

Enmity and Political Identity: Friend-Enemy-Patterns and Religion

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Abstract

Our current world seems to suggest that political identity, enmity and religion are malignantly linked. Carl Schmitt and Samuel P. Huntington are the most well known thinkers pointing in this direction. Such a view, however, simplifies dangerously the way religion is related to political identity. René Girard's mimetic theory shows that throughout history we can find very different relationships between religion and friend-enemy-patterns. Archaic religions were directly linked to friend-enemy patterns creating internal peace with the help of an outside enemy. The Biblical revelation has undermined this kind of political theology. Without the archaic sacred, however, conflicts and enmity have become even more aggressive. Enmity rooting in the pagan sacred provided a certain moderation of human conflicts seeing the enemy as good and bad at the same time. Our modern world, on the contrary, tends towards an absolute enmity seeking annihilation. This apocalyptic condition of our world forces us Christians to follow the Biblical demand to love our enemies and to renounce violence. By bearing witness to the Biblical revelation in its integrity Christian Churches form communities without the need of outside enemies. The Eucharist strengthens this kind of theological politics.

Keywords

Enmity, Eucharist, Friend-enemy-distinction, Girard René, S. P. Huntington, Identity, Politics, Religion, Carl Schmitt, Solidarity.

Our current age of terrorism and of wars against terrorism seems to suggest that political identity and religion are inseparably and malignantly linked. Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (1927) and Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) are the most well known theories suggesting this line of thinking.

Religion seems to be one of the few issues which can provide differences in a globalizing world becoming more and more homogenous. After introducing two closely connected theories the author analyzes them systematically.

After studying the key notions of enmity, politics and scapegoat mechanism, the author reflects on the theological and political significance of the Eucharist which demands us to work for peace and justice in the world.

1. Enmity and Politics

The end of the Cold War has made us more and more aware of how closely political identity and enmity are connected (cf. Ash 2001). Samuel Huntington's book *Clash of Civilization* tries to explain the reason why politics always has a close affinity to friend-enemy relations: "People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against." (Huntington 1996: 21) In Huntington's eyes, religion is not a counter force against this tendency of politics but just another version of it. He can only imagine religion as a form of organized enmity. According to him, all religions—regardless of their universalistic claims—differentiate between believers and unbelievers, between a superior in-group and an inferior out-group (Huntington 1996: 97).

Huntington's theory has close affinities to Carl Schmitt's political theory, which this infamous German law scholar developed during the first half of the 20th century. Schmitt's most important book focusing on the topic of this paper, which appeared for the first time as an article in 1927, is his *Concept of the Political*. In it we find the following definition focusing on political enmity: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy." (Schmitt 1996: 26) In this book Schmitt sees the deeper roots of enmity in

differences and strangeness close to what decades later became known as Huntington's paradigm of a clash of civilizations.

Looking solely at the parallels between Schmitt and Huntington, however, would result in missing Schmitt's most important insight into the nature of political enmity. During World War II and later, Schmitt more and more emphasized the fact that it is the danger of civil wars inside a society that necessitates the political friend-enemy-distinction. In his apologetic postwar journal *Ex Captivitate Salus* the enemy is no longer the stranger but the brother: "The other turns out to be my brother, and the brother turns out to be my enemy. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Thus begins the history of mankind. Thus looks the father of all things. ... The enemy is our own question embodied." (Schmitt 1950: 89-90 quoted in Müller 2003: 55) To understand that the brother and not the stranger is more likely to become an enemy means to prioritize systematically civil wars over interstate wars.

