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The Cross and the Begging Bowl: Deconstructing the Cosmology of Violence

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ABSTRACT Rene Girard's work on the origins of violence as it relates to Christian symbolism is an ideal construct by which to compare the teachings of the Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ. Both Jesus and Gautama eschew violence, but take different paths toward doing so.

Much of the more recent discussion of the historical Jesus has centered on his ministry as a form of social criticism.¹ Although casting Jesus of Nazareth as social critic has led to exaggerations, the conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment of his day is reminiscent of the conflict between the historical Buddha and the Brahmans witnessed to in the Pali Canon of early Buddhism. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament and the Nikaya literature is enough to recommend the issue of sacrifice as a common point for comparison. As Siddhartha Gautama clashed with Brahmans over the efficacy and morality of Vedic sacrifices, so also Jesus was clearly a critic of the cultic sacrifice offered in the Jerusalem Temple of his day. Among contemporary interpreters of religion, René Girard's theory of sacrifice suggests a fruitful way of comparing the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Buddha.

René Girard has devoted his scholarly career to locating the origins of violence within the broadest possible anthropological and religious framework. By linking violence with desire, Girard has also sought to uncover "things hidden since the foundation of the world": the nature of social structures as institutionalizations of violence and sacrificial rituals as legitimations of these structures. Girard's intellectual itinerary has led him from the roots of the modern novel to inquiries into archetypal themes in Greek tragedy and ethnographic accounts of sacred narrative, to an original and controversial reading of the New Testament.²

This essay will attempt no comprehensive study of Girard's work, especially the global claims he makes for his theory of sacrificial violence.³ Instead, I hope to outline a few of Girard's basic ideas regarding violence,

social order, and sacrificial systems, and use these ideas as a guide for comparing a Christian text with a Buddhist text, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and the Kutadanta Sutta.

THE COSMOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

The fundamentals of Girard's thesis regarding sacrificial violence can be summarized in five basic claims. First, Girard locates the origin of violence in mimetic desire. In contrast to classic Freudian theory, desire is not reducible to biological or instinctual drives. In contrast to the romantics, desire is not merely a response to an idealized object. Desire arises through imitation (*mimesis*).⁴ Mimetic desire is the human propensity to crave what has been appropriated already by others. More a matter of contagion than biological drive, desire is always modeled by a potential rival.⁵

Second, mimetic desire leads inevitably to chaotic, self-perpetuating, reciprocating acts of violence, what Girard calls "mimetic crises."⁶ Human societies are constantly threatened by acts of uncontrolled violence arising out of rivalry. When "two hands . . . reach for the same object simultaneously," Girard notes, "conflict cannot fail to result."⁷ Once aroused by mimetic desire, violence is quelled only with difficulty. One act of violence leads to another in cycles of retribution. In order to quell these cycles, a victim not party to the rivalry must be designated, that is, a victim whose death will not lead to yet another cycle of retribution. Here, we are led to a third idea, basic to Girard's theory: the scapegoat.

Faced with the chaotic violence generated by the mimetic crisis, societies must resort to acts of unanimous violence to restore order. By organizing retributive violence into a united front against an enemy common to all the rivals, either an external enemy or a member of the community symbolically designated as an enemy, violence itself is transformed into a socially constructive force. "Where only shortly before a thousand individual conflicts had raged unchecked between a thousand enemy brothers, there now reappears a true community, united in its hatred for one alone of its number. All the rancors scattered at random among the divergent individuals, all the differing antagonisms, now converge on an isolated and unique figure, the *surrogate victim*."⁸ Through scapegoating, a society succeeds in organizing violence and directing it away from itself. Candidates for scapegoating are either outsiders (the stranger who threatens from without) or insiders (persons or objects that because of mimetic desire are valued, such as children, virgin women, and animals, especially animals essential to the community's welfare).⁹

The social utility of scapegoating brings us to a fourth basic idea for Girard, the notion of sacrifice as a ritual mechanism for resisting the tendency for a society to collapse into profane violence and for legitimizing social order with religious symbols.¹⁰ For Girard, all violence is vengeance

at heart: "if left unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area." The social value of sacrifice is "to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into 'proper' channels."¹¹ Functioning societies succeed in transferring chaotic violence onto a victim against whom all can unite, thus establishing a social bond. In successful sacrificial cults, the scapegoat becomes the surrogate for the rival whose death cannot be construed as revenge.

