

A Girardian Reading of Violent Imagery in Revelation

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AMBROSE SEMINARY

A GIRARDIAN READING OF VIOLENT IMAGERY IN REVELATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF AMBROSE SEMINARY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
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BY
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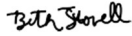
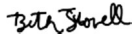
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AMBROSE SEMINARY

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A Girardian Reading of Violent Imagery in Revelation

Jeremy Duncan

ABSTRACT

René Girard's theories on the mimetic relationship between violence and religion and the genesis and maintenance of culture have had a profound impact on many disciplines. The Colloquium on Violence and Religion gathers scholars across a wide range of fields including theology and biblical studies to study Girard's work. In the past, scholars have used Girard's ideas to interpret and reinterpret Old and New Testaments texts; however, the body of work using Girard as a critical lens to read Revelation is minimal. This thesis attempts to use biblical scholarship alongside Girard's theories to build a constructive reading of Revelation. A brief sketch of Girard's work is followed by an analysis of the structure and genre of Revelation. The body of the thesis interprets violent passages, selected to represent the structure of Revelation, through Girard's work to develop a non-violent reading of the text.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Within the Jewish and Christian traditions, the hope of a peaceful future has always remained a primary part of the eschatological focus. Iconic passages such as Isaiah 11:1–9, which have helped to inform this hope, present to us images of not only an end to war but also an end to the drive to impose ourselves violently on others. At the same time, these images of peace have found themselves contrasted against the violence of seemingly opposing passages in the Scriptures. The question of how the affirmation “God is love” can be set alongside the command to “completely destroy [your enemies]” is a legitimate challenge to the consistency of the scriptural imagination. Indeed, as the philosophical reflection on violence has shifted from the purely physical toward more diverse understandings of economic, social, psychological, and “previously ignored forms of violence,”¹ the question of Christianity’s relationship to violence has only expanded. Today we deal with a cultural framework that at times sees the gospel story itself as intrinsically violent and predatory.² The question posed is no longer simply how could God condone our violent history but why does God appear to affirm the use of violence as a means of establishing his peace and can such means ever produce meaningful justice?

The book of Revelation sits in a unique position within this dialogue. Its violence has been celebrated as a compelling narrative by the pop-theology of the *Left Behind* series,³ while others like Mark Bredin have argued that Revelation is, in fact, a non-violent work designed to contrast

¹ Pieter G. R. de Villiers, “The Violence of Nonviolence in the Revelation of John,” *Open Theology* 2015:1 (2015): 189–203. cf. Desjardins’ definition of violence as anything that “violates the personhood of another in ways that are psychologically destructive” M. Desjardins, “Peace, Violence and the New Testament,” *The Biblical Seminar* 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 12.

² Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by The Heart. A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 53–57.

³ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Carol Stream: Tyndale Publishing House, 2011)

the violence of the world with the peace of God.⁴ Some have seen the violence of Revelation as legitimate retribution for the evil actions it is set against,⁵ while others have argued that the text is simply describing the violence present in a fallen world and not demonstrative of God's agenda.⁶ Even within peaceful interpretations voices acknowledge that the dominating presence of violent narrative elements "requires empathy for readers who struggle to resonate with the Revelation as violent text, and, secondly, an openness to the fact that for them Revelation's text may be liberating only to a limited degree, if at all."⁷

A recent approach to nonviolent theology has emerged through the work of René Girard. His theories of mimetic desire, religious violence, and Christian redemption have challenged the notion of Christianity as an iteration of mono-myth and set the Christian gospel in direct opposition to the idea of redemptive violence. His theories provide not only a critique of violence but also help to explain the persistence of the concept of redemptive violence in human culture. However, Girard's work has rarely been applied to Revelation in significant ways and as Loren L. Johns points out, "the Apocalypse of John has traditionally been seen as a problem for the Girardian reading of the New Testament."⁸ The purpose of this study is to explore how the work of Girard, as an interpretative lens for Revelation, can help us to understand why violence must be used explicitly in the narrative structure of Revelation for the text to achieve its non-violent agenda. This work will engage Girard's theories of mimesis as identity formation, cultural appropriation of violence as controlling mechanism, and the divine unveiling of the myth of redemptive violence. Though Girard's theories originate in a cultural climate very different from

⁴ Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003)

⁵ Richard A. Spencer, "Violence and Vengeance in Revelation," *Review & Expositor* 98, No. 1 (2001): 66–69.

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 172.

⁷ de Villiers, "The Violence of Nonviolence," 201.

⁸ Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 161. see footnote

that of the text of Revelation, Girard has systematized his theories specifically to invite us to search for resonance within such a text.⁹ Through this interpretive lens, this thesis will show that a consistent Girardian approach can be applied to the text of Revelation and will use that approach to argue that the apparent utility of violence, set against the redemptive inability of violence, is one of the core messages of Revelation.

This thesis begins with the assumption of nonviolence as a central concept in the gospel presentation of Jesus¹⁰ and compares that to various interpretations of Jesus as presented in the text of Revelation. Chapter 2 introduces a brief biography of Girard and explores his core theories. Next, Chapter 3 outlines a structural approach to Revelation that places specific scenes within larger narrative cycles. The major section of this thesis will apply Girard's theories to specific scenes from each cycle in Revelation to point toward the key reversal that the text unveils. Chapter 4 will focus on the first cycle of Revelation and the experience of the believing community. Chapters 5 through 7 will engage the second cycle where Girard ideas can be compared to the socio-political imagination of Revelation. Chapter 8 will explore the cosmic implications of Revelation's final cycle. Finally, a brief concluding chapter will summarize the key insights and provide suggestions for further development. In this way, Girard's central theological insight that Christianity is a *scandalon* undermining our assumptions about violence can provide a lens to interpret Revelation's subversive use of violence as a narrative device.

1. Nonviolence in the Person and Teachings of Jesus.

⁹ Girard was quoted in 1981 saying, "Theories are expendable. They should be criticized. When people tell me my work is too systematic, I say, 'I make it as systematic as possible for you to be able to prove it wrong.'" Cynthia Haven, "Stanford Professor and Eminent French Theorist René Girard, Member of the Académie Française, Dies at 91," *Stanford News* (2015) <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/november/rene-girard-obit-110415.html> (accessed Feb 05, 2018).

¹⁰ see Appendix A

Richard Hays writes that “from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to community to follow the example of Jesus in accepting suffering rather than inflicting it.”¹¹ Though Reza Aslan has posited in his popular if polarizing book *Zealot* that Jesus was a violent revolutionary figure, there is no meaningful evidence to suggest that conclusion.¹² Instead, engaging with the gospel narratives presents us with a thorough image of Jesus as peaceful.

While the Jesus of the Gospels is in many ways distinct from the Lamb of Revelation the consistent presence of “Jesus” throughout the text of Revelation indicates a unique focus on the testimony of the human Jesus. This awareness demonstrates that the earthly life of Jesus in the Gospels acts as a central reference point for the text of Revelation.¹³

While the Gospels approach Jesus from their unique perspectives, each of the presentations affirms the centrality of nonviolence in his life and teaching. It is also striking that in each Gospel Jesus confronts violence through intentional subversion, a hallmark of Girardian thought. In Mark, Jesus opposes the symbolic order by challenging each of the politically partisan positions that dominate the cultural climate.¹⁴ In Matthew, he directly names familiar experiences of oppression and calls for subversive protest.¹⁵ In Luke, he commandeers the imagery of violence specifically to reject such action.¹⁶ In John, Jesus directly challenges the

¹¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 332.

¹² While Desjardins acknowledges that “violence abounds within the New Testament” (108) he ultimately concludes that Aslan’s historical identification of Jesus with the political faction of zealots is groundless. M. Desjardins, “Peace, Violence and the New Testament,” 117. cf. Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013)

¹³ Bredin points out that the name Jesus is used 14 times in the text of Revelation. In fact, “Jesus” appears in the first and last verse of the letter. Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 14.

¹⁴ Appendix A 1.1. see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 124–127.

¹⁵ Appendix A 1.2. see Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers. Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 175–185

¹⁶ Appendix A 1.3. see Geoffrey WH. Lampe, “The Two Swords (Luke 22: 35–38),” *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (1984): 335–351.

idea of power as the ability to take life and repurposes it as the ability to lay one's life down.¹⁷ In this way Jesus is not merely *not* violent, he is *actively non-violent* in ways that seek to undermine violence itself. If indeed Revelation relies on both the witness of the human Jesus in Christian memory, as well as the imagination of the resurrected Christ in prophetic imagination, nonviolence and the active subversion of violence should remain a central part of the text's imagination.

2. Jesus in Revelation

When we turn to Revelation, we must note that we have moved beyond the tradition of the Gospels themselves.¹⁸ As Richard Bauckham notes, even the words of Christ in Revelation “are for the most part quite unsuitable for transference to the lips of the Jesus of the Synoptic tradition.”¹⁹ However, even as we recognize that we are encountering Jesus through the lens of this new text, we can ask how this Jesus compares to the non-violent actor that we observe in the Gospels. This is particularly true given the fact that the Revelation text invokes the earthly Jesus' testimony as comfortably as it does the risen Christ's glorification. As noted earlier, there are several ways that the apparent disconnect between the nonviolence of Jesus and the narrative violence of Revelation are reconciled. I will explore two significant approaches here.

2.1. The Legitimate Use of Violence

Scholars have often discussed the divine retributive use of violence in Revelation. Richard Spencer argues that “it is clear to anyone who has read even a few verses of The Revelation of

¹⁷ Appendix A 1.5. see Tom Thatcher, *Greater Than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2009), 67–81.

¹⁸ see Chapter 3 of this thesis for a discussion of authorship.

¹⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 93.

John that its major thrust is... God's universal addressing of the great wrongs of the world by resolute and often horrific punishment."²⁰ Much like the popularized vision of the Left Behind series, Spencer sees the Christ as Lord of the Cosmos, avenging himself for the pain he has endured at the hands of the world.²¹ This action is not only within the limits of Jesus' exalted power but his divine right.²² In this view, the violence poured out through the narrative of Revelation is directly attributable to actions of the risen Lamb in response to his rejection, and as such is legitimated by the sins of the world. William Klassen takes a slightly softer view, arguing that "throughout the various developments the purpose is always to bring men to repentance through the tragedies of history."²³ However, since even those not killed by the violence do not repent of their evil, the violence enacted against the world is shown to be just (Rev 9:20–21).

There is a disconnect here when we compare this to the Jesus of the Gospel tradition whose refusal to call for vengeance was maintained until his death and even contradicted in his final plea for the forgiveness of his persecutors (Lk 23:34). An argument can be made that the shift can be attributed to a post-resurrection Jesus, now fully vindicated and exalted to a position from which he can respond to evil ultimately. Bauckham explores the distinct shift in the worship of Jesus that occurs in the early Christian community as evidenced in the throne room scene of Revelation and the Apocalypse of Isaiah. Together these scenes show the worship in Christ in heaven as "typical of the apocalyptic Christian circles they represent."²⁴ However, while this distinction of pre and post resurrection Jesus may seem to provide a logical point of disunity, Bauckham later cites G.B. Caird, who argues that the distinctive worship of Jesus we see in the throne room of Revelation suggests otherwise: "Wherever the Old Testament says 'Lion' read

²⁰ Spencer, "Violence and Vengeance in Revelation," 66.

²¹ Ibid., 68.

²² Ibid., 69.

²³ William Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966): 304.

²⁴ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 120.

‘Lamb.’... Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.”²⁵ The resurrected and exalted Christ is then worshipped in distinct ways but precisely for the nonviolent actions that point us back to the nonviolence of Jesus’ earthly life.

Regardless, we must acknowledge that the language and imagery of Revelation are indeed violent. As Pieter de Villiers notes, “such language, as contemporary socio-linguistics point out, potentially can be more destructive than physical violence, especially where it is sanctified by religion.”²⁶ This conclusion is perhaps why Barclay comments on Revelation’s celebration at the fate of enemies, stating that this “is not the way of love which Jesus taught.”²⁷

2.2. Subversive Use of Violence

There is, however, an alternative to attempts to legitimate the violence of Revelation. Adela Yarbro Collins acknowledges that Revelation is influenced by the “darker side of the author’s human nature,”²⁸ but she still holds that Revelation is an explicit rejection of open violent conflict.²⁹ Though she sees catharsis in the violent images of retribution, she acknowledges that the text aims to call the community to non-violent action, which returns us to images we are familiar with from the Gospel narratives.

²⁵ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine*, BNTC (London: A&C Black. 1966), 75. see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 179.

²⁶ de Villiers, “The Violence of Nonviolence,” 194.

²⁷ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Volume 2*, The New Daily Study Bible. 3d (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 186.

²⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 172.

²⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Rev to John,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96/2 (1977): 247.

Bauckham argues for Revelation as Christian war scroll wherein holy war traditions are reinterpreted, making “the warfare metaphorical rather than literal.”³⁰ He explores the specific image of the Lamb as Revelation’s distinctive reinterpretation of Messiah as a military leader and argues that in Revelation’s re-framing use of these images Jewish eschatological hopes for a tribal leader are transformed into a hope for the universal redemption for all peoples through sacrifice.³¹

As noted above, Klassen ultimately sees the violence as legitimate, but he also interprets the difficult scene in Revelation 18, where the saints appear to celebrate the fate of their foes, arguing that this is instead a celebration of the victory of peace over violence in light of the self-inflicted fall of Babylon.³² It is therefore at least ambiguous as to whose hand Klassen sees the violence coming from.

In a similar vein, Caird notes that the ultimate image of retribution, the lake of fire, is reserved in Revelation not for humans at all but for the conceptual images of evil itself.³³ He sees God stepping in to “provide a way of stopping men from endlessly producing the means of their own destruction.”³⁴ God’s intervention then is set against the violence we see in the narrative.

Even as de Villiers challenges the efficacy of Revelation’s non-violent aims, he summarizes the argument that Revelation is ultimately a nonviolent text with four central concepts: 1. martyrdom is presented in Revelation as the appropriate response to the violence of the world; 2. witness is the primary means of transformation in Revelation; 3. spiritualizing language is present in the violent imagery in Revelation indicating that it should not be taken as literal violence; 4. Revelation presents patience for God’s action as the only befitting human response

³⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 213.

³¹ Ibid., 214.

³² Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John,” 304.

³³ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John the Divine*, 260.

³⁴ Ibid., 295.

to evil in opposition to violent intervention on humanity's part.³⁵ Still, de Villiers notes that the text is problematic for its use of gender-biased images of good and evil, and he ultimately concludes that "Revelation's text may be liberating only to a limited degree, if at all."³⁶

Finally, Mark Bredin argues that

Nonviolence is the essence of Revelation's understanding of God and his creation. Nonviolence is not a strategy. It is a way of transformation to wisdom and life from ignorance and death. Revelation transforms scapegoat ideology of the righteous destroying the unrighteous into the conviction that all can be righteous.³⁷

Here, Bredin not only echoes Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier in seeing nonviolence as the identity of all those in Christ rather than merely a strategy for Christian victory, but he also points forward to René Girard's theories as the potential key to unlock the truly subversive use of violence in Revelation. As demonstrated in the Gospel narratives, Jesus is not merely a martyr victim but an active participant who seeks to undermine concepts of violence. That this same theme is deeply embedded in the text of Revelation demonstrates that, while we are looking at a new perspective on Jesus, this lens is not at odds with the human Jesus of the Gospels on which Revelation depends.

³⁵ de Villiers, "The Violence of Nonviolence," 190–193.

³⁶ Ibid., 201.

³⁷ Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 34.

Chapter 2. The Life and Work of René Girard

As explored in the previous chapter, Jesus is consistently portrayed in the Gospel narratives as not only refusing the use of violence but actively working to counter violence in the world. This approach is continued into the text of Revelation through the subversive use of violent images intended to call the community to non-violent action in the pattern of Jesus. In his summary of Revelation, Bredin points us to René Girard by suggesting that the transformation of scapegoat ideology is a central part of the Revelation agenda. By exploring Girard's theories of nonviolence—in particular how violence emerges in and is used by culture and how it is undone through the Christian story—we can provide a lens through which Revelation can be understood as a subversive text in the tradition of Jesus' earthly nonviolence.

1. Biography

To properly interpret the work of René Girard and how his theories interact with Christian theology, it is important to gather a basic understanding of his biography. Girard comes to the Christian story through his efforts to understand the relationship between religion and violence and, although he is not a trained theologian, it is precisely his multi-disciplinary approach that allows his voice to speak with a unique perspective and significance.

Girard passed away at the age of 91 in 2015. Although born in Avignon, France and a member of the *Académie française*, Girard's influence was most directly felt through his work in North America as a professor at Johns Hopkins and later Stanford University. While his theories of mimetic desire, the source of violence in human history, and the scapegoat mechanism in religious practice propelled him into the theological spotlight, his path to theological influence

was circuitous. Initially, Girard studied history. After focusing on the paleography of medieval handwriting in Paris,³⁸ he earned his first doctorate in 1947 for the work *La vie privée à Avignon dans la seconde moitié du XVe siècle* (Private Life in Avignon in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century). Girard then accepted a position to teach French at Indiana University where he also completed a second Ph.D. in Contemporary History in 1950 for the work “American Opinion of France, 1940–1943.”³⁹ After being denied tenure at Indiana University, Girard taught at Duke University and Bryn Mawr College before being appointed a professor of French Literature at John Hopkins University in 1957.⁴⁰ Though he published essays in the field, his first book, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* was not published until 1961 and in English as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* in 1966. The central thesis of the work, as described by Wolfgang Palaver, is that “Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust, and Dostoyevsky arrived at their insights into human nature by going through a personal conversion themselves.”⁴¹ Though this precedes the mimetic approach developed in *La Violence et le sacré*⁴² and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*⁴³ by more than a decade in Girard’s life, it is precisely his interaction with the existential connection between author and literary work that forms the ground for his later inquiries. While he acknowledges that the creation of literary work is not merely veiled autobiography, he recognizes in his analysis that we are “not autonomous, self-sufficient

³⁸ Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory: Studies in Violence Mimesis & Culture* (trans. Gabriel Borrud; East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 3.

³⁹ An excerpt from this thesis was reprinted in the René Girard issue of *Les Cahiers de l’Herne* (2008).

⁴⁰ 1957 associate professor. 1961 full professor.

⁴¹ Palaver, *René Girard*, 1. cf. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (trans. Yvonne Freccero; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1961), 290–314.

⁴² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. Patrick Gregory; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979)

⁴³ Girard, *Things Hidden*.

individuals, but rather beings that are formed through the imitation of models.”⁴⁴ It is this central insight which comes to form the foundation of his later work.

From 1968 to 1976 he was a professor of Literature at the State University of New York, returning to John Hopkins in the late 70s to teach French Literature and Humanities before accepting the position of Andrew B. Hammond Professor of French Language, Literature and Civilization at Stanford University from 1980 until his retirement in 1995. As a trained historian, Girard had neither a background in literary analysis⁴⁵ nor the theological and anthropological training that ended up being his central contribution. “It was precisely this unconventional approach to literary analysis, however, that enabled him to develop a theory that went far beyond the field’s narrow realm.”⁴⁶ This has made Girard’s work fascinating for students of diverse interests.

2. Mimetic Theory

Though Girard’s theories are broad and far-reaching, the power of their influence is bound up in how easily they can be communicated in contemporary examples. Girard’s mimetic theory can be quickly understood in three steps.

First, for Girard, desire is the source of all violence because it is mimetic and triangular. What he means is that we do not desire anything straightforwardly; instead, we desire objects precisely because we see others desiring them.⁴⁷ More pointedly, we desire the experience we see in another, which we then project onto the object, driving us to copy (mimesis) that observed desire. As James Alison summarizes, “We are given to be who we are through the eyes of

⁴⁴ Palaver, *René Girard*, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Girard calls this the “imitative nature of desire.” René Girard, “Triangular Desire,” reproduced in *The Girard Reader* (ed. James G. Williams; New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 42.

another.”⁴⁸ This creates a triangulation between ourselves, the other, and the object, centred around this misplaced sense of desire. Though he continues to develop this theory over the course of his career, this triangular desire is remarkably well developed in his first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.⁴⁹ In analyzing the work of Cervantes, he writes that the character “Don Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual’s fundamental prerogative; he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis must choose for him.”⁵⁰ Mimetic theory sees humans as fundamentally dependent on each other for identity. We imitate each other. The boy patterns his behaviour on that of his father. The girl plays with dolls in an attempt to imitate the patterns she witnesses from her mother. However, this imitation goes beyond pattern recognition to the creation of desire as we see illustrated in Cervantes’ work. Through imitation, we learn the desire to be like another and develop the need to possess what the other has. This process can be communicated succinctly in our shared experience of contemporary advertising. Most of the advertisements we see in our culture are not designed to drive desire directly for the object being sold, but instead to associate the object available for purchase with an experience or a status we see embodied in another and then long to achieve for ourselves. This effect is precisely what is intended when celebrity endorsements are used to sell products. By copying the desire of a celebrity, we feel a kinship to something larger than merely the object for sale.

Second, this triangulation leads, inevitably, to conflict. The well-worn example of this process is to watch a child playing with a single toy in a room of available toys. When a second child enters the room, they are immediately drawn to imitate the desire for the toy in use, leading to conflict. However, since it is not the object itself which drives our desire, even the successful

⁴⁸ James Alison, *The Forgiving Victim: Listening to the Unheard Voice* (Glenview: Doers Publishing, 2013), 26.

⁴⁹ cf. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 1–17.

⁵⁰ Girard, “Triangular Desire,” 34.

acquisition of the object, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, cannot fully resolve the tension that our mimetic desire has created. As Girard writes, “Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred.”⁵¹ This is the genesis of all conflict.

In the third step, this newly arisen tension is resolved through the use of a hidden scapegoat mechanism. Once the tension has become too great to bear, it is transferred by the original parties onto a third party. This process can be as simple as a schoolyard group who taunts or bullies a weaker child and finds themselves drawn together in kinship as their competitive tensions with each other are diffused. It can also be as drastic as a fragmented German population being profoundly drawn together as they project economic difficulties and political humiliation onto the Jewish peoples during the middle of the twentieth century. Though this process can seem transparent from the outside, Girard writes that “the episode of mimetic violence and reconciliation is always recollected and narrated, as well as re-enacted from the perspective of the beneficiaries, who are also its puppets.”⁵² This scapegoating mechanism allows the competitive tension of mimetic desire and the conflict that has arisen within the community to be temporarily diffused. It is this three-step process repeating itself over and over that Girard recognized in both his analysis of literature but also in history.

Girard’s movement into religious analysis is what eventually led him to apply his model to an all-encompassing theory of the origin of culture. Though critiqued as too modern in its attempt to bring all cultures under a single structural metanarrative,⁵³ Girard’s theory is that the birth of archaic culture was founded on the accidental discovery of peace through violence. Since

⁵¹ Ibid., 40.

⁵² René Girard, “Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism,” *Berkshire Review* 14 (1979) 9–19 reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. James G. Williams), 14.

⁵³ René Girard, *Sacrifice: Breakthroughs in Mimetic Theory* (trans. Matthew Patillo and David Dawson; Michigan: Michigan State Press, 2011), introduction.

mimesis is such a powerful force in the creation of identity, the rivalry described above infects humanity like a plague whenever we gather in social proximity.⁵⁴ This plague threatened to derail the meaningful creation of cultural frameworks before they could engender the kind of progress we take for granted today. In other words, mimesis creates rivalry, which builds until it finds outlet in violence, then imitated in the gathering, resulting in the emergence of proto-culture being abandoned or destroyed before it can progress. As Chilton summarizes, “the desire to have what the other has (even to the point of wishing to be what the other is), a basic, human passion, is the root of violence: it is both ineluctable and incompatible with the existence of human culture.”⁵⁵

Girard theorizes that at some point in this cycle of forming and collapse in proto-culture a group was able to spontaneously focus their violent rivalry onto a single victim. That cathartic release enjoined the group in the temporary resolution of their mimetic rivalry and brought peace to the collective. It is not that violence was ever actually redemptive in Girard’s model. In fact, “cultural violence that does not climax in catharsis will result in mimesis”⁵⁶ and more violence. However, when the violence is directed at a scapegoat, chosen unconsciously by the collective, the tension between the remaining members is diffused and peace is the result. Since violence itself is never actually redemptive, the unconscious choice of victim is integral to the process. If anyone were to understand that the violence was actually misdirected and that the source of the conflict was still present in the collective, then the illusion would be undone, and the effect would fail, creating even more conflict and violence. However, a single victim, unconsciously chosen by the collective as scapegoat for unspoken conflict, ushers in a temporary season of

⁵⁴ see Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 99.

⁵⁵ Bruce D. Chilton, “René Girard, James Williams, And the Genesis of Violence,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3, no. 1 (1993): 18.

⁵⁶ Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad Publishing. 1996), 91.

peace. The longstanding work of Emile Durkheim saw religion as the expression of self-worship wherein communities projected dominant cultural traits onto animals, symbols, and eventually totems that stood in for God.⁵⁷ Girard, however, upends this long-held perspective, suggesting that religion is not self-worship at all but instead the systemization of the unexpected effects of spontaneous violence driven by mimetic desire. “For Girard, sacrifice is not an incoherent, primitive practice rooted in myths”⁵⁸ but “a real solution to a real problem.”⁵⁹

Clearly, one death, no matter how deeply hidden within the scapegoat complex, could not fundamentally change the nature of the human condition. Therefore, the effect is temporary. Over time mimetic rivalry begins to emerge in culture once again. Religion, and indeed culture itself, comes from the memory of that initial peace, resulting from spontaneous violence, now ritualized in the re-enactment of this violence made sacred. As Girard writes, “religious prohibitions make a good deal of sense when interpreted as efforts to prevent mimetic rivalry from spreading throughout human communities”⁶⁰ but since those prohibitions cannot fully contain mimetic rivalry religion is ultimately defined by the community’s controlled “mimesis of an initial collective founding murder.”⁶¹ This mimesis is recreated through sacrificial systems in ancient cultures or even judicial systems in modern cultures that Girard notes, “are in no real conflict with the concept of revenge.”⁶²

The persuasiveness of this social-psychological explanation is that the group need not understand the mechanism being played out; the group need only recognize the social effect at play and attribute to it sacred significance. In fact, “the sacrificial system requires a certain

⁵⁷ Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1995) Kindle Location 219

⁵⁸ James R. A. Merrick, “Book Reviews: Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross. By S. Mark Heim,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 883.

⁵⁹ S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 60.

⁶⁰ Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 10.

⁶¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 97

⁶² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1–44. reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 85.

degree of misunderstanding.”⁶³ Once the spontaneous violence first observed is translated and systemized into a repeated single victim transference through either continued human sacrifice, animal sacrifice, or other social offering to the gods, the basis for collective peace is established in ritual and culture is able to progress. As Bruce Chilton describes, “the violence of society is imputed to a person or animal who is the sacrificial victim. The ritual act of killing that victim, which is then deified in view of the killing’s apparently beneficial effect upon society, both restrains and assuages the communal violence which is at its root.”⁶⁴ This provides a satisfying explanation to the long-recognized similarities in religious development across cultural boundaries but, rather than seeing religion as part of a deep human structure, Girard sees religion as the functional tool that provides the platform for culture to emerge.

3. Christian Engagement

This explanation of culture and religion may at first appear toxic to the Christian faith. However, it was through Girard’s engagement with the Biblical text that he discovered a narrative that he felt at once challenged and brought to completion his theories of mimesis. Though the Bible seemed to live comfortably within the world of sacred violence, Girard saw in the underlying narrative thrust an identification with the victim rather than the mob. Girard acknowledges that “ambiguity or even contradiction remains in Christian theology but not in the text of the Gospels, which replaces the violent God of the past with a nonviolent one whose demand is for

⁶³ James Williams writes that “as for *méconnaissance*, it is translated in this text as “misunderstanding,” but it has the connotation of unconscious distortion and concealment of ritual and myth.” René Girard, *The Girard Reader* (ed. James G. Williams; New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 70.

