

Today's Martyrs

Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom

Meditation – I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning from the Sky

He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth – John 8:44

This essay is named after a verse from the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus confirms to the seventy-two disciples their authority over the demonic when using His name. These words also signify His personal witness as the eternal Son of God of the fall of Satan. Because these words can also symbolize the beginning of Satan's dominion on earth, the Franco-American philosopher Rene Girard choose it for the title of his book [*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*](#), the last book in an anthropological study that *almost* proves the truth of Christianity.



Rene Girard has become famous in Christian circles for his research on the *scapegoat mechanism*. Girard observed that human societies throughout history have relied on scapegoats to maintain social cohesion. Over time social friction grows, and friction eventually triggers violence. The scapegoating of certain individuals or minorities channels such violence in ways that are manageable to the powers and principalities of this world. Individuals who are in competition can put aside their differences and unite against the scapegoat. To be effective, the persecutors of the scapegoat must

accept the mass delusion - the lie - that the scapegoat deserves the violence that is directed toward it. Civilization and social order were built on controlled persecution.

According to Girard, the great exception in the ancient world to this mechanism was Judaic culture. While the Old Testament certainly has examples of scapegoating – remember, it begins with Adam's scapegoating of Eve - it also has stories that accurately depict the evil at the center of the process. The persecutions of the prophets demonstrate it. The story of Job certainly showed the process at work, when his neighbors ganged up on him at his time of misfortune. The greatest of such stories is the persecution of Joseph by his brothers, which is resolved by Joseph's ultimate Godly fortune and his forgiveness that denied violence.

In the New Testament we see more examples of scapegoating. John the Baptist died because a palace party was turned into a lynch mob by Herod's stepdaughter. The ultimate example, of course, was the execution of Jesus. Girard points out that Luke's observation that "Herod and Pilate became friends" as a result of the Crucifixion is a quite typical example of the 'benefit' of scapegoating.

But then the scapegoat mechanism failed. Jesus rose from the dead after forgiving His murderers. He proved he told the truth, that He was the innocent Son of God. He destroyed forever the delusion that scapegoats are guilty. His disciples, who abandoned Him in fear that they too would become scapegoats (Girard goes even further, maintaining that they themselves felt psychologically powerless under the contagion of violence), would later go to their own deaths as faithful witnesses to the fact that Jesus was innocent. They would preach the words of Jesus which tell us that the righteous take the side of the innocent victims of persecution or circumstance.

This would overturn the pagan world, and eventually a Christian civilization would arise in its place. Scapegoating would still happen, because as Girard would write “We are not Christian enough”, but it would become impossible to maintain the lie of the guilt of the scapegoats, at least for long. Eventually a follower of Christ would stand up for the victims, or at least their memory. Eventually even non-Christians would be influenced by this perspective, as Christianity reached around the globe.

By the 20th Century the collapse of Christian civilization was already well underway. Ideologies had arisen which thrived on victimization and scapegoats. Nazism conferred victim status on Germans and scapegoated Jews, Slavs and Romani. Marxism scapegoated so-called ruling classes and conferred victim status on nearly everyone else. In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* Girard recalled the great secrecy under which the Nazis perpetrated their genocides, and he guessed that had they won the Second World War they would have eventually bragged about their crimes. The unprosecuted murder of millions of scapegoats would have cemented the Nazi ascendancy over Christianity in central Europe, for awhile.

In the end these ideologies failed, providentially so. Rene Girard has written, however, that we are now witnessing the rise of what he called the ‘other totalitarianism’. This new ideology is similar to Marxism in that it usurps the Christian concern for victims. Like Marxism it accuses Christians of having failed to be Christian enough on the behalf of victims. It promises that it will do better, and signals that the eventual anti-Christ will care for us better than anyone. Like Marxism its ethos includes false scientism, but unlike Marxism it also includes the delusions of the pagan world, in its recreations and sexualities, and so that ethos and the alleged failures of Christians will predestine the new scapegoats.

I See Satan Fall Like Lightning was published in 1999, and in 2009 (six years before his death at age 91) Rene Girard followed with the essay [On War and Apocalypse](#) in which he darkly and mystically stated:

Christianity is the only religion that has foreseen its own failure. This prescience is known as the apocalypse. Indeed, it is in the apocalyptic texts that the word of God is most forceful, repudiating mistakes that are entirely the fault of humans, who are less and less inclined to acknowledge the mechanisms of their violence. The longer we persist in our error, the stronger God’s voice will emerge from the devastation.

Apocalypse of course merely means ‘hidden things’ of the future. Girard’s assertion of the ultimate worldly failure of Christianity is certainly open to debate, but many statements in the Bible can be read to support an end time in which faith in the Gospel has withered almost – almost - completely away. Perhaps we today on our overheating globe need only to recall the image of our beloved, bloodied Carpenter, carrying the cross to which He will soon be nailed, feeling its texture as He did all wood, already dying from hypovolemic shock as a result of His scourging, and asking the weeping women in the language of His young apprenticeship “If they do these things when the wood is green, what will they do when it is dry?”

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