Cited as: Antonysamy, Morris. (2017). Can Religion Overcome Violence? A Mimetic Perspective (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2017(Vol 21/1), 133-156. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282008

JNANADEEPA: Pune Journal of Religious Studies
PJRS ISSN 0972-33315
21/1 Jan 2017: 133-156

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4282008
Stable URL: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4282008

Can Religion Overcome Violence? A Mimetic Perspective

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Abstract: The intimate relationship between religion and violence has been a perennial question in the realm of social harmony and peace. Many approaches have been attempted to explain this enigmatic link. However, this linkage is still exploratory and brings forth ever new challenges. This paper approaches this relationship from the viewpoint of mimetic theory of René Girard. From an anthropological perspective, mimetic theory tries to explore the roots of violence in the evolution of cultures. It takes us to the deeper question of how we define and understand religion. From a universal theorization we look at the Indian scenario which offers quite many insights as well as certain challenges. Indian history, just like the world history, revolves around the mimetic fabric of conflict and violence. In the light of this discussion, the author proposes certain means of overcoming mimetic conflicts and violence. Eventually it tries to address the question of divergence between religion and politics.

Keywords: Religion, violence, mimesis, conflict, politics

Introduction

Ever since 11/9 attacks, the relationship between religion and violence has come to the foreground in academic circles. Modernity's attempt to privatize religion has all the more

triggered its manifestation in public sphere in postmodern era. Against this background, Wolfgang Huber draws our attention to the ambiguity of the present scenario. He feels that "Our time is characterized by an open conflict between two tendencies. On the one hand, freedom and human rights, peace and justice are highly esteemed in our time. But, on the other hand, we observe not only a resurgence of the spirit of hatred and violence, but, even worse, its justification and promotion with seemingly religious reasons."[1]

The present paper is an attempt to highlight the ambiguity of religion, which is perceived to be the source of both conflict and harmony. It tries to investigate how religions could promote peace and harmony and help humans to control conflict and violence. For that purpose, it seeks the help of the mimetic theory of René Girard, a cultural anthropologist and literature critic. In the light of his mimetic theory, it arrives at a workable definition of religion. And then it moves to the Indian context where it critically looks at Buddhism and evaluates the historical development of Hindu and Islam terror organizations. Finally it proposes theological politics and positive mimesis as viable means for overcoming mimetic rivalry and conflict and ensuring harmony and peace. Hence the paper has four parts.

1. The Mimetic Theory
2. How to define Religion?
3. Mimetic Appraisal of the Indian Context
4. Social Harmony and Peace

1. Mimetic Theory of René Girard

Humans learn things by imitating their neighbours. One's immediate neighbours inspire and define what one should

do and how one should behave. While this phenomenon of imitation leaves the human world fundamentally open for growth and development, it also leads to rivalry and conflict with our neighbours, if this mimetic nature is not positively oriented. Girard's mimetic theory finds itself between these two poles, -Aristotle's and Aquinas' optimistic *homo homini amicus*, or "man is a friend of man," and Hobbes' pessimistic *homo homini lupus*, or "man is a wolf to man."[2] It positions human nature something in between fundamental goodness and badness. In other words, humans can live in harmony or in conflict, depending on how they imitate one another. Therefore, humans are neither damned for chaos nor are they intrinsically angelic. Between these two choices, mimetic theory attempts to build on the aspect of freedom that renders the choice of human action ultimately open. This theory can be explained in three parts, i.e. mimetic desire, scapegoat mechanism, biblical difference.