⁶⁴ Chilton, “René Girard, James Williams, And the Genesis of Violence,” 18.

nonviolence rather than sacrifice.”⁶⁵ He writes that “the biblical tendency to ‘side with the victims’ is obvious, but modern students of the Bible tend to limit its consequences to ethical and purely ‘religious’ considerations.”⁶⁶ Despite Girard acknowledging the similarities between the biblical text and archaic religion,⁶⁷ he refuses to dismiss the Bible as mere projection.⁶⁸ Though Girard initially stays away from direct analysis of the Biblical texts in earlier works such as *Violence and the Sacred* (1979), by the time he writes *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987) he is engaging with both Old and New Testament texts. He writes,

In effect, all that I did in *Violence and the Sacred* was to retrace, with all its hesitations, my own intellectual journey, which eventually brought me to the Judeo-Christian writings, though long after I had become convinced of the importance of the victimage mechanism.⁶⁹

Girard cites the influence of an unpublished work of Frederick Nietzsche, which he calls the “single greatest theological text of the nineteenth century,”⁷⁰ as part of what brings him to the Christian story. In that work, later published as *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche contrasts Dionysus and Christ.⁷¹ Dionysus was the god of wine and was frequently compared to Jesus, whose first miracle at Cana involved the supernatural creation of large quantities of wine. The similarities run deeper still as Dionysus was also put on trial for claiming his divinity. However, it was Dionysus’ death and rising that drew most direct comparisons to Christ. Dionysus is torn to

⁶⁵ Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 18. Note that God’s preference for mercy above sacrifice actually emerges the Old Testament through passages such as Hosea 6:6

⁶⁶ Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 17.

⁶⁷ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, part 6, *The Scapegoat* (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1913), 413–414. See also 412–423 “The Crucifixion of Christ,”; quoted in René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (trans; Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 168.

⁶⁸ René Girard, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l’éclair* (Paris: Bernard Grasset. 1999), 10–12.

⁶⁹ Girard, *Things Hidden*. reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 174.

⁷⁰ René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer: Studies in Violence, Mimesis, & Culture* (Michigan State University Press. 2014), 198.

⁷¹ Frederick Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (trans; Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House. 1967), 543.

pieces by the Titans and eaten, leaving only his heart from which he is restored.⁷² Nietzsche recognizes the dying and rising motif but interprets opposing implications from the two stories. For Nietzsche, the Christ's dying and rising is a rejection of life and a desire to transcend it, while Dionysus' cycle of dying and rising is an embrace of life and a desire to return to it.⁷³ However, even as Nietzsche appears to reject the fixed moment of the Christ's resurrection in favour of the eternal cycle of dying and rising,⁷⁴ he recognizes the difference between Myth and Gospel. Nietzsche writes that "through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed... And this pseudohumanism called Christianity wants it established that no one should be sacrificed."⁷⁵ As Wolfgang Palaver summarizes, "myth justifies sacrifice, in Nietzsche's eyes, while the Gospel texts stress the innocence of the victim and attack the injustice of collective violence."⁷⁶ Girard credits the influence of this insight as central to his discovery but ultimately departs from Nietzsche, embracing the story of Christ as preferable to that of Dionysus for its finality in overcoming the cycle of scapegoating violence.

Where Girard initially sees all religious myth as the recounting of the collective murder told from the perspective of the aggressor, he begins to recognize that the Bible is this same tale of human violence made sacred but told instead from the perspective of the victim. He writes that "the biblical tendency to 'side with the victims' is obvious but modern students of the Bible tend to limit its consequence to ethical and purely 'religious' considerations."⁷⁷ For Girard the implications of this identification run much deeper, so deep, in fact, that the Gospels are able to

⁷² Marcel Detienne, *Dionysus Slain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1979)

⁷³ "Dionysus versus the 'Crucified': there you have the antithesis. It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom-it is a difference in the meaning of it." Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 543.

⁷⁴ "The 'god on the cross' is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: It will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction." Ibid., 543.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 141-142.

⁷⁶ Palaver, *René Girard*, 198.

⁷⁷ Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 17.

demystify the entire scapegoat mechanism that underlies all religious systems.⁷⁸ He writes that despite his victimization,

Jesus continues to see himself as being bound by the promise of the Kingdom. For him, the word that comes from God, that word that enjoins us to imitate no one but God, the God who refrains from all forms of reprisal and makes his sun to shine upon the ‘just’ and the ‘unjust’ without distinction—this word remains for him, absolutely, valid.⁷⁹

Here Girard skillfully emphasizes the depth of subversion that is happening in the Gospels by locating Jesus’ commitment in his mimesis of the Father. This imitation is central to Jesus’ humanity just as it is ours. However, in imitating the Father to the exclusions of all other actors, Girard argues that “the decision to adopt nonviolence is not a commitment [Jesus] could revoke, a contract whose clauses need only be observed to the extent that the other contracting parties observe them.”⁸⁰ It is because of this profound commitment to move forward in nonviolence, rather than imitate the actions of those who oppose him, that “Jesus appears as a destructive and subversive force, as a source of contamination that threatens the community.”⁸¹ By not conforming to the patterns of scapegoat victimization, Jesus can bring to light the violence inherent in what we perceive as peace. When we are embedded in the world created by the scapegoat mechanism, anything that intends to unveil that process to us appears as a threat to both our perception of self as innocent but also to the calm that we confuse for peace.

As Girard writes,

Certainly, the preaching of the Kingdom of God reveals that there is an element of violence in even the most apparently holy of institutions, like the church hierarchy, the rites of the Temple, and even family.

⁷⁸ “Instead of reading myths in light of the Gospels, people have always read the Gospels in light of myths. In comparison with the astonishing work of demystification effected by the Gospels, our own exercise in demystification are only slight sketches.” Girard, *Things Hidden*, reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 176.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

Faithful to the logic of sacrifice, those who have refused the invitation to the Kingdom are obliged to turn against Jesus. They can hardly fail to see in him the sworn enemy and corrupter of every cultural order they are vainly attempting to restore.

This means that violence will find in Jesus the most perfect victim that can be imagined, the victim that, for every conceivable reason, violence has the most reason to pick on.⁸²

Girard's point here is that, because Jesus is so thoroughly nonviolent, this makes him both the least likely victim from the outsider's perspective and the perfect victim from within the perspective of the single victim mechanism. The very fact that Jesus presents no objective threat is what puts him on an inevitable collision course with the systems that contain and propagate controlled violence. Anyone who exposes the violence inherent in the perceived peace must be branded an enemy. In this way, for Girard, the Christ functions differently from all other sacrificial myths in that Jesus' death is the final sacrifice that unveils the hidden truth of sacrificial logic, fulfilling our true longing not for sacred violence, but instead for a way out from the cycle of mimetic conflict and mitigation.

4. Scriptural Engagement

Though Girard is not a biblical scholar, he does intend for his theories to be as systematic as possible, and so he engages with a broad range of Scriptural passages throughout his later writings. While this thesis will focus on Revelation, it is significant to see how Girard engages with biblical thought and scholarship.

Given that Girard sees all religion as the systemization of the temporary peace created through the scapegoat mechanism but also sees in the Christian story the subversion of that very system and the unveiling of true peace, it is not unsurprising that he comes to see in the Hebrew Scriptures an unfolding, if incomplete, movement towards nonviolence. Girard describes both

⁸² Ibid., 182.

prohibition and ritual within the Hebrew Scriptures as designed to “spare the community another mimetic perturbation.”⁸³ Put another way, “the function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting.”⁸⁴ While the sacrificial system of Torah gives people a pattern to contain their collective need for a scapegoat, the sacrificial system as a whole is nonetheless not an expression of God’s ultimate desire for retributive payment but a concession to the pattern of human desire itself. Girard’s view of Torah as a concession is not without precedent. Jesus himself describes the Mosaic laws regarding divorce as a concession of God rather than a part of his ultimate plan for human society (Mt 19:8). Indeed, the prophets seem to sense this movement as they express the idea that sacrifice is not something God desires (Is 1:11) or requires (Ho 6:6). By acknowledging a *human* need for sacrifice and the societal function of the scapegoat mechanism in releasing collective anxiety, God moves to contain the violence of the scapegoat mechanism by shifting the practice from human to animal sacrifice and preparing the stage for the eventual unveiling of this mechanism in the Christ. As Gil Bailie describes Girard’s perspective, this is the “bestowing of sacred status on a socially tolerable form of violence to which the culture can resort as an alternative to greater and more catastrophic violence.”⁸⁵ We can see the slowly progressing movement away from sacrifice as the epitome of God’s desire and into a secondary concern as the Hebrew Scriptures move from the Mosaic cult and into the Psalmic and Prophetic traditions. Particularly, Psalm 40:6 and Hosea 6:6, which Jesus himself quotes twice in Matthew (Mt 9:13, 12:7), articulate an imagination that sees a world beyond the sacrificial, peering into the heart of the nonviolent God. In fact, in the second of the Matthean references, Jesus’ words can read like a summary of Girard’s articulation: “If

⁸³ Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. James G. Williams), 13.

⁸⁴ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. James G. Williams), 83.

⁸⁵ Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 6.

you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.” (Mt 12:7)

However, in the Song of the Suffering Servant found in Isaiah 53, Girard shows another example of his scriptural engagement. Here the prophet tells us that,

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Is 52:2-3)

Girard starts by contextualizing the four servant songs (Is 42:1–4, 49:1–6, 50:4–11, 52:13–53:12) within the “return from Babylon authorized by Cyrus.”⁸⁶ However, he notes that “the servant appears within the context of the prophetic crisis for the purpose of resolving it”⁸⁷ Here the description of the servant as having no beauty or majesty being despised and rejected “predisposes him to the role of a veritable human scapegoat.”⁸⁸ This is the victimization of an outsider where the weakest from among the community is chosen as the scapegoat. Girard notes that this scene from the prophet has no indication of the ritual violence established in the sacrificial system but instead appears to be the spontaneous eruption of the scapegoat mechanism in a time of crisis.⁸⁹ The statement, “though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Is 53:9) seems to reinforce this identification as the scapegoat, indicating that the selection of victim, though sanctioned, was not predicated on a particular transgression. As Girard writes, “the most striking aspect here, the trait which is certainly unique, is the innocence

⁸⁶ Girard, *Things Hidden*, reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 156.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

of the servant, the fact that he has no connection with violence and no affinity for it.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Girard has said that the “victim cannot be perceived as innocent and impotent, he (or she, as the case may be) must be perceived if not necessarily as the culprit in our sense, at least as a creature truly responsible for all the disorders and ailments of the community.”⁹¹ Palaver interacts with Girard’s claim, writing that “there are certainly myths that speak of innocent victims, or at least in which the victim is not blamed explicitly; however, we are aware of no mythical accounts comparable to this biblical text in which the persecutors simultaneously accept the blame for the violence in the text.”⁹² In this way the prophet Isaiah describes for us an example of the scapegoat mechanism that is designed to undermine its own premise by showing us what is hidden beneath the appearance of redemptive violence.

The Isaiah text continues, “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Is 53:4–5) Here, Girard declares that it is not God who is responsible for the suffering of the servant at all but instead the crowd who initially persecuted and only later become aware of his innocence and their culpability.⁹³ It is the crowd who considers him punished by God, and therefore he is crushed for/by the crowds’ iniquities as they direct their violence onto him. Though the scapegoat mechanism is not fully unveiled in this

⁹⁰ Ibid., 157.

⁹¹ Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 15.

⁹² Palaver, *René Girard*, 210. see Girard, *Sacrifice*. pg. 103, 166–167. “The victim cannot be perceived as innocent and impotent; he (or she as the case may be) must be perceived if not necessarily as a culprit in our sense, at least as a creature truly responsible for all the disorders and ailments of the community.” Girard, “Mimesis and Violence,” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 15.

⁹³ Girard, *Things Hidden*, reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 157.

image, for Girard, it shows that in the Old Testament a “work of exegesis is in process, operating in precisely the opposite to the usual dynamics of mythology and culture.”⁹⁴

Girard will admit that his reading is problematic. Isaiah says, “Yet it was the LORD’S will to crush him and cause him to suffer” (Is 53:10). Girard sees in this verse the pull of mythic thinking in which the grasp of the mimetic drive is not completely escaped⁹⁵ and, therefore, even as the crowd is being critiqued, the responsibility for the violence is still partly shared with God in the Prophet’s mind. However, others with more direct backgrounds in biblical scholarship have provided alternatives to what Girard sees as problematic. Ernst Haag has argued that verse 53:10a is a later addition that does not belong to the original text of Second Isaiah.⁹⁶ James Williams suggests that the verse represents the perspective of the guilty crowd even as the author intends to critique that perspective.⁹⁷ John McKenzie notes that “There is an obvious inconsistency between the death of the Servant (vss. 7–9) and what is said in these verses. [Indeed] YHWH suddenly becomes the speaker in vss. 11–12,”⁹⁸ indicating an important shift in perspective. Finally, Robert Ekblad provides a detailed essay comparing the LXX and the MT versions of this passage and concludes that,

Rather than reinforcing an image of God as one who delights in crushing his servant and people, even if it were a means to some great end, the LXX shows the same tendency visible in Isaiah 53:4, 6 to avoid implicating God in the oppression. According to the LXX, the Lord is disassociated from the persecutors.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 158.

⁹⁶ Ernst Haag, “Die Botschaft vom Gottesknecht,” *Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit im Alten Testament* (ed. Norbert Lohfink; Freiburg: Herder, 1983), 170. Idem. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, The Anchor Yale Bible 19A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 79.

⁹⁷ James Williams. *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 159–162.

⁹⁸ John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, The Anchor Yale Bible 20 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 132.

⁹⁹ E. Robert Ekblad, “God is Not to Blame: The Servant’s Atoning Suffering According to the LXX of Isaiah 53 181–204,” in *Stricken by God?* ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. 2007), 197.

What we see is that Girard's intuition, even if he is not a trained Biblical scholar, is compatible with approaches from within the discipline.

Girard sees in the Old Testament a view of God that is beginning to emerge from mythic violence even if the culture that creates these texts does not fully grasp the movement toward divine nonviolence.¹⁰⁰ Raymond Schwager describes a similar perspective when he writes that the Bible is a text in which “on the one hand, archaic visions of the veiled world of the (violent) sacred are still prevalent and, on the other hand, which are penetrated by a completely new impulse of the revelation of the true God.”¹⁰¹ For Girard, this new impulse begins in “the Old Testament, but is brought to fruition by the New Testament where it is accomplished decisively and definitively”¹⁰² in Christ. As Girard explains, “Christianity is a founding murder in reverse, which illuminates what has to remain hidden to produce ritual, sacrificial religions.”¹⁰³ Thus the centre of the Christian faith for Girard is the subversion of violence and the system that keeps violence contained and in circulation. With this understating of Girard's theories and how he relates them to both Christian thought and Scripture, we can now turn our attention to the specific text of Revelation in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Palaver, *René Girard*, 211.

¹⁰¹ Raymund Schwager, “Eindrücke einer Begegnung,” *Gewalt und Gewaltlosigkeit im Alten Testament* (ed. Norbert Lohfink; Freiburg: Herder, 1983), 217.

¹⁰² René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (trans: Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 103.

¹⁰³ René Girard, “On War and Apocalypse,” *First Things* (2009)
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/08/apocalypse-now> (accessed Feb 5, 2018).

Chapter 3. The Structure of Revelation

The previous chapter introduced René Girard's biography and theory and explored some of his engagement with Biblical texts. Though the ultimate agenda of this thesis is to apply Girard's theory as a lens through which to interpret key images in Revelation, we need to first situate our conversation within the literary genre and structural framework of Revelation. This examination will allow us to build an understanding of which images in Revelation drive the narrative forward and therefore identify the images that need to be analyzed through Girard's lens.

1. Authorship and Setting

1.1. Identifying an Author

While the identity of "John at Patmos" has been traditionally ascribed to the author of The Fourth Gospel, and in many cases to the apostle named John in the Gospels (who is also identified as the brother of James) it has never been conclusively determined or universally supported within the church. Varied views have been expressed. As early as Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165CE), the apostle John is identified as the author of Revelation (*Dial.* 84.1). Irenaeus (d. ca. 200CE) lends his support to this identity (*Haer.* 3.11.1) as do Origen (d. ca. 254CE, *Comm. Jo.* 2.41–42) and Hippolytus (d. ca. 235CE, *Antichr.* 36). Tertullian (d. ca. 225CE) confirms John's identity as the apostle (*Against Marcion.* 3.14) and adds to the legend of John by contributing a story where John is plunged into boiling oil only to escape unscathed and is therefore exiled to Patmos in a final attempt to silence him (*Prescription Against Heretics.* 36). However, "critical scholars have long agreed that the linguistic and theological differences between the Gospel of

John and Revelation are so striking that the same author could not have written both works.”¹⁰⁴ These debates surrounding Revelation’s authorship are not simply modern inventions, however. Historical opposition to seeing continuity between the Fourth Gospel and the text of Revelation falls into two main camps. Eusebius (d. ca. 339CE) records an accusation by the presbyter Caius implying that the heretic Cerinthus had written Revelation specifically to deceive readers (*Ecclesiastical Histories*, 3.28). Eusebius himself, on the testimony of Papias, concludes the author to be simply a man named John, a presbyter from Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical Histories*, 3.39).

In modern scholarship, Josephine Massyngberde Ford has presented an idiosyncratic theory suggesting that John at Patmos is, in fact, John the Baptist from the gospel narratives.¹⁰⁵ However, this theory has found little to no traction beyond her commentary. Craig Koester argues that since the author of Revelation attaches no significance to his name, claiming neither apostleship nor authority beyond the content of his message, it is unlikely that the author is using the name deceptively as Caius suggested. Instead, “the most plausible view is that John was the real name of an early Christian prophet who was active among the prophets in Asia Minor.”¹⁰⁶ David E. Aune concurs, writing that “there is insufficient internal evidence to suppose that this ‘John’ either was or pretended to be John of Ephesus, the author of the Gospel and Letters of John.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore the simplest of explanations is to take John at Patmos at his word, believing this to be his name but placing no greater importance on his extended identity beyond what he does. This approach is in line with recent trends in scholarship.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (ed. Ralph P. Martin; Dallas: Word Books, 1997), liv.

¹⁰⁵ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Yale Bible 38 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 30.

¹⁰⁶ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (ed. John J. Collins; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 68.

¹⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ cf Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, xlviii.–xlix.

This conclusion, however, does not exclude the significance of understanding “the Johannine School” in the interpretation of Revelation.¹⁰⁹ This approach posits “a community of common origin, language or rhetoric, and theological interests which includes, or has in its circumference, considerable theological diversity.”¹¹⁰ In this way, the divergences in style and even theological perspective between the Johannine texts can be accounted for while still linking the texts for study.¹¹¹

1.2. Source Critical Considerations

While it is important to understand whether source-critical efforts support or challenge assumptions about authorship, the unique nature of the text makes conclusions about Revelation difficult. However, there is enough information to warrant a synchronic reading that can help to situate the text within a particular context. F. Rousseau suggests as many as five different redactors of both Jewish and Christian background¹¹² and Ford argues that two prior Jewish apocalypses authored by John the Baptist were later fused together by a Christian disciple to give us the text of Revelation as we know it.¹¹³ However, Fiorenza concludes that due to the consistent use of Hebraisms throughout the text and “because of the uniform language of [Revelation]... contemporary scholarship tends to stress the unity of [Revelation] and to reject source-critical manipulations.”¹¹⁴ This depiction of the author means we can see continuity

¹⁰⁹ see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1998) 88–101. for a summary of the argument including a brief linguistic analysis

¹¹⁰ D. M. Smith, *John*, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1976) 69.

¹¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, The Anchor Yale Bible 29 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), cvii–cviii.

¹¹² F. Rousseau, *L'Apocalypse et le milieu prophétique du Nouveau Testament: Structure et préhistoire du texte* (Paris: Desclée. 1971)

¹¹³ Ford, *Revelation*, 38.

¹¹⁴ Fiorenza. *The Book of Revelation*, 16.

between the various sections of Revelation and reject attempts to pit source materials against each other.

While this limits speculative insight into the text by way of source critical efforts, we can surmise from the prevalence of the apocalyptic genre in Palestinian Judaism,¹¹⁵ from the author's familiarity with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament,¹¹⁶ and from the "strong continuity between Jewish tradition and the message of Jesus"¹¹⁷ assumed in Revelation, that the author is likely a Palestinian Jew who sees himself in the vein of the Hebrew Prophets, particularly Daniel, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch.¹¹⁸

1.3. Historical Setting

Despite these limitations in identifying a definitive author, the historical setting of Revelation is vitally important in developing a reading strategy. While Fiorenza advocates for the significance of the cultural climate in reading Revelation, she warns in the notes to her article "Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17–18":

While I agree that it is important to reconstruct the historical situation of the book, I would argue that we "reconstruct" the mind-set of the actor or the beliefs of the ancients only in and through our contemporary linguistic and theoretical assumptions.¹¹⁹

Even with her critique of naively positivist readings, Fiorenza still argues that the text uses conventional language that must be interpreted through the reconstruction of historical situations.

¹¹⁵ "No known examples of Jewish apocalypses originated in the eastern or western Diaspora, nor did the genre survive long in early Christianity once it had moved outside the boundaries of Palestine." Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 1.

¹¹⁶ Charles even argues for the exclusive use of the MT. R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Volume 1* (London: FB&C Limited, 2016 classic reprint), lxvi–lxxxi.

¹¹⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Gregory L. Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse: The Limits of Genre," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*. ed. David L. Barr (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta. 2006), 33.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Schüsler Fiorenza, "Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17–18," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*. ed. David L. Barr (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta. 2006), 243.

Images must be understood in terms of the effects they “would have had if the hearer or reader were, for example, a Roman slave or a Jewish freeborn wo/man in the first century.”¹²⁰

Early dates for Revelation have long been proposed, with the eleventh-century bishop Theophylact claiming that John was exiled under the reign of Nero (54–68 CE).¹²¹ The coded references to Nero in the image of the Beast and attempts to count out the seven heads of the beast as representative of Roman Emperors can be used to support these claims. However, after Nero’s death, stories of his return persisted with Tacitus even recording someone claiming to be Nero appearing in 69 CE (Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8). Therefore, the image of “the beast that was slain and yet lived” (Rev 13:14) is more convincingly demonstrative of the author’s knowledge of Nero’s death and the surviving mythology that surrounded him. Similarly, “the seven heads of the beast, like those of the dragon, were a given”¹²² for the author and not representative of any particular counting strategy. These observations place the dating of Revelation past the reign of Nero and into later Emperors.

As early as the late first century, several Church Fathers believed Revelation to have been written under the reign of Domitian. Irenaeus argues that John wrote “not long ago, almost in our own day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign” (*Haer.* 5.30.3) and Eusebius repeats this hypothesis in his *History of the Church* (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.8–9). Modern scholars like Koester,¹²³ Caird,¹²⁴ Yarbro-Collins,¹²⁵ and Mounce¹²⁶ all agree that a dating under Domitian (ca. 81–96CE) is likely. Here Fiorenza’s earlier warning is important. While Revelation frequently pits the political imagery of the Empire against the reign of God and seems to foretell a coming

¹²⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹²¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 72.

¹²² Ibid., 73. cf. Rev 1:20, 2:1–3:22, 4:5, 5:1, 5:6, 8:2, 12:3, 13:1, 15:7, 17:9

¹²³ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁴ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 6.

¹²⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 55.

¹²⁶ Robert H Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

confrontation and persecution, historical studies of Domitian's reign do not confirm a direct mirror of Revelation's concerns in history. While Domitian was said to have become increasingly violent in his later years (Suetonius, *Dom.* 8.1–12.3), evidence for the systematic persecution of "Christians is sketchy at best."¹²⁷ However, the varied predicaments presented in the seven letters of Revelation, with some communities feeling intense persecution while others exist in comfort, aligns with our current understanding of the pattern of first-century persecution, which was local and sporadic.¹²⁸ From this, Revelation can be read through the historical lens of Domitian's reign and the imagery that followed with it, but cannot necessarily be said to describe "how [life] actually was."¹²⁹

2. The Genre of Apocalyptic in Revelation

Identifying the genre is essential in determining our reading strategy of a text.¹³⁰ At the same time, the text of Revelation "resists classification in one pure genre."¹³¹ This is significant because "when a text shifts generic categories or when it is perceived as changing categories—which amounts to the same thing—it also changes meaning."¹³² Therefore, understanding that Revelation is both occupying and challenging a specific genre is essential in shaping our reading. Hybrid texts like Revelation create their meaning specifically as they "deform or incorporate conventions commonly associated with other kinds of texts."¹³³

¹²⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, 77.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁹ Fiorenza uses this phrase to describe the scientific positivist reading of Bruce Malina. Bruce Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995) *idem.* Fiorenza, "Babylon the Great", 243.

¹³⁰ Tremper Longman III, "Form Criticism, Recent Developments in Genre Theory, and the Evangelical," *WTJ* 47 (1985): 51.

¹³¹ Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse," 9.

¹³² Thomas L. Kent, *Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Perception in the Study of Narrative Texts* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986), 151.

¹³³ Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse," 22.

The first word in the Greek text of Revelation is *αποκαλυψις*. Despite the long journey *apokalupsis* has had into the English language, the plain meaning of the term is simply the “uncovering of something hidden.”¹³⁴ Apocalypse in the first century was a general-purpose word and not a technical term for a literary genre. In fact, “the prominence of the word ‘apocalypse’ at the beginning of John’s work is part of what contributed to the use of this term as a title for the visionary writings”¹³⁵ we now call apocalyptic literature. Therefore, the apocalyptic genre is the most common and perhaps logical place to begin a genre analysis of Revelation.

When considering Revelation as an apocalypse, it is helpful to remember Leon Morris’ warning: “we should make clear that ‘apocalyptic’ is our term. It is not one which the ancients used, at least in this way. It is not even certain that they regarded the books we speak of as apocalyptic as constituting a definite class.”¹³⁶ However, as stated in the previous section, it is likely that the author of Revelation sees himself in the tradition of Daniel, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch, which share certain “similarities that distinguish them from other genres such as prophecy.”¹³⁷ John Collins’ definition of apocalyptic is often cited to clarify:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ “αποκαλυψις,” BDAG, 112. also see Rom 16:25 and Eph 3:3

¹³⁵ Koester, *Revelation*, 210.

¹³⁶ Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (London: Intervarsity Press 1973), 20–21.

¹³⁷ Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse,” 33. Idem. Klaus Koch. *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (trans. Margaret Kohl; London SCM. 1972)

¹³⁸ John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards a Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9. Note that Fiorenza counters with her description of Revelation arguing that “the author insists that the ‘Lord’ of the world is not the emperor but Jesus Christ [and that] the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus Christ God has already made present eschatological salvation *in this world* and time.” Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 4. Further the revelation mediated by an otherworldly being is often undermined in Revelation. In 4 Ezra the writer is shown a Lion set to conquer the Eagle which represents empire (4 Ezra 11–12). In Revelation, however, the writer hears about a Lion, only for that image to be transformed when the direct revelation of God appears (Rev 5:6). “Jesus *is* the Lion of Judah, and the Root of David, but John ‘sees’ him as a Lamb. Precisely by juxtaposing these contrasting images, John forges a symbol of conquest by sacrificial death, which is essentially a new symbol.” Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 182.

