

# CAN VIOLENCE CAST OUT VIOLENCE?

THE SATANIC AND THE THEOMIMETIC  
IN RENÉ GIRARD AND ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

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To ask whether violence can cast out violence is here a somewhat misleading question owing to my equivocal use of the word “violence”—for I will argue that there are two very different sorts of violence: one that destroys and one that heals; one is founded on rivalry and the other on love; and that true peace is secured for human beings only by participation in a sacrifice that imitates the Father of Christ rather than the father of lies.

My remarks will develop three points: *First*, I will expound two kinds of sacrifice that are recognized by René Girard—one, the scapegoat murder, arises from a covetous rivalry that is overcome by unanimous imitation of the accuser who shifts blame onto some third party; the other, the loving self-offering,<sup>1</sup> is founded upon renunciation and forgiveness in imitation of God. I have chosen to designate these sacrifices and the cultures that they form as the “satanic” and the “theomimetic,” according to the model that is imitated by each. Violence is intrinsic and essential to the Satanic, while violence is only incidental upon and non-essential to the theomimetic. *Secondly*, we may perceive from Girard’s analysis an intrinsic instability in satanic sacrifice, which is unable to sustain the societal order and unity that it promises. *Thirdly*, I shall argue that the satanic sacrifice fails to recognize and indeed exacerbates the error at the root of human covetousness—a failure to love. This failure I shall attempt further to characterize by a constructive engagement with the teaching of St. Gregory the Great on the fall. *Fourthly*, Gregory’s teaching on the imitation of Christ will guide my

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<sup>1</sup> When I presented this paper, Fr. Robert Daly helpfully observed that the word “offering” can be misconstrued in a modern secular context. He suggested the term “communication.” I will keep the word “offering” but would like it to be understood in the sense of a self-communicative donation. I retain offering in this paper where I employ so extensively the teaching of St. Gregory the Great because, in the ascetical context where one attempts to cast off a false autonomy, there is a certain amount of necessary self-dispossession. This self-dispossession ends in a more profound self-possession, possessing oneself as a child of God in the embrace of the Father. The words “love,” “renunciation,” and “forgiveness” are all used by Girard.

further development of Girard’s brief account of the sacrifice of renunciation, to elucidate how this theomimetic sacrifice might not only diametrically *oppose* but also systematically *subvert* the satanic sacrifice by resolving the disorder out of which mimetic rivalry and scapegoating first take their rise.<sup>2</sup>

## I. TWO KINDS OF SACRIFICE

### MIMETIC DESIRE AND THE SATANIC SACRIFICE OF THE SCAPEGOAT

The theomimetic casts out the Satanic, but the means by which it does so can be understood only in light of an exposition of the Satanic, to which I now turn, beginning this presentation’s first point. Human desire, Girard argues, is imitative, or “mimetic;” we desire what we see others desiring, and with an intensity that matches theirs. Mimetic desire is, Girard says, an “intrinsic good,”<sup>3</sup> for it elevates us above the beasts by setting us free of instinct and binding us into communities of desire. Yet too easily it is perverted into covetousness, such that I desire not only the same *sort* of thing that my neighbor desires or possesses, but the *numerically-identical* thing. My neighbor becomes my rival and I become what Girard calls a “puppet”<sup>4</sup> of mimetic desire. The neighbor is drawn also into this mimetic thralldom, as his love for his possession defensively increases to match my own. Mimetic rivalry reaches an impasse when each rival begins to feel that he cannot securely possess the object of his desire while his rival remains. This transfer of attention, from the desired object to the mimetic rival, is, in Girard’s words, the “scandal,” when the rival himself is increasingly seen as the stumbling-block impeding one’s happiness. In the experience of scandal, the differences that distinguish the rivals are effaced until the mere *existence* of the rival is seized upon as the source of one’s distress. The puppet of mimetic desire can see no other way to overcome scandal than by violence,

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<sup>2</sup> As I indicate by this introduction, my concern in this paper is to address how it might be possible for mimetic “puppets” (i.e. those who become scapegoaters) to escape the cycle of violence and victimization. This is the “healing” I have in view. During the session in which this paper was given, Sheila McCarthy offered a complementary presentation that was directed more to how *victims* might heal after the experience of violence. While a certain tension could be perceived between my paper and hers, I hope that the ensuing discussion during our session demonstrated that our concerns are fundamentally compatible although future work will be necessary to incorporate the two perspectives—that of victimizer and that of victim, when sometimes an individual may be both!—into our analyses.

<sup>3</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2001) 15–16. (Hereafter *ISS*).

<sup>4</sup> *ISS* 13.

hence covetousness, the Decalogue's last prohibition concerning one's neighbor, begets murder, its first.<sup>5</sup>

Through a "mimetic snowballing,"<sup>6</sup> a whole community or society comes to be riven by rivalries and their ensuing cycles of endless vengeance, until it arrives at the catastrophic "mimetic crisis," when all human differences are effaced as every human being becomes "scandal" to every other and society slips into the cataclysmic "war of all against all." Such a calamitous destruction is averted by the operation of the "single victim mechanism," which unites all rivals against a scapegoat whom they murder in a "war of all against one."<sup>7</sup> Girard calls this mechanism "Satan,"<sup>8</sup> from Christ's statement that the devil was a "liar and a murderer" "from the beginning;" for the purposes of this paper, I shall call it "the Satanic." Scandal begets murder by way of a satanic double lie: first, the lie that one's adversary is in fact a guilty offender responsible for one's distress; and secondly, the lie that to murder one's adversary is a righteous act that will bring peace. The source of the conflict in mimetic desire is thus utterly forgotten and the murder pacifies one's violent impulse. "Satan casts out Satan" when a whole society—its differences obliterated by the contagion of mimetic rivalry and universal scandal—turns unanimously on a lone victim, falsely and mimetically accusing him or her of the disturbance caused by a thousand rivalries—indeed *believing* the victim to be guilty—and ameliorating those conflicts by a unanimous single murder.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *ISS* 19–24, 34–44.

<sup>6</sup> *ISS* 24–25.

<sup>7</sup> *ISS* 22–24.

