, "God works intimately" (Aquinas, 1265–74, Ia, q. 105, art. 5). Thus, as we retain something of this goodness, we retain the possibility of sacrifice as reciprocal giving and exchange of *agape*. The more pessimistic view might be represented by Karl Barth, who feared that the *analogia entis* allows humanity to determine morality too much on its own—out of its own supposed, *imago*-based goodness—without close guidance from revelation and Scripture (Oakes 2007: 595–616). This undue independence from revelation and Scripture, on Barth's view, led to the sorts of "morality" he witnessed in the trenches of the Frist World War and as 1930s Europe capitulated to fascism. Humanity, Barth concluded, could not be trusted to its "good" nature.

In this debate, Girard is something of an Augustinian broker, appropriately wary of humanity's capacity for aggression yet also aware that upon creation, God held humanity to be "very good" and that this goodness is not entirely lost (Augustine 390/1953: 11.21). With something of this goodness still with us, humanity may yet follow God's offer and model of love on the cross.

Tanachic covenant has something of Girard's cautious optimism. It understands humanity as being in an ongoing education toward nonviolence. We are made in the "image" of a covenantal God (our primary condition is covenantal) *and* as we are in reciprocal covenant with him and other persons. Owing to this covenantality, we may give and sacrifice in reciprocal commitment in both personal relations and public policy—as demonstrated by the *tanachic* poor laws and without which no common good can be built. Girard holds that to overcome aggression, we must learn from God's limitless love. The First Testament agrees. It proposes that we are capable of learning from God's love not because it corrects our "natural" competitive violence but because it builds upon our covenantal nature.

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