1.1 Mimetic Desire

Apart from the natural instincts (hunger, sleep, sex) that humans share with animals, desire seems to be the unique phenomenon among humans. Humans desire eternally. Yet their desire does not have any essence as such. It is created by the proximity with one's neighbours and their desires. One learns not only to desire from his/her neighbour, but also learns what to desire. The object of desire is in fact provided by the model that one tries to imitate. From a perspective reading of the major novels of European literature, Girard postulates that human desire is not based on the spontaneity of the subject's desire, but the rather the desires that surround the subject.[3] Since humans do not exactly know what to desire, they imitate the desire of others. Thus it becomes ***mimetic desire***. The expositions or gestures of other people are not central to the mimetic theory, but rather the *desires* of others, their acquisitive urges. According to Girard, humans strive to

possess the exact objects that others already possess or desire. He argues that mimesis is most active in acquisitive human behaviour, and his term for this concept is *acquisitive mimesis*.[4] On account of its extreme potential for conflict, Girard also refers to acquisitive mimesis as conflictual mimesis.[5]

While looking at the mimetic theory from the Buddhist perspective, Samuel Buchoul underlines the ideological compatibility between both of them. He argues that as mimesis negates the autonomy of the self,[6] Buddhism too claims that the notion of an independent self is part of mental construction. From this angle he makes a small modification of Girard's terminology in his theory of the dynamics of desire.

> We do not desire from the model but through the model. This new term allows for a consideration of desire as something fluid, a movement, a human feeling that we borrow from others and that will be borrowed from us later. A desire is never singular, specific to one individual who possesses it. We only continue the desires of others before us: our desires are only the adaptations, the copies of older desires, adjusted to a new setting. There are no new desires; they are only borrowed: desire can only be mimetic.[7]

Since human desire is basically mimetic, there is a danger for mimetic rivalry and conflict. As Girard argues, "the principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model."[8] Moreover, he also distinguishes between external mediation and internal mediation in the realm of mimesis. In the former, there exists social difference between the subject and the model, which to certain extent contains the conflictual dimension. But in the latter, the mediation is no longer external due to close proximity. Therefore it must have been the concern of all societies to prohibit such mimetic desires that would eventually lead to conflict and violence. Typical example

for such prohibition we find in the Ten Commandments. The first eight commandments prohibit actions while the last two prohibit desires, precisely because they are mimetic (Ex 20:1-17). And in this context Girard hypothesizes how ancient communities should have evolved with some kind of mechanism in order to deal with mimetic rivalry and conflicts in order to protect the social order.

1.2 Scapegoat Mechanism

The means by which communities protected themselves from disintegration due to mimetic rivalry, hypnotizes Girard, was the scapegoat mechanism. And it may not have been consciously instituted by some groups but could have evolved spontaneously. He arrives at this by observing certain stereotypes in mythological narratives that reinforce the logical development of this mechanism.

Practically all the mythical stories begin with some sort of disorder, either social or cosmic. And suddenly somebody is accused of the cause for the disorder. Then the whole community gathers together and eliminates that 'cause' for disorder. Then the social order returns obviously. The typical example could be the proposal of Caiaphas, the high priest who "had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people" (Jn 18:14). In this mechanism Girard identifies two significant moments. One is the moment of crisis that transforms the community from *all against all* into *all against one*. The other is the moment of (mythical) peace after the expulsion of the victim. Wolfgang Palaver explains its operative mechanism.

> At the height of crisis when all are drawn into violent rivalries and all objects have disappeared, mimesis can unify because all objects that created disunity have been replaced by hatred and violence between antagonists. Unlike exclusive objects, violence against a rival can be shared. Whereas mimetic desire in its acquisitive mode

causes "disunity among those who cannot possess their common object together," it is its antagonistic mode-a highly increased form of mimetic rivalry in which violence between the opponents has been substituted for all concrete objects-that creates "solidarity among those who can fight the same enemy together." The arbitrary blow of one of the rivals against another can fascinate others to such a degree that they imitate this deed and join in striking the momentarily weaker individual. The war of all against all suddenly becomes a war of all against one. The single victim is expelled or killed. Girard calls this unconscious, collective deed the scapegoat mechanism.[9]

The scapegoat mechanism allegedly restores the loss of differences that cause crisis in the social order. And Palaver explains how scapegoat mechanism re-establishes spatial, religious, temporal, cultural, and social differentiations.

