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The use and abuse of the scapegoat*

Summary: This paper discusses Girard's discovery of the undoing by the biblical tradition of a mechanism on which human culture rests worldwide. His literary studies brought him to the analysis of religious traditions and to the insight that sacrificial means are used in all human conduct to counterbalance the mimetic dependence by which people fear to lose their autonomy. Their common form is scapegoating, but Christ's radicalization of the biblical message has exposed and invalidated its efficacy. The article discusses the quandary that emerged from this and the possible answer to the threatening derailment of society.

Keywords: apocalypse, forgiveness, mimesis, rivalry, sacrifice, scapegoat-mystique, total war.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with René Girard's ambivalent discovery of the unmasking of a reality that desperately sought to remain hidden. While most discoveries have both positive and negative effects, the one we are dealing with here is both dangerous and beneficial in a double sense because of the ambivalence of its very object. Like Nobel's discovery of dynamite or Maria Skłodowska's radioactivity, or the Dutchman Tasman's 'discovery' of Tasmania, which brought the extermination of its people, here too discovery changes reality. Clearly, the island of Tasmania had existed and been known to its inhabitants long before the explorer landed, and DNA had done its work long before Watson discovered it. A discovery only makes a feature become a mental construct, bringing effects that may or may not be beneficial. Scapegoating, according to Girard, is a habit that has been active from all times as a means to prevent greater evil in society. But his major book's title ranks it among the *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, because people kept it out of sight for a specific reason¹.

* This is an enlarged version of the paper I delivered in November 2011 at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, at the conference devoted to the work of René Girard.

¹ R. Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, Paris 1978 (English translation: *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford 1987). This followed his *La Violence et le Sacré* Paris 1972 (English translation: *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore 1977), which first

Lifting the lid on its secret is dangerous, since it disturbs its workings. Girard reads the biblical tradition as the unmasking of this secret, reaching its summit when Christ freely accepted to die as a scapegoat. His theory contends that this unmasking had a huge impact on history, although not only in redemptive sense. In fact, Christ's salvation contained a curious paradox and proved less of a messianic bliss than old texts predicted, because the social instrument it unmasked lost its protective force. How, then, to understand Girard's decision to believe in a Church that claims this to be a blessing?

2. An anthropological theme

I shall focus on the anthropological background of the other papers read at this conference on René Girard's mimetic theory. Although primarily a historian and literary critic, Girard has dealt extensively with anthropology as the study of what the human species makes human. Before studying his input I shall first specify which part of anthropology chiefly interested him. There are many disciplines that go by this name and some of them remained outside his focus. Actually, the two disciplines from which the university as such emerged, namely theology and philosophy, both deal primarily with humanity, albeit in different senses. They ask, respectively, how humans are seen by biblical revelation and how rational thought understands humanity's place in the world. In the 19th century criticism of their approach grew and gave rise to what we now call human sciences that rely more on empirical research. Recognising that he was neither a theologian nor a philosopher, Girard reflected mainly on this empirical anthropology, even though, here too, he admittedly had to rely on the fieldwork and written reports by others. Still, his reflections are wide-ranging and often border on philosophical and theological aspects.

As to the scapegoat-imagery, Girard recognised that it stemmed from the Bible, rather than from fieldwork reports. He presented it as a central figure in human relationships. Elsewhere Fr. Adam Romejko will treat the question to which extent this Girardian concept of the scapegoat is a religious or rather a political issue. And on the biblical side, Ms Agnieszka Burakowska offers an intriguing study of the ambiguity in the Bible's ultimate dealing with it. But both the religious and political dimensions refer to some basic anthropology about how human life actually takes shape in the sociology of daily practice². It

presented his view on the connection between sacrificial rites and the social conflicts, and on the role of camouflage, by which the ritual violence could perform its task as "bringer of peace". The notion of 'discovery' or 'unmasking' has a double meaning here: Girard discovered that the biblical tradition unravelled the religious grip of the scapegoat mechanism on society.

² From the social science perspective, it has been objected that Girard roots the social practice of scapegoating in a historic event, which he makes out to be the wellspring of all sacrificial rituals. See R. Kearney, *Myths and Scapegoats: The case of René Girard*, "Theory, Culture & Society"

is primarily this social aspect that caught Girard's attention, after the study of modern literature had made him aware of *mimesis*, the bent to mutual imitation that so commonly turns into scapegoating.