In order to succeed in establishing and maintaining social order through scapegoating, sacrificial cults must succeed in masking the arbitrariness of the victim. The ability of societies to organize and channel violence by means of a scapegoat depends on their success in distinguishing profane violence, which is destructive, retributive, and self-sustaining, from sacred violence, which is socially constructive to the extent that it is successful in bringing the mimetic crisis to an end. Herein lies a fifth idea basic to Girard's theory: the mystification of violence. Following Durkheim, Girard detects an intimate connection between a culture's social structure and its sacred narratives and religious symbols.¹² If social structure is established by ordering profane violence into sacred violence, myth is the narrative of this establishment that masks the innocence of the scapegoat.¹³ Girard looks on myths as irremediably ideological. Societies use their sacred narratives to legitimize the status quo. The myths associated with sacrificial rituals serve not only to justify violence against the scapegoat, but also as mystifications that obscure the foundations of social hierarchies in violence. Thus, by establishing and maintaining social order in the redirecting of violence, mythologies also construct what might be called a "cosmology of violence" (the phrase is not Girard's) in which sacred narrative, social structure, and sacrificial systems are intimately related to the phenomenon of scapegoating.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Girard's inquiry into the representations of violence in myth and ritual has led him to a comprehensive reading of the New Testament.¹⁴ The preaching of Jesus and especially the death of Jesus must be interpreted, in Girard's view, as a critique of the cosmology of violence of Jesus' post-exilic Palestinian Jewish society. The New Testament holds up Jesus as the "Lamb of God" who, "by submitting to violence . . . reveals and uproots the structural matrix of all religion" as scapegoating.¹⁵

The death of God's innocent one lays bare what has been "hidden since the foundation of the world," namely, the innocence of the victim. Reading the New Testament from a Girardian perspective opens up new possibilities for interpretation, especially New Testament materials concerned with Jesus' conflict with the high priests and the sacrificial cult centered in the Temple in Jerusalem. Reading the Gospel of Luke from a Girardian perspective suggests the need to revisit a text that is not

always associated with this conflict, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

The Good Samaritan must be included among Jesus' best-known stories. Reading it attentive to Girard's understanding of scapegoating and the cosmology of violence suggests that the general tendency to interpret this text as moral exhortation (the "good Samaritan" held up as a model of altruism to be emulated) is to pass blindly over its sarcasm and social commentary and to miss completely its power to expose the violence at the root of social order.¹⁶

The parable is situated within an encounter between Jesus and an expert in the Mosaic Law. The general scene is set in Luke 10:25–28 where Luke tells us "There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test [Jesus] and said, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Jesus asks him to cite the Law. The man obliges by paraphrasing Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus approves of this answer. But "because he wished to justify himself" the man asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds by telling the following parable.

A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, "Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back."

The man who fell victim to the robbers could have been any one of Jesus' listeners, a Jew making his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho. The story then sets the listener up for not one but three shocks. First, a priest comes down the road. As a high official associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, the priest represents the religious establishment and the sacrificial cult centered in the Temple. The priest saw the man left half-dead by the brigands, but "passed by on the opposite side." Second, a Levite comes down the road. Levites can also be associated with the Temple and the official sacrificial cult. Lower in rank than the priests, Levites generally worked as assistants to the priests in offering sacrifices, or as musicians or doorkeepers or in other minor roles in the Temple. Like the priest, the Levite sees the man in his predicament but is unmoved. The third shock is the greatest. A Samar-

itan comes down the road. Samaritans were an ethnic group resulting from the intermarriage of Jews and Assyrians and were despised as pariahs. He sees the man, but unlike the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan stops to help the poor man. In fact, the Samaritan gives the man a great deal of help. Jesus' choice of a Samaritan for his story, like his choice of the priest and the Levite, is connected with the Temple in Jerusalem. Although they acknowledged the authority of the Torah and observed the Sabbath and feasts in much the same way as Jews, Samaritans rejected the Jerusalem Temple and the sacrifice offered there. For these reasons, Samaritans were scapegoated as ritually impure and socially outcast.