2. The Political Friend-Enemy Distinction Roots in the Scapegoat Mechanism

Schmitt's thesis that to overcome civil wars inside a society one needs an outside enemy summarizes a typical pattern of political life going back to the beginnings of human civilization. It is a pattern one can find in many different cultures. In the Greek tradition we can refer to Aeschylus's tragedy *The Eumenides*, which describes the over-coming of civil war by the establishment of a political order. The revengeful and violent Erinyes are transformed into the gentle and fruitful Eumenides. It seems that violence has fully disappeared from the city. This, however, is only superficially true. Open violence, in the sense of revenge, has been transformed into a form of structural violence that helps to create peace inside the city, but can be used against foreign enemies and internal trouble-makers at any time. The pacified Eumenides promise that common love *and* unanimous hatred will overcome civil war: "I pray that discord, greedy for evil, may never clamor in this city, and may the dust not drink the black

blood of its people and through passion cause ruinous murder for vengeance to the destruction of the state. But may they return joy for joy in a spirit of common love, and may they hate with one mind; for this is the cure of many an evil in the world.” (Aeschylus 1983: V. 977-987) Civil war has to be overcome by enmity to the outside world. Wars with foreign enemies should help to create peace inside the city. The goddess Athena recommends political friend-enemy-relations as an antidote to internal bloodshed. Friedrich Nietzsche clearly understood this dimension of ancient Greek politics: “I saw how all their institutions grew out of preventive measures taken to protect each other against their inner *explosives*. This tremendous inward tension then discharged itself in terrible and ruthless hostility to the outside world: the city-states tore each other to pieces so that the citizens of each might find peace from themselves.” (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols; What I Owe to the Ancients* Nr. 3)

But we can find the political friend-enemy-distinction not only in the Western tradition but also in the East. It seems to be a universal pattern which can be found in all cultures. In ancient India we can refer first of all to Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*— a manual of statecraft that was held in high regard by Carl Schmitt (cf. Schmitt 1995: 105-106; Maschke 1994: 292). Though the *Arthashastra* does not directly link the overcoming of civil war to an outside enemy it is nevertheless a clear example that enmity is not based on strangeness and religious or cultural differences but on proximity and likeness (cf. Girard 1987a: 85). Hostility is based on sharing a common border: “Any king, whose kingdom shares a common border with that of the conqueror is an antagonist.” (Kautilya 6.2.14) The definition of the natural enemy underlines the importance of proximity and likeness: “Among the kings with contiguous territories, a natural enemy is one who is of the same family or of equally high birth.” (Kautilya 6.2.19) Whereas the neighbor is an enemy, the neighbor of the enemy is a friend: “A king whose territory has a common boundary with that of an antagonist ... is an ally.” (Kautilya 6.2.15) The friend-enemy-

pattern connected to this “circle of states” or “circle of neighboring kings” is also mentioned in the *Law Code of Manu*, the most authoritative and the best-known legal text of ancient India. According to this code, the king “should recognize that his immediate neighbour is his enemy, as also anyone rendering assistance to the enemy; that his enemy’s immediate neighbour is an ally.” (Law Code of Manu 7.158)

René Girard’s mimetic theory helps us to understand why we can find the political friend-enemy-distinction in more or less all cultures. The main reason for this can be found in the scapegoat mechanism in which human civilization originated. A crisis at the beginning of human civilization was overcome by the nonconscious and collective expulsion or killing of a single victim. The scapegoat mechanism creates “solidarity among those who can fight the same enemy *together*” (Girard 1991: 186; cf. 1987c: 26).

Girard’s interpretation of Aeschylus’s tragedy *The Eumenides* helps us to understand how the political friend-enemy-distinction is an offspring of the scapegoat mechanism (Girard 1987b: 146-153; cf. Palaver 1998: 38-45). What was originally laid upon the scapegoat—the common enemy inside the group—is now channeled outside the city. In rituals we can find the necessary link between the political pattern and the scapegoat mechanism. The political friend-enemy distinction builds upon the ritual channeling of internal violence towards the external world. Whereas in the scapegoat mechanism, a member of the group itself is killed. Rituals already tend to sacrifice foreigners. Political enmity prolongs the ritual focus on the foreigner and takes a friend-enemy relationship between two different groups as an always already given starting point (cf. Girard 1977: 249, 278-280)