Leaving aside studies about the physical evolution of the human species, we follow Girard and focus on how humans turned into beings that communicate via symbols, where the logic of imitation prevails. When a speaker sticks up a thumb to the sound technician to signal that the microphone works fine, she acts in a typically human manner. Physical anthropology may ask how humans got this ability to signal by a thumb, and economic anthropology may study how this ability developed into a division of tasks and mutual dependency. But however basic they may be, these studies tend to leave out a crucial element. By speaking of the role and origin of symbols in social exchanges, I shall show how Girard's discovery affects our view of this realm of human interdependence by way of symbols.

As a professor of literature in the US, the Frenchman René Girard detected a curious aspect of great world literature, which he extrapolated to all human life and associated with the biblical image of the sacrificial scapegoat. This discovery in great novelists and playwrights – which he summarised by the concepts of mimetic rivalry leading to the use of scapegoats in settling conflicts – he related to the curious predominance of sacrificial practices in all religions. He realised that at the dawn of humanity something must have happened, which is still at work in every person's daily habits as the foundation of all symbolic communications. Here, he followed the common conviction that universal traits of behaviour must be traced to historical events that triggered the origin of the human culture as such. In this common habit, each person relives day by day an original setting, even though one will never know exactly what happened. This ignorance is not due just to the haziness of the past, but more importantly – in Girard's eyes – since it needs to be camouflaged and suppressed. The universality of sacrificial thinking and scapegoating practice points to the emergence of culture by a dramatic event that led to an enduring background effect.

Although the precise historical setting of the first ancestors and the cause of their conflicts will remain unknown, Girard adopts the view advanced by Freud speaking of a killing at humanity's beginnings, but without necessarily linking it to the libido and sexual rivalry. The Bible's account, like many other traditions, reflects an awareness of murderous events at the human beginnings. The contribution of Ms Magdalena Złocka-Dąbrowska reminds us that in the Bible itself two main cultural strands have merged, urging exegetes to disentangle them more clearly. But Girard, in presenting violent scapegoating as a permanent

1995, 2, p. 1-14. However, Girard sees it primarily as a social process, which must have started with some event that made a lasting impact. He explains this in the article "Generative scapegoating", in: *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Social Formation*, ed. R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, Stanford 1987.

factor that operates in the background of all myths and other forms of human symbolic life, raises the issue to a more general level³. He seeks the root of symbolic communication as such in relation to a common cultural origin.

3. Human social reality as a symbolic ambit

In my paper, I wish to discuss the workings of this symbolism and start with a reference to a great philosopher born on Polish soil, after which I shall briefly mention a scapegoating ritual I observed in Africa. By connecting these two, I shall try and illuminate how Girard understands human life as pivoting on this force and how its unravelling by the Bible has ambivalent effects in present society. Thus, we shall discover that the unmasking of this ambivalent habit has itself an ambivalent outcome.

When Girard stressed the role of scapegoating in human cultural life, he opposed the two main schools of thought in his days' Paris, both of which can be traced to the Kantian revolution, via two strands in early 20th century Germany. In 1929 at Davos (Switzerland) a debate took place between two prominent philosophers: Ernst Cassirer, born in Wroclaw, and much younger Heidegger. A deep split in Western views on human culture surfaced, which was later to develop into the two French schools Girard rejects and seeks to overcome. They both championed the Kantian plea for freedom⁴. The former was stipulating a structuralist view of man as symbolic being and the latter stressed existential freedom, but in their shared reliance on Kant, according to Girard, they both failed to note the interpersonal violent drama that pervades all human life. Cassirer saw the communication by symbols as humanity's means to rise above natural destiny, whereas Heidegger stressed that any facticity, also the structured set of symbolic signs, is first and foremost a challenge to face one's finitude and fill it anew with meaning. But Girard points out that, by respectively leading to anti-humanist structuralism and to a subject-focused existentialism, these two major streams of thought both ignored the basic process by which symbols are constantly shaped and reshaped in a dramatic setting, with scapegoating as

³ Exegetes scrutinize the traditions from around Israel that influenced the biblical creation myth. Girard takes the Genesis text as a piece of literature and relates it to a common factor in mythology, which is the camouflaged sacrificial violence. The influence of the Mesopotamian Tiamat-myth has often been quoted, and Girard follows the common opinion that Genesis deliberately avoids the violence at the heart of that story.