<sup>8</sup> *ISS* 32–38. It is important to differentiate between Girard's and Gregory's use of the name "Satan." Girard prefers to work in a wholly anthropological milieu, one that is open to but not founded upon the theological. His description of "Satan" conflates three concepts that the Augustinian and general medieval tradition preferred to keep distinct: First, there is evil, which has no being in itself but is only a distortion of some existing good; secondly, there is Girard's mimetic desire and mimetic rivalry, to which Gregory comes closest with his account of the warping of the concupiscible (desiring) and the irascible (aggressive or resisting) passions; thirdly, there is the fallen angel himself, who by his rebellion against God conforms himself to the impossibility of non-existence and who attempts, by his suggestions, to rouse in others a distorted desire that will bring them along his path as imitators. Girard's theory does not require the devil's non-existence, but wishes only to show that Christian moral realities can be described anthropologically without recourse to the supernatural.

<sup>9</sup> *ISS* 34.

This murder results in a cathartic euphoria that is experienced as a religious epiphany, occasioning what Girard calls “double transference.”<sup>10</sup> First, the Satanic has shifted scandal from a thousand rivals onto the victim, who is believed to be but never is guilty as charged; secondly, the community attributes its post-homicidal euphoria *also* to the victim, so that the one who was viewed previously as a demon and the source of conflict is seen now as a divine source of healing peace. In this way, a crisis of sufficient intensity deifies its victim. The god-victim, believed to be alive still, is gratefully worshipped and now believed to have willed, even to have *commanded*, his or her own death. Satanic sacrifice will seek henceforth to preserve cultural unity by ritually repeating the founding murder by which peace has been procured. From society’s stumbling-block, violence is made its corner-stone. *Every* human society, Girard contends, was once maintained by sacrifice; for murder is the “foundation of the world.” Satanic murder is the true foundation of all those mythologies in which the victim is (falsely) depicted as guilty or willing and his death as efficaciously bringing about the healing or even the beginning of culture.<sup>11</sup> The repeated sacrificial ritual, as the foundation of all cultural institutions,<sup>12</sup> perpetuates the “mystification”<sup>13</sup> that cloaks the single victim mechanism in its own satanic lie.

#### MIMETIC DESIRE AND THE THEOMIMETIC SACRIFICE OF RENUNCIATION

But Girard recognizes another sort of sacrifice. He states: “I would like...to make a distinction between sacrifice as murder and sacrifice as renunciation. The latter is a movement toward freedom from mimesis as potentially rivalrous acquisition and rivalry.”<sup>14</sup> But what does such a sacrifice look like? It is revealed in the life and Cross of Christ who, as innocent in *every* way, declares every scapegoat innocent of the particular charge leveled against him or her, and so reveals the lie of satanic sac-

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<sup>10</sup> *ISS* 67, 72.

<sup>11</sup> *ISS* 143–148.

<sup>12</sup> *ISS* 91–94.

<sup>13</sup> Girard’s word *meconnaissance*, translated by Williams as “misunderstanding” or “delusion.” See René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 75, 82–83. (Hereafter *Reader*).

<sup>14</sup> *Reader* 251.

rifice. Girard gives us a hint of how to participate in *this* sacrifice by posing to us a choice between models:<sup>15</sup> We may imitate Satan, the false god that accuses and destroys the victim; or we may imitate Christ's desire for God the Father, who identifies with the innocent victim and reveals Himself to be the *arch*-scapegoat whom the Satanic has sought to murder since the beginning.<sup>16</sup> Upon the Cross, Christ refuses to become a scandal: he forgives His assailants and renounces even His bodily life. *Forgiveness and renunciation, which defeat the satanic single victim mechanism, are the essence of the theomimetic sacrifice.* The Gospels show us, Girard writes, the "difference between a world where arbitrary violence triumphs without being recognized and a world where this same violence is identified, denounced, and finally forgiven."<sup>17</sup>

The Gospels' condemnation of the crowds, exposition of the single victim mechanism, and refusal to mythologically cloak Christ with guilt is what sets them apart from all the mythologies that they expose as false by this crucial difference amidst so many similarities. The gods and heroes of myth are victims of double transference. The God of the Gospels is the innocent lamb whose resurrection vindicates Him rather than the crowds.<sup>18</sup> But it is hardly enough to *state* this fact; Hitler recognized the operation of the satanic sacrifice, but, rather than spurning it, wielded it in service of his enslavement to desire. How can the theomimetic decisively cast out satanic? How can the violence-prone human community be *healed* and find true peace? Girard has offered little discussion on this point. However—and now I reach this paper's second point—I propose that a preliminary sketch can be gleaned from the ways in which the satanic sacrifice, like a negative image, *fails* to secure the peace that it promises.

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<sup>15</sup> *ISS* 42.

<sup>16</sup> *ISS* 117.

<sup>17</sup> *ISS* 114.

<sup>18</sup> *ISS* 137.

## II. THE INTRINSIC INSTABILITY OF THE SATANIC SACRIFICE

The satanic culture, founded upon the single victim mechanism, is doomed not only after the revelation of the victim's innocence upon the Cross but also due to the intrinsic instability of the sacrificial culture shaped by that sacrifice. The order achieved by the Satanic masks a more fundamental *disorder* from which that sacrifice arises—the *covetousness* that pushes mimetic desire toward rivalry. At each point of the process, satanic sacrifice fails: it does not eliminate the covetousness of *mimetic desire*; the Satanic cannot lead rivals to renounce their claims, but only to be distracted from them. Nor has the Satanic any alternative model to *mimetic rivalry* as a response to mimetic desire; it offers us no other way to be human than by becoming scandals to one another. Nor, moreover, can the Satanic, with its explosion of unanimous violence, ever break by any sort of forgiveness the link between *scandal and violence*. Finally, unanimous murder is not a positive principle of unity; the Satanic community, united by no love, remains always susceptible to a recurrence of the crisis.

Satanic unity is a *negative unity of unanimous accusation and violence*; with the scapegoat removed, the only remaining basis of unity is the fading memory of unanimous action. The satanic sacrifice, moreover, *cannot strengthen the community by repetition* because it has its most powerful effect only when that community is nearly broken by the weakness of mimetic crisis. *Nor is the Satanic culture even a true community*, for it unites by effacing differences and particularity to forge a faceless (and therefore false) mass of humanity. To the extent that difference and particular circumstance reassert themselves after the crisis has passed, the likelihood of scandal will grow until a new crisis should trigger the single victim mechanism. It cannot eliminate mimetic rivalry because mimetic rivalry is its basis.