> By transferring the violence of the group to the outside--to the victim--the differentiation of space is created. Because of the sacralization of the victim this distinction is at the same time also the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The victim belongs to the sacred; the group is the realm of the profane. The scapegoat mechanism also produces the order of time. The death of the victim is the decisive moment: it separates between "before" that is the time of the crisis and "after" that is the time of peace and order. The same is true for moral distinctions. During the crisis there was no good and bad, no truth and no falsity. The scapegoat mechanism overcomes this uncertainty: the victim is guilty, the others are innocent. All the social distinctions like ranks, hierarchy, relationships of subordination are based on these elementary differentiations. Their main function is to prevent a further outbreak of a mimetic crisis. Social differentiations channel mimesis in a way that makes rivalries less likely.[10]

Since desires arise unceasingly, the need to contain its mimetic consequences also arises. Thus the idea of ritual sacrifice emerged, which is the ritual institutionalization of

the scapegoat mechanism. We shall reflect on the 'sacrificial' dimension of this mechanism in the next section. However, the crucial question is how do we come into grasp with this way of interpreting the mechanism? How do we identify victims and persecutors? In other words, how do we transcend the hermeneutics of mythical narratives? It takes us to the next step, the biblical difference.

1.3 Biblical Difference

In order to highlight the fundamental hermeneutic difference between myths and the bible, Girard discusses the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. He compares Joseph with the king Oedipus. Despite many similarities between both the narratives, the basic difference lies in the interpretation of the phenomenon of collective violence. In the myth, the expulsions of the hero are justified each time and the victim is thus always wrong and his persecutors are always right. In the biblical account, these expulsions are never justified. Collective violence is unjustifiable.[11] From this angle Girard pinpoints the structural similarity as well as the radical difference between myths and the Hebrew Bible. The structural similarity is the basis for the radical difference from the standpoint of the narrative's identification with the victim. In spite of the numerous convergences of these two narratives, the single divergence is absolutely decisive.[12]

Analyzing the stories of Joseph and Job, Girard concludes that the biblical revolution has a universal meaning.

> It's the difference between a world where arbitrary violence triumphs without being recognized and a world where this same violence is identified, denounced, and finally forgiven. It's the difference between truth and deception, both of them absolute. Either we succumb to the contagion of the mimetic snowballing effect and fall into the lie of victimization, with mythology, or we resist

this contagion and rise into the truth of the innocent victim, with the Bible.[13]

Similarly Girard highlights the plight of the victims in the New Testament. Focusing on the collective murders of Jesus and Stephen, he argues that the biblical authors always sympathize with the victims by representing the perspective of the victims and exposing the guilt of their persecutors.

> From my anthropological perspective we can verify that the Gospels maintain the essential victory the Bible achieves, for the relation between victims and persecutors in the Gospels bears no resemblance at all to that of the myths. It is the biblical relation that prevails, the relation we have just discovered in the story of Joseph: just like the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels defend the victims wrongly accused and expose their persecutors.[14]

On the whole, the mimetic theory traces back to the anthropological roots of violence and religion. In order to comprehend their intimate relationship, we need to define religion in view of assessing its plausibility to offer harmony and peace.

2. How to Define Religion?

In a pluralistic context, as in India, we have different religious traditions. One might classify them under various categories. For instance, we may identify Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism to be religions of Book or revelation. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism can be said to be religions of cultural ethos. Then there are also natural religions practiced by tribal groups. One can even label certain religions violent and others peaceful. Moreover, ideologies like capitalism and nationalism are also identified to be religion. Among this multitude of approaches to religion, mimetic theory proposes two kinds of religion, i.e. sacrificial religion and liberative religion. These two are not separate religions as such. Rather

they coexist within a particular religious tradition. This way of approaching religion can help us to understand one's own religion deeper and that of others better.

