

WOUND MADE FOUNTAIN: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION

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The heuristic of retributive punishment on which theology has often relied to explain the Crucifixion, argues the author, does not help us understand how this event was responsive to the wounds of the violated. A heuristic of empathetic identification, however, enables us to develop a theology of redemption that appreciates how God's loving embrace of the violated can effect what retributive punishment aspires to but cannot achieve: the miraculous liberation of both the victim and the violator from the cul-de-sac of historical evil.

THE LONG UNCONTESTED STATUS of the cross as the distinctive symbol of Christianity suggests that the very heart of the faith is the belief that we are redeemed by the crucified Christ. Although the church has never defined this belief as dogma, conversion to the faith has, since Paul, been connected to and even identified with the adoption of it. Indeed the exigence of explaining it led to the development of the central dogmas of the faith (including the Trinity and the Incarnation). It is therefore difficult to exaggerate the significance of the contemporary theological movement that aspires to dismantle the heuristic of retributive justice on which the most influential traditional theologies of redemption have relied. Because this heuristic profoundly affects, when it does not determine, the way redemption is ordinarily understood, abandoning it requires us to radically rethink this most pivotal of our beliefs and the event of the Crucifixion it has traditionally helped us to understand. What is involved here is nothing less than a fundamental rethinking of Christianity itself.

According to its contemporary critics,¹ the heuristic of retributive justice is not simply historically outdated; it is morally offensive and hence renders

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¹ Essays by many of these critics, including Delores S. Williams, S. Mark Heim, J. Denny Weaver, and Rita Nakashima Brock, are anthologized in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis:

morally problematic the conception of redemption that has had the greatest impact on both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. While the theologies of redemption proposed by thinkers such as Anselm, Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther differ significantly from one other, and do not all espouse the view that Christ suffers divine punishment in our stead, it can be plausibly argued that all of them *do* interpret the suffering of the crucified Christ as the alternative to—hence in some sense a substitute for—the retributive punishment we sinners deserve; and it is precisely this suffering of the Crucified that these theologies construe as redemptive.² The critics of the heuristic

Augsburg Fortress, 2006). Stephen Finlan surveys the work of some of the critics and some contemporary defenders of traditional atonement theologies in *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2007). In my summary of the critique, I cannot do justice to subtleties in the thought of the theologians who have developed it.

² Thomas C. Oden (*The Justification Reader* [Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002]) argues that there is much more of a consensus in the Christian tradition on the issue of justification than denominational divisions and historical conflicts have led us to suppose; and he defines justification in a way that makes its meaning dependent on the heuristic of retribution: “Justification is the pardoning act of the supreme Judge of all, by which he pardons *all* the sins of those who trust in the pardoning work of Christ in our place on the cross. In this way the righteousness of Christ is applied to the believer” (36–37; italics original). “Gospel justification views the convicted offender as suddenly and fully pardoned in a way that destroys the connection between his behavior and its penal consequence. . . . Pardon reverses the sentence of condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Forgiveness is not cheap. It is not as if the sinner is inaccurately declared innocent without any price being paid. Rather, the price is paid by another, so that the liability to punishment of the sinner is removed” (57).

While Oden rightly emphasizes a widespread reliance on what I call the heuristic of retribution, he seriously underestimates the significance of the differences among those who employ it, especially the difference between those who affirm, as Calvin does, that Jesus undergoes divine punishment and those who affirm that Jesus suffers in our stead but does not undergo punishment.

The inclusion of Luther among the theologians relying on the heuristic of retribution is controversial. Gustav Aulen famously argues that Luther, like the early Fathers, employs the framework of “Christus Victor” to develop his theology of redemption—a framework that, according to Aulen, differs fundamentally from the “juridical” heuristic employed by Anselm. But the principal difference between Luther and Anselm, as Aulen explains it, has to do with whether atonement is effected by God or by Jesus in his human nature. And when Aulen describes the salvation won for us by “Christus Victor” as “deliverance from God’s judgment on sin,” he is himself relying on a matrix of juridical conceptions. See *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (1931; New York: Macmillan, 1974) 56.

J. Denny Weaver, one of the strongest critics of retributive logic, tries to liberate the “Christus Victor” heuristic from it in *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001). According to the “narrative Christus Victor” heuristic for which he argues, the death of Jesus serves no need—except the needs of “the powers of evil” (72): “God did not send Jesus to die, but to live,

insist that: (1) retributive punishment is indistinguishable from revenge; (2) it is a response to evil/violence that repeats the evil/violence it punishes; and (3) a good, loving God does no evil, and so does not respond to evil retributively.³ It follows that: (4) the Crucifixion was the result of human evil, not divine providence; (5) Jesus suffers and dies because he opposes the power of evil, not because he is a surrogate for sinners who deserve punishment; and (6) the wounds inflicted on Jesus and the suffering they entail cannot redeem humanity from historical evil since they are themselves paradigmatic examples of such evil.⁴

This critique of traditional theologies of redemption has received encouragement and gained momentum from two different but related streams of contemporary theological thought. One is the stream of theologizing that derives from the work of René Girard who argues that the religious tradition of sacrifice involves sacralizing the murder of a scapegoat by using the heuristic of divine retribution to rationalize it.⁵ According to the Girardian, the use of this heuristic by traditional theologies of

to make visible and present the reign of God”(74). I find it difficult to understand how Jesus’ mission, as so conceived, can involve atonement in any conventional sense.

Finally Bernard Lonergan’s remarks on the history of the theology of redemption, although sketchy, are more persuasive and illuminating than Aulen’s account. They are contained in Part Five of *De Verbo Incarnato*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University *ad usum auditorium*) 1964, Theses 15–17, which is to be published by the University of Toronto Press as part of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan. I am grateful to Charles C. Hefling Jr. for sharing with me his translation of these theses.

In the final two sections of the present article, I attempt to articulate the rudiments of a theology of redemption that is similar in all important respects to the account of redemption that Hefling himself sketches in his “Grace, Christ, Redemption, Lonergan (In That Order),” *Lonergan Workshop* 14 (1998) 99–113.

³ Finlan’s implicit identification of retribution with revenge is typical: “Atonement theorists frequently say that we are not taking the gravity of sin seriously enough unless we acknowledge that sin must be judged, severely punished, and avenged. This view says that there *must* be vengeance and that the substitutionary death did not remove this unchangeable fact but redirected the punishment” (*Options on Atonement* 99; italics original).

⁴ Finlan echoes the views of many other critics when he writes: “All concepts of the saving efficacy of [the Crucifixion] involve the notion of something magical taking place at the cross. What magic was there in this atrocity? God’s attitude was not changed by this shameful act of violence. There was nothing beautiful, wonderful, or salvific in the torturing and killing of the Messiah” (*ibid.* 85).

⁵ When the logic of sacrifice is applied to the Crucifixion, René Girard argues, it leads to the view that “the Father of Jesus is still a God of violence, despite what Jesus explicitly says. Indeed he comes to be the God of unequalled violence, since he not only requires the blood of the victim who is closest to him, most precious and dear to him, but he also envisages taking revenge upon the whole of mankind for a death that he both required and anticipated” (*Things Hidden since the Foun-*

redemption has served to cover up what is revolutionary about Christianity, namely, the fact that it exposes the scapegoat mechanism and summons us to abandon the logic of sacrifice and retribution.⁶ But criticizing this logic is not sufficient to liberate Christian belief from it. A new concept of redemption has to be developed. In their effort to do this, critics of retribution are inclined to draw upon another stream of contemporary thought that also aspires to radically rethink the Crucifixion, namely, Liberation Theology. In her exegesis of the Cross, the liberation theologian eschews the heuristic of retribution and employs what might be called the heuristic of empathetic identification. The Crucifixion is not an event that is in accord with the exigencies of divine justice. It signifies God's identification with the violated—with the victims of oppression.⁷ It does not offer to God a passive suffering that is somehow pleasing to him, and hence supposed to be emulated. On the contrary, it enacts God's preference for the oppressed and summons us to make his liberating love for them a historical reality.

Moving from a conception of the Crucifixion that relies on the heuristic of retribution to a conception of the Crucifixion that employs the heuristic of empathetic identification leads to a paradigm shift in our understanding of redemption. According to the heuristic of retribution, redemption occurs when the Crucified One suffers in the place of those who deserve to be punished. Here, it is the sinner, the human being who commits evil, who is the focus of God's redemptive concern, and the human being who is violated—the victim of oppression—can be redeemed only by recognizing her own sinfulness and guilt.⁸ According to the heuristic of empathy, on the

dation of the World, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1987] 213).