In sum, the satanic culture must fail because it is based on a *disorder of desire* and *two lies* that cover that disorder with murder: First, it lies that the innocent victim is the guilty and sole source of disorder. Secondly, it causes each individual falsely to identify himself or herself with the supposedly-righteous accusers (and former rivals) in the crowd. Its moment of unity is a shared vision of self

and victim; on both points it is false. Over time, the efficacy of this sacrifice will decrease, while at the same time it reinforces mimetic rivalry and the single victim mechanism as the entrenched disordered responses to mimetic desire. There is here no true healing; violence but *pretends* to cast out violence, while secretly sowing with cockle the field that it feigns to have cleansed.

### III. THE DIAGNOSIS OF THE SATANIC THE FAILURE TO LOVE

I now come to the third point of this paper, the theomimetic sacrifice, which I shall situate in the *broader* and *theological* domain toward which Girard necessarily gestures but which, as a careful anthropologist, he declines to enter fully. In this realm, I shall draw on the Western ascetical tradition, principally St. Gregory the Great.

The sacrifice of renunciation and forgiveness, which Girard attributes to Christ, is founded in Christ's imitation of God the Father in a spirit of "childlike and innocent obedience." Now, "[s]ince there is no acquisitive desire in God, this imitation cannot cause mimetic rivalry."<sup>19</sup> By "acquisitive" desire, I take Girard to mean the desire not to acquire the same *kind* of thing but to seize for one's own the individual object that is possessed by one's neighbor. I propose that *this distinction*—between *desire* and *acquisitive desire*—is the key, as will be seen when we analyze satanic vengeance as a human act. For violence, according to Girard, is always satanic and is always *vengeance* for previous violence. Even the state's execution of a criminal is a single act of vengeance that breaks the cycle because the state is not an individual upon whom one of its members can be revenged on behalf of the executed.<sup>20</sup> All penalties are seen by Girard as vengeance inasmuch as they arise from a satanic culture.<sup>21</sup> Even appeals to an order of justice fail here, *because all persons who make these appeals do so precisely as tainted by and complicit in the mechanism of the Satanic.*<sup>22</sup> Building on Girard's foundation, I argue that the

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<sup>19</sup> *Reader* 215.

<sup>20</sup> *Reader* 83–85.

<sup>21</sup> *Reader* 85.

<sup>22</sup> *Reader* 184.

Satanic foists upon us a misunderstanding concerning human acts when it perpetuates the lie that evil has being in itself. The Satanic cannot *really* allow a “debt to society” to be anything other than vengeance because *it can only understand a sinful act to be an assault that must be greeted with vengeance, then counter-vengeance, and so-on.*

To step outside of the limited satanic view, we must take further Girard’s Augustinian-inspired contention that evil has no being, to recognize—as have Augustine, Gregory the Great, and the broader Christian tradition—that evil acts are evil insofar as they distort or fail to actualize the good. There is no positive quality of evil in an act; the designation “evil” signifies that something is *missing* from the act, something whose absence the Satanic must conceal in order to pass itself off as the only possible account of human reality.

What has this to do with the distinction between good imitation of God’s desire and rivalrous imitation of acquisitive desire? That which is missing from the Satanic, that whose absence reduces penalty to vengeance, is love—which, according to Girard, is essential to Christ’s own theomimetically-sacrificial obedience: Satanic presentations of Christ’s death, according to Girard, “disregard the texts that show it involves, *of necessity*, the love of one’s neighbor, demonstrating that only death can bring this love to its fullest expression.” For, he adds, “[n]ot to love one’s brother and to kill him are the same thing;” and to die for one’s brother is to love him. He alone is not a killer who knows the fullness of love.<sup>23</sup>

The Satanic is essentially violent and its violence is essentially murderous. I would contend further that, in his remark concerning the necessity of love, Girard has indicated that *the essentially-murderous quality manifested by the Satanic originates in its failure to love.* If we join this point to the thinking of St. Gregory—as I hope to do in the remainder of this talk—we discover that satanic mimesis, which foments rivalrous acquisitive desire, is *by its lack of love* distinguished from theomimesis, which

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<sup>23</sup> Reader 187.

has in it nothing of rivalrous acquisitive desire. Covetousness, which leads—as Girard points out—to murder, arises—as Gregory explains—from a distortion of human desire according to which the human person refuses to love. Love, then, is the essential characteristic of the theomimetic sacrifice that sets it apart, absolutely and irreducibly, from the realm of the Satanic with its false and murderous sacrifice. Love, moreover, imbues the theomimetic sacrifice with the unique power to overturn the Satanic by healing the human distortion from which the Satanic draws its power.

#### ST. GREGORY'S DIAGNOSIS OF THE FALLEN HUMAN CONDITION

If the refusal to love is the essence of the Satanic, and if self-offering love is the essence of the theomimetic sacrifice of renunciation, human desire must be reformed. Yet how are the “puppets” of mimetic desire to undertake the good mimesis of the imitation of Christ’s love? Reformation, I propose, is empowered by divine grace and actualized by sacrifice; as graced and theomimetic, its context is well-described by St. Gregory’s rendering of the traditional teaching on creation and the fall.

We are created to live in God’s likeness, which is a participation in His life by knowledge and by love. We must imitate God to be like Him. Desire, perfected as love, as a *form* of imitation, for it likens the lover to the beloved. Therefore, by imitating God, we are taught more specifically to know and to love as He does, a rather Girardian notion. The essence of this love is the offering of oneself to God and to all things in light of God. Its particular realization is the relationship that Gregory calls “stability.”<sup>24</sup> Humankind originally kept stability by imitating God, the model known through contemplation. The soul thus knew God and loved Him; and in light of God she knew and loved all created things by ordering them to manifest God’s own harmony: she loved the body by conducting harmoniously its passions and physical movements; and she loved the world by transmitting God’s order and stability to her neighbor and even to inanimate material things by acts of love conformed

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<sup>24</sup> Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great* 75.

to God's own. In accord with spiritual vision, love set in order the world, both the inner and the outer, for in her imitation of God's love she saw the world through His eyes. Above all, Adam's charge was divine worship: responding to God's creative love, he was to have made of his life and the ordering of his world a harmonious song of love to God, the imitation of not a rival but a lover. *This* alone for Gregory is true sacrifice: offering self and world to God in love, and so becoming His adopted son or daughter, manifesting His likeness throughout the created order.

