THE ABSENCE OF PEACE AND THE PERVERSION OF DESIRE

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the relationship between the absence of peace and the perversion of human desire, both in its personal and structural dimensions. Beginning with a psychology of violence that defines humanity's predicament as hostility towards the authentic self, the article explores under the heading 'seven steps to radical evil' the implications of that hostility from a Christian perspective. It concludes with a note on Christian realism by invoking the doctrine of "the fall" which on the one hand shows why the mechanisms of culture are inadequate to deliver humanity from its systemic entrapment in and addiction to scapegoating violence. On the other hand, it points in hope towards the doctrine of redemption where God's love will ultimately triumph.

PERSONAL DIMENSIONS

The best attempts of the social sciences, of psychology in particular, to heal the social and personal dimensions of humanity's inability to live in peace fall short of the mark. The predominant model of self-love/self-mastery/self-realization has turned out to be a false hope. From the perspective of Christian revelation, these categories are deficient to the degree that they deny the connection between the human condition and transcendent reality. This is not to say that psychological insights may not be helpful in describing the human

predicament.[1] One author who maintains a theological view while looking at psychological roots of this condition is Charles Bellinger.[2]

Bellinger begins with Kierkegaard's conception of *angst*. It is the experience of being called by God into authentic human existence or greater spiritual freedom and maturity. The awareness even of the alternative to one's present condition produces anxieties as the individual faces the unknown, and the abyss of trust.[3] Angst is thus the "misrelation" of the self to itself and to others.[4]

Kierkegaard assumes that the Creator is continually calling his creature into deeper and more mature selfhood so that the individual faces ever new possibilities for growth and hence ever-recurring states of anxiety. To reduce the discomfort, the person seeks to maintain control by actively resisting the voice of the Creator. This turning away from God produces inner conflict. The sinful human being "hates the pressure being placed upon him to become a more mature person. He hates this possibility". This response, says Bellinger, is in one sense the dread of losing the self by being "recreated in a more mature formation". The response results in a defensive kind of self-protection.[5]

Here Bellinger spots the most basic root of the human condition: hostility towards the authentic self, leading to a form of spiritual suicide aimed against the self, the Creator and others.

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[1] Cf. Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1975); *The Structure of Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1976 (1968)). For a more biblical treatment of sin in a psychological context see also Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975) and M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope of Healing Human Evil* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1983).

[2] Charles Bellinger, *The Genealogy of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[3] Bellinger, *Genealogy of Violence*, 38.

[4] *Ibid.*, 65.

[5] Ibid., 67.

In its desire for egocentric mastery, the self defiantly attempts to justify autonomous existence by a repeated turning away from the voice of the Creator. However, such egocentricity reaps a deceptive fruit: there results a "hardening of the individual's psychological structure". The defiant self is not only scandalized by the sheer givenness of creaturely life (which it wants to shape for its own purposes), but is also threatened by the presence of God and of others whom it ought to respect and love. Thus, the inner strategy of ego-protection represents the power struggle between the self and the Creator over the right to create the self.[6] In its attempt to become its own creator, the defiant self inverts the doctrine of creation by persistently drowning out the voice of the Creator who invites it to move forward to become a more authentic self. Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell rhetorically lauds this attitude of defiance:

> … proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, [man's] knowledge and his condemnation to sustain alone a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.[7]

In this state, the individual resents gratuitous existence and "would rather rage against the universe than do anything else".[8] Such is the virulence of this condition. It refuses to be drawn into repentance, healing and transformation, which would totally undermine the defiance and the self-image forged over and against that of the Creator.

What comes into view is the mimetic intensification of sin. Scandalized by the life-promoting voice of the Creator (who calls the self forth into new life), the self hates this call because it engenders the sense of existential neediness or inadequacy. Hence, it seeks to do away with that possibility by denying the voice and by joining with

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[6] Libuse Miller, *In Search for Self* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 256.

[7] Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian,* (Simon & Schuster, 1957), 115-116.