Many who choose to read Revelation within the larger category of these writings unsurprisingly tend to emphasize the Jewish nature of the text. Rudolph Bultmann sees no problem in grouping Revelation discretely within the larger category of apocalyptic writings, suggesting that Revelation represents a “weakly christianized Judaism.”¹³⁹ Ford argues that the bulk of Revelation is, in fact, a Jewish text and suggests that only the opening three and closing two chapters are written from a Christian perspective with a secondary author having “incorporated clear Christological characteristics into this part of the work.”¹⁴⁰ This approach known as the Tübingen School is summarized by Fiorenza with the description of Revelation as “a Jewish document with a slight Christian touch-up.”¹⁴¹

However, it is also clear that while the text of Revelation uses existing traditions,¹⁴² it is at the same time subverting and challenging the assumptions we now associate with the apocalyptic genre. Gregory Linton writes that “when the Apocalypse is examined from the perspective of the diachronic development of the convention of apocalypses, several anomalies become evident.”¹⁴³ He summarizes these anomalies as the lack of pseudonymity, deficient otherworldly mediation, and the epistolary framework of Revelation. Though the difficulties with establishing the definitive authorship of Revelation have been discussed above, the fact that the text is comfortably understood as non-pseudonymous breaks with the well-established pattern of similar

¹³⁹ Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament Vol. 2* (trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM Press, 1955), 175.

¹⁴⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 85–86. cf. The Tübingen School (Baur, Köstler, Schwegler, B. Weiss, Hausrat, et al.)

¹⁴² For a detailed analysis of the apocalyptic traditions specifically used in Revelation, see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 39–91.

¹⁴³ Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse,” 35.

writings.¹⁴⁴ Though communication is obviously mediated by an angel or angels in the text of Revelation, the singular identity of the angel in Revelation is unclear. More often than not, the interpretation of events is given directly by God or Christ himself.¹⁴⁵ Finally, while Yarbrow Collins minimizes the significance of the epistolary introduction to Revelation,¹⁴⁶ Bauckham makes this a central feature of his reading,¹⁴⁷ and Fiorenza argues for the importance of taking into account the idea that “the epistolary framework of [Revelation] is not an accidental, secondary addition but expresses the author’s intention.”¹⁴⁸ In each of these ways, we see that the text of Revelation refuses to be neatly categorized alongside its apocalyptic contemporaries. Helmut Koester even suggests that although “apocalyptic concepts and traditions are widely used in the writing... its intention is rather to present a critical discussion of already existing apocalyptic views and speculation.”¹⁴⁹ Building on this conclusion, David E. Aune provides a helpful summary of the sociological spectrum between the prophetic and apocalyptic.¹⁵⁰ He argues that the primary differentiation is that the prophetic refuses to maintain a hard distinction between the righteous and the wicked, always maintaining that the wicked can repent and the righteous can lose heart. On the other hand, the apocalyptic as a genre represents a view from the oppressed that has already clearly delineated between the righteous and wicked for eschatological reward or punishment. He writes that in Revelation, “literary forms that had come to be associated either with the apocalyptic or prophetic literary traditions (but not generally

¹⁴⁴ All fifteen of the Jewish apocalypses studied by the SBL Apocalypse group were considered pseudonymous. Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse,” 35.

¹⁴⁵ Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-critical Perspective* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 276–78.

¹⁴⁶ Adela Yarbrow Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 70–71.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12–17.

¹⁴⁸ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 170.

¹⁴⁹ Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, Introduction to the New Testament 2; 2nd ed. (New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 253.

¹⁵⁰ David E. Aune, “Apocalypse Renewed: An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of John,” in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*. ed. David L. Barr (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 2006), 70.

enough to be associated with both) have been synthesized through juxtaposition.”¹⁵¹ In these ways, both technical and thematic, we see that Revelation uses generic traditions but departs from the expectations in significant ways specifically to deform the genre and create new meanings.

3. The Narrative Structure of Revelation

3.1. Reading Revelation in Cycles

With this framework for understanding the historical setting of Revelation and a strategy to interpret its genres, we can now analyze the narrative structure. One of the defining characteristics of Revelation is that it is difficult to map onto any chronological structure. It was as early as Victorinus (d. ca. 303CE) that interpreters noted that the images appeared to be “synchronous rather than successive.”¹⁵² Victorinus argued that “Revelation repeated the same message several times under different sets of images.”¹⁵³ Fiorenza agrees, arguing that “the dramatic narrative of Rev. can be envisioned as a conic spiral moving from the present to the eschatological future.”¹⁵⁴ Later she adds that Revelation is “not chronologically ordered but theologically-thematically conceived.”¹⁵⁵ In this way, Revelation moves through convictions about the present and personal experience of the church, to the political reality of Empire and Kingdom in opposition, to a cosmic exploration of the ultimate and inevitable victory of God over evil. However, each of these cycles can be understood not as chronologically successive but instead retellings of the same story at increasing scale. At the same time, this is not to suggest

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵² Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity*, History of The Christian Church 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), paragraph 8667.

¹⁵³ Koester, *Revelation*, 40.

¹⁵⁴ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 163.

that the each of the cycles are coterminous. It is clear that the ultimate defeat of evil does not happen alongside the present experience of the first-century believer. For this reason, attempts to map images in Revelation onto chronological history have misjudged the artistry with which the text has been constructed. For example, Barr points out that the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19, an image relating to the ultimate defeat of evil and often associated with a future second coming of Christ, is in fact “a revelation of present reality” within the world of the text.¹⁵⁶ He notes elsewhere that “whereas our concern is to divide the book, John’s concern was to bind it together.”¹⁵⁷ There is a broad storyline that moves Revelation toward the new Jerusalem, but cycles within the narrative “both overlap and progress [as the text] repeatedly leads readers through scenes of threat and back to the presence of God.”¹⁵⁸

This way of binding the text thematically rather than chronologically is rooted in the conviction that “Revelation’s apocalyptic outlook should not be separated from the prophetic tradition.”¹⁵⁹ As discussed earlier, prophetic tradition maintains the conviction that the future is not set, refusing to “rigidly distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.”¹⁶⁰ The prophetic genre instead prefers to call the wicked to repentance and to encourage the righteous to hold fast in faith.

Though in Judaism apocalypticism is the “successor” of prophecy, the early Christians conceived of themselves as a prophetic community. Early Christian prophecy used apocalyptic patterns and language to admonish and to interpret the situations of the community.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ David Barr, “Beyond Genre: The Expectations of Apocalypse” in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 2006), 87. Barr also points out that verbs in the passage are either present or past tense with the only future tense verb coming in the statement that the rider “will rule” the nations.

¹⁵⁷ David Barr, “The Apocalypse as Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis,” *Interpretation* 38. (1984): 43.

¹⁵⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 115.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁰ Aune, “Apocalypse Renewed”, 70.

¹⁶¹ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 169.

However, it is not only this openness to transformation that Revelation borrows from the prophetic tradition. The text does more than simply quote from prophetic sources as “John will place Isaiah’s words on the lips of an angel. Thus, the boundaries between recitation and re-contextualization are somewhat blurred in Revelation,”¹⁶² showing the text’s dependence on the prophetic tradition for more than source material. Indeed, the very structure of overlapping and expanding retellings of the same story with increasing scale can be seen in the prophetic imagination of the final form of Isaiah. Though there is, of course, significant dependence on Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Daniel throughout Revelation, the connections between Revelation and Isaiah in particular have been explored in Jan Fekkes’ *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*.¹⁶³ In this way, a brief overview of the expanding scope of the final Isaiah text provides a cyclical pattern to which Revelation may owe indirect inspiration.

At the foundation of Isaiah is a concern for the people of Israel. “Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them” (Isa 1:23). As Joseph Blenkinsopp notes, this opening salvo is “addressed to a plurality, but the description is that of a bruised and battered individual.”¹⁶⁴ This individual is representative of the community’s experience of injustice and points forward to Revelation’s opening address to the seven churches as representative of all who experience oppression.

From there the text expands its imagery outward. By chapter 13 the text of Isaiah is now using political imagery that may serve as a model for Revelation’s polemic against Empire,

¹⁶² David A. Desilva, “A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation A Call to Act Justly toward the Just and Judging God.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (1999): 90.

¹⁶³ Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSOT Press: Sheffield: 1994)

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, The Anchor Yale Bible 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 183.

embodied in its use of Rome as the antagonist. The prophetic text of Isaiah “explicitly addresses the fall of Babylon, assigning the leading role in the destruction of the city to the Medes.”¹⁶⁵ These specific political referents, however, are part of a “larger canvas of a projected cataclysm or singularity, a ‘Day of Yahveh,’ affecting the entire cosmos.”¹⁶⁶ John Oswalt summarizes Isaiah’s intent by arguing that “Babylon’s glory was the true symbol of enmity toward God,”¹⁶⁷ preparing us to read Revelation’s “recontextualization”¹⁶⁸ of Rome/Babylon as symbols of political opposition to God. As Fekkes argues, “the development of John’s picture of Babylon is consciously dependent on and limited to OT oracles against the nations, and primarily those against Babylon.”¹⁶⁹

Finally, the text of Isaiah expands its scope again and sets its sights on the final defeat of evil as the prophetic imagination leaves Israel and her immediate political moment behind to address the fate of the cosmos. Where earlier the prophet writes that “death expands its jaws, opening wide its mouth; The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered,” (Isa 5:14) as the text unfolds, we see that God “will eventually swallow up death forever. Eventually, the Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isa 25:8). Blenkinsopp articulates the magnitude of this imagery by arguing that the swallowing up of death is not merely an anachronistic confidence in the afterlife, but instead reflective of a mythological tradition that “pulls the meaning of the phrase in the direction of death as something more than a punctual event, as a force of disorder, negativity, and aridity, morally and physically.”¹⁷⁰ Fekkes argues, “the central theme of [Revelation’s final] section is summarized in the divine proclamation of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 279.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 276.

¹⁶⁷ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 302.

¹⁶⁸ Desilva, “A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation”, 90.

¹⁶⁹ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 87.

¹⁷⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 359.

21.5, ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (cf. Isa. 43.19). John’s addition of *panta* to the Isaiah text emphasizes the magnitude of his concept of renewal,¹⁷¹ thus linking Revelation to a completed imagination of the original Isaianic message. Michael Szigel adds that “the vision of Revelation 21:1–2 and its God-breathed interpretation in verses 3–5 neatly build on, tie up, and complete the ‘new creation’ theme developed throughout the Old and New Testaments,” in particular drawing attention to Isaiah 65 and 66.¹⁷²

Of course, Revelation is “a book of numerous competing and complementary compositional patterns.”¹⁷³ Therefore the parallels between Revelation and Isaiah as representative of the prophetic tradition are only one lens through which to approach the text. However, the links between these two works have been noted by others.¹⁷⁴ J. L. Ronning even uses what he sees as the unique dependence of the entire Johannine corpus on the Isaiah Targums to argue for the coherence of the Johannine School itself. Specifically referencing the dependence of Revelation on Isaiah, he writes that,

John did not content himself to depict Christ as the (human) Messiah envisaged in the Targums, but made prominent the parallels with the divine warrior of Isa 59:15b– 21/63:1–6, even giving him the name which is the Targum equivalent of the Tetragrammaton. In showing this warrior both as the (human) Messiah and as the divine Word, John is giving us the message in Rev 19 that the divine Word has become flesh.¹⁷⁵

This dependence on Isaiah as a foundation, along with a willingness to expand upon the message of Isaiah to communicate a final resolution to the prophetic imagination is a helpful lens through

¹⁷¹ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93.

¹⁷² Michael J. Szigel, "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition--Will God Annihilate the World and Re-create It Ex Nihilo?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 no. 684 (2014): 401–417.

¹⁷³ Ernst R Wendland, "The Hermeneutical Significance of Literary Structure in Revelation," *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 2 (2014): 447–476.

¹⁷⁴ see Szigel, "Extreme makeover," 401–417. and Timothy L. Decker "Live Long in the Land": The Covenantal Character of the Old Testament Allusions in the Message to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22)," *Neotestamentica* 48, no. 2 (2014): 417–446.

¹⁷⁵ J. L. Ronning, "The Targum of Isaiah and the Johannine Literature," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 2 (2007): 247–278.

which to envision the structure of Revelation. In Revelation, God's victory extends upward from individual repentance, through political confrontation, to cosmic transformation finally completing the vision first put forward in Isaiah 25:6–9 where,

The prophet envisions Yahweh first releasing the dead from Death's swallowing by destroying the shroud and covering over them and then swallowing up Death forever. On that great day, when all things have come to fulfillment, tears will be wiped away and the reproach of God's people removed. In this text, the scope of God's action is universal.¹⁷⁶

In this way, Revelation is dependent on the prophetic tradition even as that tradition is hybridized with the apocalyptic genre and taken to its ultimate conclusion. If, as Fiorenza argues, the community of John at Patmos sees itself as a prophetic community, we can read the cyclical nature of the text of Revelation, noted by Victorinus, against the prophetic movement from individual to political to cosmic dimensions as demonstrated in Isaiah.

3.2. Defining the Transitions

Clearly delineating these transitions is no simple task, however. There is a multiplicity of images that are deeply interwoven, and many attempts have been made to distinguish the complex intercalations.¹⁷⁷ Adela Yarbro-Collins argues that the imagery of Revelation makes the most sense understood as a series of six scenes divided into two main cycles.¹⁷⁸

Koester agrees that the transition between the Seven Trumpets (Rev 8:6–11:18) and the Dragon and the Beasts (Rev 11:19–15:4) is significant and designed to reveal that the earlier earth-bound story is in fact “part of a cosmic story” wherein God overcomes the forces that

¹⁷⁶ Gwendolyn B Sayler, "Apocalyptic hues in the eschatological rainbow arcing over the final lessons of the church year," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 41, no. 6 (2014): 381–389.

¹⁷⁷ For a good overview see the opening chapter of Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*. 1–37.

¹⁷⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1976), 5–55.

destroy the earth (Rev 11:18).¹⁷⁹ However, he also identifies an earlier cycle containing the seven letters (Rev 1:4–3:22). The vision stretching from Rev 4:1 to 11:18 begins with the notable phrase ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι (I was in the Spirit) but this has previously been used in 1:10 and as Bauckham argues, this is for John “a kind of second beginning for his visionary experience.”¹⁸⁰ If we take the text in three cycles moving from Christian community (Rev 1:4–3–22),¹⁸¹ to political empire (Rev 4:1–11:18), to cosmic realm (Rev 11:19–22:5) as Koester does, the repetition of seven letters, seven seals/trumpets, and seven bowls serve as a linking device across all three cycles, preventing the reader from divorcing the images from each other. This structure ties the apocalyptic imagery of the text to the prophetic imagination illustrated in Isaiah and, at the same time, reinforces the conclusion of Barr that the writer intends to bind the text of Revelation together even as it addresses diverse topics.

In this structure, we see coherent “overlap and progress, with individual sections tracing the movement from conflict to victory that shapes the book as a whole.”¹⁸² This motif, however, is set within an expanding scope, borrowed from the prophetic tradition, which moves from the community to the political and on to the cosmic dimensions of God’s victory over evil. This provides for the reader an interpretive grid to analyze each of the individual scenes.

3.2.1. The First Cycle: Community

When John addresses the seven churches, he writes that Jesus Christ is the ruler of the world and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Rev 1:5–6). Though the

¹⁷⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 112–115

¹⁸⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 4.

¹⁸¹ Contra to Yarbrow-Collins Fiorenza has argued that the opening hymn is designed to “express the authors’ own theological interest in emphasizing the relationship of Christ’s to his community.” For this reason, 1:4 through 1:9 should be understood as an integral part of the seven letters address and understood as part of the first cycle addressing the faithful community. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

¹⁸² Koester, *Revelation*, 115.

English could be read to take a future hopeful posture (made us to *become* a kingdom), the emphasis of the Greek text is the accomplished fact of the church's reigning.¹⁸³ As each of the letters unfolds they address specific situations that root the cycle in the community's experience of injustice similar to what Blenkinsopp saw in the opening of Isaiah. Whether the focus is internal debate or conflict with the surrounding culture, the unifying aspect of this cycle is the contrast of the cosmic depiction of the reigning Christ (Rev 1:13–16) with the tangible struggles of the faith community to live in the conviction of that fact. Taken against the whole of Revelation, the striking aspect of this opening cycle is the earthiness of the images and language. The churches are encouraged to recapitulate the ironic victory of Christ in their lives, through suffering, and thereby participate in the “archetypal triumph of Jesus”¹⁸⁴ in the here and now. In fact, this cycle ends with Jesus' declaration that the church is invited to be victorious and sit with him just as he has already sat down with the Father in victory (Rev 3:21). The church's faithfulness is God's victory over evil in this cycle.

3.2.2. The Second Cycle: Political

As argued by Bauckham, the repetition of the formula “I was in the Spirit” (Rev 1:10, 4:1) signals the start of “a kind of second beginning” to Revelation.¹⁸⁵ G.K. Beale adds that “although ch. 5 is sometimes viewed as a second, future enthronement of Christ, it is more natural to suppose that John has in mind only one enthronement.”¹⁸⁶ This confirms that what we are reading is not a continuation of the cycle that runs from Rev 1:4–3:22 but instead a retelling or

¹⁸³ Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009), 284.

¹⁸⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 171.

¹⁸⁵ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 311.

restatement of the same story with new perspective. This time, however, the enthronement appears to be set not in relationship to the faithfulness of the Christian community, but in opposition to the political imagery of the Emperor as “Benefactor and Saviour” of the world (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 7.71). The imagery in this cycle shifts toward an expanded scope as John is taken up into the Heavens (Rev 4:1) and observes what happens to the world. Strange creatures (Rev 4:6–8), deadly riders given power over the whole earth (Rev 6:1–8), and tribulations that affect the sun, moon and stars (Rev 8:12) fill this cycle. The reader is confronted with images of warfare that seem to pit the forces of God against the armies of the world (Rev 9:16) in a way that mirrors the “symbols of opposition to God” that Oswalt describes from the second cycle of Isaiah. When the twenty-four elders finally declare that God has begun to reign (Rev 11:17) this is specifically about the nations (Rev 11:18a) with the symbols of Empire serving a similar function to the presence of Babylon in Isaiah. God has overcome the political empires of the world in this cycle.¹⁸⁷

3.2.3. The Third Cycle: Cosmic

Taking cues from Isaiah, we anticipate another retelling of God’s victory over evil as a cosmic force.¹⁸⁸ The time must come for the destroying of that which destroys the earth. (Rev 11:18b) While the repetition of the number seven from chapters 6–16 demands that we not decisively separate these images from the previous cycle, “the beginning of chapter 12 seems an

¹⁸⁷ Yarbrow Collins makes a distinction between the Seven Seals (4:1–8:5) and the Seven Trumpets (8:6–11:18) Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 5–55. While the throne room scene (4:1–5:14) is built around the image of the scroll that provides context for the opening of the seven seals, the reversal of expectation in the appearance of the Lamb is distinct from the narrative that follows. Therefore, I will argue that 4:1–5:14 can be understood as a separate scene with the second cycle (Rev 4:1–11:18).

¹⁸⁸ see Blenkinsopp’s description of death in Isaiah as “something more than a punctual event [but] as a force of disorder, negativity, and aridity, morally and physically.” Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 359.

uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start, devoid of literary links with anything that precedes.”¹⁸⁹ Bauckham goes even farther to suggest that “John has made it abrupt precisely in order to create the impression of a fresh start.”¹⁹⁰ This new start makes sense because in chapter 11 we have been told that the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah (Rev 11:15). In this new cycle, we now see that Christ is enthroned not only alongside the church (Rev 3:21) and over the nations (Rev 11:18) but also over forces of chaos (Rev 21:1). Aune declares that this final cycle “is that of the final judgment, in which both the wicked and the righteous will be judged.”¹⁹¹ However, as Bauckham adds, “the narrative of the women and the dragon begins chronologically earlier than any previous part of the visionary narrative.”¹⁹² This indicates that this *final* cycle is ultimate in scope, not chronology. As Revelation begins the story of God’s victory for a third time, the images employed through to the end of the book become increasing mythic in scope.¹⁹³ Revelation is no longer content to speak only of personal faith and trial, or simply of political challenges to God’s kingdom and rule, but has now expanded to directly challenge the cosmic presence of evil and to tell the story of its ultimate overthrow and defeat.

4. Conclusion

While meaningful conclusions about the specific author of Revelation are limited, the text’s place in historical setting can be determined with a reasonable level of consensus. The author ascribes no particular authority to his name and instead places the significance of the text within the content of the vision itself. Created within the sporadic persecution of the Domitian reign the

¹⁸⁹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 636.

¹⁹² Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

¹⁹³ Steven J. Friesen, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 123, No. 2 (2004): 282.

text speaks to wide-ranging experiences of first-century Christianity and yet sees its message able to transcend the specific moment from which its imagery is drawn in order to speak to all who would encounter it. Though the text defies attempts to categorize it cleanly within a particular genre, the nature of the hybridized text itself provides a reading strategy that informs the interpreter to look for the subversion of tropes as the key moments of meaning creation. While the text employs imagery drawn from the Jewish apocalyptic imagination, the text also roots itself in a prophetic eschatology that sees the ultimate victory of God over chaos while refusing to neatly fit the world into inescapable categories of good and evil. Indeed, the structure of Revelation itself seems to intentionally signal a hopeful imagination drawn from the prophetic imagination of prophets like Isaiah, in which God's victory is defined by the dissolution of death itself rather than the imposition of death upon the enemies of God. This narrative framework of rehearsing the same victory of God across the experience of personal identification with Christ, the political reality of Christ's kingdom, and the final transformation of cosmic forces, unifies the disparate elements of Revelation with a single cohesive eschatology. At the same time, this structure provides the scope for the interpretation of each scene. In this way, even though each victory is not co-terminus, the believer's experience of Christ's reign in the here and now is linked through the present political reality, and to the ultimate defeat of death itself, calling the believer into an experience of that final victory in the present.

With an understanding of the genre and structure of Revelation, how the text is specifically constructed to create meaning through its subversion of generic tropes, and how the text cycles through the same narrative with increasing scope, the key images can now be interpreted using the specific lens of Girard's theories.

Chapter 4. Cycle One: The Seven Letters

As chapters 1 through 3 of this thesis have established an introduction to both the text of Revelation and the theories of René Girard, this chapter will now begin to interact directly with the text of Revelation through the lens of those theories. The intent is to demonstrate how the use of violent imagery is employed in Revelation, not to legitimate retribution as a divine strategy, but to reveal the fundamental *scandalon* of Christianity.¹⁹⁴ Due to the scale of Revelation this thesis will not attempt to engage each theme in the text but instead to specifically address the images that present violent challenges to a peaceful reading. Through Girard, the impact of Revelation as an apocalyptic vision unveiling the human dependence on violence to maintain social order can be brought into focus and reveal God's ultimate desire to disarm the power of the single victim mechanism in history. Since Girard did not spend significant portions of his work interacting directly with the text of Revelation, the methodology employed in chapters 4–8 will attempt to create a dialogue between Girard's ideas and biblical scholarship in Revelation to create a constructive reading of the text. This chapter will focus on the first cycle of Revelation before we move to the second cycle in chapters 5–7 and the third cycle in chapter 8 of this thesis. Although this thesis is focused on the work of Girard, to properly understand his influence we will also look to those who have expanded on his work, including the contributions of James Allison, Gil Bailie, Raymond Schwager, James G. Williams, and S. Mark Heim. By incorporating the work of constructive theologians who have built on Girard's body of work, we can recognize the extended implications of his ideas. At the same time, by reading Revelation

¹⁹⁴ cf. 1 Cor 1:23. The Greek word *scandalon* used here by Paul becomes a recurring motif in Girard's work to describe the hiddenness of Christ's unveiling and subsequent victory over the scapegoat mechanism.

through the narrative framework of expanding cycles outlined in chapter 3 of this thesis, we can determine which aspects of Girard's wide-ranging theories to bring to bear on each image.

Before starting this first cycle of Revelation, we must note that the nature of Girard's work as a highly systematized theory that incorporates all human desire and societal structure into a single theory. This systemization into a single theory means that, while the same forces are at play at an interpersonal level, they become easier to identify the farther back the camera pulls. Since our reading of the structure of Revelation follows the prophetic model of Isaiah, beginning at the level of the believing community, pulling back to the level of politics and empire, and finally concluding with the victory of cosmic good over evil, this particular text provides a compelling narrative in which to observe Girard's ideas. However, because Girard's ideas will be more easily identified as the cycles unfold, I acknowledge that we will need to read in ways that may seem to stretch the intent of the text, particularly when the narrative is tightly focused in on the specific historical circumstances we see in the seven churches. I contend that reading in ways that push against the text in this early cycle will be rewarded as the narrative pulls back and Girard's ideas become clear in the larger intent of Revelation.

1. Starting with Girard

For Girard, the key to the scapegoat mechanism's place in society is that its function in mitigating and controlling violence remain hidden. As Žižek summarizes Girard,

Guilt is projected onto the scapegoat whose sacrifice allows us to establish social peace by localizing violence... The crucial component of this "generative scapegoating" is of course that society "really believes" in the scapegoat's guilt: the "social function" of the scapegoating lies in its by-product, in the way it guarantees the social pact, yet it can perform this function only insofar as it is not directly posited as its aim.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 73.

The theory is that if a particular instance of the scapegoat mechanism is brought to the surface its power is lost and violence will expand unchecked. For Girard, it is only Christ's completely nonviolent sacrifice that has the power to unveil the mechanism fully and finally free humanity from its grip. This approach is consistent with a key feature of the early Christian engagement with the cross: the conviction that Jesus' death and resurrection had fundamentally altered the state of the universe. We will see this conviction come to the surface over and over again in Revelation. However, there is a paradox in the Christian imagination that Girard helps to understand, that is, how the cross can be simultaneously the universal victory of Christ over evil and the present stumbling block that prevents people from understanding that victory. In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul argues that the cross of Christ is a *scandalon* to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). Later in the same letter, Paul argues that despite this stumbling block Christ is currently reigning over the world and must reign until death itself is defeated¹⁹⁶ (1 Cor 15:25–27). Similarly, John writes that his vision in Revelation is the revealing or unveiling of Christ (*apokalupsis* in Rev 1:1) while at the same time declaring that Christ is already the present ruler of the world (Rev 1:5). If the effect of the cross was universal in scope while at the same time foolishness to those who do not understand it, then this is, as Heim describes, “an odd prescription.”¹⁹⁷ The fact that this present and universal scope of the cross is brought alongside a certain hiddenness of its effect in both Pauline and Johannine thought suggests this is more than a passing contradiction, but instead a considered part of the early Christian imagination of the cross. For Girard, this is no contradiction at all. In fact, this is the

¹⁹⁶ “This rule is currently in effect; but at ‘the end,’ when Christ has himself destroyed all the powers, he will ‘hand over the kingdom to God the Father.’ ... Christ’s rule, which by implication began with his resurrection (or subsequent ascension), *must continue* until the word of the Psalmist is fulfilled, ‘until he has put all his enemies under his feet.’” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT. Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 836.

¹⁹⁷ Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 38.

fundamental way that Christ's work *is* universal. The cross remedies a universal sickness in humanity that has been hidden from view. However, it is only once we begin to identify with Christ's work that we become aware of the scapegoat mechanism he has dismantled through his victory. The mechanism may still be at work in the world, but the process of uncovering it can no longer be reversed.