3. Enmity and Religion

It is one of the predominant signs of our time to accuse religion in general to be responsible for an increase of violence, hatred and enmity. Carl Schmitt is an often mentioned example in this

respect (cf. Meier 1995; 1998). The German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, for instance, views Schmitt's "political theology of violence"—meaning the "theologizing of the distinction between friend and enemy"—as an offspring of monotheism: "God is the truth, the gods of the others are lies. This is the theological basis to distinguish friend from enemy. The political theology of violence has become dangerous only on this ground and in this semantic framework. Schmitt's political theology still belongs to this tradition of a disposition to violence stemming from a theology of revelation." (Assmann 2002: 263-264; cf. 2000)

Let us turn to Schmitt's political theology connected to his understanding of the political to find out if Meier and Assmann are right to interpret him as a representative of a political theology of violence rooted in the Biblical revelation. Schmitt refers indirectly to Gen 3:15—the Biblical passage emphasized by Meier—in his *Concept of the Political* where he quotes a speech by Oliver Cromwell against Spain which he sees as a perfect example of a form of enmity that is a "high point of politics": "'The Spaniard is your enemy,' his 'enmity is put into him by God.' He is 'the natural enemy, the providential enemy,' and he who considers him to be an 'accidental enemy' is 'not well acquainted with Scripture and the things of God,' who says: 'I will put enmity between your seed and her seed' (Gen. III: 15). With France one can make peace, not with Spain because it is a papist state, and the pope maintains peace only as long as he wishes." (Quoted in Schmitt 1996: 68) Does this quote prove that Schmitt's affirmation of the friend-enemy-distinction is rooted in his belief in the Biblical revelation? I think Meier's thesis is wrong. It is true that Schmitt is a political theologian. But his political theology is closer to a pagan or sacrificial version of Christianity than to the Biblical revelation itself.

In order to understand the deeper meaning of this characterization we have to focus more closely on the complex relationship between religion and enmity. Pagan enmity is not primarily aimed at the destruction of the adversary but is already

a form of moderation of human conflicts. Due to its origin in the scapegoat mechanism it participates in the “double transference, the aggressive transference followed by the reconciliatory transference” (Girard 1987a: 37) that transformed the original scapegoat into a god, a being responsible for the destructive crisis and its solution—evil and good—at the same time. Like the scapegoat, the enemy is sacred in the pagan world. He is seen as an evil and as a respectful person—a curse and a blessing—at the same time. The pagan sacred protects human beings from their own violence. To take revenge is often left to the gods and not a purely human activity. René Girard clearly describes how enmity changed its character with the emergence of our modern world: “The more socially ‘efficient’ scapegoating is, the more capable it is of generating a positive transfiguration of the scapegoat, as well as the negative transfiguration of fear and hostility. The positive transfiguration is still present in the feudal and even the national traditions of military warfare. The enemy is respected as well as intensely disliked. This positive aspect weakens more and more in the modern world, as civil and ideological conflicts tend to predominate. The class enemy of the modern revolutionary never becomes ritualized as a good, even sacred enemy” (Girard 1987c: 94). It is this difference between the sacred enemy of the old world and the enemy in the modern world which is no longer protected by the pagan sacred facing therefore annihilation that plays a central role in Schmitt’s political theory.

The Biblical undermining of sacrificial culture has deprived the enemy of his sacred protection. He is now threatened by dangerous demonizations caused by heretical offsprings of the Biblical revelation. These heresies are a result of the Biblical uncovering of the scapegoat mechanism on the one hand and the rejection of the Biblical demand for the love of the enemies on the other. Modern scapegoaters are aiming at the annihilation of the enemy because they are no longer able to divinize their victim. Religious terrorists of today eagerly pursue the satanization of the

enemy (Juergensmeyer 2001: 171-186). The protective side of the old pagan sacred has completely disappeared.