The fall disrupted this order by inversion: humankind has turned *first* toward material things and, having in consequence lost contemplation and inner harmony, is dispersed among them without any transcendent model of love. Having turned, Adam "immediately fell away from the love of his Creator [and] into himself. Yet in forsaking the love of God, that true stronghold of his standing, he could not stand fast in himself either; in that by the impulse of a slippery mutability, being precipitated beneath himself through corruption, he also came to be at strife by himself."<sup>26</sup> Tossed by storms from without, in suggestions by fallen angels, provocation by natural disaster, and temptation by the irresistible attraction of material things; and from within by way of passion, desire, and the darkness of a vision beclouded by sin; humanity erratically chases finite created goods in the perpet-

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<sup>26</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia* VIII, x, 19 (translation modified):

For man was created for this end, that, with mind erect, he might mount to the citadel of contemplation, and that no touch of corruption should cause him to swerve from the love of his Maker; but herein, that he moved the foot of his will to transgression, turning it away from the innate steadfastness of his standing, he immediately fell away from the love of his Creator into himself. Yet in forsaking the love of God, that true stronghold of his standing, he could not stand fast in himself either; in that by the impulse of a slippery mutability, being precipitated beneath himself through corruption, he also came to be at strife with himself. And now, in that he is not secured by the steadfastness of his creation, he is ever being made to vary by the fit of alternating desire, so that both at rest he longs for action, and when busied pants for rest. For because the steadfast mind, when it might have stood, would not, it is now no longer able to stand even when it will, in that in leaving the contemplation of its Creator, it lost the strength of its health, and wherever placed is ever seeking some other place through uneasiness. And so in setting forth the fickleness of the human mind, let him say, *When I go to sleep, I say, When shall I arise? and again I shall look for the evening.* As if it were expressed in plain words; 'Nothing it receives sufficeth the mind, in that it has lost Him, Who might have truly sufficed to it. Thus in sleep I long for rising, and at rising I look for evening, for both when at rest I aim at the employment of action, and when employed I look for the inaction of repose.'

<sup>28</sup> *Moralia* VIII, x, 19 (translation modified).

ual panic of a “fit of alternating desire.”<sup>28</sup> “Nothing it receives suffices the mind, in that it has lost Him Who might have truly sufficed to it.”<sup>29</sup> This is not a situation from which the soul can extricate itself by mere decision; for, knowing not the divine model, humankind has no taste or desire for God. The fallen labor in a spiritual blindness and living death that anticipate hell just as contemplation and love would have anticipated heaven. She who seeks happiness apart from God soon finds, in Girardian terms, that the world is become “scandal,”<sup>30</sup> yet she knows no other way. Much like Girard, Gregory asserts that, rather than the love of neighbor and the common pursuit of God, human beings’ perpetual dissatisfaction propels them to seek constantly the good not yet possessed. This is the origin of covetous acquisitive desire, a *rivalrous* questing after limited created goods that provokes escalating conflicts characterized by rivalry, and finally violence. As Gregory observed all around him during the Lombard invasion of Italy, a desire not anchored in God is mercurial, grasping, and finally murderous. In Girardian terms, the failure to love God is the origin of mimetic rivalry and the essence of the Satanic.

We have thus found in Gregory’s account what we earlier identified as the four failures exacerbated by the satanic sacrifice: First, the lack of a good model for mimetic desire; secondly, mimetic rivalry from covetous desire; thirdly, violence as the response to the escalating scandal of frustrated desire; and fourthly, the purely-negative unity secured by unanimous accusation and murder. To be sure, for Gregory it is not mimesis but desire of the good which is humankind’s motive force; *nonetheless*, the Augustinian tradition that Gregory occupies sees desire as imitative of its object and fallen desire as seeking its own nothingness by imitating the absurdity of the devil, who is the first and highest exemplar of the Satanic. Moreover, like Girard, Gregory believes that only the theomimesis of self-offering love can free humankind from destructive rivalry. Now, we reach the fourth and fi-

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<sup>29</sup> *Moralia* VIII, x, 19 (translation modified).

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it might be said that He who made the world can then become arch-rival, hated for not granting the happiness that the sinner would seize through creatures.

nal point of this paper: as Gregory presents it, the theomimetic sacrifice, which participates in Christ's self-offering especially through the Eucharist, utterly subverts and destroys the Satanic at each of its four points.

#### IV.1 CHRIST IS THE MODEL FOR OUR DESIRE

First, Christ must be the model of our desire. Christ, stooping to our level by making Himself a way accessible to our material-addicted senses, offered Himself in sacrifice. The love that we could not offer, He offered for us; of the flesh to which we were addicted, He was for our sake divested; the material goods that we coveted, He renounced to show us that the way to the Father is to imitate the Son's desire for God above all. To the elect, still oppressed by blindness in sin, internal disorder, and a lack of love for God, His sacrifice offers salvation. How? Girard has stated that Christ did not purchase our salvation through a death-pact with a child-abusing father-god; rather, Christ's steadfast refusal to compromise with the Satanic led Him to accept the innocent death inevitably forced on Him by the single victim mechanism. For Christ's steadfastness, Girard has said, the Father forgave all—all who are complicit in the satanic mechanism. Gregory, however, wishes to say that Christ's life and ministry, *as well as* His suffering and death, do indeed pay some sort of price for human redemption. Has Gregory really stumbled back into the violent "sacred," disguising blood-thirsty sadism and wrathful vengeance as vindictive justice? It cannot be. Recall: the Satanic reduces penalty to vengeance, an equal and opposite positive evil returned for the evil given by one's rival. But if sin is failure to love, then penalty can be a *restoration* of love lost. Atonement, as Gregory understands it, is at its base a reconciliation that makes up what is lost—*not* something that was taken from God so much as it was cast off by human beings.<sup>31</sup> It is love, and a life of love lived in imitation of the Son who imitates the Father. Girard seems to agree with Gregory that renunciation is a

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<sup>31</sup> It is possible to say that, by turning to lower things, Adam "stole" from God the loving manifestation of God's own goodness through His likeness in the soul, bodily life, and the natural world—but this could misunderstand where the "taken" manifestation went. Simply, it was destroyed when Adam cast off his life of love.

liberating act of love when it relinquishes that to which one has clung as a substitute for God. This, for Gregory, is the atoning sacrifice, a re-actualization of the human being's love for God and for all things *in light* of God, forsaking the riot of fallen desire and seeking the repose of theomimetic desire. It is nothing other than Adam's lost sacrifice of self-offering love; sin has altered only the circumstances, not the essence of sacrifice: for now humankind is incapable of making this sacrifice to God, for it knows and loves Him not.

