

Liturgy as Healing of Trauma: Girardian insights on the Passion

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Although Thomas Aquinas discusses satisfaction theory as just one of the possible ways of describing what is going on in the Passion, it is this that has been picked up by and decried by feminist theologians as an example of God as divine child abuser, not only willing but requiring his son to be tortured. Sebastian Moore, building on the insights of Rene Girard, helpfully reconfigures the Passion as God revealing that all human society is built on victims, and that what Jesus does is reveal us to ourselves as victimizers who have been victimized. That is, as victims who have not dealt with their victimization, and therefore continue to repeat it.

This insight finds a correlation in trauma studies, which argues that those who have been traumatized subconsciously replay the trauma, reliving it in an attempt to somehow make sense of what happened. For example, it has been shown sex offenders were often themselves abused as children. To return to theological language, when sinned against one is infected with sin, and until one finds healing, one will continue to sin against oneself and others.

Healing from trauma happens when one is given a framework for understanding through words that build a conceptual storeroom to contain the memories, creating a new groove in the mind. This allows one to see rightly. Until then, it is difficult for survivors to speak about their experiences. If they do so, haltingly, it is a distorted vision where the victim blames him or herself. Such distorted stories perpetuate further harm, bearing in them the marks of a haunting violence. My argument in this paper is that the Eucharist, finding its source in the Passion, rightly understood, can provide such a framework for healing.