⁶ According to Girard, "the essential theme" of Jesus' preaching is that "reconciliation with God can take place unreservedly and with no sacrificial intermediary through the rules of the kingdom. This reconciliation allows God to reveal himself as he is, for the first time in human history. Thus mankind no longer has to base harmonious relationships on bloody sacrifices, ridiculous fables of a violent deity, and the whole range of mythological cultural formations" (ibid. 183). See also S. Mark Heim, "Saved by What Shouldn't Happen," in *Cross Examinations* 211–24.

⁷ See, for example, Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993). JoAnne Marie Terrell ("Our Mothers' Gardens," in *Cross Examinations* 33–49, at 42) succinctly formulates the crucial insight: "Jesus was God *incarnate*, who lived, struggled, and died in suffering solidarity with society's victims."

⁸ A striking example of how grappling with the evil that one has suffered can lead to grappling with the evil one has done can be found in Patrician Raybon's *My First White Friend: Confessions on Race, Love, and Forgiveness* (New York: Penguin, 1997). But the issue is whether redemption is offered to us *only* in our status as sinners, and not to the violated *as violated*.

other hand, the focus of God's redemptive concern is the oppressed *as* oppressed, the violated *as* violated (among whom must be numbered the violator insofar as he too is a victim of his violence). This new paradigm, which Girardian thought, liberation theology, and the critique of retribution all help to promote, introduces into theology for the first time the view of the Crucifixion that is adopted by the oppressed themselves when they recognize, in the Crucified, a God who knows, as no one else does, the suffering they have seen. Approaching the Crucifixion from this point of view provides access to truths about the Crucifixion that the heuristic of retribution covered up. Theologies of redemption that depend on this traditional heuristic are able to see the Crucified only as a surrogate for the sinner who deserved punishment, and not as the paradigmatic image of all historical victims. As a result, Jesus' cry of thirst is not heard as the voice of the oppressed. But if redemption is God's salvific response to the historical reality of evil, as all traditional theologies of redemption have claimed, it has to mean that God hears and answers the cry of the violated. The new paradigm enables us to harken to this cry, and so has the potential to revolutionize the theological understanding of Christianity as a whole.

But the theology of redemption emerging from this paradigm shift is still very much in the process of being developed and, in my judgment, has not yet responded adequately to either of the two central issues that any theology of redemption must address. The fundament of Christian faith is that God offers, through Christ, redemption from the oppressive reality of evil. Hence, a theological account of it must explain how redemption is effected for *both* the oppressed *as* oppressed, whom the traditional paradigm neglected, *and* the oppressor *as* oppressor.⁹ The new theology of redemption affirms that God empathetically identifies with the oppressed *as* oppressed, that God knows their suffering by virtue of undergoing their wounds. But it is difficult to understand how such empathetic identification with the suffering of the violated can possibly be redemptive if, as the new theology argues, this suffering is precisely the evil from which the oppressed need to be redeemed.¹⁰ Indeed, if suffering is the evil that needs to be redeemed, then God's identification with the oppressed can have no other effect than to infinitely exacerbate the already inexhaustible horror of the evil to which it is supposed to be a response. It can add

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann makes the point in this way: "Traditional doctrines of justification are sin oriented; modern liberation theology is victim oriented. Both sides belong together in a world of sin and suffering, violence and victims" ("The Crucified God: Yesterday and Today: 1972–2002," in *Cross Examinations* 127–38, at 131).

¹⁰ The problem is especially acute if one argues, as process theology does, that God's empathy with human sufferers introduces suffering into God. As Karl Rahner says, "It does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament" (quoted by Moltmann, *ibid.* 134–35).

divine intensity to the cry of the poor but not succor them from violence. Precisely because the new paradigm summons us to consider evil from the point of view of the violated, it compels us to ask, with more intensity and urgency than ever before, how God responds to the questions that pour forth from their wounds, questions that ask how God responds to the evil itself that is being done and to the evil-doers who are doing it. If the blood of the Crucified who identifies with the violated does not redeem, does it *indict*? If the Crucifixion is no substitute for penal satisfaction, if it is, on the contrary, the paradigmatic image of all historical horrors, does it *condemn* the oppressors who perpetrate it and call down upon them God's righteous judgment and just punishment? It is, to say the least, surprising that the new heuristic of empathetic identification can lead us to ask such questions, given the fact that it has been developed as a radical alternative to the logic of retribution. That it does lead to such questions suggests that there may be profound truths hidden in the folds of the logic of retribution that neither the traditional paradigm nor the critique of it has appreciated. It also suggests that the new paradigm for understanding the Crucifixion raises more questions regarding the theology of redemption than it has so far been able to answer.

That the new paradigm gives rise to difficult questions is, however, a merit, not a defect. For addressing these questions requires us to adopt the perspective of the oppressed and hence has the potential to break us open to redemptive truths that traditional theologies of redemption could not access. In the following pages, I try to find my way to such truths. I should emphasize that the kind of theological reflection I offer here is no substitute for a study of the historical Jesus and the historical event of the Crucifixion. We have no access to this event or to the person who suffered it except through painstaking historical inquiry of the sort undertaken by N. T. Wright. But as Wright has explained,¹¹ such inquiry requires developing hypotheses that provide a compelling explanation of the historical data, and it is not possible to develop such hypotheses without relying on a conceptual matrix—a complex web of theoretical meanings. Wright and other historical scholars argue that hypotheses that rely on the heuristic of

¹¹ See N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 31–144. Wright's conception of method is largely compatible with Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, and the "critical realism" he advocates is analogous to that developed by Lonergan in *Insight*. However, Wright's thinking does not make the decisive turn that Lonergan makes when he identifies being not with the empirically given but with what we access through experience, insight, and judgment.

Described in terms of Lonergan's theological "specialties," my article is an exercise in "dialectic," which leads to the formulation of some crucial "foundational" truths.

empathetic identification do, in fact, provide compelling insights into the data available to us regarding the historical Jesus and the historical event of the Crucifixion. However, to clarify the web of meanings that these hypotheses employ, to distinguish it from the web of meanings to which the heuristic of retribution is wedded, and to assess the merits of these alternative conceptual matrices requires theological reflection of the sort I attempt here.

Such theological reflection need not be and, in my judgment, should not be only an exercise of theoretical intelligence; it ought to engage one's historical subjectivity *as a whole*. To use the biblical locution, it ought to engage the heart, that is, the core of one's historical being. This is especially the case when the purpose of such reflection is to enhance our understanding of the heuristic of empathetic identification. For appreciating the full import of this heuristic involves trying to hear, understand, and speak on behalf of the violated who cry out to the divine You. Theologizing from the heart enables us to hear the existential reverberations of this cry, and identifying with it has the potential to make theology prayerful. This does not disadvantage theological intelligence; it allows theological intelligence to become an exercise in *caritas*. That is why, in this article, I address the divine You, instead of talking about God.

I begin this exercise in heartfelt theological reflection by exploring the reality of evil as it is experienced by those who suffer it. This leads to a reconsideration of the logic of retribution and, from that, toward a theology of the Crucifixion that enables us to appreciate how the Crucified One, in the very process of being crucified, responds redemptively to both the violated and the violent.

EVIL AS CUL-DE-SAC

If redemption is the divine response to the reality of human evil, if it is, as Bernard Lonergan has argued, the process by which divine love transforms historical evil into good,¹² it is possible for us to come to some understanding of redemption only if we first come to some understanding of the evil that is to be transformed by it.¹³

¹² See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed., rev. and aug., ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992) 709–51. In *De Verbo Incarnato* 565–68 (Hefling translation), Lonergan explains Christ's redemptive action in terms of Aristotle's four causes. Considered from this point of view, evil is the material cause of redemption—the matter to be transformed (566). Thesis 17 argues that God “has willed, not to do away with the evils of the human race through power, but to convert those evils into a supreme good according to the just and mysterious Law of the Cross” (552, Hefling translation).

¹³ In Lonergan's terms, understanding evil requires an inverse insight, that is, an insight that does not understand the intelligibility immanent in phenomena but

Historical evil involves a voluntary decision to commit an act that violates an objective good. Put more concretely, it always involves an oppressor and someone who is oppressed, an agent who does evil and a victim who suffers evil.¹⁴ (Even when the perpetrator and the victim are the same person, as in the case of self-hatred and suicide, the person as victim and the person as perpetrator are and have to be considered, from the moral point of view, distinct from each other). Our philosophical and theological traditions customarily locate evil principally in the violator—in the subjective intention of the agent who perpetrates it. (It is because evil is located in the evil-doer that gradations of intent determine the gravity of offenses.) Indeed, the Stoic and the Kantian, influenced by Socrates' arguments in the *Gorgias*, are inclined to claim or imply that we can only commit moral evil and cannot suffer it because moral evil, by definition, requires the intention to do evil. Traditional theologies of redemption imply that this view of evil is correct insofar as the account of redemption they propose concerns *only* evildoers, not those to whom evil is done.