[8] Bellinger, *Genealogy of Violence*, 48.

others to form a crowd, which suffers from the same sickness and seeks ego-protection in similar ways. Such company serves only to reinforce itself. If the process of defiance is repeated ever more often, a state of radical resistance is reached in which the self now hates God without cause. Its natural consequence is violence, argues Bellinger. The individual is so enraged over its inability to silence or kill the voice that "it develops a need to kill other human beings". Bellinger continues:

> He [the defiant self] subconsciously construes other human beings as a representation of that which he is trying to kill within himself. Instead of addressing his internal alienation as his own problem, he projects his anger out into the world."[9]

Let me sum up Bellinger's point. The root of humanity's lack of peace is spiritual sickness derived from hostility towards the Creator. At the same time, human beings cannot escape the voice, which summons to self-transcending life. They either answer this call and live, or refuse and die. In the latter case, they are compelled to justify their rejection of God, of themselves and of others. The result is an ever increasing corruption, violence, and, ultimately, spiritual death.

Many social phenomena powerfully illustrate this progression. Televised violence is such an example. Brutality is increasingly on display as entertainment modeling aggressive styles of conduct, desensitizing and habituating people to violence, altering modes of restraint and perpetuating the myth that violence can bring peace. Bandura cites a range of studies as early as the 1970s that have demonstrated a marked increase in interpersonal aggression as a result of TV influence.[10] Since TV programming follows the market,

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[9] *Ibid.*, 67. Eric Voegelin has called this condition "the egophanic revolt", by which he means the eclipse of the epiphany of God in human consciousness by the epiphany of the ego (Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana Sate University, 1989], 67-68).

[10] Bandura, "Psychological Mechanisms of Aggression", 1-40. Wink has shown that all TV cartoons and most movie plots are based on the ancient mythological structure of redemptive violence. Children and adults have been led by role models to *resonate* with this mythic structure that inculcates and constantly reinforces the values of dominance in the psyche of society, yet it is the "simplest,

one must assume that society insists on screening details of how to increase one's tolerance of, and skill in executing, inter-human brutality. Spanish philosopher José Ortéga y Gasset characterized modern humanity as *refus[ing] to accept any order superior to himself*.[11] This "mass man", wrote Ortéga, also proclaims himself to be "common". However, in the light of increasing consumption of violent entertainment, the systematic desensitization of children to violent solutions to life's problems, and the degenerate lyrics of the hip-hop culture,[12] such an assessment must surely be revised. "Common" humanity increasingly appears as "violent" humanity.

Seven Steps to Radical Evil

This progression towards radical evil or "maximum profanity" has been studied by Ted Peters.[13] Like Girard and Bellinger, Peters begins with the notion of existential precariousness or anxiety. He also acknowledges the operation of the scapegoat mechanism and, what is more, he clearly links human sinfulness with the kind of personal and social ills I have called elsewhere the human rights crisis. Peters' book-length treatment contains an insightful ladder of "seven steps to radical evil" which I now summarize.[14]

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laziest, most exciting, uncomplicated, irrational and primitive depiction of evil the world has ever known" (Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 22).

[11] Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951), 102 (emphasis added).

[12] Lyrics by "D12", the American hip-hop group: *"I' m past my limit of coke, I think I'll up my high by slitting your throat, push a baby carriage into the street 'til it's minced meat"*. Despite the sickening style of this subculture and its open defiance of human values, the Australian government supports with grant funds studies of how to "indigenize" hip-hop in Australia (Andrew Bolt, "D for Degenerate", *Sun Herald* [Sydney], 16 December 2004).

[13] Peters, *Sin,*10-17. On the theological difficulties connected with the concept of "radical evil" see John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-25.

[14] While Peters presents his model in form of a progression, he does not wish to imply a chronological path. He notes: "Evil is not simply progressive … [a]lthough most of us who sin stop well short of blasphemy, nearly every step is present nearly all the time" (*ibid.,*17).

Anxiety

Anxiety or fear arises at the prospect of humiliation. It is the fear of loss or loss of face, of dropping out of existence, of being nothing. Compactly expressed, it is the fear of death. It tempts the human agent to rid himself of this perceived threat by taking a preemptive strike at others; it leads to aggression and the impulse to expropriate the glory, money and power that are the objects of envy.