On the other hand, it has been argued that "Girard has in some respects overstated his case or has left out things that are essential to a fully formed Christian theology."¹⁹⁸ For example, George Hunsinger criticizes Girard for providing a theory that appears to make Christ's atoning work little more than a demonstration of hidden truth where the intent is for humanity only to learn from rather than be transformed through the cross.¹⁹⁹ While we will need to address this specific critique in chapter eight as we begin to explore the cosmic layers of Revelation's message, Hunsinger's comment, while bringing light to how Girard's theories cannot completely replace other atonement perspectives, also illuminates the significance of Girard's approach in dealing with actual human violence. Even if Girard misses certain aspects, he sees where other approaches fall short in learning the truth behind our violent outbreaks. In this way, Girard brings the Gospel victory down into conversation with these anthropological and social categories of violence that Revelation seeks to engage. As Girard says;

There is an anthropological dimension to the text of the Gospels. I have never claimed that it constitutes the whole of Christian revelation. But without it, Christianity could scarcely be true itself, and it would be incoherent in areas it need not be. To lose this dimension is to lose an essential aspect of the very humanity of Christ, of the incarnation. We would not see in Christ a victim of people such as we all are, and we would be in danger of relapsing into the religion of persecution.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁹ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 28. cf. Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 13.

²⁰⁰ René Girard, *La Route Antique des Hommes Pervers* (Paris: Grasset, 1985), 184. trans. Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 13.

In this way, even if Girard does not tell us the full story of Christ's atoning work, he forces us to add to the equation of Christ's contribution a direct challenge to the status quo that preserves violence at the apex of social order. As Heim describes, "Girard's contention is that there is a distinct, empirical level on which the cross illuminates and affects human history, a level that can be grasped rationally and is not a matter of subjective belief."²⁰¹ Girard contends that the story of Jesus in history fundamentally unveils something theretofore unrecognized and that this newfound awareness, even if it is not completely understood by the believing community, has an indelible impact on those who identify with the scapegoat victim. In fact, Girard affirms that Christ has changed the world independent of our awareness or our desire to participate with him in the dismantling of scapegoat violence because once the mechanism is made known that unveiling cannot be hidden again. We can therefore look to see the demonstrable work of Christ in the presence of a community that identifies itself with the victim rather than aggressor, that sees victory in succumbing non-violently to the scapegoat mechanism as a way to unveil its evil, and who appropriates the expectation of violence specifically in order to demonstrate the final power of peace to overcome what traps us.

Since the purpose of this thesis is not to develop a fully formed Christian theology of Revelation but instead only to bring new light to how violence is being used in the text, even amidst shortcomings, Girard provides us a uniquely qualified lens through which to explore this opening cycle of Revelation.

Specifically, Girard's interaction with a text from the Fourth Gospel is instructive for reading the seven letters. In John 8 Jesus begins a speech pointed at those "who will soon abandon him

²⁰¹ Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 13.

because they do not understand his teaching.”²⁰² This is an intriguing parallel to the setting for some of the more troubling language employed in this opening cycle of Revelation (Rev 2:23).

In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says,

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (Jn 8:42–45)

Girard sees in Jesus’ words agreement with his theories. In Jesus, we are given the option of nonviolent mimesis through the offer to imitate him in the way he has been sent in imitation of his Father. Jesus explains the hiddenness of our violence that stops us from seeing the scapegoat mechanism at work and properly understanding his message. Jesus then outlines the disastrous outcomes that befall those who remain trapped in the cycle of victimization that defines humanity’s imitation of Satan. In fact, the context for the passage is that the crowd is looking for a way to kill Jesus (Jn 8:40) and Jesus claims that their violence is a direct expression of Satan’s desire (Jn 8:44).²⁰³

Girard outlines his approach to this text in a selection from his book *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*:

Jesus tells these people, who still think of themselves as his disciples, that their father is neither Abraham nor God, as they avow, but the devil. The reason for this judgment? ... They take the devil as the model for their desires... If the models that humans choose do not orient them in the right direction, one without conflict through Christ as intermediary, they expose themselves eventually to violent loss of differences and identity and thus to the single victim mechanism... If readers do not find the mimetic cycle here, again it is

²⁰² René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001) 38.

²⁰³ “As the devil opposes the word and works of the Christ, so the Jewish opponents of Jesus are his willing instruments.” George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 135.

because they do not understand it... The Gospel of John scandalizes those who do not detect in it the choice it implies.²⁰⁴

In this passage Girard indirectly makes a distinction between Satan as father, by virtue of his role as imitative model, and Satan as father, through the creation of the lie of mimetic rivalry. In one sense, we choose God or Satan as our father by directly imitating one or the other. However, what Girard recognizes is that Satan is the father of rivalistic desire itself—the father of lies. Therefore, Satan is our Father if we imitate violent rivalry regardless of whether we recognize Satan as the source of such. Girard even speaks of “a triple correspondence between Satan, the original homicide, and the lie... that covers the homicide.”²⁰⁵ In this way, Girard prepares us to view confrontational words from the mouth of Jesus, that may even seem to be violent in nature, as clear identification of the mimetic powers at work in us and as a description of the disastrous outcomes that await those who do not become aware of their violent imitation. That Jesus speaks of disastrous outcomes does not mean that he endorses or condemns us to these outcomes, only that he names what is hidden and illuminates how mimetic rivalry, left unchecked, will devour us. If we imitate the lie of the original homicide, then we do not belong to Jesus even if we think our violence is directed nobly. However, once unveiled, the only outcome for Satan and his lies is ultimate destruction since the scapegoat mechanism can no longer function when brought to light.

2. The Seven Letters

2.1. Reading the Letters

²⁰⁴ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 38–43.

²⁰⁵ Girard, *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 160.

With this in mind we can turn our attention to the Seven Letters looking specifically for the imitation of violence that often remains hidden from view in even those who believe their allegiance is with God. The Seven Letters are presented within a visionary framework, as John is “in the Spirit” and it is someone like a son of man who dictates the text he records. Though not named, it is clearly Jesus who speaks through these letters. He begins with the familiar refrain “do not be afraid” (Mt 14:27, 17:7) and launches into a series of ἐγώ εἰμι statements that serve both to identify this as the earthly Jesus,²⁰⁶ but also to link this text, through the particular importance of this phrase, to the Fourth Gospel.²⁰⁷ Though this image of Christ is fantastic (Rev 1:13–16), his message is decidedly earthy, addressing issues “ranging from conflict with outsiders to internal disputes over accommodation of Greco-Roman religious practices to attitudes of complacency”²⁰⁸ and rooting this opening cycle in the type of anthropological concern that Girard saw as central to the Gospel. The immediate contexts for these letters are drawn from a diverse background, both geographically but also circumstantially and yet despite this earthiness, the letters address an intended audience for this section that extends to all those who would read. “A fact reiterated at the close of each of the seven proclamations by the refrain ‘Let the person with an ear hear what the Spirit announces to *the churches*’.”²⁰⁹ It is fair to say then that the text has in view both the immediate historical moment it is addressing but also the larger stage upon which these circumstances find themselves being played out over and over again in human history. In this way, the immediate experience of the community also represents concepts that echo through human history. This is important because for Girard, scapegoating is neither an objective solution to sin, nor is it merely an ancient primitive misunderstanding. It is

²⁰⁶ cf. Matthew 14:27; 22:32; 24:5; 26:22, 25, Mark 6:50; 13:6; 14:62, Luke 1:19; 21:8; 22:70; 24:39

²⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 100.

²⁰⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 231.

²⁰⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 142. Italics are Aune’s.

instead an anthropological invention that contains mimetic rivalry and suppresses outbreaks of catastrophic violence. For Girard, this is why we can observe what is being said to all those with ears to hear, even as we approach the text through the synchronic moment it addresses. As Girard says, without recognizing this anthropological dimension of actual violence actually being unveiled, “we would not see in Christ a victim of people... and we would be in danger of relapsing into the religion of persecution.”²¹⁰ Therefore, if we intend to use Girard as a lens, we need to look for the ways that violence is being named by the community, how identification is being made with the victim of violence in the community, and finally how the community recognizes and refuses to imitate the violence enacted upon it.

2.2. The Experience of Violence in Community

To observe this engagement with violence we can look to the way persecution is talked about in the Seven Letters. Some of the communities reading Revelation were acutely aware of the pressures Christ warns them against. To the church in Ephesus he writes, “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary” (Rev 2:3). Other communities may have seen that same persecution on the horizon. To the church in Smyrna he writes, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer” (Rev 2:10). However, he also writes to the church in Laodicea to say, “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Rev 3:17). This comports with scholarship that suggests persecution of the Christian community was “local and sporadic” and ranged from “verbal harassment” to accusations “prompting officials to investigate” Christian communities.²¹¹ Persecution may have been an immediate concern for

²¹⁰ Girard, *La Route Antique*, 184. trans. Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 13.

²¹¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 96.

some but the systematic persecution of the Christian community, often imagined, was not the dominant historical reality.²¹² Aune confirms this understanding of first-century persecution by pointing out that “based on the evidence found in the historical allusions in the seven proclamations, John was familiar with the situations of each church and may have exercised an itinerant prophetic ministry himself”²¹³ and at the same time citing Ernst Lohmeyer to conclude that “as a whole [the seven letters] form parts of a book intended for the entire early Christian community.”²¹⁴ G.K. Beale adds that the literary structure of the seven letters does not “correspond to the typical epistolary form and therefore are better referred to as ‘prophetic messages’.”²¹⁵ This, along with the conspicuous use of the symbolic number seven in this opening sequence and the broad circumstances presented in the letters, helps us conclude that while there are historical situations being addressed in this section, this is done within the larger framework of an imagination of all possible situations. As Victorinus wrote about John, what John says to one, he says to all. (*Comm Apoc.* 1.7)

It is not enough then to assume that the text of Revelation is written to a persecuted church with the intention the images will be read through that interpretive grid exclusively, but instead that the narrative intends to unveil violence regardless of the immediate experience of the reader.²¹⁶ In other words, both those who experience victimization and those who come to see themselves in the experience of their neighbor who experiences victimization, are able to see violence unveiled through the text. This is key for Girard who writes that, “wherever you have

²¹² Koester, *Revelation*, 96.

²¹³ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 131.

²¹⁴ Ernst Lohmeyer as cited by Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 131.

²¹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 224–225.

²¹⁶ Contemporary audiences reading through the lens of the relative safety and security of the West are not without parallel if compared against the text’s description of Laodicea.

that desire, I would say, that really active, positive desire for the other, there is some kind of divine grace present. This is what Christianity unquestionably tells us.”²¹⁷

By embracing this spectrum of experience, the text invites us to read it not merely as a message to localized communities but as “powerful incarnations”²¹⁸ of larger societal themes. In unifying the disparate experiences of the seven communities the text calls the reader to see herself in the experience of the other through identification with those who are persecuted.²¹⁹

2.3. Identification with Christ

Ultimately the goal of the letters is to draw the reader into identification with Christ as victim which is framed through theological prolegomena. In a series of three triads John gives, what Fiorenza argues represent, his personal “theological interest.”²²⁰ What is significant is that this theological interest situates Jesus as the victim who overcomes through nonviolence.

First, God is named in Rev 1:4–6 as the one who is, was, and is to come.

Next, Jesus Christ is named as the one who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Finally, glory is given to him who loves us, has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.

The opening triad recalls the language of Exodus 3:14, particularly in the LXX, where God claims to be Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. Here, however, John “expands the traditional name to include God’s

²¹⁷ Rebecca Adams, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard,” *Religion and Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993): 9–33, 26. cf. Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 65.

²¹⁸ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 7.

²¹⁹ This should not be heard to suggest that the reader is meant to see themselves as persecuted if they are not, as evidenced in the warning to Laodicea, but only that those who have not experienced violence personally can come to see violence unveiled as they identify with the victims.

²²⁰ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

past existence and future coming”²²¹ in a way that recalls the Sibylline Oracles.²²² This particular language is significant for Revelation because it is repeated in 1:8 and 4:8 and later used in modified form to signal the end of the second major section of the book in 11:17. There we read that the elders worship God, saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign” (Rev 11:17) indicating that the one “who was to come” has now arrived and a cycle of the narrative has come to a close. However, the offer of praise in 11:17 is not the first time the eschatological truth of God’s reign is acknowledged as the present reality in Revelation. Immediately after acknowledging God as the one who is to come, the second triad in this hymn declares Jesus to *be* the ruler of the kings of the earth and the final triad proclaims that he has made *us to be* a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. Though the English could be read to take a future hopeful posture (has made us to *become* a kingdom) the emphasis of the Greek text is on the accomplished fact of our reigning. We see this as the text shifts from a participle form in stating that Jesus *is* loving us and *is* freeing us from our sins to an aorist form declaring that we have *already* been made a kingdom. This departs from parallels in the Pauline tradition that repeat variations of the first two declarations in aorist form (Gal 2:20, Eph 2:4, 2 Thes 2:16). This change seems to indicate that the writer of Revelation may be modifying existing traditions to emphasize the fact that “even though the present time is full of suffering and persecutions for Christians, Christ’s love is now with them.”²²³ In this way the text is calling the reader to recognize that Christ’s non-violence in the face of persecution was in itself his crowning victory over the place of violence in human history. The believer’s identification with Christ in suffering

²²¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 215.

²²² “But he himself, eternal, revealed himself as existing now, and formerly and again in the future.” Sibylline 3:15–16 PSEUD—CW

²²³ Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 71.

becomes the experience of having overcome violence allowing the believer to reign with Christ in the world. There is no sense of forensic justification as salvation in this statement of theological interest only that through Christ's faithful witness/martyrdom our eyes have been opened to a new reality. John writes explicitly, "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him" (Rev 1:7, cf. Zech 12:10). As Rita Nakashimi Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker write:

To say that Jesus' executioners did what was historically necessary for salvation is to say that state terrorism is a good thing, that torture and murder are the will of God. It is to say that those who loved and missed Jesus, those who did not want him to die, were wrong, that enemies who cared nothing for him were right... The dominant traditions of western Christianity have turned away from the suffering of Jesus and his community, abandoning the man on the cross.²²⁴

It is precisely this "man on the cross" who suffers the unjust violence of the world. Revelation now calls the reader to see Christ as the victim, to identify with Christ in his suffering, and to mourn through this newfound awareness of violence unveiled. This conclusion is only magnified in the reference Revelation makes to Zechariah 12. The allusion "is especially important because its strategic placement at the beginning of John's letter offers the reader significant interpretive keys."²²⁵ Boyd Lutter goes as far as to suggest that in the context of an oral sermon, Zechariah 12 serves as the "preaching text" for Revelation and that "the salvific sense of 'mourning' (Rev 1:7, echoed from Zech 12:10)" is a theme that only find its conclusion as the text develops.²²⁶

Though D. R. Jones argues that Zechariah's image "anticipates the central mystery of Christ's

²²⁴ Rita Nakashimi Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs for Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 49.

²²⁵ Marko Jauhiainen, "Behold, I am coming': the use of Zechariah in Revelation," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005): 157–160.

²²⁶ Boyd Luter, "The 'Preaching Texts' of the Apocalypse (Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10): Fulfillment and Theological Significance," *Criswell Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (2014): 23–47.

atoning death,”²²⁷ Ralph L. Smith points out that caution is necessary before “assigning a vicarious role to the death of this figure.”²²⁸ He summarizes Rex Mason’s argument, writing that “the weeping is the result, not the cause of Yahweh’s regenerative work.”²²⁹ In other words, the mourning seen in Rev 1:7 and Zech 12:10 is fruit of the work Christ has accomplished in death which has now revealed our violence to be abhorrent.

Though the reader will find Zechariah woven throughout the images of Revelation (Rev 1:12 cf. Zech 4:2; Rev 6:2–8 cf. Zech 1:8, 6:2) the fact that this transformative awareness is an integral theme of Revelation affirms Girard’s intuition that the unveiling of our scapegoating has a salvific effect in itself. To mourn is to see violence for what it truly is and to be saved from the perpetual cycle of the scapegoat mechanism. This is the “theological interest”²³⁰ that underpins this opening section and will guide the specific interactions through the Seven Letters.

At the same time, it is clear that “to be a kingdom does not mean that the redeemed ‘reign’”²³¹ in the full geopolitical sense that Revelation ultimately imagines (Rev 21). It is fair to say that Revelation contains an eschatological focus where “the ‘over-comer’ is the individual Christian who enjoys special benefits in eternity for refusing to give up his faith in spite of persecution during life on earth.”²³² However, through the combined use of both political/kingdom and sacral/priest language, “John asserts that redemption involves liberation from bondage and slavery and that salvation gives new dignity to those who have been redeemed”²³³ in the here and now. For John, Jesus’ victory must be conceived of in “political

²²⁷ D. R. Jones, “A Fresh Interpretation of Zech. ix–xi,” VT 12 (1962): 241–259.

²²⁸ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary 32 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 277.

²²⁹ Ibid., cf. R. A. Mason, “The Relation of Zech. 9–14 to Proto Zechariah,” ZAW 88 (1976): 227–39.

²³⁰ Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 70.

²³¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 217.

²³² J. William Fuller, “I Will Not Erase His Name from the Book of Life,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26, no. 3 (September 1983): 299.

²³³ Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 68.

terms and socio-economic categories.”²³⁴ While this may seem contradictory on the surface, Girard takes a similar posture in his conviction that Christ’s unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism can have no possible outcome but the eventual decay of violence and the systems that support it. From the newly unveiled awareness of hidden truth, both theologically and socio-politically, liberation has indeed come to the world.

While this *already-but-not-yet* nature is familiar from the study of Jesus’ use of kingdom language, the distance between *the already* and the *not-yet* has been brought so closely together in Revelation that the distinction begins to fall apart. This is seen as John moves comfortably back and forth between future and present language. From a Girardian perspective, this indicates that the community’s awareness of Christ’s reign is transformative in and of itself and that social change is inevitable.²³⁵

As the believing community recapitulates Jesus’ ‘ironic victory’²³⁶ in their lives through the non-violent imitation of Christ (Rev 1:9), they too participate in the “archetypal triumph of Jesus”²³⁷ (Rev 1:5). The central theme in this section, epitomized in the claim that believers have now become the kingdom of God (Rev 1:6), is “the notion of Christ and the church reigning ironically in the midst of their suffering and the idea of unbelieving persecutors experiencing spiritual defeat in the midst of their physical victories.”²³⁸ Any violence carried out against the faithful believer has already been shown to be ineffective because Christ has unveiled the mechanism at play in the violence that was directed toward him. Through the believer’s

²³⁴ Ibid., 68.

²³⁵ Michael Hardin and Steven E. Berry, *Reading the Bible with René Girard: Conversations with Steven E. Berry* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), Location 2322.

²³⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

²³⁷ Ibid., 171.

²³⁸ Ibid., 172.

understanding of what was hidden until Jesus' death, those who are persecuted are now freed from the power violence has to shape their perception of reality.

The unveiling work of Christ is one of the central claims of Girard's work. He writes that "Jesus explains to us mankind's true vocation, which is to throw off the hold of the founding murder."²³⁹ Since the discovery of the utility of scapegoat violence, humanity has been enslaved to the mechanism's ability to restrain violence temporally. However, this has left us trapped in a cycle of unconsciously choosing successive scapegoats to sacrifice for the greater good. "The Bible shows that scapegoaters who slander the victim and wrongly accuse the victim have no basis on which to do so. The prophetic and Christian texts destroy that slander by demonstrating the innocence of the victim."²⁴⁰ Once this innocence is made known, as it was in Christ's death, the effect of the scapegoat mechanism, based on the misapprehension of guilt,²⁴¹ is undone. As Girard writes, "scapegoating is effective only if it is nonconscious. Then you do not call it scapegoating; you call it justice."²⁴² Once the injustice of redemptive violence has been unveiled, its power can no longer be reinstated even if attempts are made by force. Though "it almost seems as if violence is always able to conceal the truth about itself,"²⁴³ when the text refuses to view Jesus' death as just and calls the reader instead to identify with his suffering, the weakness of the power structures is revealed, and the true nature of Christ's redemptive victory is made clear. The reason those who follow Jesus have been made a kingdom at present is not simply because they are confidently awaiting the arrival of a new geopolitical state, although that will come in time as well, but because they have been freed from the worldview dominated by a false

²³⁹ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 216.

²⁴⁰ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 1040.

²⁴¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1–18, 39–44.

²⁴² Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 865.

²⁴³ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 218.

imagination of peace. They are now free to desire God directly no longer bound by the veiled mechanism of scapegoat violence.

As referenced earlier, John writes in the close of this section, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen” (Rev 1:7). In drawing language from the prophetic tradition of Zechariah (Zech 12:10), John’s language demonstrates that the unveiling of Christ transforms our perceptions of what previously seemed to be good and necessary violence into salvific mourning over our participation in the scapegoat mechanism. John’s use of this image from Zechariah is indicative of spiritual awakening not simply being surprised by the reappearance of Jesus.

3. The Synagogue of the Satan

Even as the larger theme of the first cycle is identification with the nonviolence of Christ redemptive violence appears on the surface of the seven letters almost immediately. The figure Jezebel is said to be cast on a bed of suffering, her adulterers made to suffer intensely, and her children killed (Rev 2:22–23). Considering that these words come directly from the mouth of Jesus, this is problematic for a nonviolent reading.²⁴⁴ However, I believe there are hints in the text that may become clearer as the scope of successive cycle expands. The simple fact that the children of Jezebel are given a harsher sentence than that of Jezebel herself should give pause to a surface reading. Since the most graphic image of punishment in Revelation, “the ‘lake of fire,’ is not for men [but instead] for the demonic enemies of God”²⁴⁵ and since the only divine

²⁴⁴ cf. Paul B. Duff, “‘The Synagogue of Satan’: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John” in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*. ed. David L. Barr (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta. 2006), 147–168.

²⁴⁵ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 260.

weapon present in Revelation is the sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus (a symbol of truth Rev 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21) this may indicate that the children of Jezebel should not be identified with a particular group of people who have followed this false teacher, but instead the very lies that oppose God.²⁴⁶

4. Conclusions from the First Cycle

What we see in this opening cycle is that Revelation has an imagination of violence that is far deeper and more nuanced than it is often given credit for. Persecution of the church is not assumed across the empire, and yet the entire believing community is called to experience the unjust violence of the empire through the eyes of its victims, in particular, Christ. Next, the exaltation of Christ is explored not in his ability to overthrow the kingdoms of the world but precisely in his willingness to stand as a martyr/witness to the violence of those kingdoms. In laying bare their inability to defeat him even as they murder him, the violence enacted against Christ is not divinized but is instead shown to be a symptom of an illusory peace: a peace that can never be reinstated once the violence that underpins is exposed. Finally, this new awareness of Christ's reign as deeper reality in which the believer participates is put to the test with language that forces the reader to choose between an interpretation that returns to the pre-Christian era of redemptive violence or that progresses farther into the completely non-violent way of Jesus, where even enemies are offered redemption, and violent ideas are the ones put to death.

²⁴⁶ see Appendix B

Chapter 5. Cycle Two A: The Throne Room

In the previous chapter, we explored the opening cycle of Revelation that deals with the direct experience of violence encountered by the believing community. With Girard as a lens through which to read, we saw an emerging solidarity with the victims of violence. We witnessed an awakening to the victory of Christ specifically in the unveiling of evil through his non-violent direct action and his non-violent response to evil as a martyr/witness. We were also awakened to a reading of the violent imagery used in the opening cycle that pointed to the rejection of violence and the destruction of violent ideology itself. However, I also argued that reading Girard's ideas onto the opening cycle of Revelation would prove warranted once the full scope of the text's narrative came into view. In this second cycle of Revelation, as the images expand to engage the societal and political aspects of violence, Girard's ideas become a particularly useful interpretative lens. Once the believing community has been freed from the scapegoat mechanism, it is inevitable that the implications of Christ's victory extend outward into the socio-political world. As Girard predicted, once

the Powers are weakened, they are not able to perform as they used to. They no longer have sacrifice, which makes it possible for humanity to expel its own violence with the help of victims from its own community. So these communities are going to be liberated, the human mind is going to expand more and more, and is not going to be bound by these false barriers.²⁴⁷

Since this cycle provides fertile ground for Girardian interpretation, we will explore three key scenes in three separate chapters (Chapters 5–7 of this thesis). In this first image depicting the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb who overcomes, we see an unveiling of the violence that sits at the centre of our religious imaginations and the ways those imaginations have been

²⁴⁷ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2322.

corrupted by political violence. Here, images of empire and violence are mingled together with images of religion and sacrifice, raising the tensions until the mimetic glorification of violence as a means to peace can no longer be maintained in either realm.

1. Starting with Girard

One aspect of Girard's work developed in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* may be instructive as we attempt to develop a Girardian reading of this scene in Revelation. Girard writes about the difference between internal and external mediation of desire. For Girard, mediation is the process by which a person influences what another desires. Girard writes that "the desire according to the Other is always desire to be the Other. There is only a single metaphysical desire but the particular desires which concretize this primordial desire vary ad infinitum."²⁴⁸ What he is arguing here is that our desire to be the person we imitate draws us inevitably into conflict with them and, even though there is an infinite number of individuals who could imitate each other, this is the basic desire that drives human socialization. However, a direct violent conflict between model and imitator does not always arise in every relationship because there may be any number of temporal, geographic, and social differences separating the two. Girard expands on this using the example of Don Quixote, writing that "although the geographic estrangement can constitute a factor of it, the distance between the mediator and the subject is initially spiritual. D.Q. and Sancho are always close physically but the social and intellectual distance which separates them remains insuperable."²⁴⁹ In this way the model and the imitator are kept at a distance, differentiation is maintained, and conflict is held at bay. This system is what Girard

²⁴⁸ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 101.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 22.

calls external mediation, and in this form of mimesis, two characters may imitate each other and not be drawn into a rivalry.

Internal mediation is what gives rise to the conflict described in Chapter 2. This form is when the imitator imitates a desire he perceives in the model. Wolfgang Palaver summarizes Girard this way: the “subject desires an object only when he is convinced that another also desires this same object. The mediator thus becomes a rival for the desiring subject.”²⁵⁰ Here the desire is not for the mediator or model itself but for the object the mediator is perceived to desire. In this way, because the mediator is only pointing to a desire that is now shared, the two characters are inevitably drawn into conflict regardless of the social worlds that may seem to separate them. Once that conflict erupts, it ripples throughout the society because the nature of violence is to escalate mimetically.

In Rev 4:1–5:14, the parallels between the worship of God and the Imperial cult of Rome are drawn closer and closer together until it is revealed that the mimesis is predicated on a shared desire to use violence to achieve political power. God and empire are presented not as rivals but as parallels where one might assume a separation of “sphere of influence”²⁵¹ that would allow the two to remain on parallel tracks externally mediated by differentiation. However, what the scene unveils is that the religious imagination does not desire to be like Empire, it desires to be Empire and vice versa. This desire will inevitably lead to rivalry and the eruption of direct conflict unless a scapegoat can be found that preserves the delicate balance. The surprise of this scene is that the slain Lamb does not play the role of scapegoat but instead reveals the internal mediated desire for power that sits at the heart of violent mimesis. Through the Lamb’s complete

²⁵⁰ Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 59.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

nonviolence, the true source of conflict is unveiled, and the way toward non-violent imitation is established. Girard writes,

If you want to put an end to mimetic rivalry, you must surrender everything to your rival. This will suffocate rivalry at its core. This is not a matter of political strategy; it is much easier and more fundamental. If the other places outrageous demands on you—because he is already under the spell of mimetic rivalry—he expects that you play along and attempt to outdo him. The only way to take the wind out of his sails is to do the exact opposite: Instead of outbidding him, yield to him doubly as much.²⁵²

Here in the throne room, we will see that the Lamb is shown to overcome precisely because Christ surrenders himself completely to those who see him as their rival. In this way, God undermines our political strategy and reveals peace to us.