2.1 Sacrificial Religion

We have already seen how the mechanism of scapegoat has engendered the idea of ritual sacrifice in order to check the continual threat of social disorder arising out of mimetic rivalry. From this perspective one may believe that scapegoats save humanity from disintegration. With regard to the efficacy of the scapegoat, we find two stages which appear somewhat paradoxical. In the first stage the scapegoat is identified and killed, precisely because it is guilty and hence poisons the community. In the second stage, the ritual sacrifice substitutes the scapegoat with some other object or animal, on which the guilt is passed. Though the sin/guilt of the community is passed on to the sacrificial animal, it is still expected to be unblemished. It thus explains how the same scapegoat considered to be guilty belongs to the realm of the sacred.

The double role played by the scapegoat, that is poisoning and healing the community, reveals its sacrificial character. In other words, a scapegoat to become sacred it has to be first of all guilty of something. Precisely because it is guilty, it is 'sacrificed' and raised on to the realm of the sacred. This way of understanding sacrifice is totally different from the usage of the term in modern times where it has come to mean generous offering of oneself for the good of others as Christians would interpret the crucifixion of Jesus. In this context Girard brings out the tension within Christianity in articulating the death of Jesus as 'sacrifice.'

From the structural similarities the crucifixion does not differ from the scapegoat mechanism. The difference lies in the final event of the victory over the mechanism by exposing its satanic character of murder. The resurrection of Jesus

vindicates the power of God over Satan (death). However Girard regrets that historical Christianity has not completely understood this divine mystery of the cross and therefore it interprets Jesus' crucifixion as another sacrifice that saved us from all our sins.

> Thanks to the sacrificial reading it has been possible for what call Christendom to exist for ten or twenty centuries; that is to say, a culture has existed that is based, like all cultures (at least up to a certain point) on the mythological forms engendered by the founding mechanism. Paradoxically, in the sacrificial reading the Christian text itself provides the basis. Mankind relies upon a misunderstanding of the text that explicitly reveals the founding mechanism to re-establish cultural forms which remain sacrificial and to engender a society that, by virtue of this misunderstanding, takes its place in the sequence of all other cultures, still clinging to the sacrificial vision that the Gospel rejects."[15]

Palaver pinpoints the dangerous consequences of the 'Sacrificial Christianity' which needs our attention particularly to grow in self-criticism in a pluralistic context.

> Sacrificial Christianity enables its followers to project interpersonal violence onto God, thus relieving themselves of the responsibility for this violence, which is universal and equally distributed among mankind. However, if this responsibility is not maintained by humans, it can lead to a spiral of violence that ends in the arbitrary persecution of scapegoats-onto whom the violence is unloaded. The persecution of other groups is therefore one of the typical characteristics of sacrificial Christianity; the systematic persecution of the Jews, heretics, and witches, as well as all inquisitions, crusades, and religious wars are the direct result of this decisive misunderstanding of biblical scripture.[16]

2.2 Liberative Religion

For Girard Christianity is a liberative religion, in so far as it protects us from the deception of the satanic mechanism of scapegoat. He distinguishes it from sacrificial Christianity which follows the logic of the scapegoat mechanism. In a recent interview, Palaver was asked about the interpretation of crucifixion of Jesus as a sacrifice. He begins to answer the question by stating that this interpretation is the most difficult and at the same time the most important aspect of Christian theology.[17] He articulates that though Girard modified his position with regard to the sacrificial understanding of Christianity in his dialogue with Raymund Schwager, "he always emphasized the fundamental difference between the archaic sacrifices and the crucifixion of Jesus. But this difference should not mislead us that the inter-human violence can only be unloaded onto the 'other' (scapegoat) or endured (Jesus' offer). Violence is evident in both cases. The 'sacrifice' of Jesus means a transformation of archaic way of (sacrificial) thinking…"[18]

The crucifixion therefore cannot be seen as a 'sacrifice' from the perspective of the scapegoat mechanism. On the contrary, it profoundly exposes the diabolic character of this mechanism and the enormity of its negative effect. As Girard argues:

> Jesus' death is one example among many others of the single victim mechanism. What makes the mimetic cycle of Jesus' suffering unique is, not the violence, but the fact that the victim is the Son of God, which is certainly the main thing from the standpoint of our redemption. However, if we neglect the anthropological substructure of the Passion, we will miss the true theology of the Incarnation, which makes little sense without this anthropological basis.[19]

Henceforth, we may arrive at a conclusion that sacrificial and liberative religions are not different sets of religion as

such. Rather they could be active within a particular religious tradition, as we have just seen in the case of Christianity. This way of distinguishing religion liberates us in fact from generalizing or labeling religions as violent or peaceful. It helps us in a deeper level, to come into grasp with the internal tension within each religious tradition. From this angle, we shall now look at the Indian context.