As man, Christ offers the love that fallen human beings have failed to offer. He suffers and dies not to fulfill a penalty of pain but because the voluntary renunciation of all lower things, a torturous renunciation of every human comfort and every neighborly kindness unto death itself, while persevering in a utterly-selfless and total love of God and neighbor—this loving renunciation, by one who, as Girard would put it, is outside the satanic system—is the *human actualization of a love that can overcome the immensity of absence entailed by the human race's choice for a murderous rivalry instead of a self-offering love for God*. This is how the fullness of love appears to a world not first condemned by God but afflicted by sin. The Cross does not give to God something that we stole, unless that gift be understood as the re-establishment *in us* of the loving offering that we had forsaken. To pass this sacrifice off as a divine tit-for-tat, as evil returned for evil given, is a last desperate deception perpetrated by the Satanic to distort the truth about humanity: that theomimetic self-offering love is our only possible fulfillment.

Overall we must recall that, in our Gregorian reading, theomimetic sacrifice is the proper human response to God; whether or not that sacrifice atones by a greater renunciation, it is always and simultaneously accomplishes the self-offering of love. Fasting in the desert, healing in the town, preaching on the mountain, teaching in the temple, and suffering on the Cross, Christ as man offers one and the same endless sacrifice of self-offering love that *all* must offer who would be sons and

daughters of God. Although we have sinned and He has not, His way is ours: one continuum of sacrifice that must begin *now* and continue forever.

Yet we are not free. In *Battling to the End*, Girard laments the world's blindness to Christ the model; for mimetic puppets neither heed nor follow Him. The simple revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is not enough; a transformation, an education is required, but what? Elsewhere, he answers: "Whenever you have...that really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present."<sup>32</sup> And St. Gregory tells us that, by *grace*, we *can* be healed through imitating Christ to atone by love while unlearning the Satanic. The fallen soul can offer herself thus only *within* the stream of *Christ's* offering, to which she is joined when she lives by the charity poured forth in her heart by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

#### IV.2 SACRIFICIAL RENUNCIATION HEALS THE COVETOUS DESIRE THAT GROUNDS MIMETIC RIVALRY

##### 1) TEMPORAL SACRIFICE MAKES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AN IMITATION OF MARTYRDOM.

Grace is the key to the second point: sacrificial renunciation, founded on love, heals the covetous desire that grounds mimetic rivalry and that blinds the soul to Christ's theomimetic example. For, she who loves God above all else need feel no compulsion to possess lower things. Loving God therefore heals the soul of covetousness because it habituates her to fix upon God—an inexhaustible good that will not provoke rivalry. And although we lack Adam's clear vision of God, we can love Him still because, as Gregory famously writes, love itself is a kind of knowledge that by shadowy contact prepares us for spiritual vision.<sup>33</sup> However, this sacrifice—although empowered by grace, remains difficult and even *violent* because it requires us to be able to renounce the created things to which the fallen will cannot help but cling. The sacrifice of renunciation in love therefore must imitate Christ's Passion.

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<sup>32</sup> *Reader* 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Hom. Evan.* xxvii, 4 (Hurst 215).

For Gregory, martyrdom performs this imitation; by her love upon this proving-ground, the martyr atones, is healed, and is made ready for eternal vision.<sup>34</sup> Physical martyrdom being rare, Gregory urges his flock to imitate Christ by offering *spiritual* sacrifice with the same love that animates the martyr. This sacrifice trains the saint properly to love her God, her own body, and her neighbor, as she dies to blind carnality in order to inherit the vision of eternal life, presaged in this life by contemplation.

2) COMPUNCTION OF FEAR AND COMPUNCTION OF LOVE IN THE ASCENT TO CONTEMPLATIVE VISION.

Love's journey from distorted desire to clarified vision is a sacrificial movement from the fear of God to the perfect love that casts out fear. Fear and love affectively condition love's two modes of sacrifice, pricking the heart by "compunction" (*compunctio cordis*)<sup>35</sup>—that of fear, by which the soul atones and is healed of her distortion, and that of love, wherein she oscillates between active and contemplative non-rivalrous service of God and neighbor.<sup>36</sup> Compunction of fear looks in mourning to one's past spiritual death, in fear to one's wavering present, and in dread to the future of eternal death. Farther along, however, when purgation is complete, compunction of love looks with patient resignation upon the tumult of the present and with longing looks forward to the beatific vision of the future. Love is the "engine" (*machina*)<sup>37</sup> of the journey to contemplation, compunction its goad, whereby one looks upon one's life with increasingly Christ-like eyes. This movement, driven by imi-

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<sup>34</sup> Rather than cling to lower things and suffer eternal death, the martyr boldly *anticipates* the loss of this world by offering himself or herself in testimony to a love of Christ, as He renounced his own body. By her sufferings, the martyr *atones* for sin, receiving back in self-renouncing love what she had cast off through covetousness; simultaneously, she takes upon herself a severe *paideia* or discipline of soul that *heals* her of acquisitive addiction to creatures, lest any attachment impede her vision of God. Finally, in the arena, the martyr actualizes his or her *love* of God to become a pure offering to Him.

<sup>35</sup> *Compunctio cordis*

<sup>36</sup> His treatment of these activities as "sacrificial" enables him to bring out those Christological overtones which would remain muted had he considered this life only in the ancient philosophical terms of an ascetical ascent that Christ Himself did not have to make.

<sup>37</sup> *machina*

tative love of Christ, inverts the satanic sacrifice, which begins in fear of rivalry and is driven by scandal's imitative fear to a *hatred* that casts out fear by unanimous condemnation of a victim.