Nietzsche described the modern type of enmity in his critique of the man of resentment. If we disregard the fact that he wrongly identified resentment with Judaism and Christianity—not understanding that “resentment is merely an illegitimate heir, certainly not the father of Judaeo-Christian Scripture” (Girard 1987b 108)—Nietzsche helps us to understand the specific modern version of enmity: “To be incapable of taking one’s enemies, one’s accidents, even one’s misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures ... Such a man shakes off with a single *shrug* many vermin that eat deep into others; here alone genuine ‘love of one’s enemies’ is possible—supposing it to be possible at all on earth. ... In contrast to this, picture ‘the enemy’ as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him—and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived ‘the evil enemy,’ ‘*the Evil One*,’ and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a ‘good one’—himself!” (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*; First Essay: “Good and Evil,” “Good and Bad”; Nr. 10)

Although the modern world has detached itself from pagan religion it is, however, not free of new religious temptations even increasing the level of human violence. Schmitt talks about an “age of masses with its pseudo-theological enemy-myths” (Schmitt 1950: 89) and about the terror of the “pseudo-religion of absolute humanity” (Schmitt 2002: 113). Less and less protected by the pagan sacred theologically motivated hatred has become more aggressive than ever before. Religious wars at the dawn of our modern world are an early example of that temptation. Current forms of religious terrorism are an even more dangerous exacerbation of it. In his book *Theory of the Partisan* from 1963 Schmitt reconstructs the modern shift from the real enemy to the absolute enemy, from the enemy to the foe. Whereas the enmity of the partisan of the 19th century was fundamentally limited, Lenin, “a professional revolutionary engaged in a global civil war, went

further and turned the real enemy into a foe” (Schmitt 2004: 76). Schmitt quotes Joan of Arc’s answer to her inquisitors asking her whether she claimed that God hated the English to illustrate the defensive character of the partisan’s limited type of enmity: “I do not know whether God loves or hates the English; I only know that they must be driven out of France” (Schmitt 2004: 76). Today we no longer hear an answer like that. Terrorism has become global and religiously motivated. A “member of Al Quaeda,” for instance, “would answer that God is with him and Westerners should be exterminated (or converted)” (Klitsche de la Grange 2004: 173). And some religious rhetoric accompanying the war against terrorism tends towards an absolute enmity, too.

The traditional international law has distanced itself from religion in order to overcome the religious threat. Schmitt is part of this differentiation. In his postwar journal he writes: “Theologians tend to define the enemy as someone who has to be annihilated. But I am a jurist not a theologian” (Schmitt 1950: 89). At the same time, however, he realizes that to give up all connections with traditional religion will lead to an even more dangerous world deprived of all the protections provided by the pagan sacred.

It is due to this insight that he distinguishes holy wars from modern just wars because holy wars still “enshrine something from the primordial character of an ordeal” (Schmitt 1950: 58; cf. 1938: 2; 1991: 293-296; 2003: 58; Girard 1977: 299, 314-315) whereas just wars rely solely on human judgement. Traditional international law remained, according to Schmitt, connected to the tradition of holy wars despite its differentiation from theology. The authority of jurisprudence “has become secularized but not yet profanized” (Schmitt 1950: 72). In order to keep enmity moderate and tame Schmitt tried to distinguish politics and religion without losing all sacred protection. A note in his diary illustrates his complex position: “Humanization of war means above all a de-divinization, a reduction to a purely human relation renouncing all balances and reliefs, which result from transcendent forces and powers ... Based on pure humanity, on a pure *homo homini*

homo, the humanization of war will not last for long. Man rather becomes the being of all beings; he becomes God and animal, and the enemy has to be treated simply like an animal because he cannot be divinized.” (Schmitt 1991, 270) Schmitt’s critical reference to the formula *homo homini homo* is more than revealing. It refers to Francisco de Vitoria’s repudiation of the Christian conquering and oppression of the Indians in Latin America. Schmitt accused de Vitoria of having dissolved all sacred differences between human beings leading towards universalism and its humanistic unleashing of war. De Vitoria, however, was not a humanitarian warmonger but belonged to a Christian tradition of desacralizing war leading back to Augustine (cf. Ruston 1993: 134-137). His position culminated in the statement that “difference of religion is not a cause of just war”. He therefore opposed holy war, “the doctrine that right religion sanctions war against unbelievers and the confiscation of their property” (Ruston 1993: 136). De Vitoria represents the Biblical tradition that dissolved the archaic amalgamation of religion and war and was rightly criticizing his adversaries as leaning towards paganism. Schmitt’s rejection of de Vitoria’s position underlines once more that his political theology is not primarily representing the Biblical revelation but a pagan version of it. By clinging strongly to the old sacred protections of enmity he tries to keep as much paganism alive as it is possible in a Christian age.