3. Mimetic Appraisal of the Indian Context

Girard's theory is basically rooted in the biblical revelation of Christian tradition. Its fundamental premises refer to the relationship between (Christian) faith and practice. Nevertheless, he claimsthat his scientific analysis of mimesis is not the outcome of his Christian faith. Rather his mimetic approach revealed him the invincible truth about Christianity. In other words, (his) science had led him to religion. Reason has given way to faith. For him, Christianity is typical, if not unique, of the hermeneutic revolution that represents the perspectives of victims and exposes the guilt of their persecutors. However, we shall try to find certain convergence and divergence between mimetic theory and Buddhism. Furthermore, we try to understand the historical roots of Hindutva and Islamic terror groups in India, in the light of the mimetic theory.

3.1 Buddhism and Mimetic Theory

Even before the dawn of Christianity, in 6th century BCE, Buddha taught that desire is the root cause of human suffering and detachment is the only way to attain liberation (*nirvana*). Though Buddhist analysis of the danger of desire converges much with mimetic theory, it diverges sharply in two ways. First, Girard distinguishes between positive and negative mimesis, whereby he looks at desire as something basically good. For Buddha, all suffering begins with desire. But Girard would nuance a little deeper that even not to desire

at all is also a kind of desire. It is there his positive mimesis becomes operative. Secondly, according to Buddha there is no need of a supreme being for one's liberation. It is basically one's awareness of the impermanency that surrounds oneself, which liberates a person from all sorts of attachment. On the contrary, Girard goes along with Augustine and claims that the orientation to the divine alone can ultimately save humans from inter-personal divinization which in turn leads to mimetic rivalry and conflict. And it is the divine grace that fulfills what humans lack fundamentally in their being, which is attempted to be satisfied by material possessions or inter-human relations.

Thirukkural, a Tamil literary work of 1st century BCE, also coincides with the mimetic theory.

***Patruhapatratranpatrinaiappatraippatruhapatruvidarku* (350)**

This verse is located in the section of renunciation. Here the Tamil word *patru* is used in a threefold meaning. It means acquisitive desire, the act of clinging on and the feet of God. It could be translated as the following. In order to get detached from all kinds of desire, one should cling on to the feet of God, and that desire alone can free a person from all other desires. Hence mimetic theory has been operative on the Indian soil even before Christian era.

The historical-political development of Buddhism pinpoints that it rose against two fundamental practices of Brahmanic Hinduism, i.e. caste system and animal sacrifice. Even today, caste plays a powerful role in Indian society. Looking at it from the perspective of the victims of caste system, it is basically a system of graded inequality and institutionalized injustice. At the very root of the system, the scapegoat mechanism is operative. And Buddhism revolted against the inhuman treatment of untouchables and opened

(*sangha*) communities for all people to live together. Most astonishingly, they allowed women to become nuns and live together with monks as a community of disciples. Thus Buddhism championed the cause of human dignity and social justice. Secondly, Buddhism also revolted against the practice of animal sacrifice, advocated vegetarianism and propagated the idea of *ahimsa*, i.e. not to harm any living being.

Though Buddhism emerged as a revolutionary movement, fighting for equality and justice and insisting on nonviolence, it would be simplistic to call it a peaceful religion, especially when we look at the events taking place in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. In these predominantly Buddhist countries, we see Buddhist monks publically provoking violence against other ethnical and religious groups and openly sympathizing with genocidal movements. This does not however make Buddhism as a violent religion either. It only makes the question of the relationship between religion and violence more complex and problematic. At this juncture, the mimetic theory offers us some means to understand this relationship at a deeper level. Let's consider the development of Hindu and Islamic Terrorism on the Indian soil.