After finishing his story, Jesus turns to the scholar of the Law, who had "stood up to test him," and asks: "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" The scholar of the law cannot bring himself even to say the word "Samaritan" and answers only, "The one who treated him with mercy" (Luke 10:36-37).¹⁷

Approaching this familiar text from a Girardian perspective releases us to read it in new ways. Jesus' little story is in fact an assault on the religious presuppositions of his audience. The parable unfolds by setting its hearer up for a fall. What the scholar of the law expects to be the case turns out not to be the case. The story exposes what cultural systems seek to keep mystified: the innocence of the scapegoat and the illegitimacy of the social structures that allow for scapegoating. What religious symbolism and sacrificial ritual mythologizes, this text demythologizes. By undermining cultural and religious presuppositions about purity and moral rectitude, Jesus' parable confronts his audience with the fact that they can no longer justify themselves or the cosmology of violence by the sacrificial systems and scapegoating mechanisms that they themselves have created for precisely that purpose. By reading this parable as moral exhortation, Christians have succeeded in rendering it harmless.

Reading the Parable of the Good Samaritan attentive to Girard's notion of sacred violence allows us to see other New Testament texts in a new light. Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees over purity rites and the Sabbath, his radical inclusivity as seen in his practice of table fellowship and treatment of women, and even Jesus' conflict with the Zealots and their demonization of the Romans can be read as deconstructions of the cosmology of violence.¹⁸ Nor should Girard's utility as a hermeneutical tool be restricted to the New Testament. The roots of Jesus' critique of violence can be traced deep into the Jewish prophetic tradition.¹⁹

THE KUTADANTA SUTTA

Among the most controversial aspects of Girard's interpretation of Christianity is his claim that the New Testament is unparalleled as an exposé of scapegoating systems.²⁰ Although this essay will not address this aspect of

Girard's project directly, it will examine a Buddhist text, the Kutadanta Sutta, from a Girardian point of view in the hope that the juxtaposition of a Buddhist text with a Christian text might contribute to the larger discussion of Girard's project. The Kutadanta Sutta seems an especially appropriate candidate for comparison with the Parable of the Good Samaritan in that it also deals with the issue of sacrifice. In this text, a Brahman approaches the Buddha for advice regarding the technicalities of offering an extravagant sacrifice. The Buddha responds to this request by telling a parable about a king's decision to forego a bloody sacrifice for an unbloody ritual. The text ends with the conversion of Kutadanta to the Samgha. This text serves to establish that the Buddhist tradition, like the Christian, holds within itself the power to deconstruct the cosmology of violence and to expose the illegitimacy of sacrificial cults.

In comparing the historical Buddha with Jesus of Nazareth as social critics, there is a tendency to place heavy emphasis on the real similarities that obtain between these two religious teachers at the expense of a full appreciation of the differences that distinguish them. Such a procedure can run the risk of interpreting both Jesus and the historical Buddha with categories taken from the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. Perhaps interpreting Jesus as a latter-day Hebrew prophet is less a distortion than interpreting the historical Buddha as such.²¹ Siddhartha Gautama has often been portrayed as a critic of "Hinduism" and the caste system. In fact, the caste system was still very much in a state of development in the lower Ganges river valley in the sixth century B.C.E. Although the social and religious system known today as Brahmanism was securely established in the northwest, it was only in the process of establishing itself in the lower river valley. There is, nevertheless, ample evidence in early Buddhist literature to justify the claim that the Buddha was a critic of his society. This characteristic is apparent in his conflict with (some) Brahmans over their claim to inherent purity, their materialism, and their support for animal sacrifice.²² The Dharma should not be misinterpreted as a call to reform Indian society politically (leaving in abeyance for the moment the degree to which the Gospel can be construed as such a call), but rather an invitation to renounce late Vedic society and its cosmology of violence. One of the several ways the Buddha preached this renunciation was to call into question the legitimacy of Brahmanism and its cult of sacrifice.

Under the influence of Brahmanism, North India increasingly evolved into a hierarchical society of four basic classes (*varna*) based on increasing levels of Aryan purity. The founding event of this society was mythologized in the form of a sacrifice. Rig Veda 10:90 is a hymn commemorating the dismemberment of *Purusha*, the primordial person, in a cosmic sacrifice. The hymn explains how the four classes (Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras) were derived from the dismembered body parts of the primordial person. Brahmanic sacrifices served to construct, reinforce, and legitimize this four-

tiered social structure. In the late Vedic period, sacrifices sponsored by Ksatriyas and performed by Brahmans often entailed elaborate and expensive ceremonies involving, in many cases, the slaughter of hundreds of animals.