But what makes a human intention evil is the evil character of what it intends. And what is intended is evil only because it violates an existing ontological/moral good. In the theological tradition that Anselm helps to create, this good is identified with the divine, and sin is defined as “dishonoring God” by “taking away from God what is his.”¹⁵ God is the one against whom the “offense” of sin is principally and primarily committed. But the same tradition that asserts this also insists that “nothing can be added to, or subtracted from, the honor of God” because the latter is “inherently incorruptible and in no way capable of change.”¹⁶ The divine You cannot be injured or harmed and so cannot be the victim who suffers evil because, as Aquinas explains, there is no passive potency in the divine act.¹⁷ While evil *is* contrary to Your will, it is so not because it does violence to You but because it insults, injures, harms—in some way violates—the goodness ontologically intrinsic to one of the creatures You

rather recognizes that a phenomenon is unintelligible (*Insight* 43–50). I think it important to emphasize that, in the case of evil, the “un” signifies not simply the lack of intelligibility (and being) but the violation or undoing of intelligibility (and being). Anselm emphasizes this aspect of evil in his essay on redemption; see “Why God Became Man,” trans. Janet Fairweather, in Anselm, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (New York: Oxford University, 1998) 1.15.

¹⁴ In this article I focus exclusively on human persons as victims of evil. But the “victim” of evil is not necessarily a person. Because of the ontological goodness immanent in and constitutive of every creature, as well as creation as a whole, and because of the fact that every creature can be affected by what is done to it, every creature is susceptible to violation in the moral sense of “violation.”

¹⁵ Anselm, “Why God Became Man” 1.11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1.15.

¹⁷ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 1, chap. 16.

have loved into being.¹⁸ Because it does such violence, we can say that evil is abhorrent to You, meaning not that Your experience of horror is like ours but that our experience of evil as horrific gives us an inkling of how opposed evil is to Your intentions for creation. Evil “offends” You because of the fact that it violates the created order. It follows from this that *the primary locus of evil is the injury, the harm, the wound, that is inflicted on the creature.*¹⁹ If we are to face the reality of historical evil, we must focus *principally* on the violence suffered by the oppressed.

While the traditional theologies that are influenced by the heuristic of retribution fixate theological attention on the sinner, Christian iconography provides us, to some degree at least, a corrective to this one-dimensional theological orientation—if we can liberate our experience of it from the traditional interpretation of its meaning. We see in such iconography precisely what Girard claims Christianity was the first to expose: the slaughter of the innocent, the paradigm of violence. If Rogier Van der Weyden gives us a more compelling image of this violence than Matthias Grünewald, it is precisely because the crucified body of Van der Weyden’s Jesus is as tender and fragile as the body of a child; it is the defenseless, unassuming body of innocence itself. There is often included in the scene that such iconography depicts most if not all of the elements needed to make it a paradigmatic image of historical horror: the soldiers finishing the murder; the crowd encouraging the soldiers out of fear and envy of them;²⁰ a few figures weeping over what is happening but impotent to help; and, in the center of the scene, as at the very heart of history itself, the mortally wounded body of an innocent. The data available to us about the historical event of the Crucifixion suggest that this traditional iconographical portrayal is not inaccurate.

We say when we see such a wounded body—any violation of the innocence inherent in creation—that “it cries out to heaven.” And if it does not or cannot so cry out, something in us summons us to do so on its behalf.

¹⁸ In Anselm’s words, the sinner “is disturbing, as far as he is able, the order and beauty of the universe” (“Why God Became Man” 1.15).

¹⁹ In discussing evil, I rely throughout the article on the image of a wound in the hope that it suggests an undoing or violation that is irreducible to the ontological “not.” Evil, I would argue, is horrific in a way that the ontological “not” is not. I find John Millbank’s account of evil in his *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003) problematic because it overstates the similarity of evil to illusion and fails to fully appreciate evil as an irrevocable wounding or tearing of the goodness of being. This leads him to propose what I consider a nostalgic account of forgiveness, according to which it entails a “restoration of paradise” (54). The resurrected Jesus is not restored to a prelapsarian condition. The wounds are not only still present; they are still open.

²⁰ This description of the crowd is inspired by Elias Canetti’s depiction in his *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Viking, 1966).

This protest, addressed to whatever divinity may exist, calls upon the divine to bring justice to bear on human history.²¹ It is motivated by and charged with moral outrage, a passion in which love of the good and hatred of evil intermix and intensify each other. Moral outrage includes moral horror, but it is not simply aghast at evil; it wholeheartedly and unequivocally revolts against it. Moral outrage differs from rage *simpliciter* because of the fact that what enrages it is the violation of a moral good; it differs from love *simpliciter* because it is the response of love to the violation of what deserves to be loved—the original goodness of the world. There is always audible in outrage the cry of violated innocence—the anguish of an irreparable loss and an unbearable grief. Evil is not an event that happens *in* the world as we know it; it is an event that happens *to* world as we know it. Evil is world-shattering. Because it violates the sacral order of creation that is anterior to it, the moral outrage that revolts against it is inherently nostalgic: it is intent on retrieving the original order of the world that evil has shattered. Once evil is done, once it is introduced into history, the categorical imperative to live justly commands us to retrieve the original order evil has shattered.

History itself, however, makes it impossible for us to meet the demands of this categorical imperative. The historical reality of evil is a moral outrage that ought not to exist; but once evil has been committed, the very irreversibility of history makes it impossible for us to undo or erase it and hence renders us morally impotent. We *cannot* do what we *ought* to do.²²

²¹ To say that moral intelligence responds to evil by spontaneously calling upon the divine to bring justice to human history is analogous to saying, as Kant does, that practical reason is compelled to postulate a divine agent capable of bringing happiness to the morally righteous. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956) 128–36.

²² That historical evil ought to but cannot be reversed belies the Kantian claim that “ought” implies “can.” “Ought” implies “ought to be able to”; but part of the horror of evil as a historical reality is that its irreversibility morally incapacitates us. By virtue of the fact that this incapacity is consequent upon the first human sin, it is appropriate to affirm that this “original sin” irreparably and irreversibly altered the human condition. Kant does not recognize “fallenness” in this sense. He does say that we are born in a “fallen” condition insofar as we are predisposed to act on the basis of desire rather than for the sake of doing our moral duty (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans., intro. and notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson [New York: Harper & Row, 1960] 15–50). But this insight into our psychological predispositions leaves entirely out of account the objective reality of historical evil—the violence done to the innocent. This oversight is not surprising, given Kant’s identification of the moral good with the subjective intention of the agent. It is only in Kant’s unequivocal and unconditional endorsement of retributive punishment that we find an implicit acknowledgment of the exigence to reverse historical evil (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., intro., notes by Mary Gregor [New York: Cambridge University, 1991] 140–45 and 168–69). But Kant’s

What Christians call “original sin” is world-shattering not because the divine You appends disastrous consequences to an action that would otherwise lack them. It is world-shattering because, once evil is done, historicity makes irretrievable the order of justice that evil ruptures. This impossibility of erasing injustice and retrieving the original condition produces a conflict that would otherwise not exist—a conflict between normative order and historicity as such. For normative order requires undoing what historicity makes irrevocable. The recognition of this irrevocability, the recognition that it is impossible to erase and hence necessary to *bear* horrific evil, gives rise to anguish—in fact, to the most excruciating modality of anguish that the human heart can experience because there is in it not only the grief of irretrievable loss but the *dolor* of having to bear what is morally unbearable.

We will be in a better position to appreciate why evil is unbearable if we pause to consider whether we can apply to the oppressed person’s experience of it the “stages of grief” that our therapeutic culture tries to apply to *all* traumatizing ordeals. Anger, as a stage of grief, is comparable to what I have been calling moral outrage: unlike denial, it acknowledges that something terrible has happened or is happening, but it refuses to accept what has happened and is determined to resist it. Depression replaces anger when the will to resist is still operative, but the futility of resistance is recognized. The stage of “acceptance” arrives when one not only recognizes that the terrible reality is inescapable but accepts it *as* inescapable. According to the therapeutic account, “acceptance” leads one to abandon resistance and become reconciled to the unavoidable; it enables one to “move past” the past and “move on” to a future unaffected by it. Applying these “stages” to the experience of evil implies that, while the oppressed person may initially be morally outraged by evil and long to retrieve the condition shattered by it, outrage must yield to the depressing realization that evil has to be borne since history is irreversible. And this depressing realization can then lead one to an “acceptance” of the evil that has been done and so enable one to “get on” with one’s life.

This heuristic is profoundly problematic when applied to *any* traumatizing ordeal because it fails to appreciate the world-shattering character of trauma.²³ But it is especially inappropriate—even morally outrageous—to apply this heuristic to the experience of evil. For accepting evil as a “fact of life” and “moving on” involves normalizing it, and normalizing evil is itself

belief that such punishment can bring humans to justice and justice to humans fails to take into account what I argue below—that punishment cannot undo the evil it punishes.