Unbelief

Failure in faith follows on. We will only give in to this temptation when we do not trust. Only trust makes us fearless in the face of existential threats. Trust overcomes the temptation to strike out against God and neighbor. Without the spiritual power of trust, which is another way of saying without faith in God, we live in a perpetual state of unbelief and its inevitable consequence, the fear of loss, which we try to overcome by the preemptive strike against other people in its many destructive forms.

Pride

When we cover this anxiety by denying its existence, we enter the state of pride or ego-centrism. Like narcissism, it pretends to God-likeness by seeing itself as the life source. Traditionally, pride has been seen as the essence of sin, for it is a turning away from the divine center, which is our origin. Pride is the substitute of the human for the divine and is therefore idolatrous. It contradicts the first commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:3-4). For Augustine, pride arose in a soul that was inordinately enamored of its own power.[15] Thus pride relies on its own achievements, refuses to accept limits, arrogantly elevates itself above others, even into the sphere of the divine, is insensitive to the suffering of others, and is unable to enter into a sympathetic understanding of their needs. The evil of

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[15] Augustine, *City of God,* 12.6; 14.13.

pride fragments communities and leads to repression, nepotism, exploitation, exclusion, violence and war.[16]

Concupiscence

The state of pride has another face: concupiscence. This is the desire to make the soul secure against all contingencies through possessions. It manifests in the tendency to keep up with the Joneses, in over-indulgence and in the desire to possess for the sake of possession. It seeks to profit from other people's loss and favors an economic system that exploits the poor. It is impatient and wants what it wants now. The inflamed passions of sexual lust and its deliberate and destructive pursuit also belong to this condition.

Self-justification

When pride and concupiscence are at work, they lead to transcendent desire, wanting to possess what God possesses, namely his goodness and to ascribe it to ourselves. This attempt to make ourselves good or "righteous" is called self-justification. Its surface expression is scapegoating. We seek to exonerate ourselves at the expense of others, which in individuals and society often takes the form of political ideology, racial prejudice, religious intolerance or simply blame-mongering in any form. It is deceitful, and denies its own sinfulness, off-loading it onto others.

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[16] In the 20th century war casualties increased from approximately 20 million to 108 million, a fivefold increase compared with the previous century, while the ratio of casualties to world population which had been static for 300 years, more than doubled in that period (based on statistics on war casualties found in Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 221 in combination with data on world population in Raymund Peal, *Natural History of Population* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939], 238 Fig. 38). According to Wink, more people died in war in the 20th century than in the last 5000 years combined. While these statistics speak for themselves about our violent propensities, there is nothing more evil in modern preparation for war than the retention and development of nuclear weapons, especially the black market in radioactive material and weapons technology recently uncovered by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Yet investigations are being hampered by conflicting political interests between Pakistan where this clandestine operation began more than thirty years ago, and the USA (accessed 26 December 2004); available from http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/26/International/asia/26nuke.html

Cruelty

When through self-justification we reject the possibility that there is any goodness outside and independent of ourselves (the grace of God and of others), we remove ourselves from the possibility of forgiveness. This leads to a hardening of the heart, which means further loss of empathy. The result is cruelty, or the ability to ignore the suffering of others. It shows in the willingness to inflict bodily and emotional pain on animals or people so as to cause anguish and fear. This unconscious by-product of unbelief (or "unfaith" as Peters calls it) also manifests in a conscious infliction of suffering. Cruelty will abuse and kill deliberately, and even enjoy it. A cruel state will pursue a policy of abuse, torture, disappearances and murder.

Blasphemy

The last stage in this progression is the sin of blasphemy. It is the sin of radical evil. Peters defines it as the "misuse of divine symbols so as to prevent the communication with God's grace". It is the most sinister expression of self-justification. In its overt form, it uses the symbols of God to justify human action by appealing to the divine right of kings or the use of Scripture to justify oppression and slavery. Covertly, it prevents access to the message of redemption, and creates soul-destroying associations between the symbols of grace and practices of oppression. Consequently the message of redemption and hope is not just denied but deliberately "pressed into service of violence and destruction" aiming at the spiritual death of the victims.[17] With blasphemy, sin has evolved into radical evil, the overt and satanic enmity towards God, which even enjoys deliberate violation of the divine image and values.