The Kutadanta Sutta of the Digha Nikaya takes on the issue of sacrifice directly.²³ Like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, this text is a rhetorical tour de force. But in contrast to the skillful use of surprise in Jesus' story, the Kutadanta Sutta is a splendid example of the subtle irony and gentle humor that characterizes many texts assembled within the Sutta-Pitaka. So subtle is the use of irony and humor that, like the rhetorical finesse of Jesus' parable, the explaining of it threatens to ruin the effect. Also like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, here we have a story located within a dialogue between the Buddha and an interlocutor.

The story begins with the Buddha entering the village of Khanumata. At the time of the arrival of the Buddha, a great sacrifice is being prepared for the benefit of Kutadanta, a rich Brahman, who lives on an estate given to him by the King of Magadha "with power over it as if he were a king." In preparation for the sacrifice, hundreds of animals—bulls, steers, heifers, goats, and rams—had been prepared. The name "Kutadanta" (sharp-tooth) satirizes this Brahman's thirst for slaughtering a goodly number of his fellow creatures in order to preserve the social order of his estate. Hearing of the presence of the Buddha, Kutadanta takes the implausible step of seeking out this famous renouncer for advice on the daunting technicalities involved in the performance of a successful sacrifice. In reply, the Buddha tells the story of King Mahavijita to Kutadanta surrounded by his fellow Brahmans.

The Buddha tells the story of Mahavijita ("wide-realm"), a king who is "mighty, with great wealth and large property; with stores of silver and gold, of aids to enjoyment, of goods and corn; with his treasure-houses and his garners full." Because of all these possessions, he is anxious and so decides to sponsor a great sacrifice to ensure his continued prosperity. The King consults his chaplain, a Brahman, who in turn offers the King some unexpected advice. Since poverty has led to a problem of brigands plaguing the realm, raising taxes to finance the sacrifice would be ill-advised. Ignoring the King's desire for a great sacrifice, the Brahman goes on to advise the King to adopt socially responsible policies to ensure the security of the merchants and agriculturalists and the honesty of civic officials. Taking the chaplain's advice, Mahavijita enacts these social policies and, with the prosperity of the people, the problem of brigandage disappears.

King Mahavijita, however, still wants his great sacrifice. So, the Brahman chaplain advises him to consult with the nobles, the Brahmans, the householders, and the officials of the realm to learn if they favor such a sacrifice. In addition, the Brahman places three restrictions on the sacrifice: (1) the sacrifice must entail the cooperation of the four social classes; (2) the sacri-

fice must involve neither the slaughter of animals nor the mass cutting of trees; and (3) those who labor on the extensive preparations for the sacrifice must not be coerced. To top off this comic scenario, the nobles, Brahmins, householders, and officials of the realm beg the King to allow them to help finance the sacrifice.

On hearing the Buddha's story, the Brahmins accompanying Kutadanta are nothing less than ecstatic: "How glorious the sacrifice, how pure its accomplishment!" Kutadanta, however is troubled and asks if there is any other sacrifice "less difficult and less troublesome, with more fruit and more advantage still than this?" The Buddha responds with an inventory of increasingly fruitful "sacrifices." Superior to King Mahavijita's unbloody sacrifice is the practice of giving alms to the renouncers (typically, the Buddha does not single out his own followers for largesse). Better still is building *viharas* (shelters) for the renouncers; better still is taking the three refuges; better still is taking the five moral precepts (abstaining from destroying life, stealing, lustful conduct, lying, and intoxicating drinks). The "sacrifice" that is most fruitful of all is the cultivation of the mindfulness with which one becomes an Arahant. "And there is no sacrifice a man can celebrate, O Brahman, higher and sweeter than this."

Kutadanta delights in the Buddha's teaching and resolves then and there to renounce the world, take the three refuges, and become a disciple of the Buddha. He orders all the bulls, steers, heifers, goats, and rams set free. "Let them eat green grass and drink fresh water, and may cool breezes waft around them." Then Kutadanta is instructed by the Buddha in right conduct, the four noble truths, and the doctrine of impermanence.