2. The Throne Room

With Girard's ideas about mediation in mind, we turn now to the text of Rev 4:1–5:14. With Christ having already overcome the violence of the world and having been seated at the right hand of God in Rev 3:21, this second cycle begins the same story of Christ's exaltation from a new perspective. As G. K. Beale acknowledges, "although ch. 5 is sometimes viewed as a second, future enthronement of Christ, it is more natural to suppose that John has in mind only one enthronement."²⁵³ This conclusion reinforces the suggestion made in Chapter 3 of this thesis that we see a recapitulation of the enthronement in 1:5 now retold in a second cycle that extends from 4:1 to 11:18.

2.1. Introducing the Characters

²⁵² René Girard, *Quand ces choses commenceront: Entretiens avec Michel Trieguer* (Paris: Arléa, 1996), 76. trans. Palaver, *René Girard*, 220.

²⁵³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 311.

While the throne room scene has been compared to first-century synagogue liturgies,²⁵⁴ the distinct referents to both the Old Testament and Roman Imperial imagery are likely intended to function together to form a new imagination of worship, challenging contemporary assumptions. While determining the true identity of the one on the throne is one of the central purposes of this scene, understanding the cast of characters that surround the throne is integral in leading the reader to a proper conclusion. Many attempts have been made to identify the twenty-four elders that surround the throne.²⁵⁵ Reference can be made to Rev 21:12–14, where the city of the New Jerusalem is said to have twenty-four gates named for the twelve tribes along with the twelve apostles. This connection may directly provide the identity of the elders in the scene, and this internal consistency is compelling for Beale.²⁵⁶ Alternatively, Craig Keener suggests that the twenty-four groups of priests and musicians in 1 Chronicles 24:7–19; 25:1–31 should be the guiding reference “given their function in worship.”²⁵⁷ Outside the biblical text, reference can also be made to the fact that “the Babylonians spoke of twenty-four celestial bodies”²⁵⁸ and 2 Enoch refers to heavenly powers using the term *elders* (2 Enoch 4:1). Perhaps most compelling, however, is how the image draws parallels to the Roman Imperial Cult. Emperor Domitian had twenty-four *lictores* that attended to him,²⁵⁹ twice the normal number.²⁶⁰ Further, the choir of the Imperial cult wore wreaths/crowns similar to the description in Revelation,²⁶¹ and there is

²⁵⁴ John A. Lamb, “Apocalypse Et Liturgie. By Prigent Pierre. Delachaux Et Niestlé (Cahiers Théologiques 52), Neuchâtel, 1964. Pp. 84. Sw. Fr. 6.75,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (1965): 379–80.

²⁵⁵ John P. Burke, “The Identity of the Twenty-Four Elders: A Critical Monograph,” *Grace Journal* 2, no. 3 (Fall 61): 29.

²⁵⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*.

²⁵⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (ed. Terry C. Muck; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 172.

²⁵⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 361.

²⁵⁹ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 67.4.3

²⁶⁰ Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 162.

²⁶¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 361.

evidence to suggest there were imperial singers at Smyrna,²⁶² a city already identified with Roman persecution earlier in the text (Rev 2:10). Supporting this line of thought, the twenty-four elders begin to worship by laying down their crowns and crying out, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev 4:11). This gift of golden crowns is mirrored in the Imperial cult, as Josephus records similar gifts given in recognition of Roman conquerors Pompey and Titus (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 14.35; Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 7.105). Tacitus records that a vassal King would remove his crown and place it on the statue of the Emperor in a signal of subordination (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.29).²⁶³ Even the song sung by the elders has a parallel in Imperial worship. Vespasian was given the title, “Benefactor, Saviour, the only worthy emperor of Rome” (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 7.71) ²⁶⁴ and it was said that Domitian demanded the title “Lord and God,”²⁶⁵ even though the practice was reserved for Emperors after death. While the historicity of Suetonius’ claims about Domitian has been brought into question, the presence of his writing indicates that at the very least there was a popular imagination of Domitian demanding such titles.²⁶⁶ While a dating for the text of Revelation and the connection to Domitian has been discussed previously in Chapter 3, it can also be noted that Domitian built his *Neokoros* in the city of Ephesus,²⁶⁷ another centre identified in the opening letters (Rev 2:1–7). In fact, a gold coin of Domitian depicts the thunderbolts of

²⁶² Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, And the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 21. I Smyr, *Die Inschriften von Smyrna*. 2 Vols. (Edited by G Peltz. Bonn: Habelt 1982), 594.3; idem. Koester, *Revelation*, 273.

²⁶³ Koester, *Revelation*, 365.

²⁶⁴ note the presence of the term worthy [*axios*] in both the language Rev 4:11 and the Emperors.

²⁶⁵ Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13.2.

²⁶⁶ Koester provides three reasons this claim must be read with nuance. 1. precedent before Domitian. 2. lack of inscriptional evidence for Suetonius’ claim. 3. use by those attempting to flatter the Emperor. Koester, *Revelation*, 366.

²⁶⁷ Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 139.

Jupiter above the throne²⁶⁸ reminiscent of John's image of lightning and peals of thunder coming from the throne in this scene (Rev 4:5). Finally, the image of the one upon the throne appearing as jasper and carnelian (Rev 4:3) brings to bear the imagery of the Christian writer Prudentius, who describes a blood baptism called taurobolium.²⁶⁹ While tying the practice directly to the emperor is speculative it has been argued that the later image of Christian robes washed white in blood (Rev 7:13–14) is designed as a direct contrast to this pagan practice.²⁷⁰ If white robes are a subversion of taurobolium, then the image of one on the throne, red in appearance, may hint towards an identity in opposition to God and point the reader back to the Imperial Cult once again. At the same time, the presence of Roman imagery present in the scene should not cause us to lose sight of the Jewish worship imagery that is equally as striking. J. Daryl Charles points out the similarity of this scene to Old Testament passages from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1.²⁷¹ However, both of the OT passages identify the one at the centre of worship as YHWH, an identification that the text here intentionally avoids clarifying for the moment. The simple fact that the text here pulls together imagery from the worship of the Emperor and the worship of YHWH and reserves identification of the one on the throne for later may be an indication that the intent is specifically to draw attention to the syncretic nature of these images in culture for polemic reasons. In the context of a Christian writing, we may assume the identity of God on the throne, but the parallels to Domitian cause the ancient reader, even unconsciously, to become aware of the parallels between God and Emperor.

Next, John sees four living creatures, covered with eyes, each with six wings. One has the face of a lion, the second the face of an ox; one has the face of a man and finally, one looks like

²⁶⁸ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1952), 187.

²⁶⁹ Marvin W. Meyer, "Mystery Religions," *AYBD* 4:943.

²⁷⁰ Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Volume 2*, 37.

²⁷¹ J. Daryl Charles, "An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb," *JETS* 34:4 (Dec 1991): 475–484.

an eagle. These creatures praise the one who sits on the throne (Rev 4:7–8). These images are familiar from Jewish writings (cf. Ezek 1:4–10). While there are variations between visions in Revelation and Ezekiel, the text seems to be pulling from familiar Hebrew imagery. This use of imagery is not at all uncommon for the period as can be seen in the Apocalypse of Abraham.²⁷²

Again, variations on the theme occur, but the presence of four living creatures with multiple wings and eyes, and the specific faces of a lion, man, ox, and eagle indicate that this is imagery from within the Jewish literary world. This is a conventional image of a rightly ordered universe worshipping the creator. As Ian Duguid argues, the faces “of a man, a lion (the highest wild animal), an ox (the highest domestic animal), and an eagle (the highest bird)—symbolizing the fact that they embody within themselves all of the highest attributes of living creation.”²⁷³ Aune discusses the use of eyes in ANE literature and points out the text’s allusion to Ezekiel as well as the image as a symbol for wisdom.²⁷⁴ In this way, the text creates an interplay between the political imagery of Roman Imperial worship remixed with conventional imagery of Hebrew worship to create a striking if not unsettling image. This approach is consistent with the larger message of Ezekiel where the imagery is drawn from. Wes Howard-Brock writes that Ezekiel challenges “the central claim of every manifestation of imperial religion: that a human king who stands above all others is the means through which people experience the divine.”²⁷⁵

²⁷² I saw under the fire a throne of fire and the many-eyed ones round about, reciting the song, under the throne four fiery living creatures, singing. And the appearance of each of them was the same, each having four faces. And this (was) the aspect of their faces: of a lion, of a man, of an ox, and of an eagle. Each one had four heads on its body so that the four living creatures had sixteen faces. And each one had six wings: two on the shoulders, two halfway down, and two at the loins. With the wings which were on their shoulders they covered their faces, with the wings at their loins they clothed their feet, and they would stretch the two middle wings out and fly, erect. Abraham_apoc 18:3–7 PSEUD—CW

²⁷³ Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 46.

²⁷⁴ See Aune for a discussion of eyes in ANE literature. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 298.

²⁷⁵ Wes Howard-Brock, *“Come Out My People!”: God’s Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 231.

In this way, the text draws us to see the emergence of mimetic rivalry as the Imperial Cult and Christian Worship imitate each other. It could be argued that the rivalry is mediated externally by the gap in the sphere of influence but, as the enthronement of Christ observed the first cycle and repeated here is brought into view, the conflict between religion and politics is made explicit. Both are desiring not the other, but of the place of control in society.

2.2. Introducing the Conflict

The content of the scroll in Rev 5:1–3 is perhaps less important than the symbol it represents. It is Christ who ultimately receives the scroll and opens it in Rev 6:1–8:1. However, first, the scroll serves a narrative function to help introduce the Lamb and identify the one on the throne. The image of a scroll would have reminded Jewish readers of the Old Testament Scriptures,²⁷⁶ and this view was prevalent in ancient interpreters. Origen writes that the whole Scripture is what is revealed in the scroll (*Comm. Gospel John* 5.6). Others have suggested that the scroll is, in fact, the Lamb's book of life from 13:8 and 21:27. Though English translations often switch the language from scroll to book to differentiate the passages, the Greek βιβλίον sits behind both references. Keener suggests this as a probable reading.²⁷⁷ However, scrolls were often used in Apocalyptic writings to suggest a larger plan for history. For example, Daniel 12:4 and 1 Enoch 81:1–4 use the image of a scroll to represent God's eschatological plans for the world. 1 Enoch 89:71 even introduces the image of seals on a scroll to indicate assurance that the scroll has not been tampered with. Koester builds on this, arguing that the seals here indicate that the scroll is “a valid statement of God's purposes.”²⁷⁸ Given that visionary aspects of John's experience have already been communicated before the introduction of this scroll we should not equate the scroll

²⁷⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 64.

²⁷⁷ Keener, *Revelation*, 185.

²⁷⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 383.

with the vision of John itself. In the same way, since later references to a scroll (Rev 10:2, 9–10) are differentiated with the diminutive βιβλαρίδιον, we can neither combine each scroll reference in Revelation into a single object. It seems reasonable then to assume that John is using the image in ways that resonate with apocalyptic precedent as a blueprint for God’s purposes in the world. The tension then is that no one can be found who is worthy to direct God’s plan. This tension helps to explain John’s weeping at the prospect of a future unfulfilled or, as Loren L. Johns writes, “the implication is that the continued progress of history toward its divinely assigned goal”²⁷⁹ is at risk.

2.3. The Surprising Reveal

In Rev 5:5–6 we begin to see Girard’s ideas emerge in the narrative. “The idea that worthiness in the eyes of heaven could be linked to conquest (νικάω) had an important place in the readers’ social worlds,”²⁸⁰ and the images employed so far have done nothing to challenge that thesis. In fact, the imagery has reinforced that tendency by linking images of the worship YHWH with Imperial political power, hinting that each imitates the other. The stage is now set for an unveiling of what has been hidden, that is, the fact that the internally mediated desire for power is actually what needs to be dismantled by Christ.

First, John hears about a Lion but then turns to see a slain Lamb. The scene is pulled off with surprising dexterity. Loren Johns provides a helpful breakdown of the images and their rhetorical force. He writes that “the lion appears to be the quintessential symbol of the warrior and of the warrior’s superior power in the Prophets.”²⁸¹ Further, the “traditional appeals to ‘tribe of Judah’

²⁷⁹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse*, 163.

²⁸⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, 384.

²⁸¹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 165.

and the ‘root of David’ suggest the onset of the Messianic redemption.”²⁸² John J. Collins explores the use of the OT referent to the branch of David in Isaiah 11 as a Messianic image in the Dead Sea Scrolls, adding importance to the image here in Revelation.²⁸³ Bauckham adds “that there seems little doubt that Revelation 5:5 strongly and deliberately evokes the image of the Messiah as a new David who wins military victory over the enemies of Israel.”²⁸⁴ However, all of these titles are used to provide force to the impending revelation of *how* the Lamb triumphs (νικάω).

As Johns describes, the slain Lamb that John turns to see “is a powerful and mind-wrenching switch of images for which the reader is unprepared.”²⁸⁵ That is precisely the force and the point that the scene has been carefully building to all along. It is not only the messianic titles ascribed to the Lamb that are wrenched in new directions but also all the images of Roman Imperial Worship and the conventional images of Hebrew worship that have been laid out for the reader. All of this is now swallowed up in this new unveiling of Christ as slain lamb. Bauckham argues that the reveal of the “Lamb expresses John’s Jewish Christian reinterpretation of current Jewish eschatological hopes”²⁸⁶ and Koester points to the contrast between the Lamb and the “cult to Domitian, which emphasized the ideology of power and victory.”²⁸⁷ Barr summarizes the scene, echoing Loren Johns, with the statement that “a more complete reversal of value would be hard to imagine.”²⁸⁸ That is, of course, unless we have properly understood the meaning of the opening cycle, which communicated the enthronement of Christ through martyrdom rather than conquest.

²⁸² Ibid., 168.

²⁸³ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs and the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 26.

²⁸⁴ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 215.

²⁸⁵ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 168.

²⁸⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 214. cf. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 75.

²⁸⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, 335.

²⁸⁸ Barr, “Apocalypse as Symbolic Transformation of the World,” 41.

The revealing of the Lamb is almost universally understood to be a reversal of expectation, as the text shifts the understanding of God's νικάω away from earthly parallels seen in the political realm to the completely nonviolent νικάω of Christ as martyr/witness. However, the application of Girard's theories to this moment are significant in disarming one of the significant challenges in applying Girard's thought to Revelation as a whole. As Johns points out, "the Apocalypse of John has traditionally been seen as a problem for the Girardian reading of the New Testament."²⁸⁹ The problem arises when the appearance of the slain Lamb has been understood to reinforce sacrificial models. However, as Johns also points out in the same section, that very fact that the Lamb is meant to be a surprise indicates that we should not assume that it is designed to reinforce old ideas. Indeed, through the lens of Girard, the reveal here is not only the surprising appearance of the Messiah, but the way this scene fundamentally recomposes an imagination of God and his purpose in the world.

Though earlier in his writing Girard appears to reject all language of sacrifice as evidence of scapegoating,²⁹⁰ he later provides space for sacrificial rhetoric to serve a purpose outside the scapegoat mechanism.²⁹¹ Even still, to suggest that the Lamb is being presented as a propitiative or even expiative sacrifice would damage Girard's central thesis that Christ's work undoes the scapegoat mechanism completely. Here, the image of the Lamb certainly communicates that "the agent through whom God will achieve final victory is a symbol of sacrifice"²⁹² and so it is important to be aware of Girard's more open posture toward sacrificial rhetoric in later work. Even so, the nature of that sacrifice is entirely ambiguous in the text. The presence of the

²⁸⁹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 161. see footnote 41

²⁹⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 228. cf. Robert Hamerton-Kely ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathon K. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1987) 10.

²⁹¹ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 200.

²⁹² Donald Guthrie, "The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1987): 64–71.

economic term ἀγοράζω (purchased)²⁹³ in the song of the elders (Rev 5:9–10) may provide impetus to imagine a ransom model at play. However, while the term is related to the manumission of slaves²⁹⁴ and is most common in general commercial usage,²⁹⁵ there is nothing in the elders’ song to suggest that this purchase payment has been made *to* God. In the text, a price has simply been paid to free persons from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 5:9). This cost to unveil the scapegoat mechanism and free humanity from the cycle of violence is not in any way a challenge to Girard’s imagination of Christ. In fact, it is central to it. Girard writes in a section called *A Nonsacrificial Reading of the Gospel Text* that Jesus “is always ready to pay with his own person in order to spare men the terrible destiny that awaits them.”²⁹⁶ Indeed, in another passage, Girard uses the same economic language we see in Revelation to describe Christ’s work, arguing that the *price* paid to free humanity from ongoing violence was precisely Jesus’ death.²⁹⁷ However, Girard writes that in the

Bible we can see the gradual emergence of scapegoating in the modern and critical sense. It is there and there only that a genuine *theme* or *motif* of scapegoating can make its appearance and, simultaneously with it, a growing realization that we will not become fully human unless we confront and restrain this unconscious activity of ours by all possible means.²⁹⁸

What Girard is saying is that the Bible is a reflection of the unique work of God in history and that Christ’s “unconditional refusal of scapegoating, even if the price must be death,”²⁹⁹ has awakened humanity to the presence of the scapegoat mechanism in the world. Though the disparate texts of the Bible may reflect varying states of awareness, the descriptions of violence,

²⁹³ BDAG, s.v. “ἀγοράζω.”

²⁹⁴ TDNT, s.vv. “ἀγοράζω, εξαγοράζω,” I:124.

²⁹⁵ NIDNTTE, s.v. “ἀγοράζω,”

²⁹⁶ Girard, *Things Hidden*, reproduced in *Girard Reader*, 182.

²⁹⁷ René Girard, forward to James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Scared: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989), vi.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, vi.

sacrificial or otherwise, are imbued with a movement towards the unveiling of this unconscious need.

Returning to the text of Revelation, Johns argues that,

While it is certainly true that the slaughter of the lamb is central to the rhetorical force of the image, it is not true that expiation is. In fact, the logic and language of slaughter as expiatory sacrifice are quite rare in the Apocalypse, while the logic and language of slaughter as political resistance and martyrdom are common. Because ‘sacrificial’ language is imprecise and often implies an expiatory force, such language should be avoided with reference to the Apocalypse.³⁰⁰

With this, we return to the language of the opening cycle where we observed Christ’s enthronement specifically through his role as martyr/witness. In another work Johns expands on this, pointing out that the text of Revelation “consistently uses the Greek word *sphazô* to speak of the Lamb as having been slaughtered, or murdered, rather than *thyô*, the word that would normally have been used when speaking of ritually ‘sacrificing’ an animal.”³⁰¹ Indeed *thyô* appears nowhere in Revelation as the text opts for “slaughterhouse language, not Temple language.”³⁰²

The surprising appearance of the Lamb is not a ritual sacrifice that reinforces the violence of the scapegoat mechanism, but instead the slaughter of an innocent victim that brings out into the open how all other power structures depend on violence for their ability to conquer. If we were to assume that God conquers in the way the Emperor does, through the death of scapegoats, then the rhetorical force of the scandalous revelation of the Lamb is lost. In this way, the Lamb is a revelation of the one who sits on the throne as much as it is the revealing of the Messiah.

³⁰⁰ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 161. Mounce provides a commentary that leans much closer to a propitiative understanding of this scene but is still careful to write that Christ’s “death was the means whereby he purchased people *for* God” italics mine. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 135.

³⁰¹ Loren L. Johns, “Atonement and Sacrifice in the Book of Revelation,” *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective: Essays in Honor of J. Denny Weaver* (Alain Epp Weaver, and Gerald J. Mast. eds.; Cascadia Publishing House, 2008), 132,

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 132.

In fact, it is possible that hidden in the narrative is the implication that the Lamb did not appear as the violent conqueror expected and that this is why he was murdered. Girard writes that

Violence is unable to bear the presence of a being who owes it nothing—that pays no homage and threatens its kingship in the only way possible. What violence does not and cannot comprehend is that, in getting rid of Jesus by the usual means, it falls into a trap that could be laid only by innocence.³⁰³

In this way, the Lamb refuses the identity of scapegoat, retains his allegiance to nonviolence, and at the same time frees the one on the throne from the misplaced expectations placed on God through the allusions to Domitian noted above. Where God has been seen as a conqueror in the type of Empire and the Messiah victor in the vein of David, the slain Lamb reveals the triune God to be utterly free of our misplaced projections. There is no rivalry within Godself, and therefore Jesus is not drawn to an imitation of the desire for power that has placed religion and politics on a path of conflict. If the slaughter of the Lamb is seen to be redemptive in itself rather than as a revelation of the inability of violence to redeem, we find ourselves caught back in the cycle of scapegoat violence that Girard's work leads us away from. However, if instead, the slaughter of the Lamb is interpreted to be redemptive in the sense that it unveils the hidden violence that sits at the heart of our political and religious structures, then through it we encounter the nonviolent nature of God. As Girard says, what we see is that "Jesus is the only man who achieves the goal God has set for all mankind, the only man who has nothing to do with violence and its works... if the fulfilment, on earth, passes inevitably through the death of Jesus, this is not because the Father demands his death, for strange sacrificial motive."³⁰⁴ The Lamb is God's Messiah because he unveils the mechanism that sits at the centre of our political

³⁰³ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 183.

³⁰⁴ Girard, *Things Hidden*, reproduced in *Girard Reader*, 186.

and religious *peace*. In this way, a newfound awareness of God is as much the surprising reveal as the nature of the Lamb. Here, God, Messiah, and salvation are all freed from our violent expectations as Jesus' nonviolent witness in the previous cycle is now expanded into an image of his nonviolent worthiness to direct God's plan for history.

Chapter 6. Cycle Two B: The Seven Seals

In the previous scene explored in Chapter 5, Christ's ability to overcome (Rev 5:5) and his worthiness to open the scroll (Rev 5:9a) is directly tied to his nonviolence (Rev 5:9b). However, despite the fact the scene's thematic emphasis is on Christ's reign in the world, the images have remained in the heavenly realm. As the cycle transitions into the second movement outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis (Rev 5:14–8:5), the focus returns to the earthly experience with the emergence of the four riders.

1. Starting with Girard

The horsemen of the apocalypse which emerge through the opening of the seven seals have been the subject of disturbing and at times beautiful works of art. Reading this passage, one may picture in her mind the Nazgul from the Lord of the Rings, or perhaps more classically, the work of Viktor Vasnetsov as he pictured the riders of the Apocalypse in 1887. However, in Vasnetsov's work, the Lamb is depicted at the top of the painting overseeing this destruction and terror brought upon the world through the riders. Indeed, upon the opening of the sixth seal, the kings of the earth cry out asking to be hidden "from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16), a statement that should give pause to a simplistic non-violent interpretation of the Lamb's role in the narrative. As Heim rightly points out, "the God depicted *in* the Bible need not always be identified with the God *of* the Bible"³⁰⁵ and often violence that appears associated with God has a more nuanced theological intent. Here, assuming that John has indeed intended to bind the narrative of Revelation together, the subversion of violence we have already encountered in the text should lead us to search for continuity with the nonviolence of Jesus that forms the foundation for these

³⁰⁵ Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 67. italics mine

visions. Revelation, like the rest of the Bible, is not afraid to talk about the real violence present in the world, but where that violence originates from is a central focus of the text's questioning.

For this reason, before we turn to the content of these seals the work of Girard becomes helpful again. In the previous scene, the role of sacrificial violence is called into question. This subversion means that the primary means through which violence is contained and mitigated has been irrevocably damaged. This is positive in the long view because as Girard says we are no longer “going to be bound by these false barriers,”³⁰⁶ at the same time, our tools have been damaged. That damage means violence can now no longer be contained by the scapegoat mechanism. In other words, if sacrificial violence has been undone in the previous scene we should expect to see violence now spill out in the next scene. This is precisely what Girard notices in the words of Jesus. For Girard, the statement, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34) is not an endorsement of violence or an indication that Jesus intends to wield the sword himself. It is instead an acknowledgement of the fact that real violence will erupt when the work of Christ reveals what is hidden in our systems. This concept is laid out in an exchange between David Cayley and Girard for the CBC radio show *Ideas*. Cayley asks, “Why would Jesus’ gospel of love and mutual forbearance create division and discord?”³⁰⁷ Girard answers,

If we are without sacrifices, either we’re going to love each other or we’re going to die. We have no more protection against our own violence. Therefore, we are confronted with a choice: either we’re going to follow the rules of the Kingdom of God or the situation is going to get infinitely worse.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2322.

³⁰⁷ David Cayley, “The Scapegoat: The Ideas of René Girard,” *CBC Radio* (2001) <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-scapegoat-the-ideas-of-rené-girard-part-1-1.3474195> (accessed Feb 5, 2018).

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

Cayley summarizes but saying that “Jesus flushes the hidden violence of culture into the open, imposing a choice on people, and it is this choice, Girard says, that constitutes the unveiling or uncovering that Christians call the Apocalypse.”³⁰⁹ What Girard opens for us is the realization that the appearance of real violence in the story is not a barrier to a nonviolent reading but instead an essential factor in unveiling violence in the world. If the tool of scapegoating is to be overcome, then we must be confronted with our mimetic rivalries and choose to imitate the new nonviolent way of Jesus. However, the loss of that mitigating scapegoat ritual will inevitably bring more violence into the world before it can overcome. Here, the fact that the kings of the earth assume the outbreaks of violence in the wake of Jesus’ enthronement is the intent of the Lamb and describe it as such (Rev 6:16) is precisely what Girard has prepared us to expect. Christ’s unveiling of violence does bring more violence into the world but only because the tools previously used to hide it from us are crumbling.

2. The Appearance of the Four Riders

In the appearance of the four riders, John returns to Zechariah for inspiration (Zech 6:1–5).³¹⁰ Though the similarities are clear, there are differences in the presentations. Where Zechariah introduces red, then black, then white, and finally dappled horses, in Revelation it is a white, then red, then black and finally a pale horse. Though *χλωρος* typically means “green,” it is often associated with the sick or with the dead, describing a pale grey.³¹¹ This description could certainly be appropriate for a dappled horse. Finally, while Zechariah’s vision describes groups of horses pulling chariots, John’s picture is one of single horses mounted by individual riders.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, 215.

³¹¹ Louw-Nida, s.v. “*χλωρο*,” 79.35.

Despite these differences, the context for the horses' appearance draws surprising resonance. While it is understood that the horses represent for Zechariah opposition to the Persian empire (6th Century BCE), Ralph Smith adds that "it would be easy to get the impression from Zechariah's language about horses and chariots in 6:1–8 that he is advocating rebellion against the Persian empire. He is not speaking here about earthly armies or rebellion. He is referring to Yahweh's intervention. Warfare is not the way to the messianic kingdom."³¹² So while the horses represent a conflict between God and the world, they were not originally indicative of actual historical warfare. This distinction should give us some clue as to how John intends to use these images as he now assigns them to the first four seals on the scroll.

The first rider emerges with the opening of the first seal: a white horse with the rider holding a bow. This rider appears as a conqueror focused on conquest (Rev 6:2). If the images used in the previous scene were meant to evoke an awareness of the power of the Roman Emperor, this image appears designed to do exactly the opposite. The image of a bow is certainly an image of military power. However, the use of a bow to denote military might is often set at odds with the ability of God to bring peace in the OT. There is no shortage of verses where God is said to break the bows of his enemies (Ps 37:15, 46:9; Jer 49:35, 51:56; Hos 1:5). In fact, Zechariah 9:10 uses the same motif with the chariots taken from Ephraim, the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow broken as God proclaims peace to the nations. Surprisingly, however, in Zechariah, it is the bow of God's people that must be broken for peace to come. As Carol Meyers explains, "Just as the king (Zech 9:9) is "humble," yet still a royal figure, so too will he rule without activating the military aspects of political power that had long signified the ability of any

³¹² Smith, *Micah—Malachi*, 216.

monarch to achieve and sustain sovereignty.”³¹³ As if to make the point, when the Zechariah text returns to the image of the war-bow in 9:13, it is Judah who will become the bow and Ephraim who will become the arrow. If the bow in 9:10 is an image of human weaponry disarmed, the transformed image in 9:13 is “divine power expressed metaphorically.”³¹⁴ In other words, God’s activity is of a fundamentally different category from ours. This recognition in itself may signal that the appearance of this rider conceals a hidden agenda set against the redemptive use of violence.