²³ I argue this in *The Way of Suffering: A Geography of Crisis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1988).

morally horrifying since it involves complicity with it.²⁴ To think of evil as a “part” of life is to fail to appreciate the fact that it cannot be assimilated into a way-of-life devoted to the good. This is precisely why evil is not “part” of life but life-shattering. Applying the “stage of acceptance” to an experience of evil would be nothing but an exercise in denial; it would domesticate evil by repressing its very character *as* world-shattering. To fully appreciate the horror of evil *as* a life-shattering reality, we have to recognize that evil raises the question of whether it is possible to go on: it throws into question the very possibility of a future. The issue is whether it is possible to live with evil. The oppressed person cannot assimilate the violence of oppression into her ongoing moral life because violence is contrary to normative order. She cannot erase evil because history is irreversible. Because evil, once it occurs, is inescapable, one must bear it. Because it is morally horrific and hence impossible to assimilate into a moral life, it is unbearable. It is necessary, then, to bear what cannot be borne. Recognizing evil as horrifying engenders moral outrage—an unequivocal refusal to accept it and a wholehearted determination to erase it. Recognizing that it is impossible to erase it leads to the anguish of having to bear what ought not be borne. The anguish does not quiet the outrage, and the outrage provides no way out of the anguish. The anguish and the outrage exacerbate each other. For the very fact that it is necessary to bear the unbearable reality of evil compounds its horror. The more horrifying evil is, the greater the outrage it provokes, and the more excruciating it is to have to bear it. We can imagine a dialectic in which outrage and anguish intensify each other until they are finally brought together in a single heartrending torment.

When considered from the point of view of the victim, evil is a *cul-de-sac*. But it is also, ironically, and for similar reasons, a *cul-de-sac* for the *violator*, if the violator is repentant.

Recognition of culpability—acknowledgment of guilt—is a prerequisite of repentance. But, contrary to what traditional theological accounts of repentance may lead one to suppose, the logic of guilt does not lead the perpetrator to focus primarily on the impact his evil act has on his own moral stature. The belief that it does so is related to, if it does not derive from, the Socratic/

²⁴ Malcolm X is a paradigmatic example of an individual who refuses to accept the historical reality of evil because he recognizes that such acceptance involves complicity. To accept being an American as if it were simply a matter of historical fact, would involve, in his view, being complicit with the society that kidnapped his ancestors. Because he refused to accept this kidnapping and to deny that he was African, he argued that the United Nations, not the American court system, was the appropriate venue for addressing the injustices to which he and his fellow kidnap victims were subjected in the United States. See Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992) 6, 19.

Stoic view that moral evil principally consists in severing one's own relationship to normative order. But an act is not evil because it severs my relationship to the good; it severs my relationship to the good because it is evil. And what makes it evil is that it violates an objective good. When I try to avoid facing my guilt, I try to avoid thinking about what I have done. But guilt has a kind of power over me that I am unable to entirely evade; it keeps gnawing at me in an effort to make me reflect on it and discern what is producing it. When I finally do reflect on my actions, in the hope that guilt will cease to gnaw at me, it leads me, like a trail of blood, to the Other whom I have violated—to the Other whose blood is on my hands. To acknowledge guilt, I must look upon the wound that I have inflicted. To repent, to be contrite, is to find this wound unbearable, and be willing to do anything I can to remove it. Just as guilt requires me to fixate my gaze not on my own loss of moral stature but on the wound suffered by the person I have oppressed, repentance is not my regretting what I have done because of the impact it has on me; it is my regretting the horrifying violence I have done to the Other. I am morally compelled to look upon this wound I have inflicted—and morally compelled to turn away from it in horror.

It is precisely because of my having inflicted this wound, which I cannot bear to look upon, that I cannot bear to be in my own presence. The unrelenting logic of repentance begins with the impossibility of living with the violence I have done to the Other and leads from there, with inexorable logic, to the impossibility of living with myself. Here again, contrition imposes an impossible exigence: it prohibits my turning away from who I am and fleeing into denial—and it requires me to recognize myself as abhorrent and to turn away from myself. We know, through guilt and repentance, that it is not possible to separate the violator from his violence, the sinner from his sin. I am a sinner precisely because I committed myself to sin, became sin-full; I am a sinner because I *am* sin, am evil—hence abhorrent and unlovable.²⁵ When I try to imagine giving voice to who I am, I imagine a scream of abjection that expresses the horror involved in my having to be a self I find horrifying because of the horrifying evil I have done to the Other.

As for the oppressed, so too for the oppressor, the only salvific possibility is an impossibility: reversing time, undoing what has been done, retrieving the condition antecedent to the violation. The repentant oppressor would do anything to erase the wound, to rescind his deed, to retract the decision that led to it, but the irreversibility of history renders all efforts to do these things futile. And precisely because it is impossible to go back, it is also impossible to go on. For the oppressor would be able to go on only if

²⁵ It does not follow from this that I am *only* sin or that my being is *reducible* to evil.

he could “move past” what he has done to a relationship with normative order which is unaffected by it. But because the oppressor *is* the sin he has committed, he cannot enter into relationship with the good because the evil he is is incompatible with it. The impossibility of reversing what he has done cuts him off from the future. History is a cul-de-sac in which he is trapped, and his own historicity makes it impossible for him to escape it. Unable to retrieve the condition antecedent to sin, unable to access a future unaffected by it, he is compelled to live with what his contrition makes unbearable.

ATONEMENT AND RETRIBUTION AS RESPONSES TO THE CRY FOR JUSTICE

Original justice—the condition of wholeness or integrity anterior to the doing and suffering of evil—is irretrievable. Nevertheless, once evil occurs, *some* effort must be made to redress injustice—to repair, remedy, heal the rupture/wound that evil produces. No repair, no healing, can possibly be so efficacious that it erases what has occurred and reverses history. But to “go on” as if nothing world-shattering has occurred, or to pursue revenge by making victims of violators, would involve a horrifying complicity in evil. When the wound “cries out to heaven,” the divine You responds to this cry by teaching us through our own reasoning, and Your revelation to the nations, that some atonement must be made, some penalty must be paid, if justice is not to be utterly eclipsed. We might say that the purpose of atonement and punishment is to turn history back toward the moral future from which evil closes it off.

Atonement is by definition voluntary, while punishment is by definition coercive. But in spite of this difference, each can help illuminate the meaning of the other. Just as the one who longs to atone undertakes penitential practices comparable to punishments, so too the violator subjected to punishment can accept it as a penitential practice he must perform to make atonement.²⁶ If a violator is repentant, this does not mean that the suffering that punishment entails is morally unnecessary or unjustifiable; it means only that the punishment is suffered voluntarily and so transformed into atonement. What is crucial for us here is to come to some understanding of why punishment requires suffering and why the logic of repentance leads one to suffer voluntarily.

While theories of punishment based on deterrence, rehabilitation, and retribution differ profoundly from one another, suffering usually plays a

²⁶ R. A. Duff, *Trials and Punishments* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991), develops a theory of punishment that is based on his very illuminating insights into its relationship with repentance.

crucial role in all of them. If punishment is to deter other possible violators, it must, as Jeremy Bentham argues, be sufficiently painful or costly to outweigh the benefits of violence;²⁷ if punishment is to have a transformative effect on the psyche, it must, as Plato explains, purge and reorganize it, both of which are painful processes,²⁸ and if punishment is to be retributive, it must entail a suffering comparable to that suffered by the victim. However, as even this spare explanation of them makes clear, only the retributivist theory connects penal suffering directly to the suffering undergone by the victim and insists that suffering is required if the evil done to the victim is to be redressed. Deterrence requires suffering only in order to influence the cost-benefit calculations of human agents; rehabilitation requires suffering only to the degree that it is necessary for the transformation of character. The retributivist alone argues that justice itself demands that the perpetrator suffer, even if he is already repentant and entirely rehabilitated, and even if the suffering he undergoes can have no deterrent value.²⁹

Contemporary theological critics of retribution identify it with revenge, that is, with a response to evil that repeats the violence it purports to abhor, and they do so precisely because of the fact that it requires the violator to suffer. Jean Luc-Marion has articulated succinctly the profound mistake that retribution supposedly entails: “this is where evil wins its first victory: it compels the sufferer to maintain his innocence by an accusation, to perpetuate suffering through the demand for another suffering, to oppose evil with counter-evil.”³⁰ And it is the connection between the logic of retributive justice and the concept of sacrificial atonement that leads Girard to decry both as characteristic of a religious orientation that sacralizes violence.³¹ From the point of view espoused by Marion, Girard, and

²⁷ See Jeremy Bentham, “Of the Proportion between Punishments and Offences,” in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, reprinted in *Punishment and Rehabilitation*, 3rd ed., ed. Jeffrie G. Murphy (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1995) 21–35.