Like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Kutadanta Sutta erodes the foundations of the cosmology of violence. But while Jesus' parable is more explicitly focused on the social mechanisms of scapegoating, the Buddha's parable addresses more directly the issue of mimetic desire. King Mahavijita is anxious because he possesses so many things and wants to sponsor an enormous sacrifice in order to ensure his security. The text makes no mention of the need to appease the gods with extravagant offerings. According to Girard, the entire notion of divine appeasement is but an aspect of the mystification of scapegoating mechanisms necessary to keep sacrificial cults operating. What makes such elaborate sacrifices necessary, in Girard's view, is the need to defuse the potential for violence generated by mimetic desire.²⁴

In fact, texts linking sacrificial rituals with mimetic desire abound in early Buddhist literature. In the *Samyutta Nikaya* (I, 69), to give but one example, the Buddha equates sacrificial rites with what Girard would call mimetic desire. When making preparations for a sacrifice, the Buddha instructs his audience, there is no need to gather wood, for the sole combustible is pride, the smoke is hatred, the cinders are falsehood, language is the tool, the heart of man is the altar, and the flame is egoism.²⁵ The linkage of sac-

rificial ritual with desire in this text supports the view that sacrificial practices are at least implicit in one of the most important Buddhist texts on desire, the famous Fire Sermon.²⁶ In addition, Girard's theory of sacred violence suggests that the early Buddhist metaphor for *nirvana* as an extinguishing of a flame also can be linked with the renunciation of Brahmanic sacrifices and the cosmology of violence constructed by those sacrifices. As the illusion of independent selfhood (*atman*) has been constructed and can be deconstructed in the extinguishing of desire, so also the cosmology of violence, constructed in Brahmanical sacrifice, deconstructed by means of renunciation.

The Kutadanta Sutta, however, does not reject sacrifice outright. Sacrifice is not simply forsworn, rather, the meaning of sacrifice is transformed. The grand sacrifice that Kutadanta's Brahmins implausibly extol as "glorious" and "pure" is a ritual in which scapegoating symbolism has been measurably diluted by the refusal to slaughter animals and mow down trees. Moreover, this sacrifice without scapegoating is merely the bottom rung of a catalogue of sacrifices that bear "more fruit and more advantage" based on increasing degrees of the renunciation of mimetic desire, from almsgiving and the building of *viharas* to the radical quelling of desire characteristic of the Arahats.²⁷

THE CROSS AND THE BEGGING BOWL

In Christian tradition, the great symbol of the power of the Gospel to deconstruct the cosmology of violence is the cross on which Jesus died. Jesus' death marks the historical event that consummates his ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God through his healing and preaching. For Girard, the death of God's innocent one on the cross lays bare the workings of all scapegoating systems.²⁸ Thus, in Christian doctrine and in Girard's thought, the cross of Jesus marks the beginning of a new dispensation in which it is no longer possible to obscure the innocence of victims of violence with the mystifications of religious and social notions of hierarchy, purity, and moral rectitude. In this regard, the cross is demythologizing. If, as Girard would have it, myth is a way to misperceive reality by sacralizing violence, the cross is the refusal to misperceive. If sacrificial cults and scapegoating mechanisms construct a cosmology of sacralized violence, the cross deconstructs that cosmology. For this reason, the cross has been a world-shattering and socially destabilizing force in Christian tradition.²⁹ In overturning our presuppositions about the world and the legitimacy of violence, including structural violence, in the world, the cross also reveals the human propensity to lie about ourselves and the justice of our causes. Therefore, the cross of Jesus calls for the renunciation of the cosmology of violence and the scapegoating rituals that maintain and legitimate it. In the cross of Jesus, Christians see the birth of a new basis for engendering social solidar-

ity, no longer based on redirecting violence by sacralizing it, but renouncing violence altogether.³⁰

Among Girard's most controversial claims is his view that the New Testament is unequalled in its power to reveal the innocence of the victim. In light of the foregoing discussion of the Kutadanta Sutta, Girard's conclusion about the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel must be placed in abeyance. Contrary to Girard, the Buddhist tradition may be seen as a religious path for addressing the problem of violence generated by mimetic desire *alternative* to that of Christianity, a path that Christians may not fully know or fully understand.³¹

The Dharma and the Gospel cannot simply be equated, even to the extent that both call for the renunciation of scapegoating and sacralized violence. As a concluding thought, we might ask if there is a Buddhist symbol for this renunciation that corresponds to the Christian symbolism of the cross. Such a symbol would bear not only similarities to the cross, but also significant differences because the social, religious, and cultural circumstances of Jesus' call to conversion are not the same as the circumstances attending the Buddha's call to renunciation.