What this analysis has made clear is that sin bears a far more virulent connotation than that of an occasional personal lapse or

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[17] Peters refers here to the practice of ritual abuse in Satanist cults where all symbols of Christian hope are prostituted to function as symbols of spiritual death, robbing the victims of all access to transcendent comfort.

misdemeanor. It has unmasked it as a deep-seated spiritual phenomenon that not only opposes the good, but even aims at its destruction. Radical manifestations may surface at the individual level as callousness and cruelty towards others. When this kind of evil rules collective structures, it appears as genocide, terrorism, the Mafia, the sex industry, the illicit drug and weapons trade, fraudulent and exploitative business organizations, oppressive political and religious systems. This is not to say that other social structures are immune. If, as I have argued, the human condition is universal as well as systemic, the entire fabric of global society is affected to a greater or lesser degree and thus even contributes, often unknowingly, to the propagation of such evils as political oppression, economic and ecological exploitation, religious persecution, the arms race, terrorism, world-wide hunger and so on. It is to these structural manifestations of sin that we now turn.

STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS

The Dominance System[18]

For archaic society, violence was not a problem; it was primordial. According to Mesopotamian and Babylonian mythology, chaos preceded order and it took violence to establish the latter. Evil too was primordial, constitutive of deity itself. In the epic myth *Enuma Elish,*[19] Marduk, the god of Babylon, was enthroned as the supreme god after having vanquished the old gods by murder and combat. Deicide preceded the creation of the cosmos, which Marduk formed

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[18] The term "dominance system" was coined by Wink who studied the structural manifestation of evil in his trilogy, *Naming the Powers: the Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: the Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). *Engaging the Powers; Discernment and Resistance in a World of Dominion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[19] For a profound commentary *cf.* Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 175-210.

from the monster corpse of Tiamat, "the mother of them all".[20] Even humanity's origin was violent, "created from the blood of an assassinated god".[21] Thus, "the chaos of violence is in our blood" and violence must continually be imposed to curb it by the system of dominance that was set up in the heavens. It was no coincidence, Wink notes, that the myth of Marduk's elevation to supremacy among the gods appeared when Babylon gained ascendancy over neighboring city states.[22]

Girard has argued that archaic society survived because it was able to manage its violence, and the key was the discovery of the scapegoat mechanism. As a societal structure, it limited the escalating retaliation from mimetic contagion.

Whether human social evolution featured a "golden age" of non-violence as some anthropologists have suggested is debatable.[23] The "original" (pre-fall) society of the Biblical account is certainly portrayed as egalitarian, agricultural and free from sacred violence.[24] However, Genesis 3 – 6 describes how jealousy and possessive-ness eventually led to a violence-sanctioned pattern of dominance on a global scale. As the human population grew, war and conquest were inevitable. Violence between groups caused conditions of chaos that could be resolved only by dominance of some over others. In Girardian terms one could say that it was the mysterious dynamic of

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[20] The contrast to the biblical story could not be more striking. It tells of a good God who brings forth a good creation not through combat and violence, but through sovereign utterance. The God of Israel is a God who speaks.

[21] Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 14.

[22] *Ibid.,* 15.

[23] Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), "Introduction", in *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) and Ashley Montague, *Learning Non-Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[24] The central position of the woman in the story (Gen 3) and her bold initiative in relation to the fruit make certainly sense if seen in the context of an agricultural society.

the mimetic double that propelled civilization in the direction of power and dominance. The more successful a society was in conquering its external threats, the more it would have imitated its aggressors. It exercised dominance, not by merely matching, but by exceeding, the military prowess and violence of the other. In short, power and dominance became the *indispensable* and *constitutive* structures of human survival.[25]

The New Testament equivalent for the dominance system is "the world" (*kosmos*). Its predominant characteristics are pride and covetousness (1 Jn 2:16) which is idolatry (Col 2:16). Tasker holds that this *kosmos* is pervaded by a "spirit of its own" which "dominates human reason and understanding".[26] while Albert C. Winn refers to it as "a series of ordered, structured, interlocking systems that are actually and potentially destructive of human values of the most basic kind … and therefore opposed to God who is the source of such values".[27] In other words, the world system presents itself in various forms. The political, social, economic and cultural institutions cohere by the mimetic unanimity built around opposition to God.