²⁸ See Plato, *The Gorgias* 480.

²⁹ This is the position advocated by Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

³⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University, 2002) 5.

³¹ See, for example, Girard, *Things Hidden*, passim. Girard’s claim that, prior to Judeo-Christian revelation, human culture sacralized violence implies that human beings are inherently bent toward violence and fail to recognize it as a violation of the sacred. I do not understand how this view can be made compatible with Genesis or with the Christian conception of original sin as a fall, as James Alison claims it to be in *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroads, 1998). For it would seem that in Girard’s view there is no original integrity in the historical subject or in human history, only an original violence. Girard’s theory of the sacred is similar in a number of crucial respects to that developed by George Bataille, insofar as Bataille also connects the human

the theological critics of retribution, ascribing retribution and the demand for sacrificial atonement to the divine You is part of the process by which culture creates a law of justice to rationalize and disguise its own practice of murder. And this law, this logic, only serves to turn history into an ever accelerating gyre of violence. The alternative to this logic, argue Marion and Girard, is to respond to evil with the kind of forgiving love that Jesus practices.

But such a view would require us to believe that what we call the longing for justice is only a shibboleth for the desire to violate, and that forgiving love is a moral duty, not a gift and unmerited grace. Moreover, this view simply assumes that requiring the violator to suffer is indistinguishable from doing violence to him, and that the victim's cry for justice is indistinguishable from a call for vengeance. The clue that suggests that these equations are profoundly erroneous is precisely the intimate connection that exists between retributive punishment and repentance. Tracking the logic of this connection will enable us to understand that, just as it is a grave mistake to confuse repentance with masochistic self-loathing, so it is a grave mistake to confuse retribution with the practice of revenge.

The logic linking retribution and repentance derives from the wound of the violated. Whenever violence, in the moral sense of the word, is being done, there is an innocent victim; there issues from the wound of every innocent victim an anguished cry for justice. In its original form, this cry is the summons to help, the appeal for succor, that the victim expresses while violence is being done to her. But even after the violence has been done, even when the act that inflicts it is finished, this appeal for succor still resounds. The victim still needs to be ransomed; she still needs to be saved from the evil done to her, the wound inflicted on her, because it is impossible for it to be assimilated into moral order. The demand for justice is not originally issued by the political authority of the polis, or even by the divine You, who is the voice of moral order itself. It comes from the violated being of the innocent.

This cry for justice is addressed to moral order itself and therefore to anyone and everyone who is capable of appreciating moral exigencies. But the person who above all ought to hear it, the one person who is most profoundly obligated to respond to it, is the perpetrator who inflicted the wound. More than anyone else, I, the violator, am the one who ought to give succor to the person I have violated. When I recognize this—when I am repentant—this repentance leads me to will that the wound I inflicted

experience of the sacred to the cultic practice of violence (see his *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, 3 vols. [New York: Zone, 1993], esp. vols. 2 and 3). But dignity, not violence, is the centerpiece of Bataille's anthropology, which is far less reductionist and more dialectical than Girard's.

on the victim be removed from her. Repentance creates in me the longing to substitute myself for her and to bear in her stead the wound she has suffered because of my violence. This substitution is, however, a historical impossibility. I cannot suffer in place of the person I have violated; all I can do is *share* her wound, try to participate in the wound I have inflicted. Since every violator ought to be repentant, this is what every violator ought to will.³² Hence, it is entirely just and fitting that this suffering is precisely what retribution and sacrificial atonement require. Repentance sears the logic underlying retribution into the heart of the violator and so makes him or her willing to bear the suffering that punishment imposes. But repentance also sheds light on, without softening, the severity of retribution by enabling us to recognize that such punishment is summoned into being by the call for justice that issues from the violated. The purpose of retribution is to succor the violated from injustice by requiring the violator to share the wound he or she has inflicted.

As so conceived, retributive justice differs fundamentally from revenge with which critics of retribution confuse it;³³ for what summons it into being is the victim's longing to be rescued from evil, not the desire of the victim to violate her violator. If they desire revenge, the victim and those who identify with her want to repeat the violation that has occurred by doing to the violator what the violator has done. The desire for revenge is satisfied only when the violator is left in the same condition of abjection in which he left the victim. The victim's cry for justice, on the other hand, summons the violator to try to ameliorate her abjection by suffering in her place or at least by suffering with her the wound this violence has inflicted on her. By virtue of the fact that it is called into being by this summons, retributive punishment is an attempt to right the wrong, not repeat it, an attempt to undo violence by requiring the violator to share the burden of the suffering he has caused. If nothing obstructs the logic of revenge, it sets in motion a gyre of violence that has no end because it multiplies victims and turns every victim into a violator. In contrast, the logic of retribution attempts to be restorative and reconciliatory; it tries to bring justice to the violated by bringing the violator back into the fold of justice. This reconciliation requires that the violator suffer, but the purpose of his suffering is to succor the victim. Unlike revenge, which has nothing to look forward to

³² John L'Heureux's novel, *The Shrine at Altamira* (Grove, 1992), provides an excruciating and paradigmatic description of how repentance and retribution lead the violator to identify with the wound of the violated. It also illuminates what I discuss below: how forgiveness transforms the wound.

³³ The same confusion underlying the critique of retribution can underlie the defense of revenge, as it does at least to some degree in the case of Jeffrie Murphy (see "Getting Even: The Role of the Victim," in *Punishment and Rehabilitation* 132–51).

except violence upon violence and derives from a surreptitious despair regarding the possibility of justice, the logic of retribution is nostalgic for original justice and derives from the hope that it is possible to bring historical existence back into accord with normative order.

Once it is recognized that retributive justice differs fundamentally from revenge, the crucial moral question regarding it is whether it can achieve what it intends. To use the Reformers' preferred term for discussing these matters, can repentance and the voluntary suffering of punishment *justify* the violator? On the one hand, the fact that a violator is sorry for the injustice perpetrated, and has willingly borne the punishment imposed in the hope of redressing it to some degree, inclines us to believe that the violator is *entitled* to return to a rightful place in the human community, and that it would be wrong to disallow this. On this view, repentance and punishment suffice to correct evil. This view does not, however, take into account the fact that the original wound has not been removed. It is true that the punished and repentant violator shares in the wound—has become to some degree a participant in it. But no repentance however genuine, and no punishment however severe, can remove the wound from the victim or relocate it in the violator. In this sense, the injustice remains. And insofar as no retributive procedure or act of atonement can possibly undo or correct it, retribution and atonement do not suffice for justification—do not reconcile the violator with normative order. It would seem, then, that such reconciliation can be brought about only if repentance and punishment are supplemented by the gift of forgiveness—by an act of generosity that goes beyond justice for the purpose of “justifying” the violator.

This is, I believe, precisely the logic and the matrix of concepts underlying those traditional theologies of redemption that rely on the heuristic of retribution. The basic principle of these theologies is that, even if penance and punishment are necessary to reconcile the sinner to normative order, they do not suffice. No action or suffering of the sinner can bring him back into the “good graces” of the divine You; only Your grace can do this. “Justification,” reconciliation, can be brought about only by Your love for the sinner—a forgiving love that is undeserved because the irreparability and irreversibility of the evil the sinner has done makes him unworthy of it. Traditional theologies of redemption do not use the logic of retribution to explain Your unmerited love for us. They use it to explain why the conduit of this unmerited love is the Crucifixion—why divine love is enacted in and through death on a cross. The logic of retributive punishment, which is part of the law of divine justice itself, makes it appropriate, if not necessary, for Your unmerited love to take the form of Your suffering in place of our suffering what retribution would require us to bear. According to one version of the penal theology of redemption, You submit Yourself to the

regimen of retribution itself, undergoing punishment in our stead; because it is infinite in worth, Your suffering punishment can do what ours cannot, that is, pay in full the penalty for evil and hence meet the requirements of justice.³⁴ According to another version of penal theology, Your suffering on the cross is not punishment *per se* but involves suffering analogous to what punishment entails; it provides infinite “satisfaction” in place of punishment and thereby merits pardon for us.³⁵ But in the latter case, as in the former, it is the logic of punishment that provides the framework in terms of which the rationale for the Crucifixion is worked out.³⁶ Even the question at the heart of the debate between the Protestant and Catholic accounts of redemption, as these have traditionally been understood—the question as to whether repentance is a prerequisite for receiving, or a consequence set in motion by, Your forgiving love—leaves undisturbed the heuristic of retribution that conditions how it is posed. However this question is answered, redemption itself is identified with Christ’s loving substitution of his suffering for our punishment.

³⁴ As John Calvin puts it, “Accordingly, our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and the name of Adam in order to take Adam’s place in obeying the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God’s righteous judgment, and, in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved. . . . He offered as a sacrifice the flesh he received from us, that he might wipe out our guilt by his act of expiation and appease the Father’s righteous wrath” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 1:466–67).