⁴ Cassirer and Heidegger were linked to the Marburg and Baden schools of neo-Kantianism; the former put full weight on the formal side of symbolic systems, reducing freedom to a juggling of pre-established values. The latter rather emphasized the challenge that this facticity held for autonomous, existential decision-making. Without referring to the divide that appeared in 1929 and has fascinated many researchers ever since, Girard mainly reacts to its later effects in French existentialism (Sartre) and structuralism (Lévi-Strauss), both of whom ignore the mimetic violence as a basic social factor.

its key factor. Starting from literary criticism, he discovered that the universal human need to learn by imitation and mimesis made envy and rivalry become basic forces in human life. They lead to endless tensions, for which scapegoating constitutes a standard problem-solving mechanism. Symbols are not just tools to get to grip with reality. They are social residues of judgments and attempts by people to favour some aspects and discard others. Any symbol or concept results from a previous process of sifting the useful and the harmful, the good and the bad, in which a sacrificial logic is at work⁵.

Gestures evidently carry different meanings in various cultures. A smile may mean a number of things, depending on the setting. One learns to value symbolic meanings by imbibing one's culture. While symbols enable us to control nature, they also limit our freedom due to habits. We share not only a material environment, but also operating brain structures that organise things in a particular way. Yet according to Girard, one common factor is often ignored. Without being a philosopher like Cassirer analysing the basic nature of signs, or a researcher studying actual symbolic traditions in the field, he has helped to grasp how symbolic systems actually arise. After Freud's emphasis on a person's sexual drive (libido) as the primal force and Marx's focus on material needs, and after Lévi-Strauss' attempt to transcend this by pointing to structuring mental codes by which people create order, Girard returned to a more practical issue, without rejecting their contributions. He noted that, at the heart of all cultures worldwide, there are sacrificial religions that rely on a curious logic of violence, which in his eyes, holds the key when it comes to activating those codes and turn them into symbolic system. His literary criticism discovered that interpersonal strife, due to the imitative urge, is generally solved by blaming or ousting each other thanks to the application of shared ideas of good and evil. What he sought to explain was how these discriminating codes could be understood across cultural divides. Indeed, although the word 'brother' may imply different things in Poland and in Congo, we can still understand it cross-culturally. Resemblances in the symbolic forms are insufficiently profound to explain such intra- and inter-cultural concord.

Humans learn to shape the social condition of their survival from the moment of birth by a combination of imitation and rivalry. They can hardly rely on instincts, but in much more complex ways than animals learn by imitation or mimesis. The core of Girard's mimetic theory is that humans constantly evaluate each other's actions, drawing near by imitation and distancing themselves

⁵ In Polish context, Leszek Kołakowski has voiced the postmodern critique on the ambivalence of any so-called modern progress. See especially his *Modernity on Endless Trial*, Chicago 1990. It bears pointing out that Girard's idea of the sacrificial origin of all culture is treated in related areas by Julia Kristeva, who links it to the very process of birth, in which a baby and mother struggle with mutual ties and the obligation to let go. She also relates this to the formation of language. Cf. J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror and Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York 1982 and 1984 (French originals, respectively, 1980 and 1974).

to mark their own identity. Great novelists taught him that people are profoundly mimetic. They imitate while simultaneously justifying their distance (difference) by scapegoating. This is the typically human tool of ordering society⁶. We need to come close to others by mimesis, but also to mark difference for 'arguable' reasons. Scapegoating is the very mechanism by which rivals stay distant while enhancing group unity.

Human society cannot be defined as a social contract between persons who 'agree to disagree' and try to get on by pragmatic means. Girard rejects this placid imagery of an 'agreement'. Culture actually develops by clashes and violent solutions. Animals solve conflicts differently from humans. At some moment humans discovered that inculcating (and sacrificing) a weak figure in the group brought peace to the group as a whole⁷. After that primary discovery, this solution became a ritualised pattern that re-enacted the 'lucky peace-making feat'. After many centuries of such practices, myth came to formulate a mental validation of that ritual solution by turning verdicts and sacrifices into a chart to solve strife and make peace via narrative tools⁸. These myths are not just amusing fairy tales or cognitive experiments. In reality, religion originated when a mimetic crisis that had run out of control was stopped via collective violence against one individual, and when the inculcation of that victim on fake moral grounds covered up the violent act. So, where Cassirer calls man a symbolic animal, Girard adds that this human interaction shaped its symbols through violence. The 'gods' cover up this fraud by 'demanding' it to be repeated ritually. But Girard notes that such a camouflage can never be total and watertight. All rituals and myths are beset by a subconscious awareness of fraud, which has to be suppressed by a wilful 'not knowing' – *méconnaissance*, in Girard's terms.