3.2 Hindu and Islamic Terrorism

We may have been acquainted with Islamic terrorism or terror organizations. But Hindu terror groups are portrayed in the media as rightwing extreme groups. They don't even use the word 'Hindu' to refer to such groups. On the contrary, time again we hear about the reports of terror attacks by groups having affiliations to Islam. Though some kind of bias is evident on the surface, we shall try to grasp the mimetic roots of both these terror orientations.

When we consider the roots of Hindutva, the ideological fountain of Hindu terror groups, it takes us back to the period of the colonial rule of both the Islamic Moguls and the

Christian Europeans. C. Jaffrelot identifies the historical root of Hindutva with a political response to the colonial rule. He contends that the colonial attitude caused

> A sense of backwardness and decline among colonized and dominated peoples, from which a certain élite stratum, chiefly comprising the intelligentsia, then set about reforming their traditions. Subsequently, their main concern was to endow that renewed tradition with the sanction of a theoretical 'Golden Age', an ideological interpretation of the past, perfectly fashioned in order to meet the challenge of the West.[20]

Subhash Anand also observes how the hegemonic attitude of European missionaries provoked some kind of aggressive response from Hindu revivalists like Dayanand Sarasvati, who "set up Vedic Infallibility an authority to match and counteract the infallibility of the Christian Bible and the Muslim Qur'ān."[21]

The *Ratha-yathra* (grand rally) of L.K. Advani in September 1990 is another example of the wounded psyche expressing itself symbolically. The *yatra* began from Somnath in Gujrath. It was symbolically meant to reawaken the hurt feelings among Hindus over the destruction Somnath temple by Mahmud Ghazni in 11th century CE. This event became for the Hindus a 'chosen trauma.'[22] S. Kakar also points out that

> An event which causes a community to feel helpless and victimized by another and whose mental representation becomes embedded in the group's collective identity... ..A chosen trauma is reactivated again to strengthen a group's cohesiveness through 'memories' of its persecution, victimization, and yet its eventual survival.[23]

From this background one can better understand how and why the movement for Ramjanmabhumimobilized Hindus and demolished the Babri Masjid in 1992.

Another example of such mimetic dynamic could be traced back to Moplah Rebellion in 1921 in Calicut and the genocide of Muslims in Gujrath in 2002.

> A well-armed crowd of fanatic Muslims paralyzed the local government and attacked the Hindu population. Temples were desecrated and men were forcefully circumcised. Hindu women were raped, if they were pregnant, ripped open. People were flayed alive or murdered, their houses set on fire, their bodies dumped in wells, sometimes even when only half-dead.[24]

The same events recurred in 2002 in Gujrat. The only difference is that the victims were Muslims. More than 2000 thousand Muslims were killed and their women brutally raped, pregnant women ripped open, and their credentials vandalized, and all done under the indirect support of the state machineries.

The demolition of Babri Masjid and the genocide in Gujrat did provoke some Muslims to join terrorist organizations to fight back, in other words to wage the 'just war.' Thus we witness a series of terror attacks by Islamic terror groups as reported by the media and the state. Nevertheless the terror attacks by Hindu terror groups are underplayed both by the media and the state machinery. Now the question is not to find out which group is guiltier. Out attempt is rather to understand the spiral of mimetic violence that seems to be unending and contagious. The universal phenomenon of mimetic violence is disgracefully visible in these developments. However, mimetic theory offers some hope to come out of the spiral of mimetic violence.

4. Social Harmony and Peace

While religions propagate peace and harmony on the one hand, they also seem to justify violence (if not provoke) under certain circumstances. Here, a distinction can be helpful

between 'religious' violence and violence in the name of religion. The former may induce violence for seemingly social causes, i.e. justice, self-defence, equality, whereas the latter might provoke violence for political reasons. Whatever be the reasons, history has taught us that violence cannot bring peace and harmony but can only produce more violence. It therefore calls our attention to reflect how and why religions are politicized and at the same time how they could bring about harmony and peace.