In his attempt to distinguish what he calls the “classical idea” of atonement, which he attributes to the Fathers and especially to Luther, from the “Latin theory” of atonement, which he attributes to the medievals, Aulen argues at one point that, according to the former, divine Love “is infinite . . . , justifying men without any satisfaction of the Divine Justice” (*Christus Victor* 155). But if this were true, it would seem to imply that atonement and the suffering that atones are entirely superfluous. At other points Aulen argues that the “classical idea” differs from the “Latin theory” because the classical idea insists that “only a heavenly, divine, eternal sacrifice . . . made *to* God” (77; italics original) can cleanse us. If Christ makes such a sacrifice, it is because God asks for it as a way of making satisfaction for human sin.

³⁵ This is the view that Lonergan derives from Anselm and Aquinas and develops in thesis 16 of *De Verbo Incarnato* (486–552, Hefling translation). He opposes it to the view that Jesus undergoes punishment in our place, a position that he thinks is often espoused by thinkers in the Protestant tradition and sometimes by thinkers in the Catholic tradition.

³⁶ While Lonergan argues that Christ “incurred no punishment” and hence “cannot be said to have paid a penalty under God’s retributive justice,” he nevertheless continues to rely on the heuristic of retribution insofar as he argues that “Christ *took on* . . . the punishment owed for sins” although he “did not *incur*” this punishment (*ibid.* 497; emphasis original).

There is, however, a profound ambivalence inherent in such theologies of redemption. On the one hand, they insist that our redemption is made possible by the incursion of divine love into the regimen of retributive justice and by the transfusion of this love into us. This love is forgiving insofar as it is specifically offered us instead of, and in place of, the punishment we deserve. On the other hand, such theologies of redemption also insist that Your forgiving love does not disregard or even override the logic of punishment. On the contrary, redemptive love submits to the regimen of the Law insofar as it is willing either to suffer punishment as the Law requires or to undergo suffering that takes the place of this punishment. In such explanations of it, Christ's redemptive, forgiving love conforms to, or is at least amenable to, the logic of the economy into which it is infused, in spite of the fact that it is not itself governed by the logic of this economy. Forgiveness, as so construed, is a supplement to the Law and relies on the ambivalent logic of supplementarity that Derrida has diagnosed.³⁷ On the one hand, forgiving love transcends the Law insofar it is an undeserved, unmerited grace that goes beyond justice. On the other hand, forgiving love, as explained by penal theologies of redemption, is *only* a supplement to the Law insofar as it is given to us in the form of suffering that is at least analogous to what the Law requires. The meaning, logic, and propriety of the suffering that redemption involves derives from the law of justice and the justice of the law. In this sense, the Cross does not create its own logic or its own law. It is planted, as it were, in an economy that exists prior to and independently of it.

That there is something profoundly problematic about this account of redemption is indicated by the fact that, even though it is wedded to the logic of retributive punishment and is intent on satisfying the Law of justice, it focuses exclusively on the relevance of the Crucifixion to the perpetrator of evil and entirely ignores the very wound of the victim from which the logic of retributive punishment itself derives. Retribution, like repentance, requires the violator not only to recognize and reflect on this wound but to share in it. It follows from this that we can understand how the Crucifixion is related to the logic of retributive justice only if we first understand its import for the violated. If the Cross is Your response to evil, then even according to the logic of retribution, it cannot be principally and primarily Your response to the violator; it must be principally and primarily Your response to the wound that cries out to You for justice. But it is

³⁷ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976) 141–64, and 269–316. In his discussion of forgiveness, Derrida voices support for a “pure and unconditional forgiveness” which is not afflicted by the logic of supplementarity (*On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, pref. Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney [New York: Routledge, 2001]).

precisely the relevance of the Crucifixion to the victim of evil that is obscured when we view the crucified Jesus as a surrogate for the violator. For when we view the Crucifixion as the execution of divine retribution, or as the payment of a debt to You, or as an offering of satisfaction to You—in short, as an event that in some sense satisfies Your moral exigencies—it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to realize that what we are witnessing is first and foremost the murder of an innocent that is contrary to Your will. Girard is right to argue that the death of Jesus should not be construed as a sacrifice that satisfies Your sense of justice or propriety.³⁸ For Jesus is being murdered, and murder cannot possibly be part of Your justice—or a supplement to it. Insofar as it is a murder, the Crucifixion cannot possibly be the means of our justification. The crucified Jesus is not suffering retributive punishment at the hands of human agents implementing divine justice; he is suffering evil. The issue, then, is how can Jesus' death be the divine response to evil if it is itself evil—a horrific reality that cries out to heaven.

THE REDEMPTION OF THE VIOLATED

If we are to hypothesize that the Crucifixion is Your redemptive response to evil, we must begin by recognizing the crucified Jesus for what he is first and foremost: an innocent human being to whom evil is being done.

If Your redemptive response to *all* historical evil is incarnate in the historical Jesus at the Crucifixion, this implies that in and through him You embrace every historical victim. This embrace of the violated would then be the divine answer to every human wound that “cries out to heaven.” Jesus himself announces his relationship to all the violated when he says that anyone who gives succor “to the least” of his brethren, gives succor to him (Mt 25:40). On its first level, this statement announces the fact that Jesus, as a human being, affiliates himself with every human person who is, has been, or will be in need of succor. But the church has always understood this to be a statement of Jesus as *Christ*—a statement in which You give Your Word to us. On this deeper level, the statement can be heard as an announcement that You respond to the horrific reality of human evil by entering into solidarity with every historical individual who has been violated. As Jesus describes it, this solidarity is so intimate, so profound, so complete, that it is nothing less than an identification. This suggests that Your Word responds to the historical reality of evil principally and primarily by becoming one with the violated. If it is modeled after, and a consequence of, Your identification of Your Word with the human Jesus, this radical solidarity uniting You with the violated is as charged

³⁸ See, for example, Girard, *Things Hidden* 141–262.

with ontological import as the Incarnation itself: it means that You *become* every violated person.

This is the same modality of speech that has historically been employed to describe the Incarnation—to describe Your will to “descend” into the world, the flow of love out of Yourself and into human history: to emphasize that when You pour Your love into history You hold nothing back, we say that You become human. According to process theology of the sort developed by Jürgen Moltmann, this becoming affects You—alters the character of Your being.³⁹ But if such a change in You were to occur, it cannot possibly be constitutive of redemption. For it would mean that You Yourself are the victim of history. And if this is the case, then history is in infinitely greater need of redemption than it would otherwise be—and incapable of being redeemed since there would be no one capable of redeeming it.

But the “classical” conviction that there is no passive potency in Your divine act throws open to us another way of interpreting the belief that, at the Crucifixion, You become the violated. The belief that You do not change does *not* require us to abandon this locution. It requires us to affirm that becoming the violated does not alter You; rather, it alters the suffering You assume, the wound You become, the violated with whom You identify. Such an identification would be ontologically transformative: by virtue of Your identifying Yourself with her, every human victim, whether or not she experiences and realizes it, would become divine. Your response to the wound that cries out to heaven would be to divinize it—to pour Your love into it so that it becomes You.

The pouring of divine love into this wound cannot remove it or erase it. It cannot even close it or heal it. The slaughter of the innocent cannot be reversed. Evil, once done, cannot be undone. The original integrity of the world is irretrievable. If this original integrity could be retrieved, the resurrected body of Jesus would have no wounds; he would have been made whole. But redemptive love is not restorative: it does not enable the wounded to re-turn to the condition of wholeness antecedent to their suffering of violence. The wounds of the resurrected Jesus remain open. It does not follow, however, that this is a defect in the Resurrection, or that divinizing love fails. It can mean that You embrace and pour Yourself into the wound itself. The recipient of divinizing love would then be not the victim in her original goodness but precisely the victim *as* victim—the wound *as* wound.

The original goodness of the victim, which You proclaim and celebrate at creation, has not been destroyed; it has been irreparably violated. The victim cannot bear to look upon her self in her original goodness because she cannot do so without seeing, and turning away in repugnance from, the

³⁹ See Jürgen Moltmann, “The Crucified God,” in *Cross Examinations* 127–38.

horrific wound that has defaced this goodness. There is, however, no place she can turn away *to*. The horror, which is unbearable, has to be borne, and it is the necessity of bearing the unbearable that makes the victim cry out in anguish. Redemptive love has to be a response to precisely this shriek of horror. Unlike the divine acclamation at creation, redemptive love cannot be directed toward the creature in her original glory; its intended recipient has to be the victim in her very abjection. If divine love is responsive to the horrific evil done to the victim, then it embraces her precisely *as* the bearer of it; it reaches all the way down to the place in the violated where the wound that she cannot bear to face and cannot escape is located. And in entering this place, in embracing the victim *in* her very abjection, You would be “taking upon” Yourself the very evil—the very sin—that is humanly unbearable.