3) THE SACRIFICES PROMPTED BY COMPUNCTION OF FEAR AND COMPUNCTION OF LOVE.

Theomimetic sacrifice neutralizes covetous desire through loving renunciation. Love's initial sacrifice is dominated by fear.<sup>38</sup> It looks to avert God's punishment; not yet free enough of attachments to be able to embrace Him for His own sake. From a Girardian perspective, those who are still acquisitive puppets of desire cannot yet offer themselves, but must first unlearn the shortsightedness of the Satanic; fear of losing the greatest good weans them from the acquisitive fear of losing lower goods. Therefore, loving God and yet still attached to the world, the Christian practices abstinence to atone for sin by a focused love that will escape eternal damnation. In transition through a healing purgation toward a recollection not bound to lower things, the sacrifice of fear imitates the willingness of Peter and Andrew to leave their nets in response to Christ's call; it obeys Christ's command "deny yourself."<sup>39</sup>

This renunciation, always driven by love and imitation of Christ, undermines covetous mimetic desire by setting aright every linkage of stability that was broken in the fall—God and soul, soul and body, Christian and world or neighbor, and Christian and Church: thus the soul offers to God tears of repentance and pleas for forgiveness. With respect to the body, she is able only to discipline the flesh, both for atonement and to disentangle herself from addiction to fleshly pleasure; not ready, though, to forsake material possessions, she but *restrains* her vice by not coveting her *neighbor's* goods. As for her neighbor, the Christian (not yet quite able to love) but restrains her hatred and foregoes vengeance. Already, we have an alternative solution to the sacrifice proffered by the Satanic; yet mimetic rivalry and its consequences are only held back, not yet eliminated. Nonetheless, those making

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<sup>38</sup> Gregory likens this to the initial "sacrifice of flesh" that the priests of Levi offered upon the brass altar before the temple's outer gate.

<sup>39</sup> We note that, where contemplation is not available to supply a model, the Scriptures supply concrete models of the truth believed by faith.

the sacrifice of fear do imitate Christ and are therefore worthy models who can lead back to God those who are still carnal by attracting them to imitate a love that will free them from bondage to rivalry. Founded on charity's first stirrings, the sacrifice of fear begins the self-renouncing struggle in the arena, against the fallen angels, to offer oneself to God in pure praise.

Having atoned for her sins,<sup>40</sup> the Christian now no longer flees hell but, through the compunction of love, diligently seeks the reward of heaven by deeds of love amidst an abstinence that trains her toward serene detachment. This sacrifice of love, which reverberates between contemplative repose and worldly activity, embraces Christ's call "take up your cross and follow me."<sup>41</sup> The Christian is able to follow Him *freely* now, without the goad of fear, because she is detached from fallen desires. Unlike the satanic sacrifice, the sacrifice of love gains true self-possession without catharsis, not by feat of bare restraint but by a true healing reorientation to the love of Christ. Now the soul's tears are tears of longing. Lest the chaotic passions again draw her into dispersion, she continues to discipline the flesh, no longer to atone but only to train by exercising of love, healing her wounds. Spiritually, she abstains freely even from desire, becoming as a dove who hovers at the window to look out but who cannot be compelled to fly into the world despite its allurements. No longer merely restraining herself from vice, she offers sacrifice by cultivating virtue<sup>42</sup> and by renouncing herself so thoroughly that she gives up ownership of her own deeds;<sup>43</sup> she seeks a 'reward' but she would credit God for its attainment. To the neighbor she offers not restraint of hate, but true *compassion* in love, not merely foregoing vengeance but offering forgiveness. This renunciation and forgiveness mirror nicely Girard's own description of Christ's refusal to become scandal. The Gregorian account of theomimetic sacrifice does not efface differences in rivalry, but effaces rivalry by relations of love. By the ongoing training that subdues the flesh, theomimesis solves the problem of diminishing re-

<sup>40</sup> Here, Levi becomes Sadoch, offering the sacrifice of incense upon the gold altar before the veil.

<sup>41</sup> In his *Dialogues*, Gregory likens the Christian at this stage to the deacon Stephen.

<sup>42</sup> The sacrifice of incense on the gold altar.

<sup>43</sup> The sacrifice of powder.

turns in the satanic sacrifice; for the theomimetic sacrifice of love *builds up* the community rather than relying on its near-disintegration.

Gregory distinguishes non-exclusively between a higher and lower sacrifice of love.<sup>44</sup> The higher is in contemplation; the soul shares its fruits with her neighbor by intercessory sighs, suffering with compassion for her neighbor's woes. The lower sacrifice, more active, learns of God from the Scriptures and from preachers, turning then to teach and to admonish the neighbor, or by alms to help him in need. Within the Body of Christ, both sacrifices of love exercise a sort of priesthood for those still lingering in fear; for Christians who practice these more pure sacrifices of love and longing, are able by their love—in prayers and teaching—to lift higher their fearful neighbors.

The temporal sacrifice prepares for vision by atonement, purification, and the stirring-up of love for a full self-offering to God. Temporal sacrifice must, therefore, be viewed in light of the “eternal holocaust,” the sacrifice of pure love in offering oneself to the God known in the beatific vision. This is the sacrifice of praise, which is anticipated by the higher sacrifice of love that offers an “earthly holocaust,” while the sacrifice of fear is but a “burnt offering;” all, however, are consumed by the fire of love. Both earthly sacrifices are superseded in heaven without losing continuity; here the soul is the bride of Christ who rejoices to make a perpetual offering of herself into the arms of her spouse. Her abstinence of the flesh has prepared the bodily incorruptibility of her resurrection; and her renunciation of the spirit has forged her integrity. Her contemplation has given way to direct vision. She is bound to the whole Church in Christ's body. Yet, prior to the resurrection, even the souls of the blessed continue to offer intercession for those still *in via*.

We see, therefore, that the theomimetic sacrifice of love—continuous throughout<sup>45</sup>—subverts covetous desire and mimetic rivalry, accomplishing a mutually-reinforcing unity within Christ's body

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<sup>44</sup> There are two priesthods of Sadoch—the higher and the lower.