Certainly, the Roman Empire was exceedingly powerful in the military realm, but the use of the term conquest (*νικᾶω*) has already been contrasted with the surprising triumph of the Lamb in Revelation. The worthiness of the Lamb is set in opposition to the worthiness of the Emperor, and the conquest of the Lamb is expressed explicitly at the moment where it appears his enemies have triumphed over him (Rev 5:6). In this image, the series of reversals continues as the image of a mounted bowman is set in contrast with the strength of the Roman military. While bowmen on horses were not a significant part of the Roman war machine, they were a central feature in smaller armies outside the empire. The Empire spent significant resources defending against small attacks and raids by those outside the borders. As Koester notes, “rather than a Roman legionnaire, the rider looks more like one of the mounted bowmen of the tribal peoples who lived in the outlying regions of the empire.”³¹⁵ The Parthians lived on the eastern frontiers of the Empire and were notorious for conducting these types of attacks on Roman lands. William Barclay writes that

in AD 62 an unprecedented event had occurred. A Roman army had actually had to surrender to Vologeses, the king of the Parthians... the Parthians rode on white horses

³¹³ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, The Anchor Yale Bible 25C (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 133.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

³¹⁵ Koester, *Revelation*, 406.

and they were the most famous bowmen in the world... A “Parthian shot” still means a final, devastating blow, to which there is no possible answer.³¹⁶

While Barclay perhaps overstates the case for identifying this rider specifically with the Parthians,³¹⁷ the rider represents the “spirit of conquest and militarism”³¹⁸ specifically through an image that draws the imagination away from the dominance of Rome. Since this rider sets out as a conqueror (*νικάω*) bent on conquest (*νικάω* Rev 6:2), it is only natural to compare this back to the previous scene where the Lamb triumphed (*νικάω*) through his death. Since that *νικάω* was “not a provisional victory but the final and unlimited victory,”³¹⁹ this conquest through violence must be limited in scope and ultimately opposed to the reigning of Christ. This image then, set in contrast to the victory of Christ, is designed to show how all other forms of victory based on violence are *always* temporary and precarious. This realization is echoed by Girard who argues that any peace obtained through the scapegoat mechanism is necessarily temporary and limited.³²⁰ Through Girard, we see in this image the sword that Jesus brings (Mt 10:34), but it is not through direct violence on the part of the Lamb. Instead, it is an awareness of the vulnerability in the scapegoat mechanism that once provided for our safety but is now unveiled in Christ. For Christians who had their eyes opened to the victory of the Lamb, the security of militarism can never seem secure again. With this as a framing device, we can now see how the tension is amplified further as successive forms of socio-political stability are undermined in the successive riders.

³¹⁶ Barclay, *The Revelation of John*. vol 2, 5

³¹⁷ There is scant evidence to corroborate Barclay’s claim that the Parthians rode white horses.

³¹⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 142.

³¹⁹ TDNT, s.v. “νικάω νίκη νίκος υπερνικάω,” IV:944.

³²⁰ René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (trans. M. B. DeBevoise; East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 44.

The next rider is given the power to take peace from the world (Rev 6:4). One of the great claims of Rome was the *Pax Romana*. Of all the claims the Empire made, one of the central claims was that the Emperor had brought peace to the world. As John Dominic Crossan describes, “the sequential program of Rome’s Imperial theology [was] religion, war, victory, peace—or more briefly peace through victory.”³²¹ Michael Kirwan describes this aspect of Girard’s thought by stating that for Girard “the overriding purpose of political institutions is the restraint of conflict. This is the kind of thing the Roman Empire excelled at, imposing its *pax romana* on other peoples by virtue of its military superiority.”³²² In fact, the peace through victory narrative of Rome is a powerful example of scapegoat mechanism in action. *Our* peace comes only through the violent death of those who oppose *us*. However, in the light of the cross, this compromised peace based on violence against outsiders was deemed incompatible with the emerging Christian narrative.

In Philippians, Paul quotes a community hymn, writing that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and tongue confess (Phil 2:10–11). Paul’s endorsement of the “indirect polemic against Caesar and the ‘civic tradition’ of their world”³²³ stems precisely from the fact that the Romans made similar claims about the Emperors. For example, Horace writes that “upon you [Augustus], while still among us, we already bestow honors, set up altars to swear by in your name, and that nothing like you will arise after you or has arisen before you.”³²⁴ However, Paul argues that the glorification of Christ is the direct result of Christ’s self-emptying and sacrifice (Phil 2:6–8).³²⁵ This worthiness is directly contrasted by the claims of worthiness put forward by

³²¹ John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 25.

³²² Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd, 2004), Location 986.

³²³ John Reumann, *Philippians*, The Anchor Yale Bible 33B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 374.

³²⁴ Crossan, *God and Empire*, 19.

³²⁵ “There is a causal relationship between the actions narrated in w. 9–11 and those of w. 6–8.” Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians: Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmanns, 2005), 100.

the Emperors whose honour was predicated on his ability to bring peace through violent *νικάω*.³²⁶ This contrast between Jesus and Emperor is the same contrast Revelation explores.

Here, this second rider is given the power to remove that violently enforced peace from the world. The NIV reads, “its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other” (Rev 6:4), but the translation is reading too much into the Greek conjunction *ἵνα*.³²⁷ The ESV renders the passage the “rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another” (Rev 6:4). This semantic shift is not a small distinction, however, because it shifts the role of the rider from causing the violence in the scene directly to merely removing the artificial barriers presented by the *Pax Romana*. As Aune writes, this is “a conscious reversal of the Roman achievement.”³²⁸ The rider is John’s way of showing the *peace* of Roman society for the facade that it is. Indeed, as Girard says, “those who accuse Christianity of being responsible for violence are not right, of course, but indirectly they are saying something which is true: the more the Gospel influences the world, the more it destroys the sacrificial apparatus that up to now has protected human culture.”³²⁹ Therefore when the violence of the *Pax Romana* is removed, the violence it has been covering up is revealed. In this way, the rider represents the unveiling of predatory peace.

A third rider emerges on a black horse. This rider holds pair of scales in his hand (Rev 6:5). Not only did Rome claim that the peace of Rome was historic, but it also claimed that the prosperity of Rome was unprecedented. We are told that when this rider comes, a quart of wheat and three quarts of barley will cost a denarius, an outrageous cost associated with a crisis (Rev

³²⁶ Ibid., 25.

³²⁷ “(‘Even that’) would not imply purpose but specify that the extent of such strife.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 381.

³²⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 395.

³²⁹ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2322.

6:6, Josephus, *Ant.* 14.28).³³⁰ Oil and wine, however, remain readily available. Wheat, barley, oil, and wine have precedent in their connected usage, particularly in speaking of famine. The prophet Joel writes in 1:10–11 that “the fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the olive oil fails. Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed.” However, in Joel’s description of famine, all four goods are diminished as expected. While it is certainly true that rich and poor both consumed oil and wine regularly (1 Kgs 17:12, Lam 2:12), in times of hardship it is reasonable to assume that the basic sustenance of bread would take precedence. Aune notes the deep irony embedded in this image³³¹ and Mounce notes that interpreters have understood this statement “to underscore the social inequity existing in a time of scarcity.”³³² John’s choice to make a distinction between the necessities and the luxuries of life indicates that he is commenting on more than food shortage. Here the rider is unveiling the inability of an economic system that disproportionately impacts the poor to bring sustenance to the world.

Finally, we see a pale horse with a rider named Death, and Hades following close behind (Rev 6:8). Death here is the normal word *thanatos* but is used as a title instead. *Hades* is used the same way even though typically *hades* was regarded as a place in Greek thought. “The LXX uses “death” (θανατος), and “Hades” (αδης) in combination almost synonymously in reference to the region of the dead.”³³³ Here, however, these two personifications (cf. Sir 14:12; PssSol 16:2; 4 Ezra 8:53) bring famine and plague and animal attacks upon the world (Rev 6:8). This is a difficult image to grapple with, but the trajectory of the first three riders calls the reader to

³³⁰ “The prices in Revelation were eight to sixteen times higher than usual, rates associated with severe shortages.” Koester, *Revelation*, 396.

³³¹ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 398.

³³² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 144.

³³³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 382.

imagine this within the larger sequence. Since Death and Hades will ultimately find their fate in the lake fire (Rev 20:13–14) along with all those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:18), it does not seem reasonable to imagine them as direct agents of the Lamb here. Instead, these figures seem to represent a vulnerability to the vagaries of life. A contemporary of John, the philosopher Epictetus, who had fled Rome under the reign of Domitian, may provide some help.³³⁴ He wrote these words while in exile from Rome.

Behold now, Caesar seems to provide us with profound peace, there are no wants any longer, no battles, no brigandage on a large scale, no piracy, but at any hour we may travel by land, or sail from the rising of the sun to its setting. Can he, then, at all provide us with peace from fever too, and from shipwreck, and from fire, or earthquake for lightning? Come, can he give us peace from love? He cannot. From sorrow? From envy? He cannot—absolutely none of these things.³³⁵

This angst provides the best parallel for the questions that emerge in the appearance of the fourth rider. The victory of the Lamb has exposed the Empire’s inability to provide freedom from the most vexing questions of life and death. Though it may be tempting to see the riders being unleashed upon the world by God as the Lamb opens the seals, “the threats represented by the horsemen are not directly imposed by God.”³³⁶ They are representative of what happens as our illusions crumble in the light of the Lamb who has *νικάω* through death and opened our eyes to the violence inherent in peace generated through the scapegoat mechanism. If the riders represent the decay of the systems that contain our violence, then this image of Death and Hades, personified before those who do not recognize Christ’s reign, is contrasted with the experience of those who enter into the *νικάω* of the Lamb (Rev 3:21).

James Allison explains the implications of Girard’s approach.

³³⁴ Frederic William Farrar, *Seekers After God* (London: MacMillan: 1877), 219.

³³⁵ Epictetus, *Diatr*, 3.13.9.

³³⁶ Koester, *Revelation*, 409.

In Jesus' resurrection, God demonstrated to us... a life so completely deathless as to be able to assume being a shameful victimary corpse within itself, and become as such the source of life for others. So what is meant by the Resurrection as an impetus for moral life, is that we are inducted into beginning to live as if death were not, being able to befriend our mortality in all its extremities, extremities which include human victimhood in all its moral and physical dimensions. The outward and visible sign, if you like, of the resurrection in our lives, is the fear and stigma of death having become moot for us. And thereafter for our creativity, our longing for justice and flourishing, to have been unleashed into the beginnings of practical responses, by not having death as its circumscription.³³⁷

In the nonviolent imitation of Christ, Death and Hades hold no more fear for the believer and through this lens, each of the four riders can be understood to represent an aspect of the sword that Jesus brings (Mt 10:34). Christ removes the old barriers that have contained violence and preserved the socio-political status quo.

Koester summarizes the appearance of the riders;

They are designed to unsettle complacent readers—like those at Sardis and Laodicea, who may be lulled into a false sense of security by social and economic conditions that are favorable to them—reminding them that the present order will not continue forever. At the same time, the visions give the oppressed, like those at Smyrna, incentive to persevere with confidence that the veneer of peace, which enables those with influence to threaten them, will be taken away.³³⁸

For Girard, “Christ is a new phase in human freedom, which is so total and so great that humanity becomes the victim of its own devices.”³³⁹ In this way the riders represent, through a

³³⁷ James Allison, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice* (Glenview: DOERS Publishing, 2013) 544.

³³⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 409.

³³⁹ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2335.

Girardian lens, not God's wrath poured out on the world, but the crumbling of a perceived peace built on scapegoat violence.³⁴⁰

3. The Fifth and Sixth Seals

The scene, however, is not yet concluded. When the fifth seal is opened, John sees the souls of those slain because of their faithfulness. They cry out asking to be avenged (Rev 6:9–10). As Mounce suggests “that the souls of the martyrs were ‘under the altar’ is a way of saying that their untimely deaths on earth are from God’s perspective a sacrifice.”³⁴¹ This untimely death suggests that their suffering is not part of God’s plan but instead the unholy consequence of evil in the world. However, as the victims now turn to God to ask for vengeance, we must wrestle with the appropriateness of their request. Beale argues that this should not be interpreted as “a cry for bitter, personal revenge,”³⁴² but he provides nothing to support this beyond the fact that the call for vengeance is preceded by an appeal to a God who is ‘holy and true.’ However, since the claim of ‘holiness’ comes from the mouth of those making the request, this does little to prove that the request itself is ‘true.’ The martyrs do seem to allude to Psalm 78, which reads in the LXX, “let the avenging of thy servant’s blood that has been shed be known among the heathen before our eyes” (Ps 78:10 LXX). However, once again we have only God’s response to meaningfully determine the worthiness of the request. Reading with Girard as a lens, we should not be surprised to see victims of violence call for more violence; this is the nature of mimesis. While the martyrs are provided white robes which symbolize purity in Revelation,³⁴³ Denny Weaver points out that the martyrs “petulantly bemoan the slowness of God in avenging their

³⁴⁰ For a parallel one could look to Paul’s theology in Romans 1:24 where’s God’s wrath is described as giving them over to their sinful desires.

³⁴¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 146.

³⁴² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 393.

³⁴³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 149.

deaths.”³⁴⁴ Indeed, the robes foreshadow the surprise that these white garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:13–14), a paradoxical image that draws the reader back to the “complete reversal of value”³⁴⁵ from the Lamb’s introduction (Rev 5:5–6). These hints prepare us to look for a similar reversal here.

Next, an earthquake shakes the earth, the sun turns black, the moon turns red, and the stars fall from the sky (Rev 6:12–13). Eugene Boring notes that “this scene is no more to be taken literally than the rest of John’s metaphorical language.”³⁴⁶ However, he also argues that it should not be taken to describe a purely spiritual meaning, as if “John had only dressed up his expectation of a social revolution in apocalyptic language.”³⁴⁷ This imagery seems to speak of creation mourning as if sin has undermined the very premise of creation.

Next, everyone, from kings to slaves, runs to hide from the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:15–16). Eduard Schick argues that this list covers everyone “from the highest social caste to the lowest class of society”³⁴⁸ as all turn to God expecting the worst. Koester acknowledges that “these signs depict a cosmic collapse that is so vast that it can only be taken as the end of the world”³⁴⁹ and yet also observes that “these cosmic signs do not show finality.”³⁵⁰ Once again conventional imagery is being used in unconventional ways. “The expression ‘wrath of the Lamb’ is so incongruous that interpreters debate whether it can be taken seriously.”³⁵¹ Though ‘not taken seriously’ may be overly dismissive language, considering that nothing approaching a violent climax appears in the scene’s finale, I would argue that the ‘wrath

³⁴⁴ Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2001), Location 399.

³⁴⁵ Barr, “Apocalypse as Symbolic Transformation of the World,” 41.

³⁴⁶ Eugene M. Boring, *Revelation* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2011), 126.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁴⁸ Eduard Schick, *The Revelation of St John*, The New Testament for Spiritual Reading 12 (Sheed and Ward, 1977), 72.

³⁴⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 411.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 411.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 413.

of the Lamb' cannot be taken at face value. The force of the language, contrasted with the absence of wrath, is designed to emphasize that those who expect wrath from God have misapprehended his character. God's wrath is reserved for the forces of evil that destroy God's creation (Rev 11:18), not those held in captivity to them. The extended implication is that those who call for the Lamb to act in such ways against their enemies and persecutors have misapprehended God's character as well.

4. Interlude and Reversal

Just as the wrath of the Lamb and the One on the throne is to be revealed (Rev 6:17), the scene undermines the reader's expectations with a familiar maneuver. Seals are placed on the foreheads of the servants of God and John hears that the saints number 144,000, drawn from the tribes of Israel (Rev 7:3–4). However, the contrast between what John hears and sees in the previous scene is now repeated, as before him appears an innumerable multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev 7:9–10). Reading the text as intentionally bound together the way Barr encourages,³⁵² we recognize the significance of this repeated motif to the intent of the larger scene.

Despite the fears of those opposed to God (Rev 6:15–17) and in a reversal of the wishes of the martyrs (Rev 6:10), the true nature of Christ's victory is once again set in opposition to expectations. Though much work has been done on the meaning behind the number 144,000, this "obviously symbolic"³⁵³ Jewish figure is swallowed up in the innumerable myriad drawn from across every conceivable dividing line. In contrast to the expectations of both groups given voice

³⁵² Barr, "The Apocalypse as Symbolic Transformation of the World," 43.

³⁵³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 158.

in the crescendo, the worship here is not in celebration of, but set against, the destruction that was described in the opening of the previous seals. As Denny Weaver describes the scene:

Revelation 7 pictures these multitudes in celebration of the victory of the Lamb over the devastation and destruction that mounted through seals one to four and six. Juxtaposition of this celebration in seal six with the utter chaos and destruction in the scene of 5:12–17 suggests the greatness of the victory. This celebration matches that of chapter 5, which acclaimed the victory of the slaughtered lamb, the resurrected Christ. The symbolic imagery in the scene of the throne room and the celebration that culminates the opening of the seven seals presents an awe-inspiring and thrilling message, namely that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate and definitive cosmic victory of the reign of God over the rule of Satan and the multiple evils that he produces, including war and devastation, famine, pestilence, and natural disasters.³⁵⁴

Girard's work brings another layer of meaning to the surface. The dueling references to white robes and palm branches bring together the religious and political elements of Christ's victory. The image of a multitude drawn from unexpected sources washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14) is a "striking paradox."³⁵⁵ It is "drawn from the practice of expiatory sacrifice in Israelite-Jewish cultic tradition"³⁵⁶ but the presence of the palm frond, a "metonymy to mean 'victory'," ³⁵⁷ suggests that the text is intending to speak of more than religious atonement at this moment. Instead, this is a celebration of the inevitable point where Christ's undoing of scapegoat violence has worked its way through the human story, and even the suffering inherent in the crumbling of old systems has been replaced by a new thoroughly nonviolent order. For Girard this liberation is inevitable.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Location 412.

³⁵⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 165.

³⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 475.

³⁵⁷ The association of the palm with victory is so close that statues of the goddess Nike or Victory can be described by metonymy as *palmaris deae facies*, "with the appearance of the goddess of the palm." Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 468.

³⁵⁸ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2322

First, Christ unveils the scapegoat mechanism at work in our midst. Then, that awareness destabilizes the systems that maintain social order. In light of the chaos that follows, the temptation to return to the mimesis of old models rears its ugly head. However, as the Lamb reaffirms a commitment to nonviolence, inspiring a “non-violent imitation”³⁵⁹ in the world, the religious victory of Christ (white robes) is transformed into the socio-political victory of the kingdom (palm fronds).

For Girard, the destabilizing effect that Christ calls the sword (Mt 10:34) is not a reason to celebrate. Neither is the pain brought forward on the opening of the seals here in Revelation. The sword, however, must be named and understood if the implication of Christ’s victory is to be properly realized in the world. Girard gives a great deal of attention to this in the interview recorded in *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, arguing that Christian eschatology cannot be “single mindedly rosy” but must name the apocalyptic consequences of “the loss of sacrificial protection, the loss of the Powers” that have held humanity captive.³⁶⁰

5. Conclusion

If one should observe the dramatic reversal in the previous scene and naively read the opening of the seals as if each image is to be taken at face value, he or she would miss both the nature of Revelation and the implications of Girard’s work. Revelation is intent on building up and then subverting the apocalyptic conventions it assumes for itself. Similarly, Girard is acutely aware of the socio-political elements of his theory including the outbreaks of violence that become necessary on the path toward non-violence. By reading through Girard’s ideas what this scene affirms is that a naively optimistic interpretation of Christ’s victory of violence is untenable. We

³⁵⁹Girard, *Things Hidden*, 430.

³⁶⁰Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2361.

must become aware of the presence of violence in the world, and we must resist the temptation to return to violence once we see the effectiveness it once had lost. For this reason, we must not assume that the outbreaks of violence no longer contained by the scapegoat mechanism is in any way a shortcoming of the work completed by Christ. This unveiling is the function that the seals play in Revelation. Christ has taken control of the scroll that represents God's ultimate plan in the world, and he has begun to move the world toward that destiny through the perturbations that transformation implies. However, the perception of the violence that erupts does not in itself indicate the locus of the struggle. Therefore, the reader must stay engaged through to the end of the scene to realize that the celebration God intends is the victory over the barriers that provide cover for scapegoat violence.

Chapter 7: Cycle Two C: The Seven Trumpets

With the first two sections of the second cycle of Revelation already explored in chapters 5 and 6, this chapter explores the final scene within the second cycle of Revelation. In this scene, there remains a large and complex drama that takes place after the seventh seal is opened but before we reach the end of the narrative cycle. Beginning in Rev 8 and concluding in Rev 11, John invites us to imagine, from two different perspectives, how God might deal with evil in the socio-political realm. As explored in the previous section, the text of Revelation has already confronted the implications of a world where the stabilizing forces of scapegoat violence have been undermined. Through a Girardian lens, the riders of the apocalypse represent the social forces of chaos now unrestrained by scapegoat violence. As Jesus says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34). However, what we see is that the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16) is not a direct violence enacted by Jesus himself, but instead the ‘giving over’ of social structures to the violence they once kept hidden.

1. Starting with Girard

As the seven seals now give way to a series of trumpets, that same story is told from a new perspective: the struggle to move toward non-violent mimesis. This process for Girard is almost analogous to sanctification in classic Christian language. Simply being made aware of the injustice of Christ’s murder does not instantaneously free us from the desires with which we have been conditioned to respond. The interviewer, Rebecca Adams, points out in a dialogue with Girard that his theories argue that mimetic desire is only a kind of desire humans know and, since we cannot desire what we have not seen in another, she questions whether this implies an

“almost Augustinian—idea of the bondage of the will.”³⁶¹ Girard, however, is quick to counter and his response provides insight into how he understands Christ’s death as the emergence of a new option to imitate in the world. This nonviolence is an option that we must nevertheless choose consciously. He says,

No, that impression is not true. I believe in freedom of the will. Jesus says that scandals must happen, and he tells his disciples that they will all be scandalized when he is arrested; but at the same time he says: happy are those to whom I will not be a scandal... That scandal must happen might sound like determinism, but it is not... As to whether I am advocating the renunciation of mimetic desire, yes and no. Not the renunciation of mimetic desire itself, because what Jesus advocates is mimetic desire. Imitate me and imitate the father though me, he says, so it’s twice mimetic. Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the father.³⁶²

Girard adds in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* that “people do not wish to know that the whole of human culture is based on the mythic process of conjuring away man’s violence by endlessly projecting it upon new victims [and this in part why] religion and law contrives to repress it.”³⁶³ Through this lens, what is possible to see in the coming scene is a pointed contrast between the mimesis that has directed history to the point of Christ and the mimesis that is now offered to the world in Christ. By juxtaposing those two forms of imitation, the text creates a tension that calls us to leave behind what comes naturally in favour of what is revealed by Christ. However, we should not be surprised to see alternatives to nonviolence presented in the text. In fact, Girard references the Olivet Discourse in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 24:1–25,46; Mk 13; Lk 17:22–37, 21:5–33) as an example of the pull mythic thinking still present in the text.³⁶⁴ This perspective awakens the reader to the fact that Revelation is

³⁶¹ Adams, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice,” 22.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 164.

³⁶⁴ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 185–190.

presenting a contrast between alternative responses within a community struggling toward the nonviolent imitation of Christ.

2. The Seven trumpets

2.1. The Purpose of Repetition

In this scene (Rev 8:6–11:18), the text unveils a series of seven trumpets. Though attempts have been made to delineate the seven scrolls, seven trumpets, and seven bowls as 21 distinct historical events, Fiorenza demonstrates that “the literary structure and visionary accounts of Revelation do not follow a chronological but a topical order.”³⁶⁵ The movement from seals to trumpets to bowls is “simple repetition that increases in intensification.”³⁶⁶ Jan Lambrecht argues that the open-ended seventh seal includes “all that follows, together with the intensification with and within each plague septet.”³⁶⁷ The trumpets, then, are a form of recapitulation, retelling the same story from a new perspective still within the political cycle that binds the section from 4:1 to 11:18. That is not to say, however, that the trumpets carry the same meaning as the previously explored seals, only that they do not describe new historical events.

The transformation of the title from Revelation 1, “the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Rev 1:8) into the “Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was” (Rev 11:17), full stop, indicates for us that the text intends this to be a climactic moment. God is no longer “to come”; he is now “come.” Darrell W. Johnson sees here the climax of a chiasmic structure that informs the entire letter of Revelation.³⁶⁸ However, a multiplicity of

³⁶⁵ Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 138. cf. 43–46.

³⁶⁶ John A. Mclean, “The Structure of The Book of Revelation and Its Implication for The Pre-Wrath Rapture,” *Michigan Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 155.

³⁶⁷ Jan Lambrecht, “A Structuration of Revelation 4, 1–22, 5,” *BETL* 53 (1980): 87.

³⁶⁸ Darrell W. Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 391–396.

chiasmus have been found and argued for throughout the book of Revelation with central moments placed at various points and no consensus determined.³⁶⁹ It is clear, however, that “in the schedule of God’s redemptive program a decisive point has now been reached.”³⁷⁰

2.2. The Trumpets as History or Metaphor

With fire mixed with blood (Rev 8:7), mountains thrown into seas (Rev 8:8), waters turned poisonous (Rev 8:10), celestial bodies struck with darkness (Rev 8:12), locusts with human faces (Rev 9:7) and an enormous army preparing for battle (Rev 9:16), the entire trumpet scene is full of fertile and violent imagery. However, even as the text moves the reader towards the showdown, the text concludes the images of battle on a decidedly anticlimactic note. Those who survive the plagues do not repent of their evil (Rev 9:20–21). This frustration is a remarkable statement given the absolute confidence the text has placed in Christ and his victory up to this point. Even after all of the violence unleashed in the first six trumpets, the purposes of God have not been accomplished. However, just as the gap between the sixth and seventh seal provided an opportunity to reflect and draw new conclusions, a similar break is introduced following the sixth trumpet in 10:1.

Instead of the ultimate violent outpouring we might expect, John now retreats into a long interlude before the final seventh trumpet. This interlude is where attempts to interpret the trumpets as historical events tend to coalesce as two witnesses appear in the temple (Rev 11:3).

The first Jewish temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 6th century B.C.E. The second temple was destroyed by Rome when Vespasian sent his son Titus to attack Jerusalem. Since the year 70 C.E., before the time of the writing of Revelation, there has

³⁶⁹ For an overview of various attempts to outline chiastic structures of Revelation see Mclean, “The Structure of The Book of Revelation,” 139–168.

³⁷⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 228.

not been a physical temple in Jerusalem.³⁷¹ For this reason, attempts to situate the trumpets historically revolve around speculation of a rebuilt temple.