4. The Theological Politics of the Eucharist

Schmitt’s example makes clear that the relationship between religion and enmity is complex. The political theology underpinning his emphasis on the friend-enemy-distinction is not rooted in the Biblical revelation but is a futile attempt to restore the protective political patterns of the pagan sacred. The Biblical revelation has undermined the old sacred in a way that it is no longer possible to go back to these relatively peaceful patterns. At the same time, however, we should not overlook the fact that the Biblical revelation has made our world more dangerous. Without the protections of the old sacred we are on the brink of destroying the whole world.

This apocalyptic situation of our current world caused Schmitt to long for the old sacred. It is at same time the true reason that justifies to some degree Assmann's critique of monotheism. The Biblical revelation is truly dangerous. But it remains a complete misunderstanding to accuse monotheism of directly causing a political theology of violence.

Mimetic theory helps us to understand the positions of Schmitt and Assmann better and provides us at the same time with a view of the Biblical revelation that is much more appropriate. According to mimetic theory, the biblical message has slowly undermined all the sacrificial brakes against human violence and rivalry. Over a long period of time Christianity has led to a global crises—an apocalyptic state—with all its dangers of violence and bloodshed. Jesus referred to this world when he said that he has not “come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34). As a first reaction one would think—close to Schmitt's political theology—that the old sacrificial order must be restored to prevent such an outbreak of violence. Girard, however, knows that a return to the old constraints is not possible without the creation of a most appalling tyranny (Girard 1978: 82; 1987a: 286; 1991: 282). Humanity is therefore forced to follow the way of the Sermon on the Mount if it does not want to disappear completely. “The definitive renunciation of violence ... will become for us the condition *sine qua non* for the survival of humanity it-self.” (Girard 1987a: 137; cf. 258; 1994: 126) We are more and more forced to follow the way of Jesus who referred us to the nonviolence of his heavenly father who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45). The nonviolent God calls us to give up violence and love our enemies.

Our current times can be explained as a partial adoption of the Biblical revelation leading precisely to the global crisis we have to deal with today: “If the revelation is to be used as a weapon of divisive power in mimetic rivalry it must be first divided. As long as it remains intact it will be a force for peace, and only if it is

fragmented can it be used in service of war. Broken into pieces it provides the opposing doubles with weapons that are vastly superior to what would be available in its absence.” (Girard 1986: 116)

Christian Churches are called today to bear witness to the Biblical revelation in its integrity. Therefore the Biblical perspective has to become the starting point and not politics with its leaning towards divisions and distinctions. As long as we focus primarily on politics it is very difficult to avoid Schmitt’s or Huntington’s logic. Political theology is not able to break with it because it is bound to the enmity going along with ordinary politics. Instead of making theology an ally of politics rooted in paganism we should therefore try to create political bodies that rely on the Biblical revelation. Political theology has to give way to theological politics. The Church as a body politic is called to live a form of Christian solidarity no longer in need of an outside enemy. Pope John Paul II’s understanding of this kind of solidarity in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* clearly addresses the problem of enmity: “In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself ... One’s neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* No. 40). It is especially the eucharist which enables us to go beyond ordinary political friend-enemy-patterns. Whereas friend-enemy-distinctions stem from the scapegoat mechanism the Eucharist is a reversal of the pagan pattern fostering a theological politics that helps to overcome political enmity (Schwager 1999: 223-229). John Paul II, clearly underlines the political importance of the eucharist regarding our work for peace and justice: “The Lord unites us with himself through the Eucharist ... and he unites us with himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union; and thus united, he sends us into the whole world to bear witness, through faith and works, to God’s love, preparing the coming of his Kingdom and anticipating it, though in the obscurity of the present time.” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* No. 48)

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