What would this “taking upon,” this “bearing” of sin, entail? First of all, it would involve suffering, that is, passion in its etymological sense. “Suffering” here does not mean simply undergoing; it involves “allowing,” “letting be done,” instead of resisting, rejecting, overpowering, eliminating. To say that the divine You “bears” evil is to say, in the first place, what You do *not* do: You do not vanquish evil through an exercise of divine power. But in “suffering” sin, the divine You would not just refrain from repulsing evil; You would lovingly bear, tenderly embrace, the very wound of evil that afflicts the victim. To say that the wound of evil is borne by the divine You would be to say that this wound is enfolded into Your grace through an exercise of generosity that it is humanly impossible to comprehend. There would be a divine madness here that defies all the expectations of human reason and offends our human sensibilities: we would have to affirm that You pour into the very wound of evil a love that enfolds this wound in Your divinity. This divinizing love, if it were to freely circulate in the victim, would do what would otherwise be not only impossible but unimaginable and inconceivable: flooding the wound with love, it would ontologically transform it into a fountain. What flows from this fountain would be precisely the divine love that is poured into it. Toward whom would this love flow? It would move, with a kind of inexorable divine gravity, toward the place in the universe that most needs it because it least deserves it; it would flow toward the violator. To appreciate what this flow would entail, we have to try to discern how divinizing love flowing from the wound of the victim would affect the violator who inflicted it.

THE REDEMPTION OF THE VIOLATOR

As a repentant violator, I cannot bear to look upon, and would do anything to undo, the wound I have inflicted. But if, in the madness of divine irony, this wound is transformed into a fountain, then redemption

flows to me from it. The Crucifixion would be the original enactment of this divine irony; it would simultaneously be murder and benediction, unbearable horror and transforming grace. If it is true that, in the historical Jesus of Nazareth, divinizing Love circulates without hindrance,⁴⁰ this would mean that, when my violence causes a fatal wound in him, there immediately flows from this wound, as from a fountain, a love that is directed toward me in my very character as a murderer. The very murder I commit is thereby transformed by the one who suffers it into an act of donative love for me. The blood my violence draws is shed on my behalf. The wound itself becomes the spring that enables forgiveness to flow from the violated to the violator.

Precisely because it would be directed toward the murderer in his very character *as* a murderer, forgiveness would shatter the belief that underlies and informs our entire moral life—our belief that no one can possibly look upon what is abhorrent and intrinsically unlovable in us without recoiling from it in horror.⁴¹ This belief makes guilt and shame inextricable from each other: I cannot admit to myself that I am a murderer without realizing that, if others knew the truth about me, they would find me utterly repugnant; I cannot realize there is something in me that others will find repugnant without desperately desiring to cover it up. And if human others must recoil from me in horror, then all the more so must the divine You whose very being is goodness itself. If it had a million years, human intelligence would not be able to imagine the possibility that there is a kind of love capable of tenderly embracing the abhorrent. For, from the human point of view, as Aristotle says, “not everything can be loved, but only what is good.”⁴² The love Paul describes, the love that embraces us “while we [are] still sinners” (Rom 5:8)—while we are unlovable—is, for us, morally unimaginable, logically inconceivable, historically impossible.

⁴⁰ John Millbank emphasizes that forgiving love circulates in Jesus the Christ without first having to overcome what he calls rancor. See Millbank, *Being Reconciled*, esp. 61–93. I would distinguish the righteous anger of the oppressed from rancor as well as from the desire for revenge.

⁴¹ Millbank considers the idea of loving the unlovable a “perversion of the gospel,” and claims that forgiveness involves “attending to what remains positively loveable” in the violator (*Being Reconciled* 52). This would mean that, when Jesus speaks of loving not just one’s friends but one’s enemies, he means simply that we should locate some basis of friendship in our enemies and ignore the enemy *as* enemy. But if there is some lovable goodness in our enemies, finding and responding to it is a moral duty, not an undeserved generosity. Performing such a duty does not in principle require divine grace. The kind of love that Millbank considers a perversion of the gospel is, in my judgment, precisely the revolutionary kind of love that is constitutive of the Good News. It is a kind of love that, from the point of view of pagan philosophy, was unimaginable and inconceivable.

⁴² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1165b.

Indeed, this love is so unimaginable and inconceivable that we often explain forgiveness in a way that does not require it. We are inclined to build a rational case for forgiveness by emphasizing the violator's repentance and his willingness to suffer punishment, or by arguing that he is still an end-in-himself, that there still exists in him the original goodness of created being and hence the capacity for repentance and moral conversion.⁴³ Recognizing in the violator positive characteristics that are intrinsically good and hence lovable makes it possible—and, we are wont to think, morally justifiable—for us to look past what is abhorrent in the violator, and so to forgive him. Forgiveness, as so construed, is entirely consonant with our moral sensibilities and can easily be assimilated into the human framework of moral reasoning, for it involves looking away from what we, as human, cannot possibly embrace—the violator *as* violator. But looking away from the violator *as* violator involves looking away from his violence; and looking away from his violence involves looking away from the wound in the violated—the very wound that cries out for justice. In short, forgiveness as so conceived involves looking away from the very reality of evil to which forgiveness is supposed to be a response. And it looks away from this reality precisely because responding lovingly to it is humanly unimaginable and inconceivable.

But if forgiveness flows from the very wounds of the historical Jesus, then it *is* this unimaginable, inconceivable, impossible love. For such forgiveness would not look past the evil I have done and so would not look past the evil in me in the hope of finding some vestige of the lovable. It would be offered to the evil in me—to the unlovable *as* unlovable; it would track down the murderer in me so that it can give to this murderer, as a gift, the very life he is taking. If this is what is happening in and through the Crucifixion, then what is unimaginable, inconceivable, and humanly impossible is occurring: You turn my murder of You into Your dying out of love for me *as* Your murderer. What flows from the wound I inflict would then be a river of blood that baptizes me into grace. There is no love that could possibly be more excruciating to give than such forgiveness because it comes from the very wound that violence inflicts. This is why it is, in its very essence, crucifying, why it is a love that can be enacted and expressed only by an outpouring of blood. And precisely because such forgiveness is excruciating for the giver, it must be so for the recipient. The violator *as* violator, would be able to receive what flows toward him from the wound of the victim only by opening himself *to* this wound and allowing himself to be affected by it. But to open oneself to a wound is to become an open wound. Just as such forgiveness would not erase the wound of the victim or

⁴³ An excellent example of such argumentation is Trudy Govier's *Forgiveness and Revenge* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

enable the retrieval of original wholeness, so it would not “wash away” evil from the violator or restore the violator’s original integrity. Forgiveness would ontologically transform the wound of the victim into a fountain; to receive it, the violator must drink from this spring. The excruciating love that flows from it would not remove, diminish, or assuage the torment I experience when I realize that I am evil. It would transform the torment of being unlovable into the anguish of being loved. To be loved in this way is ex-cruc-iating because the very tenderness of this love tears my heart open and makes *it* a wound. There is nothing in the universe that could be as poignant as being forgiven—or as heart-wrenching. There is no human pain as traumatizing as the anguish of being loved *in* one’s evil—and no human joy that remotely approaches the ec-stasis constitutive of it. The violator, in receiving forgiveness, would become the open wound he inflicted.⁴⁴ This wound is itself redemptive if divine grace transforms it into a fountain of forgiveness. To receive forgiveness is to become the body and blood of the person one has murdered.

THE LAW OF THE CROSS AS THE LOGIC OF DIVINE MADNESS

If the Crucifixion introduces such forgiveness into human history, then it creates a new law—the Law of the Cross—which does not follow, and cannot be understood in terms of, the moral logic of the Law antecedent to it. For, according to the conception of it being proposed here, the Crucifixion

- (1) does not enable either the violated or the violator to return to their original condition of integrity; it is not restorative and does not lead back to a state of being antecedent to evil. Forgiveness does not erase the wound that the violator inflicts and the victim suffers; indeed, it does not even close this wound.

Moreover, the Crucifixion

- (2) does not satisfy what have traditionally been construed as the implacable requirements of divine justice. For the Crucifixion itself, since it involves the murder of an innocent, calls out for punishment and so

⁴⁴ The fear that forgiveness, if disassociated from the logic of retribution, would involve the gratuitous release of the violator from suffering rests on the assumption that forgiveness simply “wipes the slate clean” so that being forgiven involves simply a remission of sin and punishment. This way of understanding forgiveness fails to take into account that it flows from the wound of the victim, and that receiving forgiveness requires becoming the wound. Far from releasing the violator from suffering, forgiveness summons the violator to suffer the wound he has inflicted. This suffering is life-giving because what flows from the wound is love.

cannot be the means through which the exigencies of divine justice are satisfied. There is violence, there are violators, and there is a victim; but no punishment is inflicted on the violators for the purpose of saving the victim from the injustice done to him or her.