In search of such a symbol within the Buddhist tradition, we may turn again to the Kutadanta Sutta. After reflecting on the Buddha's parable about King Mahavijita, Kutadanta joined the Samgha and received instruction from the Buddha in ethics, the Four Noble Truths, and the doctrine of impermanence. Then, in the last scene of the Sutta, we are told that "... the Blessed One, who had dressed early in the morning, put on his outer robe, and taking his bowl with him, went with the brethren to Kutadanta's sacrificial pit, and sat down there on the seat prepared for him." The Sutta, which began with plans in place for the slaughter of hundreds of animals, ends instead with a banquet. "And Kutadanta the Brahman satisfied the brethren with the Buddha at their head, with his own hand, with sweet food, both hard and soft, till they refused any more." In the pit that had been prepared for the slaughter of innocents there is an intercaste meal: Kutadanta the Brahman eats with Siddhartha the Ksatriya. The begging bowl has taken the place of the sacrificial fire. In the renunciation of violence, we witness a new form of social solidarity no longer based on hierarchies of purity and religiously sanctioned scapegoating, a communion of Brahman (Kutadanta) and Ksatriya (the Buddha). For Christians, the cross means that the altar of sacrifice has become a banquet table. In Buddhist tradition, the monk who enters a village and holds out the begging bowl, ready to receive food from the hands of all, exposes the reality of violence on which the social hierarchies of caste distinctions are founded.

Critics of this Girardian interpretation of the Kuttadanta Sutta have argued that the final scene of the Sutta, in which the Ksatriya dines with the Brahman, is not about the deconstruction of social hierarchy. Rather the final scene mirrors the establishment of a new kind of hierarchy. The

monk, taking the part of the superior, is honored by the patron, taking the part of his inferior. In this alternative reading, while the begging bowl is a symbol of renunciation, it is also about patronage and the hierarchy implicit in patronage. The Sutta may be about the renunciation of violence, but is also about the reestablishment of social hierarchy. Girard is in agreement with the basic import of this alternative reading of the Sutta. He believes that there is nothing in Buddhism equivalent to the cross in its power to deconstruct the cosmology of violence.³² The New Testament remains unrivaled as a text that unmasks the scapegoating mechanism and delegitimizes hierarchies of violence.

As noted above, Girard's interpretation of the New Testament remains among his most controversial claims. At the very least this comparison of the Kuttadanta Sutta with the Parable of the Good Samaritan using Girard's approach has led to questions regarding the conflict between the Buddha and the Brahmins and the import of this conflict for understanding Buddhist renunciation as a form of social critique. In addition, the comparison of the Sutta and the Parable leads us to ask further questions about how Buddhism and Christianity engage in social criticism in different ways. Both the historical Buddha and Jesus of Nazareth were critics of their respective societies. Both Christianity and Buddhism offer resources for deconstructing social hierarchies and the cosmology of violence. A Girardian reading, however limited and problematic, suggests that there are both similarities and differences in this regard. Finally, this Girardian reading of the Sutta and the Parable suggests that Buddhists and Christians can read each other's scriptures in new and provocative ways.

NOTES

1. Take for example the attention garnered by the works of John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and Burton Mack. For John Dominic Crossan, see *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1992); *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994); and *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). For Marcus Borg, see *Jesus, a New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991); and *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994). For Burton Mack, see *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

2. Among Girard's more well-known publications are *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); "To Double Business Bound": *Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); *Job: The Victim of His People*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); and *A Theater of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

3. Paul Valadier echoes Girard himself in writing of Girard's "triple audacity": a comprehensive anthropology, a critique of modernity, and a theory of religion in general that demonstrates the uniqueness of Christian revelation. See Paul Valadier, "Bouc émissaire et Révélation chrétienne selon René Girard," in *Études* 357, no. 2–3 (1982): 253.