4. A fantasy or a daily practice?

In Girard's reading of anthropological data, human culture starts when primates learn to stop the run-away bloodletting by putting the blame on a random culprit, which is ousted or even killed. This may sound like a fairytale, notably when he claims that the victim is perceived as restoring peace through

⁶ This is not to deny that (according to recent research) animals also show embryonic forms of scapegoating, and even the use of language and of tools. Anthropology is not about finding the philosophical criteria to define the decisive difference between the species.

⁷ Girard adopted the notion of the 'original murder' from Sigmund Freud, who derived it from James Frazer's classic study *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890). See the 1922 HTML version in: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/frazer/gb02600.htm> (accessed on September 14, 2011). Freud transformed it into a patricide for sexual reasons, but Girard rejects this connection with the sexual libido, which places the origin of all cultural action in the individual's drive. Still, he is adamant that such violence must have taken place at the dawn of humanity.

⁸ See V. Propp, *Morphologie du conte*, Paris 1965.

its death and, therefore, is given a divine status as the bringer of bliss. Is he not simplifying things when he defines gods as products of a fraudulent scapegoating and presents sacrificial rites as the core of religion and even of all culture? In fact, field studies of sacrificial rites in various parts of Africa have convinced me that he is right⁹. It is hard to ignore the social tension commonly building up during such ceremonies until to the actual killing and ebbing away straight after the bloodshed. This may seem logical when a sacrifice is offered on behalf of a culprit having committed a fault. But even in those cases, the question remains why the animal itself used to be insulted. This even happened when the animal was decorated, suggesting that it was killed and yet glorified in advance for restoring order.

Sometimes the victim is literally 'scapegoated', similar to the biblical text of Lev 16 on the great Feast of Atonement. At Anloga (Ghana) I observed such a ritual at a yearly festival. The priest-king of the Bate clan was led to the lagoon together with a goat decorated with a ribbon. He wore a spotty garment and was mocked and jeered by an aggressive crowd. At the edge of the lagoon, the crowd turned onto the black goat, driving it into the lagoon, just as the Jewish Azazel in the desert, never to come back. The animal replaced the priest-king, who counted as 'filthy', and was salvaged by the ritual. Indeed, he who offered sacrifices for the people's faults counted as filth, himself needing purification. After the ousting of the goat, he could return to celebrate the festival and the public mood changed radically¹⁰.

If this ritual of carrying off society's guilt resembles the biblical one, it must be noted that the latter is even more paradoxical. Via the priest, God himself gave the people the goat for the removal of their guilt. This implies that the biblical God identified with the goat that was to carry away the sins. We need to come back to this. We must first note the ambivalence of the rites as such and the subdued awareness that the sacrificial victim is in fact innocent, while chosen to carry the guilt of the community. And next, we are to realise that the ritual is a stylised form of what happens every minute of our life¹¹. Seeking culprits for whatever befalls us and telling tales to cover up our scapegoating others for life's ills, is daily practice. It is actually what Genesis described as the 'primary' sin. Adam used his newly won 'knowledge of good and evil' to point his finger at Eve, denouncing her in the presence of God. And she continued

⁹ I did my fieldwork in the Central African Republic and Ghana among various ethnic groups where I asked these questions on many occasions. Apart from many articles, I wrote *Peuple d'autrui*, Brussels 1976.

¹⁰ The priest of a clan sanctuary in Anlo-Ewe counts as a *fia*, a king. It can be a woman, in which case a male colleague will do the sacrificial killing at her altar. Priests hold no power, but like the *zikpui fia* (holder of the political chair), they are just as ambiguous as Girard explains in respect of the sacred king. The latter is often believed to have a grip on witches, because he is a witch himself and, therefore, 'filth'.