4.1 Political Theology and Theological Politics

Palaver distinguishes between political theology and theological politics. In the context of the interaction between religion and politics, he pinpoints the traditional model of friend-enemy patterns rooted in the scapegoat mechanism. In order to avoid such danger of scapegoating, he envisions counter-politics based on the biblical principles of love and justice.

> The Biblical perspective has to become the starting point and not politics with its leaning towards divisions and distinctions. Political theology is not able to break with it (archaic sacred) because it is bound to the enmity going along with ordinary politics. Instead of making theology an ally of politics rooted in paganism (of sacrificial culture) we should therefore try to create political bodies that rely on the Biblical revelation. Political theology has to give way to theological politics.[25]

According to Palaver, political theology orients itself primarily towards political concerns. In order to achieve political gains like power and position, it tries to use religious symbols and beliefs. Hence politics becomes an end and religion a means. On the contrary, theological politics challenges our political convictions and strategies in the light of religious values. Here politics becomes a means and religion an end. Let us consider, for example, the election theology of Israel.

Israelites believe that they are specially chosen by God. This choice has a religious meaning. For, God calls a particular people in order to save it from different kinds of evil. This (religious) election becomes politicized when they demonize other peoples who are not 'chosen' by God. Thus politicization of religion leads to hatred and enmity. We can also see certain politicization of the mission command of Jesus in Mt 28:16-20. The religious command of mission has been perceived in a political manner. That is, it was understood to Christianize nations and conquer lands and powers in a political sense.

The same politicizing attitude also manifests itself in the identification of religion and nation, which we also find in Judaism, i.e. Zion Movement. Anand also highlights how Aurobindo Ghose, one of the pioneers of Hindutva, identifies nation with religion. This could be seen as the combination of politicization of religion and communalization of politics.

> Nationalism is not a mere political programme. Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed in which you shall have to live. If you are going to be a Nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of Nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit. It is a religion by which we are trying to realize God in the nation, in our fellow countrymen.[26]

When we combine religion and politics in a political manner, that is, to use religion in order to accomplish political goals, the mimetic rivalry and conflict are inevitable. On the other hand, when we integrate them in a religious manner, which means, to make political arrangements serve religious values, there are chances of overcoming mimetic rivalry and conflict between religions and peoples. This demands the practice of positive mimesis and the hierarchy of spiritual goods.

4.2 Positive Mimesis and Spiritual Goods

The biblical revelation of the scapegoat mechanism overcame the archaic way of controlling violence. However, it has indirectly brought us a more frightening danger. For, when we are freed from the bondage of this archaic mechanism, we should be able to confront rivalries without the protection of this 'sacrificial' mechanism.[27] That does not mean we are helpless. The mimetic theory posits the efficacy of positive mimesis in order to deal with mimetic rivalry and conflict arising out of negative mimesis. In positive mimesis, subject and model remain non-rivals. In negative mimesis, subject and model become rivals. As a believer in Christ, Girard projects Jesus as the non-rival model par excellence. For, Jesus imitates his Father out of love and humility whereas Satan imitates God out of envy and pride. Thus Jesus' God-*Abba*-experience is religious, while Satan's God-encounter is political, i.e. to win over God.

In India we are blessed with different religious traditions. All of them struggle within fighting the tension between satanic and divine forces in different ways. Hence the obvious fight between religions is in fact deviation from the real problem. That means, to fight satanic forces within each tradition requires all traditions to be self-critical. For that purpose, positive mimesis needs to be rooted in the hierarchy of spiritual goods.

Catholic tradition has always emphasized the primacy of spiritual goods over temporal goods. The more we pursue temporal goods, i.e., power, position, wealth, the more we get into mimetic rivalry and conflict. On the other hand, the more we seek spiritual goods, i.e. love, peace, justice, the more harmony and equity we enjoy. I don't think any religion would dispute with this way of going about. This becomes more and more evident when we look at the eruption of violence which is obviously unleashed for socio-economic-political reasons

but given religious flavour. Once it is given a religious colour it spreads like anything. That is why the relation between religion and violence becomes crucial and enigmatic. After all, human beings are both religious (transcendent) and violent.