It does not, however, follow from (1) and (2) that the Law of the Cross created by forgiveness overlooks the Law of justice. The Law of the Cross would be unjust if it ignored—were deaf to—the cry for justice issuing from the wound of the violated, or if it imposed on the victim a duty to do what no human person is capable of doing, namely, love what is inherently unlovable. But, far from ignoring the wound of the violated, the Law of the Cross announces that the divine You utterly identifies with, and thereby divinizes, the victim. And it is this divinization of the victim that makes it possible for the victim to offer the violator a kind of love that is humanly unimaginable, inconceivable, and impossible. This love is not part of a regimen of punishment or debt payment or satisfaction. It does not require the violator to pay any penalty or make him submit to retributive justice; it offers to embrace him without conditions. Such an offer of love would be unjust if it ignored the evil in the violator, if it endorsed this evil, or if it accepted it as if it were not horrific. But this offer of love does not ignore evil since it is made to the violator *as* violator; it does not endorse evil because it calls upon the violator *as* violator to open himself to love, instead of closing himself off from it; and it does not accept evil as if it were not horrific because the forgiveness it gives to the violator requires him to become the open wound he has inflicted.

Comparing forgiveness as so conceived to retributive punishment as described in the second part of this meditation enables us to appreciate how the forgiveness that gives rise to the Law of the Cross meets the exigencies that the regimen of retribution itself tries to but cannot satisfy. Forgiveness does what punishment cannot do; it ontologically transforms the very wound from which the logic of retribution derives. Retributive punishment requires the violator to share in the wound of the violated as a way of making some kind of restitution, as a way of redressing or at least mitigating the evil done by inflicting it. If it could do so, retribution would require the violator to substitute himself for the victim and to undergo in her place the suffering his violence caused. But through retributive punishment—through the operation of the Law of justice—the wound cannot possibly become anything other than the horrific reality it is, no matter how efficaciously the Law is applied. Evil, considered from the viewpoint of human logic, does not have any possibility of goodness immanent within it. It is the dead end of history, the irreversible and irreparable undoing of the original integrity constitutive of creation. Whatever justice retribution can retrieve, whatever restitution it can effect, whatever restoration it

accomplishes can only approximate the integrity that evil has violated. The wound remains, and remains horrific. This is why the only punishment that would be fully commensurate with evil in its irreparability and irreversibility would be a punishment without end. According to the logic of retributive justice on which the most influential traditional theologies of redemption relied, we are saved from such everlasting punishment because the wounds You bore were infinitely horrifying and hence were able to serve as a substitute for the damnation we deserve. But such a substitution would not save us. On the contrary, it would reactivate the very logic of retribution it is supposed to pacify. For if You suffer in our place, then we are responsible for the wounds You bear, and You are the new and ultimate victim of our violence. When we repent the actions that caused these wounds, the logic of repentance leads us to try to remove them from You and bear them ourselves. To know that we cannot do that, to have to look upon Your wounds in all their horror for all eternity, this itself would be precisely hell. The logic of retribution on which traditional theologies of redemption rely leads back into, not out of, the cul-de-sac in which evil traps violators and victims alike.

But if it is the event of forgiveness, the Crucifixion of Jesus is not governed by this logic; it “throes” us open to, and “throes” open to us, a possibility that defies this logic and that only the divine You can conceive and introduce into history: the possibility that the very wound we inflict on You, the very wound which indicts and damns us, can itself be transformed into a fountain of forgiving love. This possibility is not immanent within the wound; it is not a possibility inherent in human history. If forgiving love is real, it is so only because it is brought to the wound—the wound at the very heart of history itself—by the divine Word that divinizes this wound by embracing it. The wound, if it is so embraced, does not close or heal, is not erased or assuaged; it becomes a spring from which flows the wine of redemption. The wound into which Thomas puts his finger does not prove that the resurrection failed. On the contrary. The resurrection, if it occurs, *is* precisely the transformation of this wound into a font of love, the transformation of fatal violence into life-giving generosity. We perpetrators of violence are saved only if the wound we inflict stays open and so can pour out upon us Your forgiveness for our inflicting it.

Redemption, as so construed, saves us perpetrators of violence from both our sins and the punishment we deserve to suffer because of them. And there is a sense in which the Redeemer who effects redemption, as so understood, does so, as traditional theologies of redemption affirm, by suffering for us the wound that retributive justice requires us to bear. But if Jesus accepts his wounds in this way, he is not voluntarily suffering punishment in our stead; he is suffering violence at our hands. What makes this suffering redemptive would be the fact that he undergoes it in a way

that transforms the wound he suffers into a fountain of love. It is this transformation, which only You can effect, that would be able to save us. What makes the traditional theologies of redemption problematic is that they do not recognize such a transformation and so fail to appreciate that a new and unprecedented economy is thereby created, an economy in which justice itself is transformed into forgiveness. In this economy, as in the regimen of retribution, the violator is called upon to share in, participate in, identify with, the wound of the violated. But in this case, such sharing, such participation, is not punishment. It is drinking from the font of redemption. It is precisely heaven.⁴⁵

Redemption, as so understood, is possible only through the “sacrificial offering” of the Crucified; but here sacrifice has a profoundly different meaning from the one assigned it by the heuristic of retribution and by those Girardian critics of the concept of sacrifice who insist that it has to be abandoned because it is inseparable from this heuristic. The crucified Jesus is not a sacrificial victim who offers himself to the divine You in place of and on behalf of the violators whose evil requires atonement. Jesus puts himself in the place of the victim, not the violator. And in the very process of being murdered, he offers himself to—sacrifices himself for—his murderers. This “sacrifice” is not made within, and cannot be understood in terms of, the economy of sacrifice predicated on the principle of retributive justice that existed antecedent to it. It brings to bear on this economy a kind of loving sacrifice that radically transforms it. This transformation, if it occurs, does not undo or obliterate evil. It makes good out of evil. It is, I hope, not blasphemous to suggest that making being from nothing would pale in comparison to this creative act.⁴⁶ There can be no creativity more exorbitant, more contrary to human expectation; if it happens, it is the effect of a kind of divine madness, a wisdom incomprehensible to us.

Evil leads us into a historical cul-de-sac. Once we commit or suffer it, it makes it impossible for any of us—the violent or the violated—to retrieve our original integrity; it makes the future impossible for us because we cannot assimilate evil into life as we ought to live it. We can neither escape

⁴⁵ It is this experience of the open wounds of Jesus that the Christocentric mystics describe. Of the great many who might be cited, I will quote only the one I happen to be reading as I write this: “I felt, in my extreme unworthiness, that I had received supernaturally the favors for which I had been asking in the words of the prayer I spoke of. I knew in my spirit that I had received the stigmata of your adorable and venerable wounds interiorly in my heart, just as though they had been made on the natural places of the body. By these wounds you not only healed my soul, but you gave me to drink of the inebriating cup of love’s nectar” (Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Margaret Winkworth [New York: Paulist, 1993] 100).

⁴⁶ This is a view Anselm endorses: “Indeed, God’s restoration of human nature was more miraculous than his creation of it” (*Why God Became Man* 16).

evil, nor can we live with it. This is why, once evil happens, there is no hope left us—except to hope that redemption can occur in some way impossible for us to imagine or conceive. The Crucifixion, I believe, throes us open to, and “throes” open to us, precisely this possibility that we could otherwise never have envisioned because it is past justice itself: it is past original justice and past the approximation to justice that retribution seeks; it is past every past and past anything we can reach by trying to retrieve the past. It belongs to the unprecedented future.

But if the Crucifixion has “throen” us open to this future, then it is already upon us, already happening to us. You are making redemption out of the very horrors of history, out of the very violence and carnage of holocausts and genocides. If such redemption is offered us, it must involve a horrific event because it is effected precisely by Your entering fully into—becoming fully incarnate in—the cul-de-sac in which evil places us. It is accomplished by Your identification with the wound of every one of the violated and by Your making this wound itself into a font of forgiveness for every violator. Your entering into the cul-de-sac of horror breaks it open to Your divinizing love. The horror thereby becomes the conduit of grace. The dead end of history becomes the open wound of eternity. The source of despair for victim and violator alike is that the wound suffered and inflicted never closes. But if divinizing love flows into this wound, and forgiving love out of it, then, through the divine madness of redemptive irony, the source of despair is itself transformed into the source of redemption.

Editor’s note: This article presented an unusual difficulty regarding the use of gender-specific pronouns, particularly around the theme of violator and victim. To avoid awkward rhetoric, the author and I agreed to consistently make “violator” masculine (as the underlying Latin does) and “violated” or “victim” feminine (cohering with the more usual social occurrence). By so doing, we do not wish to imply that women are exempt from the role of violator and men from the role of victim.