

Violence and Love: Changing God's Mind

Metanoia: The Two Loves of God and Neighbor

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*Excerpt from a presentation by
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The scandal of religion is that it is a force both for war and peace, for justice and injustice, for life and death. The Bible is clearly a text obsessed with "making" and "unmaking" bodies, as Elaine Scarry puts it in her extraordinary comparison of the Judeo-Christian scriptures and the writings of Marx. The structure of belief operates through the bodily wounds inflicted upon living creatures by their Creator: "wounding re-enacts the creation because it re-enacts the power of alteration that has its first profound occurrence in creation" (Scarry, 1985: 183). The Hebrew God is the Lord of the Weapon who commands belief and destroys infidelity. His Voice demands loyalty and promises blessings or immeasurable suffering according to the people's response. The reverberation of Biblical violence becomes a visceral response to the vicissitudes of Israel, until, as we shall argue, God Himself experiences a "change of heart" (*metanoia*), laying down the weapons of the God of Pain, to assume in His Son a life of compassion for us fellow beings. God's Law requires innocent children to be slain as a preface to the Exodus. Yet Israel's Divine adoption is part of God's "controversy" with Israel (Micah 6:1-16) and is coupled with the threat of abandonment and slaughter in response to Israel's unfaithfulness.

I am setting aside the seductive generalization of mimetic violence (Freud, 1960; Girard, 1977) as an account of Biblical violence. This is because I think it misses the *intergenerational structure of*

genocide in the family murder—the death of a child or parent or of a spouse prescribed by the male appropriation /envy of female procreation. Obviously, genocide is not a uniquely Biblical imperative. But where colonization and genealogy are identified in a tribal or national mission then genocide is the ultimate aim of political conquest. We have to ask why parents kill their children

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in order to "understand" why other people's children, women and men are killed. The Biblical family is passionate because its Divine Father has singled it out over other families whom He can destroy in favor of the family whose line He blesses. Divine adoption is the model of patriarchal control over maternity, i.e. of the male *gift* of sperm and the priestly reinscription of circumcision that redeems the first-born son of man (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990). Freud's oedipalisation of the question loses its intergenerational context, i.e. it ignores why Laios wished to kill his son, Oedipus. In Freud's model, the sons envy the father's possession of the mother. But the male envies the female's procreativity, i.e. mimetic rivalry is not homoerotic but heterosexual (Scubla, 1985). How is male procreative envy structured? It is structured *intergenerationally*, as we have shown, through cross-

cousin marriage where the avunculate relationship assigns to the brother ritual power of life and death over his sister's child as the one to whom he is most certainly *kinsman*. Thus patriarchy satisfies both psychosexual rivalry and the politics of intergenerational identity.

Regina Schwartz (1997:116-117) remarks on the "metaphysical scarcity" that characterizes Hebrew monotheism driving it towards particularism and exclusion rather than universal inclusion. God's gifts set off rivalry and violence because they involve *expropriation*, i.e. an identity staked at the cost of another's loss of identity (*Genesis* 12:12; 13:14-17). Territorial identity, however, is easily destabilized by kinship identity. In other words the purity of Israel (*Leviticus* 20:26) cannot be achieved without

a precarious juggling of insider/ outsider marriages. Here woman becomes the figure of instability, disorder and betrayal. Israel herself becomes a whore among the nations, unfaithful to her Divine husband (*Jeremiah* 3: 2-3) who finally resolves to replace this stone Law with a new Law of Love written in Israel's heart (*Jeremiah* 32: 39-40) to which I return later. Behind the figure of woman's disorderliness, however, there lies male envy of woman's procreativity (God is parthenogenetic). When male envy is translated into kinship, *adoption rules birth*, i.e. the father can prefer/reject sons and wives. Patriarchy I would argue underlies the scarcity of love observed by Schwartz because its arbitrariness is intrinsic to its control over offspring regarded as the continuation of the male line (patrilineage). We may think of the rituals of sacrifice and circumcision as male memory systems that erase

maternal origin. The arbitrariness of paternal love rules the “naturalness” of mother love. Behind this convention lies the sanction of *inheritance*, i.e. the bequest land which identifies kinsmen and people. The father’s *word* and not the *mother-body*, is the source of male sibling rivalry. But neither are brothers in a homoerotic struggle to seduce the father, as Freud claimed. The father’s preoccupation is with heterosexual envy, the desire to abrogate the parthenogenetic power of woman (with a little help from supernumerary sperm, or to avoid anachronism, from males no more significant to women than are women to men!).

René Girard separates Old Testament violence from any reflexive formulation of its aporias until its sacrificial logic is exposed in the New Testament. I think it is necessary to show that the critique of sacrificial logic underlying religion, politics and society is continuous from the Bible, through the Gospels to Hobbes, Kant and Rawls (1972). In short, I shall try to elicit the *anti-sacrificial logic* that is the underlying principle of civic peace and social justice. I want to argue that it is the God of violence who “repents”

(*metanoia*) His first performance to become the God of Love. The moment God withdraws the family privilege of the chosen people he has cancelled the law of genocide as its sanction. In effect, the God of Love suspends the family in favor of a non-sacrificial fraternity. We can then envisage an ethical covenant in which the Law of Love prescribes the exclusion of the least one among us. By commuting the violence of ethnic, class and gender difference into the violence of unjustifiable difference, we inaugurate a secular covenant of social justice and personal inviolability for which we alone are responsible (Mizruchi, 1988).

The figure of Christ’s Two Kingdoms restates the political paradox of Israel’s largely unsuccessful kingdom on earth by reattaching it to a kingdom in heaven just when the conquering Roman emperors were becoming divine! At this point, Jesus inaugurates the double contract that structures political modernity:

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s (Mark, 12:17)

Here we have a formula for the separation of Church and State that rejects equally the history of the State as Church and Church as State. Christ’s formula is not, however, a formula for doubling our social obligations. Rather it enunciates a lexical order (Rawls, 1972: 42-45) that suspends any *sacrificial* relation between society (state, economy) and the least individual. Consider the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20.1–16).

How are “we” to hear this story? We might take the viewpoint of any of the individual laborers each of whose ordinary sense of justice (equal pay for equal work) is violated by the master. In turn, even the master might attribute his dealings with the laborer as directed solely by his right of ownership, underscoring it by rejecting the egalitarian interpretation in allegiance to Derridean autonomy of the gift (Derrida, 1991; O’Neill, 1999). What the master challenges as I see it, is the laborers’ capacity for fraternity. What they risk in the name of justice is demanding that the master treat them equally but as exploited labor! Here, then, is the old sacrificial logic of collectively (mis)recognized violence. However, the master’s act is not simply the prototype of Rawlsian social justice because the master’s model is Divine Mercy (Grace) rather than the secular inclusion of the least advantaged in any calculation of welfare. The Two Commandments are not subsumable to yield a Derridean *ethics without religion*. Rather, we must retain their “lexical order,” giving priority to the fore-gift of mercy and forgiveness.