5. Conclusion

The mimetic theory strikes at the anthropological roots of violence. The universality of mimesis vindicates the history of wars and bloodsheds all through the centuries. However, it is difficult to conclude that all religions must have come out of the founding murder/scapegoat mechanism as we have shown that Buddhism and Christianity have emerged as liberating religions in exposing the mechanism of scapegoat. Nevertheless, religions struggle from within to overcome this satanic mechanism. Hence the question of violence needs to be posed at a deeper level.

The violence which religions reportedly perpetuate is basically the result of human interaction with one another. The question of religious violence, therefore, is first and foremost a human question, a social and anthropological question, and not directly a religious question.[28] And Girard cautions us that "the violence we would love to transfer to religion is really our own, and we must confront it directly. To turn religions into the scapegoats of our own violence can only backfire in the end."[29] And Jeremiah L. Albergalso underlines the anthropological openness and giftedness for overcoming violence and promoting social harmony.

> Religion both in a primitive sense, that is the violent sacred and the Gospels continue to play a profound role in contemporary society. In its archaic form, religion infiltrates the latest technology, the newest gadgets and uses them as a way of violently controlling violence. Scandal and scapegoating are only its most obvious forms. The Gospels, in turn, reveal the scapegoat to be innocent and scandal to be based not on one's own

righteousness but on one's envy of the other. More than that, they encourage us to find new ways of relating to each other, undoing the lie upon which our identity is built and replacing it with being gifted with who we are.[30]

Notes

1. Wolfgang Huber, "Religion and Violence in a Globalized World," *Bulletin of the GHI* 47 (Fall 2010): 51.
2. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard Mckeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001)1058-59 (II55a); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 3, trans. The English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates and Washburn, 1928), 177 (III), 54 (IV); Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthrone, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-4; quoted by Wolfgang Palaver, *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (Michigan: Michigan State University, 2013), 37.
3. Palaver, *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 35.
4. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with J.M Oughourlian and G. Lefrot,* trans. Stephen Bann and Michel Metteer (Stanford. CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 26; quoted by Palaver, *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 46.
5. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 187; quoted by Palaver, *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 46.
6. According to Girard, the idea of autonomy of the self is a myth in the sense that mimesis controls the entire cognitive and behavioural processes.
7. Samuel Buchoul, "The Nonself of Girard," *Contagion Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* 20 (2013), 111-12.
8. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 11.

9. Palaver, "René Girard's Contribution to Political Theology: Overcoming Deadlocks of Competition and Enmity," in *Between Philosophy and Theology: Contemporary Interpretations of Christianity*, eds. LievenBoeve and Christophe Brabant, 153 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
10. Palaver, "On Violence: A Mimetic Perspective," http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/137.html (accessed November 10, 2015).
11. Girard, *I See Satan Fall*...., 109.
12. Ibid.,109.
13. Ibid., 114.
14. Ibid., 122.
15. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 181.
16. Palaver, *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*,247; he also quotes from Girard, *I see Satan*…., 26.
17. Palaver, "The Message of the Scapegoat" (Die Botschaft des Sündenbocks), http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/1115.html (accessed December 8 2015).
18. Palaver, "The Message of the Scapegoat"
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20. C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics-1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity Building, Implantation and Mobilization* (New Delhi: Penguin Bks., 1999), 13; quoted by SubhashAnand, *Hindutva: A Christian Response* (Indore: Satprakashan, 2001), 13.
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25. Palaver, "Enmity and Political Identity: Friend-Enemy Patterns and Religion," http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/874.html (accessed December 10, 2015).
26. R.C. Majumdar, *Struggle for Freedom*, 77.
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Article received: Feb 7, 2016
Article approved: Sept 12, 2016
No of words: 6695