Of course, the temple language has been employed previously in Revelation, and that provides an entrance into an alternative approach. If as discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, that Revelation is a product of the Domitian era, then it is written in the context of a destroyed Jewish temple. For this reason, it is likely the text intends temple language to be evocative, if not entirely metaphorical in its use. For example, the text contrasts the synagogue of Satan (Rev 3:9) with the promise to the faithful to be made pillars in the temple of God (Rev 3:12). This figurative use of temple language is used as early as Philo, who used the word *ναός* to denote a people group.³⁷² This usage corresponds to

a certain spiritualization that may be observed in the Psalms. Attention is focused on the temple not so much as a place of sacrifice and hence of the priesthood, but as the place above all others that is longed for (Ps 27:4 [26:4], the place to which a cry for help (28:2 [27:2]) or the individual's worship is directed (5:7 [5:8]; 138:2 [137:2]), and hence also the place of comfort (65:4 [64:5]), of God's response (18:6 [17:7]), of God's might (68:28–29 [67:29–30]; cf. 29:9 [28:9]).³⁷³

Jesus himself uses this figurative language to describe his own body saying, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn 2:19). The writer of the Fourth Gospel even adds for clarification that “the temple he had spoken of was his body” (Jn 2:21) to make the meaning explicit for us. In the writing of Paul, this figurative sense is also firmly established. He is frequently found teaching that the temple of God is no longer to be understood as a physical space at all (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). It is likely that this is the image of *ναός* that the text is

³⁷¹ The site of the temple has been occupied by the Dome of the Rock since the 7th century. Tractate Yoma 54b designates the site of the temple as the first part of the earth to come into existence in the Genesis creation narratives.

³⁷² NIDNTTE, s.v. “*ναός*,” 3:370.

³⁷³ NIDNTTE, s.v. “*ναός*,” 3:371.

using in Rev 3.³⁷⁴ Given that the text has already employed the figurative use of temple language it is then reasonable to imagine that this is the intent in Rev 11 as the temple is used in a sense consistent with other images throughout the trumpet narrative. Understanding that the entire trumpet scene, from the fire mixed with blood (Rev 8:7), through the appearance of the witnesses (Rev 11:3), to the worship of the enthroned Christ (Rev 11:15), is to be read in the same metaphorical realm, Girard's awareness of the struggle between competing mimetic options becomes a compelling interpretive grid.

3. Competing Perspectives

The opening image of an angel responding to the prayers of God's people (Rev 8:2–3) seems to draw attention back to the mimetic tension briefly encountered in the previous scene. There, the martyrs who followed the Lamb into death still struggle to free themselves from the violent mimesis of the world, and they call out asking God to enact vengeance on their behalf (Rev 6:10). In the conclusion of that scene, the reversal is made complete when the reader is surprised to see that the prayers of martyrs do not reflect the character of God and God refuses to show his wrath in the expected ways. Rather, God extends surprising grace to an unexpected multitude. In the opening of the trumpets, it is as if we are taken back to the moment of the martyr's prayers coming up before God. This time, God begins to act out their request (Rev 8:7–9:19). However, the violent outburst has a disappointing effect and humanity still does not repent (Rev 9:21). Next, an angel appears with a message for John to communicate but, just when he is about to write down the thunderous lion-like roar, he hears a voice from heaven tell him to stop (Rev 10:1–4).

³⁷⁴ "He understands the temple and the city as symbols of the people of God." Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 272.

There are four significant points to examine in this transitional passage. First, the text makes a distinction between the little scroll in the hand of the angel and the scroll we saw earlier in the hand of the one on the throne. The use of the diminutive βιβλαρίδιον (Rev 10:2, 9, 10) opposed to the normative βιβλίον (Rev 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9), is an indication that John wants us to mark the distinction. The fact that this scroll lays open should not be taken as an indication that this is the earlier scroll with its seals opened, since as noted, the seventh seal includes all that follows, including the trumpets now being recounted. Mounce argues that “the two scrolls of Revelation cannot be the same [since] the scroll of destiny begins with the seals and continues to the end of the Apocalypse.”³⁷⁵ This little scroll is better equated to the contents of what is about to unfold in the context of the trumpet narrative inclusive.

Second, John tells us that he hears a loud shout like the roar of a lion (Rev 10:3). We have seen both the image of a lion (Rev 5:5) and the juxtaposition of hearing and seeing (Rev 5:11, 7:9) already in the letter. Here, the loud shout causes the voices of the seven thunders to speak. These seven thunders are difficult to identify.³⁷⁶ The use of the definite article may indicate that John expects his readers to understand that the reference is perhaps a nod to Psalm 29,³⁷⁷ but this does little to explain the specific meaning here in Revelation. It has also been argued that the thunders represent “premonitions of God’s anger about to burst forth in judgment.”³⁷⁸ This conjecture is reasonable: to imagine that there is “no specific content”³⁷⁹ communicated besides the intensification that Lambrecht described earlier. However, upon landing on that conclusion, we are immediately told that John hears about God’s anger but then is told not to write what it says (Rev 10:4). This moment appears to be yet another play on the hearing/seeing motif in

³⁷⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 202–203.

³⁷⁶ *επτα* is omitted by P47 *pc ai* is omitted by 1611, 2344 *pc*

³⁷⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 204.

³⁷⁸ I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 578.

³⁷⁹ Mclean, “The Structure of The Book of Revelation,” 155.

Revelation. John hears the roar of judgment, but that hearing is not consistent with the unveiling the text intends. This juxtaposition only reinforces the symmetry between the three scenes in this cycle (cf. Rev 5:11, 7:9, 10:4).

Third, we read that, “when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished” (Rev 10:7). The word μυστηριον that John uses here has a rich history. Mystery cults in the time of Christianity celebrated a “dramatic representation of the deity suffering and overcoming death, and the initiated attained salvation and deification by sharing in the deity’s fortunes.”³⁸⁰ Specifically, in Daniel (Dan 2:18–19, 27–30; 4:9), the term is used to render the Aramaic *zār* to describe “a definite theological sense, that of eschatological secret, i.e., the vision of what God has decreed shall take place in the future.”³⁸¹ Here it is likely the word takes on shades of both meanings, along with the added emphasis of the apocalyptic genre that calls to watch for the unveiling of what has been hidden.

Finally, John is told to take the little scroll that contains the mystery of God and eat it (Rev 10:8–10 cf. Ezk 2:8–3:3) in order that he might be compelled (Rev 10:9) to prophesy “about many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Rev 10:11). This moment is a significant transition in the trumpet narrative. Everything from 8:6 through the end of chapter 9 is expressed from the perspective of the voice that calls for vengeance (Rev 8:4). Now God compels someone to speak for God (Rev 10:9–11).

3.1. Violent Narrative as Catharsis or Mimetic Struggle

Before exploring the counter-narrative that God unveils, we turn to the work of Adela Yarbro Collins. In her work *Crisis and Catharsis*, she presents the thesis that Revelation represents the

³⁸⁰ NIDNTTE, s.v. “μυστηριον,” 3:351.

³⁸¹ NIDNTTE, s.v. “μυστηριον,” 3:352.

“darker side of the author’s human nature” even as the broader intent of the text is a call to nonviolence.³⁸² Yarbrow Collins sees in Revelation the release of violent tensions through a narrative that helps the community remain nonviolent even in the face of perceived persecution. She writes that “the book’s repeated presentations of the destruction of the hearers’ enemies [function as an] imaginative way of resolving the tension between expectations and social reality.”³⁸³ While Yarbrow Collins agrees that the ultimate goal of Revelation is a call to the nonviolent life of Christ, she imagines the text facilitating that non-violence through the indulgence of violent fantasies. In order to maintain a conviction that Christ’s lordship contains a socio-political dimension, the “solution of the Apocalypse is an act of creative imagination which, like that of the schizophrenic, withdraws from empirical reality.”³⁸⁴ However, in acknowledging that the text is not describing an empirical reality, she opens the opportunity to reimagine this scene from the perspective of Girard. Rather than providing a chance to indulge in violent fantasy, a Girardian perspective might imagine the text creating a point of decision in the mind of the reader.

As the prayers of the martyrs go up before God (Rev 8:4), the text begins to play out the violent fantasies of those still drawn by the allure of mimetic violence. Vengeance is enacted against the enemies of God or, more accurately, the enemies of those persecuted. The narrative does indeed indulge their fantasy, piling ever more brutal plague on top of plague as those murdered are avenged seven times (Rev 4:15) and then 77 times over (Rev 4:24), through the intensification of trumpets within seals. However, from a Girardian perspective, the point is not that indulging violent fantasy enables the community to remain nonviolent in life, but that the

³⁸² Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 172.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

violent fantasy is shown to be ineffective. After the violent outpouring, the people do not repent (Rev 9:20–21).

Heim describes the process at play here by saying that “injustice against scapegoats becomes a charter for an unrestrained tide of righteous wrath against their oppressors.”³⁸⁵ However, he explains three crucial distinctions in how this violence can be misinterpreted:

The description or prediction of an explosion of violence is not the same thing as a claim that God is the one who requires it. This is an important distinction to keep in mind. A second distinction is the one between violence that is a disintegration of human factionalism and violence that is a war of cosmic revenge. And a third distinction is the difference between defining God’s wrath as anger against violence and defining it as the righteous exercise of violence.³⁸⁶

If the first distinction is an overriding principle explored in the throne room scene, and the second a distillation of what is played out through the opening of the seals, then the final distinction is what we are witnessing here in the trumpets. God’s anger *against* violence has been muddled together with God’s anger *as* violence. That difference needs to be drawn to the surface and clarified for the narrative to move forward. Girard is keenly aware of the pull of mythic thinking, even once we have awakened to the work of Christ, and he expects to see it operate in the text.³⁸⁷ The way Girard approaches the parable of the wicked tenants (Lk 20:9–16, Mk 12:1–11, Mt 21:33–41) is instructive for us here. In a conversation recorded in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, he is confronted with the problematic words of Jesus who says that the returning owner will murder the treacherous tenants (Lk 20:15–16, Mk 12:9). However, Girard pivots to the version of the parable recorded in Matthew.

“Matthew has the same question as Mark, and Jesus asks it. Yet this time *it is not he who replies*, but his listeners... Jesus does not credit God with the violence. He allows his

³⁸⁵ Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 264.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁸⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 185–190.

audience to come to their own conclusions and these represent not his thoughts but their own, thoughts that take God's violence for granted."³⁸⁸

Girard goes on to explain a source-critical argument for why he prefers the Matthew text, but the key for us comes in his conclusion. He says that "Jesus is obliged to speak their language up to a certain point and take into account illusions that cannot yet be eradicated. If his audience conceives of the deity as vengeful, then the audience can only approach the truth if it is still partly clothed in myth."³⁸⁹ Through Girard, we can see a similar idea at play in the trumpet scene where the outbreak of vengeance allows the audience to approach God still partly clothed in myth. However, the door is opened to look back critically once the fantasy of violence is shown to be ineffective.

3.2. The Nonviolent Counter-Narrative

The approach outlined here requires a counter-narrative to emerge in the scene. I argue that this begins when the little scroll is eaten by John. The thunders are shut up, and a new prophetic word is given to contrast the imagination that has come before. Though the counter-narrative that follows is still partly shrouded in the mythic thinking that hides violence from us, I believe we can see the truth of the Lamb emerge as the ineffectiveness of violence is contrasted with the mysterious victory of God.

John is given a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God *and* the altar *and* those who worship there (Rev 11:1 italics mine). Despite the concrete language of measurement, this image reinforces the assumption that the temple of God is not a rebuilt Jewish temple³⁹⁰ but

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 187–188.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 189.

³⁹⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

instead “the Christian community who worship God.”³⁹¹ Indeed, the question of how to measure the church appears to be answered in the description of the witnesses who appear and prophesy on behalf of God (Rev 11:3–6).³⁹²

Though the awesome power given to the witnesses may be taken as a continuation of the vengeful judgement that precedes it, the introduction of these figures as witnesses (a word that ties them to the introduction of Jesus in 1:5), as olive trees (Zech 4:11), and as lampstands before the Lord of the earth (Zech 4:14) draws us back to imagery previously employed by the text in Rev 1:20. This imagery roots the appearance of these figures in the imitation of Christ. In fact, the combination of strength and martyrdom is distinctly reminiscent of Jesus’ proclamation that no one takes his life from him but instead he gives it freely (Jn 10:18). Despite the implication that the witnesses can defend themselves supernaturally against attack (Rev 11:5) at the first sign of violence they are instead overcome and killed (Rev 11:7).

At the same time, even as these figures are modeled on Christ, they are also being drawn from a distinctly prophetic imagination. Though Revelation uses the images of Zechariah with a great deal of liberty, they are nonetheless intended to be recognizable here. Zechariah’s single solid golden lampstand with seven lamps in Zech 4:2 has already become seven golden lampstands, which are the seven churches in Rev 1:20. Now the two olive trees of Zechariah 4:3,11 become two trees and two lampstands before the Lord in Rev 11:4. Despite the liberty in usage, it is clear that the overall prophetic thrust of Zechariah is what grounds John’s use of these images. In Zechariah, the olive trees represent the high priest Joshua and the Jewish governor Zerubbabel,³⁹³ and they are told that God’s plans will be carried out “not by might nor by power,

³⁹¹ Boring, *Revelation*, 143.

³⁹² “b. non-spatially αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἑαυτοὺς μετροῦντες they measure (i.e. evaluate) themselves by one another.” BDAG, s.v. “μετρέω,” 643.

³⁹³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 219.

but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zech 4:6). Though it may be argued that the reduction of the lampstands from seven to two indicates a withering of the church, Koester argues that the image here in chapter 11 is designed to add credence to the figures and probably "comes from the principle that the agreement of two witnesses indicates valid testimony."³⁹⁴ Swete adds that the dual identification of the witnesses in chapter 11 as both olive trees and lampstands indicates their role not only in bearing the truth but also in keeping "alive the light of truth."³⁹⁵ Still, it is the image from Zechariah that grounds the work of these figures in the Spirit of God, who is at work accomplishing his mysterious victory not by might nor by power (Zech 4:6). Intriguingly, when Jesus refers to religious violence against those who speak on behalf of God, he symbolically points to the founding murder of Abel and the death of Zechariah (Mt 23:34–36). Though the English translation has a pleasant A—Z motif, the placement of Zechariah's death in the last book of the Hebrew Scriptures (2 Chr 24:20–12) suggests Jesus intended a similar *inclusio*. Whether Revelation is aware of the significance of Zechariah in Jesus' imagination of violence or not, both John and Jesus use Zechariah as representative of opposition to violence.

Even the descriptions of the power given to the witnesses appear to be figurative. Fire comes from their mouths as we see in Jeremiah 5:14. They can stop it from raining, like Elijah (Lk 4:25 cf. 1 Kg 17, also note 3.5 years or 1260 days). They turn water to blood like Moses in Exodus 7:17. When they have finished their work, they give their lives freely as Jesus does in the Gospels (Mk 8:31). And when their resurrection is recounted, the text combines the breath imagery of creation (Gen 2:7) and recreation (Ezek 37:5) to wrap this prophetic imagination together. It is as if these figures are composite images of all the prophets who have come

³⁹⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, 497. cf. Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19

³⁹⁵ Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 135.

before.³⁹⁶ The fact that these images, drawn from the Old Testament prophets, have violent undertones is vital if the counter-narrative is to be correctly understood. These whispers serve to pull older images into this newly revealed non-violent salvation of the Lamb. Thus, the question of how one can measure the temple, which is the worshiping community, is answered in a broad overview of the long biblical imagination of faithfulness. The Church is measured by how it continues the story of the prophets now brought fully into the light through Christ.

As the martyrs are resurrected and ascend, a final catastrophic earthquake shakes the city and kills 7000. This moment is indeed a problematic image to find here on the verge of the nonviolent victory of Christ, but it also finds its roots in the prophetic tradition (Ezek 38:19–20, Zech 14:4). Therefore, the climactic earthquake may, in fact, be better understood metaphorically as “some great upheaval in the social order”³⁹⁷ (cf. Hag 2:6–7) similar to what was expressed in the seven seals.

4. The Nonviolent Resolution

In stark contrast to the ineffectiveness of the six trumpets that came from the old mimetic imagination, the new mimesis of those who discover the faithfulness of the prophetic tradition and follow that into the nonviolent imitation of Christ does bring about the mysterious *νικάω* of God. As Bauckham says, “the story of the two witnesses is a kind of parable. Two individual prophets represent the prophetic witness to which the whole church is called.”³⁹⁸ They show the reader that calamity and vengeance will not change the world; only the nonviolent martyr-

³⁹⁶ Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), Kindle Location 1377.

³⁹⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 223.

³⁹⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 273.

witness of those who learn to imitate the Christ can. Here Bauckham's analysis almost seems to be reading from Girard.

When they too maintain their witness even to death and are seen to be vindicated as true witnesses, then their witness participates in the power of his witness to convert the nations. The symbolic narrative of 11:11–12 need not mean the nations have to literally see the resurrection of the Christian martyrs before they are convinced of the truth of their witness. It does mean that they have to perceive the martyrs' participation in Christ's triumph over death.³⁹⁹

Bauckham describes here precisely what Girard argues. Once the hiddenness of the scapegoat mechanism is unveiled, it can no longer exercise its hold over people. While *innocent* people have been murdered throughout history once the Christ, who owed nothing to violence, was murdered, this opened the eyes of those willing to identify with him as a victim. When the community bears witness to their identification with Christ, the infection of nonviolent mimesis spreads.

Compare this to what Girard says in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*.

The Cross is the supreme scandal not because on it divine majesty succumbs to the most inglorious punishment—quite similar things are found in most religions—but because the Gospels are making a much more radical revelation... It discredits and deconstructs all the gods of violence, since it reveals the true God, who has not the slightest violence in him.⁴⁰⁰

Through the nonviolent imitation of Christ, the church participates in his witness to convert the nations by unveiling the possibility of a new perception of *νικάω* and a new path for mimesis. Even in death, through nonviolent witness, “communities are going to be liberated, the human mind is going to expand more and more, and is not going to be bound by these false barriers.”⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 281.

⁴⁰⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 429–430.

⁴⁰¹ Hardin, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, Location 2322.

5. Conclusions from the Trumpet Scene

The hidden aspect of the trumpet scene is that it ushers the reader into an unveiling of God's victory set against the retributive logic of vengeance. Through Girard's work, we perceive an attempt to delineate between two possible mimetic paths. The first, which leads to a dead end, continues the violent mimesis that is the foundation of the current social order and is, therefore, unable to wake the world from its present predicament (Rev 9:20–21). The second is the paradoxical way of *νικάω* through the nonviolent imitation of Christ even to the point of death. This nonviolent mimesis comes from outside the story, only through the divinity of Christ. Girard writes that “you cannot become aware of the truth unless you act in opposition to the laws of violence, and you cannot act in opposition to these laws unless you already grasp the truth.”⁴⁰² However, once nonviolence is unleashed in the world, “it becomes impossible to turn the clock back. There is an end to cyclical history, for the very reason that its mechanisms are beginning to be uncovered.”⁴⁰³ At the same time, “the danger is never far away that Christianity may fall into a sacrificial reading of its own revelation, and take on a persecutory character as a result”⁴⁰⁴ and this scene pre-emptively reveals how a return to violence would work against the victory of the Lamb.

6. Conclusions from the Larger Second Cycle

Girard's focus on the social nature of his theories means that this section of Revelation is perhaps the most fertile for Girardian analysis. As he says,

⁴⁰² Girard, *Girard Reader*, 192.

⁴⁰³ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 206.

⁴⁰⁴ Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 191.

for all violence to be destroyed, it would be sufficient for all mankind to decide to abide by this one rule. If all mankind offered the other cheek, no cheek would be struck. But for that to be possible, it would be necessary for each person separately and all people together to commit themselves irrevocably to the common good.⁴⁰⁵

This collective nature of human society, drawn from the mimetic nature of human desire, means that, for Girard, Gospel must be anthropological. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore whether Girard's ideas can be applied consistently to the socio-political realm on which this second cycle of Revelation focuses.

In the three major scenes of the cycle, three ideas from Girard can be observed.

First, that the Lamb represents both Jesus' victory over death and his victory over the power of mimetic violence. The image of the Lamb shows Jesus contrasted with the sacrificial expectations of religion, but also against the scapegoat mechanism embedded in the power structures of Empire. The image of the slain Lamb as victor reveals the Father to us, free from the violence we have projected on to him, by refusing violent paths to power represented by the internally mediated rivalry between religion and politics.

Second, the seals illustrate the genuine violence that comes from a transition away from the controlling work of the scapegoat mechanism. Without a means to channel violent desire, social forces that have appeared to keep us safe now look vulnerable and chaotic. That uncertainty gives rise to unchecked violence. The apocalyptic imagery of this cycle is not meant to be taken literally, but it is describing a real violence that emerges as scapegoating becomes ineffective.

Finally, the trumpets force the reader to face the continued pull of violent mimesis. Even if scapegoating cannot work once unveiled, that does not mean old habits die easily. Two paths are presented in this final scene: one which returns to an old imagination shown to be ineffective, and a new way which calls the reader to dive more deeply into the nonviolent imitation of Christ.

⁴⁰⁵ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 184.

The church bears witness to the nonviolence of Christ in the world, thereby transforming the world through Christ's work.

Chapter 8. Cycle Three: The Cosmic Victory Over Violence

Chapters 5 through 7 of this thesis explored the second cycle of Revelation and focused on the victory of Christ in the socio-political realm. Fantastic images drawn from the apocalyptic imagination were used to communicate a growing awareness of Christ's nonviolent work and to demonstrate the tumultuous but necessary process through which that work will inevitably liberate the world. Real eruptions of violence unconstrained by the scapegoat mechanism revealed the vulnerability of the socio-political order on which we have come to depend.

However, there is still one final cycle in the Revelation narrative. As Bauckham points out, 12:1 is a fresh start, or perhaps we could say a return to the beginning of the story.⁴⁰⁶ The story of Christ's victory is told one final time with the cosmic scope of good and evil in view. In this final cycle, Christ's victory in the socio-political realm is retold with the forces of empire, false religion, and wealth recast as servants of Satan defeated not only in their first-century incarnations but ultimately. Reading this climactic cycle through Girard provides interpretive options consistent with the subversive imagery discussed in previous chapters.

1. Starting with Girard

Despite the fact that this cycle takes up almost half of the book of Revelation, it will assume less of the focus in this thesis because the work of Girard focuses on the anthropological nature of his theories. Therefore, the immediate socio-political implications of Revelation's second cycle are fertile ground for Girardian analysis. However, that point of tension does provide an opportunity to address one of the perceived shortcomings in Girard's ideas. Greg Boyd, in defending his work against criticism from Girardian readers, writes:

⁴⁰⁶ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 15.

Atonement theories have customarily been grouped into two camps: a) subjective atonement theories, where the cross is understood to change something in us, but not fundamentally affect the way things are, and; b) objective atonement theories, where the cross is understood to fundamentally affect the way things are and only affect a change in us as a consequence of this.

If I understand him correctly, Girard advocates a subjective atonement theory. The cross exposes the lie of our scapegoat mechanism and thus opens up a non-violent way for us to deal with conflict. The cross also reveals God's true non-violent nature by exposing all our violent conceptions of God to be projections...

To be sure, I wholeheartedly agree that Girard's understanding of the cross is good, so far as it goes... however, I don't believe Girard's view goes far enough, at least not if our goal is to make sense of what the New Testament (NT) says was accomplished on the cross.⁴⁰⁷

Though this thesis is not focused on atonement theories, Boyd's critique is not alone. As noted earlier, George Hunsinger also criticizes Girard for appearing to make the cross little more than a demonstration of hidden truth where the intent is to learn from rather than be transformed by Christ.⁴⁰⁸ However, Girard addresses similar concerns in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* by arguing that "Christ is the only agent capable of escaping from these structures [that bind us] and freeing us from their dominance."⁴⁰⁹ The unique place of Christ is why, in Girard's words, "the Gospels and the whole New Testament, together with the theologians of the first councils, proclaim that Christ is God not because he was crucified, but because he is God born of God from all eternity."⁴¹⁰ However, while these statements identify Christ as divine in Girard's thought and acknowledge that only God could be the one to free humanity, they do not speak directly to an objective victory over evil the way Boyd advocates. Indeed, Girard speaks of "a triple correspondence between Satan, the original homicide, and the lie... that covers the

⁴⁰⁷ Greg Boyd, "Christus Victor Atonement and Girard's Scapegoat Theory," *ReKnew* (2017) http://reknew.org/2017/05/christus-victor-atonement-girards-scapegoat-theory/#_ftn1 (accessed Feb 5, 2018).

⁴⁰⁸ Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 28. cf. Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 13.

⁴⁰⁹ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 219.

⁴¹⁰ Girard, *Girard Reader*, 192.

homicide”⁴¹¹ and seems quite comfortable using Satan metaphorically in that sense. For this reason, to see how Girard’s ideas can be laid alongside the final cycle of Revelation focused on the *objective* victory over evil becomes a critical exercise in testing Girard’s ideas.

1.1. The Antagonist in Girard

Though Girard often speaks of Satan in figurative ways, he should not be understood as being dismissive of the importance of an embodied evil but rather argues for the significance of the Satan character.⁴¹² For this reason, that great dragon who is called the Devil or Satan (Rev 12:9) is a figure worthy of Girardian analysis. For Girard, the starting point in understanding Satan comes in Mark 3. Jesus says, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come” (Mark 3:23–26 cf. Mt 12:26–27). Here, the opponents of Jesus have accused him of expelling demons through the power of Beelzebul (Mk 3:22). It appears that the somewhat counter-intuitive accusation of expelling demons through the power of Satan was a typical charge.⁴¹³ Though the name Beelzebul appears nowhere else in Jewish writing, it seems to be a colloquial reference to Satan.⁴¹⁴ The fact that no one objects when Jesus clarifies by switching to the more common vernacular would appear to confirm this suspicion. It is assumed that Jesus’ response is intended to point out the inherent absurdity of the allegation against him. This absurdity is what Robert A. Guelich identifies as *reductio ad absurdum*.⁴¹⁵ However, what Guelich also recognizes is that the

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 160.

⁴¹² Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 32.

⁴¹³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible 62 (ed. Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 229. cf. Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 34.

⁴¹⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 141.

⁴¹⁵ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary 34A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 175.

point of Jesus' rhetoric is to "show that Satan has indeed 'met his end.'"⁴¹⁶ This is where Girard's unique perspective provides insight. For Girard, the power of this encounter lies in the hidden fact that Jesus is affirming his critic's assumption about Satan's ability to drive himself out.

Girard writes that,

Jesus does not deny the reality of Satan's self-expulsion; he asserts it. The proof that Satan possesses this power is the affirmation, frequently repeated, that this power is coming to its end. The imminent fall of Satan, prophesied by Christ, is one and the same thing as the end of his power of self-expulsion. The demonic or satanic expulsion of demons has worked previously, at least temporarily, because the violent outcome of scandal, the violent expulsion of scapegoats, works for a while.⁴¹⁷

What Girard is describing here is the understanding that the accuser seduces humanity into the imitation of himself so that he can create a mimetic rivalry, driving the need for scapegoat violence. That Satan can then drive himself out through the enactment of ritual violence is precisely his power over the world. Our *peace* becomes dependent on returning to Satan's violence.⁴¹⁸ By acknowledging the ability of Satan to drive out Satan and in forcing his audience to question their assumptions about Satan, Jesus has begun the process of bringing Satan's reign to an end. For Girard, this is a decisive moment in the Gospels because the mechanism of violence is unveiled for those who are willing to see it. What Girard is telling us here is that Satan will not be driven out by external force because that driven-out-ness is precisely the scapegoat violence he engenders. Only an awareness of Satan's presence within our mimetic desires can disarm the rivalry he creates and bring his reign to an end. Ironically, Boyd speaks of a similar victory over evil using the metaphor of Aikido to describe God's actions:

Aikido is a martial arts technique that trains "warriors" to engage in nonresistant combat, turning the force of aggressors back on themselves in order to neutralize their opponent

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 175.