According to Wink, the "dominance system" appeared in human history at least some five thousand years ago with the great conquests in Mesopotamia. Its appearance coincided with the taming of the horse and the invention of the wheel, which ushered in epochal change. This system is self-perpetuating. What is more, it evolves towards a maximization of power.[28] Since it is not intrinsically hostile to the human affairs internal to it, culture and commerce flourish under its patronage, at least for the élite. Tragically, it permits no

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[25] Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 39-43.

[26] R. V. G. Tasker, "World", in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas *et al*. (1962), 1338-40.

[27] Albert C. Winn, *A Sense of Mission* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 70, cited in Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 51 n. 3.

[28] Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 40.

other structural option to exist alongside it. The implication is clear: participation comes at the price of total complicity with its mechanisms of dominance through conformity to its ethos. Wink describes "the system" in these terms:

> It is characterized by unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, biased race relations, patriarchal gender relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all. No matter what shape the domination system takes (from the ancient Near Eastern states to the Pax Romana to feudal Europe to communist state capitalism to modern market capitalism), the basic structure has persisted now for at least five thousand years … [29]

This system functions anonymously. No one in particular has designed or chosen it, yet all humanity seems to have come under its sway. Without realizing it, even top-echelon decision-makers are subject to forces they do not control in the realms of international affairs, the economy or technology. This web of interlocking dominant structures derives its strength from acquiescence accorded to it by all concerned.[30] In the next section, we shall explore what gives this deceptive power the appearance of sovereignty that demands a society's cultural allegiance.

The Figure of Satan

In order to appreciate the system of dominance, Girard maintains, it is necessary to re-familiarize ourselves with the biblical depiction of Satan as the power behind the present world order. Girard is not suggesting that there exists a metaphysical entity called Satan. Rather, in his *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* he is drawing attention to the presence of an uncanny, seemingly transcendent power operating within the structures of society.[31]

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[29] Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 39-40.

[30] A phenomenon strikingly exemplified by the "Auschwitz-doctor" syndrome.

[31] Cf. Girard, *I See Satan* Fall, op. *cit.*

The Biblical terminology associates the figure of Satan to the role of "the deceiver", "the accuser" (Rev 12:10), "the tempter" (Mt 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5), "the father of lies" (Jn 8:44), "the prince of this world" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). These different satanic activities, when examined from the perspective of Girard's theory, are manifestations of the typical mimetic structures such as self-justification, accusation of the other, scapegoating and so on. From this perspective, the personified depiction of Satan is itself the projection of such mimetic structures. As James Williams notes, Satan has only a parasitic existence in relation to both humanity and God.[32]

The satanic *persona* is paradoxically at the same time both the seducer and the adversary. He first appeals to mimetic desire, then, suddenly transforms himself into the adversary. The meaning of this contradiction becomes clear, however, when it is viewed as the model/obstacle dynamic of the mimetic double.[33] This is to suggest that Satan is simply identical with the victimage mechanism, which generates disorder *as well as* violently establishing order.

In a divided community, the satanic influence creates unanimity. It transforms the innumerable pent-up conflicts and scandals by bringing into being a functional order within a given culture or society. It achieves this through the dynamics of victimary violence which perpetuates the social order even as it contains the barbarous forces of destruction. Structurally speaking, these found expression in the ancient Babylonian combat myth. To bring about the new order, the "old gods" (regime, city, leader, religion…) of previous allegiance must be destroyed by violent means.[34] This form of self-expulsion and victimary violence makes the satanic figure an

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[32] James Williams, "Foreword", in Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* xii. For a more detailed exposition of the figure of Satan see also Wink, *Unmasking the Powers,* 9-40.

[33] Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* 33.