4. Here Girard's background in literary criticism is evident, especially his debt to Eric Auerbach and his widely influential work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). For Girard's own employment of this principle in literary analysis of figures ranging from Dante to Nietzsche and Camus, see *To Double Business Bound*. Girard's *A Theater of Envy* addresses mimetic desire in the plays of William Shakespeare.

5. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 145–149; *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, pp. 7–10, 283–298.

6. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 78–79, 287–289.

7. Girard, *To Double Business Bound*, p. 201.

8. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 79.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–88, 250–273; *Things Hidden*, p. 31.

10. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 1–67, 89–118; *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, pp. 3–47.

11. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 10.

12. For a discussion of Girard's work in relationship to Durkheim, see Paisley Livingston, "Demystification and History in Girard and Durkheim," in *Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard*, ed. Paul Dumouchel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 113–133.

13. Girard, *To Double Business Bound*, pp. 88–198; *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 250–273; *Things Hidden*, pp. 30–47, 105–125; *The Scapegoat*, *passim*.

14. For Girard's interpretation of the New Testament, see *Things Hidden*, pp. 147, 105–125.

15. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 176–179.

16. For contemporary interpretations of this parable by figures such as Patte, Crossan, and Funk, see *Semeia 2: The Parable of the Good Samaritan*, John Dominic Crossan ed. (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974).

17. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1963), p. 205.

18. For an application of Girard's ideas to the New Testament, see Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

19. For Girard's reading of Old Testament texts, see *Things Hidden*, pp. 141–158, and *Job: The Victim of His People*.

20. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 176–179. A recent work on Girard by Gil Bailie underscores Girard's placement of the Gospels in sharp contrast to religion. See Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1995). For a critique of Girard as a comprehensive interpretation of the New Testament, see Ted Peters, "Atonement and the Final Scapegoat," in *Perspective in Religious Studies* 19: 151–181.

21. For a discussion of Jesus' affinities with the Jewish prophetic tradition, see E. P. Evans, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), as well as Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), and *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

22. The historical Buddha's conflict with the Brahman class is abundantly well documented in the literature of early Buddhism. On the claim to purity, see for example the Vasettha Sutta (Majjhima-Nikaya III, 9), the Digha-Nikaya I, 115 and the Samyutta Nikaya III, 9, v. 650. On Brahman materialism, see *inter alia*, Sutta-Nipata II, 7:284–295, and Digha Nikaya I, 126–128 and 129–130. For an extensive dis-

cussion of the Buddha's controversies with Brahmans, see Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 39–46.

23. A translation of this text may be found in *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. 2, ed. F. Max Müller (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1899, 1956), pp. 173–185.

24. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 6–27.

25. For a good discussion of the historical Buddha's critique of Brahmanical sacrifices, see Joseph Masson, "Le bouddisme ancien face au brahmane et au sacrifice," in *Studia Missionalia* 22 (1973): 123–144.

26. The Adittaspariyaya Sutta, in the Samyutta-Nikaya 35:28.

27. In not condemning sacrifice outright but rather calling for the transformation of the meaning of sacrifice, the Kutadanta Sutta is indicative of early Buddhist literature more broadly. For a discussion of the issue of sacrifice in the Pali Canon, see Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 59–62. Nor does it seem, *pace* Girard, that Jesus of Nazareth called for the abolition of sacrifice. New Testament texts, especially texts in Hebrews and the Pauline Corpus, suggest that Jesus, like the historical Buddha, called for a transformation of the meaning of sacrifice as well. Girard's insistence that Jesus' death on the cross is *not* a sacrifice but rather a death that exposes the mechanism of scapegoating does not seem well conceived, especially given the abundance of New Testament texts that use the language of sacrifice to understand the execution of Jesus. Girard is well aware of these problems and addresses them directly. See, for example, *Things Hidden*, pp. 224–262.

28. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 111.

29. For a now classic restatement of the Lutheran theology of the cross, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1974).

30. For an extended discussion of the symbolism of the cross from a perspective informed in large measure by Girard's theory of sacred violence, see Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

31. Jean-Claude Dussault, "René Girard: la révélation évangélique et le bouddhisme," in *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 10, no. 1 (1981): 59–66.

32. Girard's response to the Kuttadanta Sutta and his assessment of Buddhism more generally were made to me in a conversation with him.