¹¹ Girard stresses that his focus is not on the historic details of the primordial sacrifice, but on the link between the sacrificial rituals and the scapegoating in our daily life. See *Violent Origins*.

in the same vein. This can be presented as revolt against God only in a derived way. God, as the principle of harmonic life, wished to spare humans this judicious 'knowledge of good and evil', but the snake interpreted it as God's jealous rivalry. Humans followed the latter interpretation ever since. But it is crucial to see that the Bible presents this act as a thwarting of God's love, which leads to ousting the other as a culprit – scapegoat.

Girard's mimetic theory views this solving of conflicts by the ousting of scapegoats as the origin of symbolic culture. Scapegoats are used, and indeed abused, to create harmony by bogus means. As it is obvious that humans constantly use this tool, we may leave it here and turn to the remark that this hardly counts as a discovery, since it seems a truism. To this Girard is keen to reply that people readily see this speck in the other's eye, while commonly ignore it in their own. The Bible's systematic criticism made him recognise this mechanism's injustice and identify it as the Bible's core message, which was brought to a height in Jesus, who exposed the practice by accepting death rather than connive with it. That unmasked the mechanism and rendered its workings basically obsolete. But this had an ambiguous effect and Girard, for many years now, has been reflecting on its ambivalence.

There is no denying that the universal use of scapegoating is socio-political in intent, even if religious in appearance. And its usefulness relies on a fraudulent abuse. It not only consists in bullying the feeble for a 'good' cause, but also implies a deceitful suppression of that insight (*méconnaissance*) from the onset. By contrast, according to Girard, Jesus was consistently devoted to exposing this false sacrificial scheme, which allowed the powerful to use the Law against the marginalised. He presented the God of Exodus as a father, siding with anyone who was victimized. He fought the misconception that God was the author and master of this scapegoating practice. Thus, he created a new paradigm, which inspired his disciples and, after their impressive Paschal experiences, gave them the courage to continue his work despite the defeat of Golgotha¹². In giving his life to unmask the sacrificial logic, he created a new dispensation, as is spelled out by the Letter to the Hebrews¹³. However, this dispensation itself proves to be open to abuse.

¹² Calling the fact that Jesus preached God as Defender of the poor rather than Lord of the Powers a novel paradigm is only partly correct, because it is in line with the basic revelation of the Scriptures. Jesus pointed this out to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24). Still, it proved to have a revolutionizing effect.

¹³ At first, Girard read Hebrews as a relapse into the sacrificial views, because it seems to depict Jesus' death as the ultimate sacrifice demanded by God. Cf. *Des choses cachées...*, p. 251–254. But after intense exchanges with Raymund Schwager SJ, he called this his last anti-Christian judgment for failing to note the difference between devoting oneself to God's cause and being killed as a sacrifice demanded by God. He now identified Heb 10:1–10 as a key text (actualising the prophets and psalms such as Ps 40). He returns to this switch in various interviews and in *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*, Paris 2001 and refers to it in his latest book *Battling to the End*, East Lansing 2010, p. 35 (originally *Achever Clausewitz*).

5. The Lordship of the Lamb

Before studying Jesus' ambivalent anti-scapegoating scheme, an anthropological observation is required concerning faith. In many Indo-European languages, the word 'Church' derives from the Greek *Kurios*, the Lord¹⁴. Whatever the Semitic meaning of lordship may have been, it came to be dominated by the Indo-European tradition after the Exile and the Hellenistic influences in the Second Temple period. Hence, obedient submission to the political-military leadership started to mark this concept, in line with what Dumézil has called the 2nd function in the Indo-European traditions. Faith came to mean primarily the commitment to a group led by the *Kurios*, who was to bring salvation through his apocalyptic victory. But the imagery of this leadership is linked to oaths, confraternities, and to the sacrificial rituals of initiation. God became the Lord who demanded an act of allegiance. Thus, during the Exile, adherence to Israel's God via circumcision became a key imagery, which carried a double semantic charge. This bred a paradoxical mix of two traditions, so that a blend of two forms of divine Lordship emerged. The Lord of Powers exacting obedience, sacrifices and loyalty meets the Lord of the Exodus siding with the slaves and demanding concern for orphans and the outlawed. Indeed, the prophetic tradition and certain psalms, rather than stressing mere obedience, beat an anti-sacrificial drum: God wants justice rather than sacrifices and does not "trust your sacrifices"¹⁵. This means that God rebels against his social role and Jesus is the one who radicalises this line, exposing and opposing the violence in the symbolic system of his own religion. As a result, the defenders of the system feel obliged to disown him for 'good reasons', since "it is better that one dies for the entire people"¹⁶. He knows that he is a scapegoat, but accepts this in the awareness that resistance would mean succumbing to the system.