[34] Interestingly, much of what goes by the name of foreign policy follows the same structure (Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 29).

indispensable force in a sinful world. Hence, Satan is called the "prince" of a world populated by subjects that assent to violence as the path to peace. Speaking of Satan, Girard writes,

> If he would not protect his domain from the violence that threatens to destroy it, even though it is essentially his own, he would not merit the title of prince, which the Gospels do not award him lightly. If he were purely a destroyer, he would have lost his domain long ago.[35]

Satan is also called "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4). This title describes the spiritual dimension of this figure. It points to the interiority of a society that willfully seeks its own good without reference to God. Humanity's hostile disposition towards the Creator generates its own destructive counterforce. Wink believes that this arises from alignment of "our own narcissistic anxiety with the spirit of malignant narcissism itself",[36] This "spirit" is diametrically opposed to the Creator's design (see the exalted vision of humanity presented in the previous chapter). But humanity by its own devising has elevated Satan to the place of sovereignty. He is "the god of this world" by human consent. This spurious form of transcendence is culturally effective. Satan now takes the place of God. The rights of the Creator are made to yield to the rights of the creature. This leads to an ethos of self-sufficiency and independence from God characterized by the idolizing of power and domination.

Satan, like God, seeks out his worshipers and forms them in his own image. He is the personification of the mesmeric force of envy and unrestrained desire. Palaver points to the inner connection between worship and imitation on the one hand and idolatry and envy on the other (see also Ex 20:4, 17; Col 3:5).[37] The imitation of this perverted

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[35] Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* 35.

[36] Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 24.

[37] Palaver writes: "As soon as we are no longer directed towards God, we begin to worship our neighbor and through imitation we finally long for his goods" (Palaver, "Envy and Emulations"). The fact that this principle keeps the world economy going is not totally immaterial to our argument as it only demonstrates the ambiguity and paradox of the power which the New Testament calls the "prince

divinity leads to the endless violence that poses at the same time as the foundation of social cohesion. The culture it generates, as Ignatieff perceptively noted, puts bloody social orders first.[38]

CONCLUSION: CHRISTIAN REALISM

Christian anthropology holds that despite humanity's ruin in the fall, the image of God that is stamped on them cannot be effaced entirely, for it is part of humanity's constitution. It manifests in the pursuit of knowledge, in the drive to harness the powers of nature, and in the development of art, culture and civilization. However, because of its fallen condition, humanity experiences frustration in the midst of these endeavors. As noted earlier, even humanity's best efforts contain already the seeds of their decline. The very discoveries that promise the most good become through misuse candidates for producing the greatest harm.

Moreover, I have argued that mimetic intensification of sin produces radical evil in soul and society, the outcome of a mysterious progression beginning with anxiety and ending in blasphemy. While evil exists in people and institutions, neither of them are evil *per se*. Rather, evil is a disorder, an unnatural phenomenon that cannot exist without a host feeding parasitically on what is good.

Christian realism thus expresses the reality of evil while preserving the sovereignty and goodness of God. It offers an effective antidote to several fallacious assumptions that feed an unwarranted secular optimism. It counters the fallacy that human society can indeed be built without taking personal and structural sin into account. It spoils the myth of human perfectibility, including the perfectibility of

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of this world". Also, if Satan is the prince of this global system of fallen mimetic desire, it is no surprise that advertisers should ever more brazenly sing envy's praise.

[38] Ignatieff, *Politics and Idolatry*, 172.

human institutions, and sets us free from the insistence of a false universalism that we are responsible for everything.[39]

Moreover, this analysis reveals why mechanisms of culture and social organization are inadequate to deliver humanity from its systemic entrapment in and addiction to mimetic scapegoating, and why eventually no creaturely arrangement holds. Nations fall, empires crumble, corruption is found in the U.N.;[40] all this is unavoidable. And as the doctrine of the fall shows, much of it is the fruit of humanity's resistance to God's ordering. This fissure runs through every human endeavor, including the human rights project confronting us with our impotence to heal it. But this does not mean, as Wink reminds us, that "everything we do is evil, vain, or hopeless, but merely that all is ambiguous, tainted with ego-centricity, subject to deflection from its divine goal, or capable of being co-opted toward other ends".[41]

If the absence of peace in the world is indeed rooted in humanity's rivalry with the Creator, its violent manifestation is none other than the fruit of perverted desire. While created in the image of God, rivalry with the Creator is a self-destructive option for humanity. Yet, God has revealed a way out. When human desire disavows rivalry and begins to resonate with the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the human creature assumes its rightful posture, and God's peace begins to reign. According to Christian hope, ultimately, every knee shall bow before the grace of God when his kingdom of *shalom* will rule at last.

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[39] See Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 69-73.

[40] The "Oil for Food Scandal" implicated the highest officials.

[41] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 73.