<sup>45</sup> At no point, even in its initial purgative stages, is sacrifice merely a discipline of pain to be got through in order to reach some promised reward. Sacrifice, even when painful, is always an activity of love and therefore maintains—from

that progressively is made invulnerable to disruption. The theomimetic sacrifice need not efface differences, for through compassion the saints meet each individual where he or she may be, assisting those below them. This sacrifice accomplishes what the Satanic cannot by binding all participants in their particularity through the new and graced mimesis of imitating Christ.

#### IV.3 SACRIFICE ELIMINATES THE POSSIBILITY OF SCANDAL AND ITS VIOLENCE OR ACCUSATION.

Thus far, the theomimetically-sacrificial life has healed the soul to undermine acquisitive mimetic desire and its satanic rivalry. In the third and fourth steps, theomimetic sacrifice directly attacks the moment of scandal, in which escalating mimetic covetousness yields to the double lie of the single victim mechanism—unanimous accusation and unanimous murder.

Scandal begins when acquisitive desire is frustrated by a rival; yet in theomimetic sacrifice violence has cast out violence—by a loving discipline through painful renunciation of earthly comforts, the Christian can no longer be commanded by others' enduring desire for these things. Willing even to renounce her own deeds, she cannot be drawn into scandal. Without exploring scandal in so great a depth as does Girard, Gregory nonetheless complements him on one important point: When earthly desires are frustrated, Gregory explains, we must see that the loving God is encouraging us to engage in self-scrutiny and theomimetic sacrifice. Whereas we make the world an occasion for forsaking God, He makes its every allurements an occasion of pedagogical chastisement through famine, the disappointment of lust, the fleetingness of beauty, the instability of riches and power, and the trauma of assault by one's neighbors.<sup>47</sup> For *when a suffered loss is onerous, self-scrutiny recognizes a remaining*

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its rude beginnings to its extraordinary fulfillment—a continuity of love that is the essence of human being.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory identifies three such occasions of chastisement, to which the Christian must respond by self-renunciation as did Christ when He was tempted in the desert: Thus, when God takes away from earthly good (as He will eventually take away our bodily life) we, like the martyrs, must make it an offering of joy; when the devil tempts us, we must turn patiently to Christ for our strength, being placid in the face of bodily and spiritual temptation; when the neighbor persecutes us, we must forgive rather than revenge ourselves.

*attachment and perhaps a sin for which to atone.* Self-scrutiny becomes ongoing vigilance, lest we should fail to sustain the sacrifice (i.e. positive mimesis) and give in to our propensity for violence. We must continuously re-assess our motive for sacrifice, lest we strive or admonish our neighbor for pride rather than love. In time, the Christian will learn with joy to turn chastisements to her *aid* as simultaneously-atoning, healing, and vivifying sacrifices—rather than adumbrations of eternal suffering, they permit a renewal of love. By cutting off any escalation toward scandal, this response also permanently forestalls the false accusation of Girard’s “persecutory unconscious,” which would have initiated the single victim mechanism’s transition to satanic sacrifice.<sup>48</sup>

#### IV.4 THE COMMUNITY OF THE NEW CREATION IS UNITED IN CHRIST BY LOVE

##### THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW CREATION

Now we come to the final refutation of the Satanic: the unity of the Church, sustained by theomimetically-sacrificial living. The satanic sacrifice fabricates unity by falsely accusing an innocent party and by murder, in which one mimetically identifies oneself with a supposedly-righteous mob. This judgment and identification partake of the Satanic essence—the refusal to love. The theomimetic pattern, however, makes a *true* judgment by declaring *oneself* to be guilty—followed by a *truly-good* mimetic identification with Christ the victim who is truly innocent. In this, one is united to the activity and membership of the whole Church, but not in a unity *against* anyone. The Satanic demands an adversary for its violence whilst, even in the throes of renunciation, the theomimetic asks only for love. The theomimetic bond of charity unites the Church as Christ’s Body in the Holy Spirit. René Girard calls the murderous origination of the satanic sacrifice the “foundation of the world.” St. Gregory calls the Church, founded on Christ’s loving sacrifice, the “New Creation.” Christians live proleptically in the New Creation by the good mimesis of sacrificial love.

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<sup>48</sup> *ISS* 125–127. Girard writes that “duping oneself is what characterizes the entire satanic process.”

Theomimetic sacrifice is not a transaction; at no point does it merely endure pain for a later reward; rather, by its very act it both trains for and actualizes a self-offering in love. It depends entirely on the ongoing work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, who are conforming the Christian to the stability lost by Adam and renewed by Christ.<sup>49</sup> To follow Christ, one must immolate one's passions to God, that the Holy Spirit may have their place.

#### THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

I cannot conclude this paper without discussing the sacrifice of the Mass. Just as the revelation of the satanic mechanism could be accomplished only by Christ, who as divine is not subject to the mimetic world, so too the theomimetic sacrifice of Christians is sustained only by divine grace. The life of sacrifice imitates and lives in Christ;<sup>50</sup> consequently, it depends completely upon the Church. *All* sacrifice must be made within the Church precisely because the Church, as Christ's body, participates in His ongoing sacrificial love offered to the Father on behalf of all humanity. Theomimetic sacrifice, Gregory teaches, is fulfilled *within* Christ's own offering—by the Holy Spirit who gives us the virtues and stirs us into love—that it be truly an offering through Christ, in the Spirit, to the Father.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, the life of sacrifice imitates and lives particularly in the Mass, for it is in the Mass that we are joined to Christ's own passion—His own perfect offering of self-renunciation and love—for

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<sup>49</sup> Employing an image of temple worship, Gregory describes the courtyard surrounding the altar seen by Ezekiel. Three of its four equally-measured sides surrounding the altar are faith, hope, and charity, so that the *surface* of the court, upon which one must tread to approach the altar, is the even measure of these three Spirit-given virtues; without preserving this measure, one cannot hope to make of oneself a sacrifice.

<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, this journey of sacrifice imitates and lives in Christ. Therefore, the one who would offer sacrifice must know Christ well. In a homily on the instructions given to Moses concerning the preparation of the Passover, Gregory points out that the lamb must be roasted whole rather than boiled. For boiling separates the flesh from the bones. Therefore, we must meditate on Christ's Incarnation with love (fire), seeing how He manifests in His humanity the perfection of conformity to God; keeping the lamb whole, we must not separate the humanity (flesh) from the divinity, nor seek the divinity (bones) without apprehending it as the very support and structure of Christ's human life. Then we must eat the Passover, through our sacrifice; the blood of the lamb must be smeared on the lintel (our mind, meditating on Christ's example), on one doorpost (our reception of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist), and on the other doorpost (our imitation of Christ's loving sacrifice in our own life). By embracing suffering even with thanksgiving and following Him in sacrifice, the Christian becomes Christ's bride.