The exposure of the sacrificial mechanism by Jesus, who chose to be a victim rather than to victimize others, has had an ambivalent historical effect. We discern three trends, two rather negative and one being positive yet largely unnoticed. The scapegoat mechanism in fact has hardened but also given rise to a 'victim mystique'. These two developments have brought about dangerous and adverse anthropological effects. Girard stresses that by unmasking the scapegoat mechanism the Bible actually undermined its protective working. Although this meant to discourage the practice, it often acerbated it to an alarming extent.

¹⁴ *Kyrka, Kirche, Kerk, Tserkow, Church, Kościół*. The etymology of the Polish *kościół* is rather uncertain, but it seems plausible to relate it to this *kuriakè* group and consider it close to the German *Kirche*.

¹⁵ A paraphrase on Is 58:3-7 in a Dutch song for Lent by Huub Oosterhuis.

¹⁶ Cf. John 18:14. Girard stresses that the high priest Caiaphas thus exposes the logic of the victimary scheme.

Girard's latest book on all-out warfare reluctantly recognises this adverse link between Christ's revealing act and worsening bloodshed¹⁷. Equally dangerous has been the invitation to find a fictitious title of victimhood, contained in the Bible's ideal of siding with victims. When the Enlightenment put the secular State systematically in the Church's place, it became an ever-stronger social habit of people to ask what the State could do for them as a victim. These two forms of 'victim-mystique' – one praising total war on social evil and the other viewing oneself as a victim of (anonymous) powers – merged into an anthropological condition that calls for a reply. The scapegoat awareness has itself become a dominant social force, which can easily be abused for adverse purposes.

6. Redemption of backfiring solidarity

The spectre of these two negative trends, reinforcing each other, is quite frightening. In fact, violence in tribal conflicts usually stops with the first gush of bloodshed and the victim counts as the 'sacrifice' that brought the peace of a cease-fire. But modern warfare – using lethal long-distance arms and ABC-weaponry – entails totalitarian killings and hails the quasi-religious idea that all enemies of the 'elected' nation deserve extermination. This is part of the 'victim mystique'. For, if God is believed to side with the maltreated poor, the idea of 'election' must imply a total and all-inclusive protection, so that anyone feeling mistreated is to count as a protégée, deserving full protection. Unlike the society where any mishap, such as blindness or disease, counted either as divine punishment or test, the new condition is largely inverted. Now, any disadvantaged person is made to feel entitled to special protection and to equal chances. But since everybody is disadvantaged in one way or another, this tends to have huge social consequences. For example, homosexuals should not only be allowed to marry, but also receive any technical assistance available to have offspring that are genetically theirs, since their natural incapacity to reproduce counts as an unfair and victimising disadvantage.

Together these two negative trends underscore a basic contradiction in modern societies between respect of both equality and of identity. Consequently, they harbour grave socio-political dangers, even though they may also counterbalance each other¹⁸. It is here that the third aspect emerges, which Girard

¹⁷ The argument that the total wars arrived only after the Enlightenment's atheist rejection of Christianity is not very convincing, firstly, because Europe had been indulging in bloody (religious) wars for centuries, including crusades, inquisition, and imperialist colonisations; and secondly, because the total wars after Napoleon have been fought mainly on high 'ethical' grounds, to eradicate the perceived evil in the opponent's system.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor (a.o. in *The Sources of the Self*) has stressed this inner contradiction between claims of total equality as institutionalised in the ideals of the French Revolution and the stress on

relates to the Bible's revelation and presents as the source of human creativity. Beyond the mystique of total war and idealised victimhood following from the unveiling of the sacrificial logic, Girard points to an often-ignored side of the Bible's apocalypticism. Indeed, leaving the transcendent imagery of apocalypses aside, we note that this unmasking the scapegoat mechanism offers a perspective on how to solve the post-modern dilemma between equality and identity that becomes more pressing by the day. For this we must carry Girard's view of the Bible's revelation to its logical end.