<sup>51</sup> We have gestured already at Sadoch's "offering" of Levi to the Lord.

our salvation. In order that the Eucharist may be effective for our transformation unto salvation, we must partake of the fruits of Christ's sacrifice by—*during the Mass*—making of ourselves a sacrifice of love to be offered along with Christ. In the Mass, we complete the anti-satanic self-judgment followed by mimetic identification with the innocent Christ.<sup>52</sup> We must offer or attend the Mass with tears of compunction (both of fear and of love); and we must carry forth from the Mass that sacrificial living. Our sacrificial lives, Gregory writes, must be conformed to *the Sacrifice*.<sup>53</sup> For Christ did not suffer that we might escape suffering; rather, He *loved, that we might love*.

The Mass, in which we participate as a perfect sacrifice of love, *anticipates the perfect sacrifice of praise and the eternal holocaust of heaven*.<sup>54</sup> It therefore portends what will be accomplished in the eschaton—what we might call the utter subversion and destruction of the Satanic. For Gregory, Christ's entire earthly life was a movement of sacrifice that was consummated upon the Cross and that continues still in heaven. He is the New Adam who restores and transcends the praise that Adam lost when he fell. Therefore, at the eucharistic sacrifice, the heavens are opened, the angels descend and we are united to the heavenly liturgy not by image only, nor even by hopeful expectation alone, but truly because the *desire* of our compunction of love spans the gap between heaven and earth and between invisible and visible so that truly we *do* enter into the praise of the angels because, by the Holy Spirit and in the Eucharist, we *do* have access to the perfect eternal holocaust, despite our imperfect par-

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory does not use the terms “anti-satanic” and “mimetic,” but he emphasizes self-judgment and imitative self-offering. I here intend only to draw attention to the subversive parallel with Girard's account of the single victim mechanism.

<sup>53</sup> In book IV of the *Dialogues*, Gregory speaks of the bishop of Narni, “whose own life was conformed to the Sacrifice” of the Mass. He offered himself to his neighbor and to God in love, sustained by his celebration of the Mass. Finally, his death also was the image of the Eucharist. Having received Christ, he was restored to stability and became “fixed in prayer” until he was joined everlastingly to Christ as he expired. Gregory does not say it, but I am tempted to say that he believes that, even outside of the Mass, all of our sacrifices are made as if *contained* by the Mass, for they all are made through Christ and depend on his own perfect offering.

<sup>54</sup> Sacrifice, therefore, especially seen in its Christological and eucharistic foundation, spans the entirety of life, from temporal to eternal. It serves to summarize a few correspondences: Through atonement in this life, one avoids hell in the next. Through renunciation in this life, one prepares for a good death in the love of God. Through healing in this life, one has no need of purgation in the next. Through abstinence in this life, one prepares incorruption in the next; through spiritual abstinence in this life, one prepares integrity in the next. Through prayer in this life, one anticipates prayer in the next. Through contemplation in this life, one tastes the vision of the next. Lastly, through love in this life, one anticipates eternal love in the next.

icipation in it during this life. This indeed, is the healing of desire. This indeed, I propose, is the true mimesis. This, *indeed*, is the true sacrifice before which all satanic sacrifice must vanish like smoke.

#### FINAL REMARKS

To conclude. I have gone beyond Girard into the theological territory that he so humbly avoids. Yet I hope that you will find my diagnosis of the Satanic and its antithesis, the theomimetic, to be faithful to what Girard has given us. For, as I hope is by now apparent, theomimetic sacrifice is not first of all a response to the human history of sin and guilt; it is a response to *God* that is only accidentally conditioned by sin. Had there been no fall, there would still be sacrifice. Therefore, even when it is proximately an atonement, theomimetic sacrifice is always stable perseverance—despite the fallen condition—in union with and love of God. It is significant that one has not yet taken up one's Cross in the sacrifice of fear but only in that of love. Hence the Cross, which is renewed by the sacrifice of the Mass, is a pure and purifying offering of love; it is atoning, yes, but only because its essence is a self-renunciation not in a cold dark fear but in a living flame of love that, in this life, prepares to look on His face in the next.

Satanic vengeance is a negative image, structurally similar to Christ's sacrifice but fundamentally distinguished by its failure to love.<sup>55</sup> With the theomimetic sacrifice pointing to the self-donation of Father and Son as the non-violent and supremely loving origin of true sacrifice, the satanic sacrifice is revealed to be no sacrifice at all, but only a failure, no, a bald *refusal* to offer sacrifice. Every victim of the Satanic is a scapegoat in place of God Himself, of whom the Satanic has made a rival for the possession of freedom, or life, or goodness—by which rivalry indeed Satan himself first sought his own non-existence. The satanic sacrifice is the ultimate parody of the theomimetic sacrifice. Only

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<sup>55</sup> I must credit Michael Darcy with calling my attention to the simultaneous structural similarity and essential opposition. One might perhaps further extend the metaphor of the negative image to argue that there can be no permanent solution to mimetic violence simply by eliminating one element of the structure. Rather, the entire edifice must be subverted and reformed by beginning at its source: the distortion of desire. The ascetical life of graced sacrificial love accomplishes this reformation and so destroys the Satanic even while maintaining a similarity of outward appearance by which the Satanic made mockery of the theomimetic during its reign.

love, applied sometimes even with violence to the resistance of the distorted soul, can truly cast out the violence of the Satanic. Only the Crucified, received in the eucharistic sacrifice, can cast down the imposter from his seat and dress with wine and oil the wounds of his every victim. Only the community of Christ's Body, founded upon and participating in His sacrifice of love, can hope not to perish when the flood comes.

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<sup>56</sup> A fully-annotated version of this paper is forthcoming. The material on St. Gregory the Great in this paper was derived from my previous research and was written without references at hand, hence the paucity of citations. However, the information is derived principally from the following sources, the English translations of which I list below.

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