If the redemptive revelation targets primarily the all-pervasive scapegoating habit, we should try and link its initial and final symbolisms. I advanced that Adam's sin did not consist in stealing a fruit that God reserved as his own, but in the abuse of the knowledge of good and evil, in opposition to God's harmonising design. His scapegoating of Eve was exactly what God had wanted to prevent. Adam used the discriminatory knowledge as a tool to create discord and subjugation. Human newborn babies will henceforth be part of this sinful ambiance. This is what Jesus came to redress. What his redemption will eventually entail appears in the final biblical image of the apocalyptic wedding. The breached man-wife unity of Eden, where man became universally master and lord over his wife, is restored and brought to its prime harmony by the Lamb's wedding. Jesus takes as his bride the mob that lynched him, that is to say: us, who crucified him. He makes us his consort, forgiving us "for not knowing what we did". In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul stipulates that salvation must be read in such marital terms. In truth, this honours the basic anthropological insight that all conscious relationship to the other as other is ultimately rooted in sexual difference, since only in sexual procreation beings become truly 'inter-dependent', and thereby capable of 'symbolizing'.

Finally, we realize that the notion of scapegoat will always remain ambivalent. Girard demonstrates that its camouflaged form served humanity in establishing peace, but at the expense of grave abuses, starting in the sexual domain. The saving apocalyptic Lamb inverts the sacrificial image of 'Lordship' by taking injustice upon himself, while making us his partner in an interrelationship, where scapegoating is not absent, but kept under mutual scrutiny. Humanity's symbolic nature now implies understanding that any sign may be judiciously used to scapegoat the other in Adam's manner. Or formulated in more philosophical terms, it means learning how to live ethically with the inevitability of the habit of scapegoating, which is due to the imperfect knowledge of good and evil. Neither the hope of reaching the perfect insight that can make our

personal identity. In cultural studies, this reflects the dilemma between two definitions of culture, either as a personal quality or an inherited set of customs. Both sides demand to be respected and defended. Both also have totalitarian but opposite claims. Girard faces the same dilemma, when he criticises resolving the chaos of total indifferentiation by a sacrifice that restores differentiation at the expense of an arbitrary victim.

ethical decisions failure-proof nor a mindless surrender to objectified prescripts should be the goal to pursue. The first will lead to fanaticism, while the latter will result in a totalitarian regime.

The acceptance that limited knowledge is bound to make any ethical option for the good liable to the use of scapegoating should be balanced by an endless willingness to forgive the others who “do not know what they are doing” (Lk 24: 34) and by a humble readiness to acknowledge guilt. This turns the abuse of scapegoating into a moral use built on a commitment to mutual redemption. Salvation, thus, means receiving the grace to hear God’s protest against that victimisation of the other, first and foremost of the partner nearby. The apocalyptic consort of the Lamb may now say *Our Father* in addressing the other, using the graced insight in scapegoating. For the scapegoat is God, the Father¹⁹.

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¹⁹ In this somewhat elliptic phrase, I refer to my study of the Our Father *Onze Vader die de ander zijt*, Almeer 1992, (*Our Father who art the Other*), which has never been translated. Recognition of the other as the source of myself, whom I tend to reject and scapegoat, is the beginning of the conversion that Girard dubs resurrection, in the terms he reads it in great literary works, such as Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*. The mutual admission that we butcher each other – in Shakespeare’s words – while we piously claim to be offering sacrifices to the good, and the readiness to overcome this anomaly in a sincere mood of mutual forgiveness, is the conversion Girard aims for. See on this theme M. Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, London 2009, p. 8-9.

Używanie i nadużywanie mechanizmu kozła ofiarnego

Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje odkrycie Girarda dotyczące obnażenia przez tradycję biblijną mechanizmu, na którym opiera się kultura wszędzie na świecie. Badania literackie doprowadziły Girarda do analizy tradycji religijnych i do przekonania, że człowiek zawsze sięga po ofiarnicze sposoby, żeby zrównoważyć mimetyczną zależność, która niesie niebezpieczeństwo utraty autonomii. Przybierają one powszechnie formę mechanizmu kozła ofiarnego, ale radykalizacja przesłania biblijnego dokonana przez Chrystusa obnażyła i unieszkodliwiła jego skuteczność. Artykuł omawia problemy, jakie się wyłoniły i możliwe odpowiedzi na zagrażającą społeczeństwu deformację społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: apokalipsa, mimesis, mistyka prześladowania, ofiara, przebaczenie, rywalizacja, wojna totalna.