⁴¹⁷ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 34.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 32–33.

and hopefully to enlighten them regarding the evil in their heart that fueled their aggression... God judges sin, defeats evil, and works for the redemption of creation by withdrawing his protective presence, thereby allowing evil to run its self-destructive course and ultimately to self-destruct.⁴¹⁹

In this way, what Boyd sees as an objective victory is very similar to what Girard is describing in his exegesis of Mark 3. God does not act in violence to destroy his opposition, but in unveiling the scapegoat mechanism undoes Satan's kingdom. Girard's approach to the defeat of evil is helpful as the text introduces Satan directly.

2. Introducing the Characters

While the dragon is identified as the Devil or Satan in the text (Rev 12:9), the background to this dragon image is significant. Some have argued that the text's opposition to syncretic practices (Rev 2:6) would preclude the use of pagan images.⁴²⁰ However, the similarity of this scene to the well-worn narrative of a divine protagonist who battles a great dragon⁴²¹ (Ps 74), representing the forces of chaos,⁴²² is too much to ignore. At the same time, the text's unique telling of this story pulls not only from the Greek version⁴²³ but interweaves images drawn from the OT (Ps 2:9 cf. Rev 12:5), making it truly distinct from any earlier tradition. As Koester points out, "the origins of mythic images do not determine their meanings. Authors could shape the mythic images to make different, even contradictory, points in different contexts."⁴²⁴ As Jerry L. Sumney

⁴¹⁹ Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament's Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross* (vol. 1 & 2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 767–768.

⁴²⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 230.

⁴²¹ cf. Tiamat in Babylonian mythology and Leviathan in OT

⁴²² Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (trans. K. William Whitney Jr.; Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 239–50.

⁴²³ Steven J. Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 123, No. 2 (Summer, 2004): 281–313.

⁴²⁴ Koester, *Revelation*, 528.

concludes, “most interpreters agree that the story of the woman in 12:1–6 resembles most closely and is perhaps drawn from the myth of the birth of Apollo.”⁴²⁵

In Greek mythology, Leto was a Titan goddess and an early lover of Zeus. When she became pregnant by Zeus with twin children, Zeus’ wife, Hera, became incensed. In addition to casting Leto out of Olympus, she sent the great snake-like dragon of Delphi, Python, to hunt Leto and devour her children. Poseidon hides Leto so the children can be born and the son, Apollo, is given a magical arrow by Zeus, which he uses to kill Python.⁴²⁶ The significance of this myth for the text of Revelation is heightened because it was also used to build the view that the Emperor, in the role of Apollo,⁴²⁷ had overcome the forces of chaos to bring the peace and light of Rome to the world.⁴²⁸ In its Greek form, this myth is an image of Satan being driven out violently. However, far from endorsing that mythology, the text of Revelation now builds on top of this familiar premise⁴²⁹ to tell a new tale that subverts the claims of empire.⁴³⁰

2.1. The Casting Out

It is with the birth of the child that the text makes a profound break from the Leto myth.⁴³¹ The child is born, and a battle erupts in heaven. The angel Michael goes to war with the dragon, but

⁴²⁵ Jerry L. Sumney, “The Dragon Has Been Defeated—Revelation 12,” *Review & Expositor* 98, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 104.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ “Nero styled himself as Apollo; his image on coins bore the radiant beams from his head that were Apollo’s trademark, and his admirers acclaimed him as the god” Koester, *Revelation*, 559. cf Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 62.20.5.

⁴²⁸ “Several Roman emperors had identified themselves as Apollo and had given Roma the role of Leto.” Sumney, “The Dragon Has Been Defeated,” 104.

⁴²⁹ “The third major cult that may have had influence on the Corinthians was that of Apollo. Several temples in Corinth were for the worship of Apollo, and the famous shrine at Delphi was primarily that of Apollo. The slave girl that Paul encountered in Philippi on the way to Corinth had a spirit of Python, or one inspired by Apollo.” H. Wayne House, “Tongues and The Mystery Religions of Corinth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140, no. 558 (Apr 83): 138.

⁴³⁰ Adele Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message 22 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 86.

⁴³¹ This scene is “a portrayal of Jesus’ birth.” Koester, *Revelation*, 546. The woman, rather than a specific reference to either Mary or Israel, is “the experience of the people of God at all times.” Sumney, “The Dragon Has Been Defeated,” 105. cf Boring, *Revelation*, 152.

the dragon loses and is cast down on the earth (Rev 12:9). On the surface, this is the expected battle where Satan is overcome by Jesus in the role of Apollo. However, the triumph (*νικάω*) takes a surprising shape.

Several things now jump out from the victory hymn (Rev 12:10–12) with Girard's reading of Mark as background. First, the *νικάω* of those who overcome the dragon does not come through anything that conforms to *battle* imagery. Second, the child does not grow up to kill the dragon as the Apollo character might be expected to do. Finally, the triumph (*νικάω*) is by the blood of the Lamb (the death that unveiled scapegoat violence), the word of testimony (the mimesis of Christ), and the commitment to nonviolence even to the point of death (Rev 12:11). In other words, victory over the dragon is won as the mimetic community of Christ refuses to imitate the warfare of Satan and Satan is denied the opportunity to drive himself out at the critical moment of conflict. Since the community refuses to imitate Satan's violence with violence, he is powerless over them.

As Girard writes, violence conceals itself and "its only chance of being heard is when it is in the process of being driven out, in the brief moment that proceeds the destruction of its victim."⁴³² Here it is the community's imitation of the nonviolent way of Jesus that overcomes the dragon precisely at the moment of their destruction (Rev 11:11). A close reading of the text also reveals that the potentially problematic language of Satan being 'hurled down' (Rev 12:10) is transformed at the climactic moment into the idea that the Devil has *gone down* to you (Rev 12:12). After being unable to provoke a violent confrontation in heaven, the Devil is left with no option but to seek out someone else to accuse. Once the source of desire is no longer hidden, rivalry cannot be provoked, and the work of Satan becomes meaningless. In this image, the Roman imagination of Apollo as a violent victor is subverted, and this becomes the power

⁴³² Girard, *Girard Reader*, 192.

through which Satan is made impotent. Girard speaks of a similar moment of Aikido as he exegetes Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:8. In an interview with David Cayley he says:

"It's just so powerful. If the powers, if the kings of this world, that's the same thing as power and principalities, and the same thing as Satan. Let's say, 'if Satan had known, he would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' This sentence is inevitably very important to me because what does it mean? It means Satan is fooled in triggering the mechanism. Why? Because he thinks the mechanism is going to remain hidden as usual, that no one will see that the victim is innocent, that his accusation will work as it always does. Therefore, Satan doesn't realize that the truth is going to come out in the cross."⁴³³

Confronted with the weakening of scapegoat violence once unveiled, the dragon attempts to provoke an imitation of his violence in heaven. It is his failure to initiate a rivalry that is his defeat. Though the dragon continues to roar and threaten humanity after leaving heaven, the end of the hymn provides commentary for what follows. Satan is filled with fury, precisely because he knows that his time is short (Rev 12:12). Once Christ's work infiltrates the community, and non-violent mimesis takes hold, Satan can no longer drive out Satan through means of concealed violence and his power over the world is, to paraphrase Girard, on the clock.⁴³⁴ By accusing the one who is truly innocent, the accusation is shown to be false and finally understood as a lie. In siding with the victim, the mechanism is disarmed, and Satan's power is removed.

3. The Supporting Characters

With the victory of nonviolence over Satan's attempt to create conflict in heaven, the text of Revelation now introduces a series of fantastic characters who recast the political, religious and economic forces observed in the previous cycle as pawns of Satan. These figures represent what

⁴³³ David Cayley, "The Scapegoat: The Ideas of René Girard," *CBC Radio* (2001) <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-scapegoat-the-ideas-of-rené-girard-part-1-1.3474195> (accessed Feb 5, 2018).

⁴³⁴ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 206.

Girard, borrowing a line from the Apostle Paul, calls the principalities and powers. He writes that,

Though not identical with Satan, the powers are all his tributaries because they are all servants of the false gods that are the offspring of Satan, that is the offspring of the founding murder. So here it is not a matter of religion for the individual or belief in a purely individual sense, as modern people tend to hold. What we are talking about here are rather the social phenomena that the founding murder created. The system of powers Satan has engendered is a concrete phenomenon, material and simultaneously spiritual, religious in a very special sense, efficacious and illusory at the same time. It is religion as illusion, which protects humans from violence and chaos by means of sacrificial rituals. Although this system is grounded in an illusion, its action in the world is real to the extent that idolatry, or false transcendence, commands obedience.⁴³⁵

What Girard is saying here is the nature of Satan is that his power is embedded in social phenomenon. The fact that this cycle of Revelation deals with political, religious, and economic imagery is not merely a restatement of the previous socio-political cycle. The introduction of Satan sets the stage for the reader to imagine a final cosmic resolution to the narrative and now the social structures of the previous cycle are reimagined as manifestations of the evil that is opposed to God. The politics, religion, and economics of the first century are personified to demonstrate that they are only temporal expressions of the evil already defeated by God. To understand these characters, they must be understood in their socio-political location, but as Yarbrow-Collins argues, the intent lies between the historical events and abstract truths.⁴³⁶ In other words, the text is challenging Satan through examples of how his power is embedded in social phenomena. Girard's description of these powers as concrete and illusory at the same time is illustrative of how they are unveiled here by John. The specific identification of the characters is necessary only in that it unveils the abstract power God triumphs over.

⁴³⁵ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 96.

⁴³⁶ Yarbrow Collins, *The Apocalypse*, 87.

3.1. The Beast from the Sea

Commonly, the Beast from the Sea has been identified with the Antichrist. There are a couple of reasons for this. As noted, where the Lamb redeems from every tribe, people, language, and nation, the beast conquers every tribe, people, language, and nation (Rev 5:9 cf. Rev 13:7). He is, very literally, the anti-Jesus. However, if John wishes to identify the Beast from the Sea with the man of lawlessness (2 Th 2:3), he does not explicitly do so. This first beast has seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns, depicting him as exceedingly powerful (Rev 13:1). He also looks like a leopard but has the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion (Rev 13:2). This imagery comes from Daniel 7. There, Daniel has a vision where he sees four successive beasts coming up from the water: first, a lion; second, a bear; third, a leopard; and finally, a ten-horned monster (Dan 7:3–7). These monsters represent successive empires up until the writing of Daniel: the Babylonians, the Meds, the Persians and the Greeks.⁴³⁷ John takes these images and combines them into one great beast. However, John has also added the image of seven heads, one of which has been fatally wounded but appears to be alive (Rev 13:3), and has given the beast a number, which is 666 (Rev 13:18).

From the reunification of Rome under Augustus through to Domitian, there were seven emperors. During this time a great fire destroyed much of Rome in 64 CE.⁴³⁸ This fire was widely attributed to Nero himself (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44). Therefore, a scapegoat was needed to deflect the blame, and the early Christian community provided an apparent solution.⁴³⁹ A

⁴³⁷ For an excellent discussion of the beasts of Daniel and the various identification of associated empires see John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible 27 (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 298–300.

⁴³⁸ Barclay. *The Revelation of John*. vol 2, 118.

⁴³⁹ Timothy D. Barnes, "Legislation Against the Christians," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58, no. 1–2 (1968): 32–50.

Girardian reader may assume that it was precisely the nonviolent character of the Christian community that drove Nero to choose them as scapegoats.⁴⁴⁰ In the end, Nero dies by suicide, but rumours persist that he had gone into hiding and would return.⁴⁴² Augustine wrote of Nero that some believe “he now lives in concealment in the vigor of that same age which he had reached when he was believed to have perished, and will live until he is revealed in his own time and restored to his kingdom.”⁴⁴³ Most interpreters see the influence of this *Nero Redivivus* legend in the head of the beast that seemed to have had a fatal wound but had been healed.⁴⁴⁴ Second, while attempts have been made to creatively assign the number of the beast to many historical figures, the most straightforward reading of the gematria implied in the riddle suggests we look to Nero as well.⁴⁴⁵

At the same time, the combination of the *Nero Redivivus* legend and the successive empires of Daniel’s imagery make clear to the reader that this beast is not intended to represent a specific Emperor but instead the concept of Empire itself. In this way, the present empire of Rome, which imposes itself on the Christian community, is neutered by John. Rome is nothing more than another example of Empire, which itself is only a tool for the accuser who calls us to imitate his violence. In Girard’s language, this image represents politics as a tool for the perpetuation of mimetic rivalry. He writes of Rome as such, saying,

the Roman Empire is a power, even the supreme power in the world where Christianity appeals. It must therefore rest upon a founding murder, a collective murder similar to the Passion, a kind of “lynching.” ...The successive emperors draw their authority from the

⁴⁴⁰ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 215–220.

⁴⁴¹ Barclay, *The Revelation of John. Vol 2*, 119.

⁴⁴² Sibylline Oracles, Book V, 470–74.

⁴⁴³ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XX.19.3.

⁴⁴⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 727. Koester, *Revelation*, 581. Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 318.

⁴⁴⁵ Both variant readings of the text point to Nero. 666 see Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 847. 616 see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 770–771.

sacrificial power that emanates from the deity whose name they bear, the first Caesar who was assassinated.⁴⁴⁶

That this beast is given the power to wage war against God's holy people (Rev 13:4) is an indication that Satan tries to cast the believing community in the role of scapegoat. Violence is directed against a single victim so that the larger society can rally against the infection of nonviolence that threatens its stability. This description of politics being given the power of the accuser (Rev 13:2) to drive out the threat through violence is captured in Girard's approach to the scene involving the release of Barabas. He argues that Pilate's negotiations with the crowd are not intended to prevent an innocent death but only to utilize the scapegoat mechanism in the least disruptive way possible.⁴⁴⁷

Pilate embodies the nature of political empire for Girard. The purpose of the beast/empire is to drive out violence by the authority of Satan and maintain the illusion of peace. If a genuinely violent victim can unify the society, this is ideal. However, even more significant than the threat of mimetic rivalry erupting is the presence of a community that identifies with the victim and refuses the empire's call to violence. They must be made the enemy at all costs because they threaten the stability of the scapegoat mechanism at the root of Satan's power over the world.

3.2. The Beast from the Land

A second beast, looking like a lamb but roaring like a dragon, comes up from the earth (Rev 13:11). This second beast gathers people to worship the first (Rev 13:12), and represents the cultic religion that reinforces and worships the effectiveness of Empire. Despite describing the beast's appearance as a lamb, Massyngberde Ford suggests that the absence of the definite article

⁴⁴⁶ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 98–99.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

indicates “that the second beast is a parody not of the Lamb but of the two witnesses.”⁴⁴⁸ The strength of her conclusion is perhaps less grounded in the absence of the definite article but instead in the role of the second beast who gives witness to the first in the same way the witnesses in Rev 11 draw attention to Christ. Here Girard’s lens provides insight into the description of the beast. The appearance as a lamb represents the false illusion of peace that sacrificial religion creates in the world, but the voice of a dragon speaks to the hidden violence that maintains order. This interpretation itself is not controversial with Mounce arguing that the image is designed to convey the false “impression of gentle harmlessness.”⁴⁴⁹ However, through Girard, we also recognize that the very power of sacrificial religion comes in its ability to draw followers into the imitation of hidden violence. False Religion, personified in the second beast, is what maintains peace by calling followers to divinize the violence of the state.

Girard writes that,

Satan is the prince of this world. If he could not protect his domain from the violence that threatens to destroy it even though it is essentially his own, he would not merit this title of prince, which the Gospels do not award him lightly. If he were purely a destroyer. Satan would have lost his domain long ago. To understand why he is the master of all the kingdoms of this world, we must take Jesus at his word: disorder expels disorder, or in other words Satan really expels Satan.⁴⁵⁰

It is Satan’s ability to maintain his kingdom by using violence to drive out violence that is his power over the world. Political empire and false religion are only concretized examples of the principalities and powers the nonviolence of Christ opposes.

3.3. The Harlot

⁴⁴⁸ Ford, *Revelation*, 214.

⁴⁴⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 255.

⁴⁵⁰ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 35

The Harlot completes the trio of principalities and powers that serve Satan. There is a woman who is called Babylon and another riddle to solve (Rev 17:5). The woman rides atop the beast that represents empire (Rev 17:4). She is draped in luxurious purple cloth, covered in gold and precious stones (Rev 17:5). The seven heads of the beast are equated with the seven hills the woman sits upon (Rev 17:9). In coins from the time of Vespasian, you can see the woman Roma seated on seven hills with her sword pointed down symbolizing the *Pax Romana*.⁴⁵¹ Though the woman calls the reader to imagine Rome, she is named Babylon, and so the image seems to point to the principality that sits behind the reader's concrete experience of Rome.⁴⁵²

The poem in Rev 18 begins to clarify the identity of this woman. All the nations have drunk her maddening wine and the kings have committed adultery with her, but most tellingly, the merchants have grown rich from her excessive luxuries (Rev 18:3). The woman is an image of the economy of Rome "at the center of a great network of trade (Rev 17:1–18:24),"⁴⁵³ particularly the trade of human bodies and souls (Rev 18:13).⁴⁵⁴ "This is a vivid commentary on the social conditions of the day. Slave traders regarded their human cargo as so much merchandise to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire."⁴⁵⁵ Swete argues that the language employed by John refers to little more than human livestock (cf. Ezek 27:13; Num 31:35; 1 Chr 5:21).⁴⁵⁶ Koester points to the tombstone of a Roman slave merchant named Aulus Caprilus Timothéos.⁴⁵⁷ The stone shows an image of Timothéos reclining on a couch while being served. Below, in the second relief, is another group of slaves working in the fields. In the bottom panel is a crowded

⁴⁵¹ see image Koester, *Revelation*, 685.

⁴⁵² see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 343–370.

⁴⁵³ Craig R. Koester, "Roman slave trade and the critique of Babylon in Revelation 18," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2008): 766–786.

⁴⁵⁴ σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων Revelation 18:13 GNT28-T

⁴⁵⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 336.

⁴⁵⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 235.

⁴⁵⁷ See image in Koester, *Revelation*, 720.

mass of human bodies, chained together, being taken to be sold at the market. The economy of empire appears finely dressed seated peacefully on seven hills (Rev 17:9), but it is drunk on the oppression of all those it takes to keep empire stable (Rev 17:6). In this way, the Harlot's wealth and peace are shown to rest on the Empire (Rev 17:3) who is nothing but a manifestation of Satan's mimetic power.

4. Principalities and Powers

For Girard, the more we admire power and prestige "the more enslaved we become to our mimetic models."⁴⁵⁸ In this third cycle of Revelation the concrete phenomena explored in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis are shown to be manifestations of the evil that opposes the Lamb. Gil Bailie writes

that the social aggregation of sin is the key to the spontaneous mimetic phenomenon by which the sins of the many are transformed into a violent consensus, the unanimity of which is experienced as restoration of the community's moral rectitude and social harmony.⁴⁵⁹

Once we see that empire, religion, and economy can be understood as collective expressions of the sin of scapegoat violence, we see that Christ's victory is not over social phenomena directly but over the evil that resides behind the concretized expressions. Thus, the triumph (*νικάω*) of Christ must become a cosmic victory over the founding murder itself.⁴⁶⁰

5. The Protagonist

⁴⁵⁸ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 14–15.

⁴⁵⁹ Gil Bailie, *God's Gamble: The Gravitational Power of Crucified Love* (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2016) Location 622.

⁴⁶⁰ Girard speaks of "a triple correspondence between Satan, the original homicide, and the lie... that covers the homicide." Girard, *Girard Reader*, 160.

There is one final character that must be addressed: the rider on the white horse and the perceived violence this reappearance of Jesus presents (Rev 19:11). However, to examine the appearance of the rider, we need to backtrack briefly to the introduction of the Armageddon language that appears in a section known as “the seven bowls” (Rev 16:2–21). As discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis, this sequence is best understood as a recapitulation of previous events.⁴⁶¹ However, during this third cycle, images that previously appeared with the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13–21) are now given new depth by John. In the trumpet sequence, a great army amasses for battle with God. That battle, however, is bypassed as the seventh trumpet ushers in the mystery of God, which was the transformative power of nonviolent witness. With the sixth bowl, the kings of the earth gather together for a battle at the place called Armageddon (Rev 16:16). Armageddon is a compound word made out of two Hebrew words, *har* and *Megiddo*. This word is “a mythical place-name”⁴⁶² constructed from the Hebrew for mount and the geographic place Megiddo which was a small city about 100kms north of Jerusalem. The reason we can assume the place is mythical is that there is no such thing as mount Megiddo.⁴⁶³ In fact, there are only the plains of Megiddo, also known as the valley of Jezreel.⁴⁶⁴ This counterfactual language is designed to emphasize the figurative use of Megiddo, an infamous location throughout Hebrew history.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ Mclean. “The Structure of The Book of Revelation,” 155. and Lambrecht, “A Structuration of Revelation 4,” 87.

⁴⁶² BDAG, s.v. “Ἀρμαγεδών,” 132.

⁴⁶³ A figurative view of “Armageddon” is apparent also from the fact that no “mountain” of Megiddo has ever existed. G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1137.

⁴⁶⁴ “There is no Mt. Megiddo.” Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 302.

⁴⁶⁵ In approximately 1486 BCE, perhaps when the Hebrews were still slaves in Egypt, the Egyptian army under Thutmose III fought a battle against an alliance of Canaanite tribes. Pharaoh Neco killed King Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE (2 Kgs 23:29–30; cf 2 Chr 35:22–24) leading to the Hebrews being pulled into the battle and eventually conquered by Babylon. Merneptah led a campaign in 1220 BCE. Deborah battled the Canaanites in the book Judges (Judg 4:6–16; 5:19). Gideon found victory over the Midianites (Judg 7). Saul was defeated by the Philistines (1 Sam 29:1; 31:1–7). Eusebius even records that the Romans set up a permanent camp at Megiddo known as “*Legio* in the

The use of this figurative Megiddo language is communicating that the showdown between God and evil will be a culmination of all violent confrontations throughout history. A contemporary English equivalent might be to say that God will meet evil at ground-zero. This evocative location is where the rider on the white horse wages his just war (Rev 19:11–16).

Despite the memory of battle that the language and setting evoke, a literal violent reading of this passage is confronted with challenges immediately. While the term δικαιοσύνη used to describe the war of the rider and translated ‘justice’ in the passage is a complicated term, the conflation of the “practice of judicial responsibility with focus on fairness, justice, equitableness, fairness”⁴⁶⁶ is not comfortably associated with the idea of waging war. Given the term’s frequent use to translate the Hebrew qdx, it is probably most appropriately interpreted “with the sense ‘to put right’.”⁴⁶⁷ While it can be argued that violence can indeed put things to right, that runs counter to everything the text has described as the νικάω of the Lamb to this point.

This rider is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. This indication of the rider’s identity as Christ is confirmed by the name written on his thigh (Rev 19:16). Though the image of Christ, battle ready, wearing “the bloody garments of the warrior god of Isaiah 63:1–3”⁴⁶⁸ is a jarring image, the intent is juxtaposition. As Eugene Boring writes, “John uses all of the traditional messianic imagery, but he consistently asks the hearer-reader to interpret the Lion as the Lamb, as he himself does, even in this bloody scene.”⁴⁶⁹ This image is meant to evoke the slain Lamb from Rev 5:6, as this is not the blood of his enemies that covers the rider but instead the blood of his sacrifice, which has already overcome his enemies (cf Rev

great plain.” Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 899 idem. (Eusebius Onomasticon [ed. E. Klostermann] 14.31; 28.26; 58.1; 70.10; 90.12; 100.10; 108.6, 13; 110.21; 116.21; 140.1)

⁴⁶⁶ BDAG, s.v. “δικαιοσύνη,” 247.

⁴⁶⁷ NIDNTTE, s.v. “δικαιοσύνη,” 1:724.

⁴⁶⁸ Boring, *Revelation*, 196.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 196.

5:6; 1:5–6).⁴⁷⁰ The recognition of this contrast between warrior god and slain lamb goes back to the early church with Origen writing that “he is clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood, since the Word who became flesh, and died because he became flesh, is invested with traces of that passion” (*Comm. Jo.* 2.61). Indeed, the only weapon this rider carries is the sword that comes from his mouth, which he uses to strike down the nations (Rev 19:15). Despite the violence present in the use of the verb *πατασσω*, we see again the juxtaposition the text presents. This rider is the Lamb who uses his testimony (Rev 12:11) to *νικάω*. Rather than conjuring a violent conqueror returning for vengeance, the image here is reminiscent of the suffering servant of Isaiah whose mouth is made like a sharpened sword (Is 49:2). In contrast to the image’s first impression, this rider does not have blood on his hands at all. Instead, the text has presented the reader with the image of a warrior god specifically to undermine that imagination. The metaphor of testimony represented as a sharpened sword has numerous precedents in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures (cf Ps 59:7, 64:3, Is 49:2, Eph 6:17, Heb 4:12) and the text of Revelation has already put this image in the mouth of Jesus: “I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev 2:16). Any interpretation of this scene must flow from this nonviolent framework already set forward in the letter. As Loren L. Johns argues;

In keeping with the pivotal scene in Rev 5 and the message of the book as a whole, the blood here is the blood of martyrdom. This contrasts with Isa 63:1–3, the source of this imagery, where the blood is the blood of the enemies of the divine warrior. John is, in fact, challenging the reader to look more carefully at his language and to reinterpret Isaiah 63 in the light of the Lamb. The warrior himself is called “the word of God” (19:13) and his only weapon is the sword that comes from out of his mouth (19:16 cf. 1:16, 2:12). So even here, no real battle scene is narrated.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Koester, *Revelation*, 765.

⁴⁷¹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 184–185.

This conclusion is confirmed as the seeming anticipation of battle ends not with a war but with a whimper (Rev 19:19–21). Granted, this is another gruesome image as the opposition to God is killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider and birds pick at the flesh of the dead. However, the restatement of the source of this sword “out of the mouth of the rider” (Rev 19:21) reinforces the figurative nature of both the sword and the death that it causes. Although Mounce argues that the scene is not to be understood literally, he still interprets a violent retributive response from the lamb.⁴⁷² However, since the kings and nations are later welcomed into the New Jerusalem to find healing (Rev 21:24, 22:2) it seems that the “contrast between scenes of destruction and scenes of redemption can better be understood rhetorically.”⁴⁷³ The rider is an image of the work of Christ that destroys that which destroys God’s earth (Rev 11:18). The beast, who is the power of empire, and the prophet, who is the witness of false religion, are thrown into the fire. Caird notes that this climactic image of judgement is reserved not for humans but for conceptual images of evil itself.⁴⁷⁴ “Central to the Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse is the forging of a new understanding of the means by which one conquers: that of a consistent, nonviolent resistance born of clear allegiance to God.”⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, Girard speaks of the unprecedented power that comes from the mouth of the victim at the decisive moment of nonviolence. He writes that,

The victim, therefore, has to reach out at the very moment when his mouth is being shut by violence. He has to say enough for the violence to be incited against him. But this must not take place in the dark... This unprecedented task of revealing the truth about violence requires a man who is not obliged to violence for anything and does not think in terms of violence—someone who is capable of talking back to violence while remaining entirely untouched by it.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 359.

⁴⁷³ Koester, *Revelation*, 768.

⁴⁷⁴ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 260.

⁴⁷⁵ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 183.

⁴⁷⁶ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 218.

There is a striking parallel between Girard's explanation of the revealing of the truth about violence and the image of the rider whose testimony cuts like a sword as he is covered in the blood of the violence enacted against him. From a Girardian perspective, the reason the rider's words are transformative is that they are spoken in the moment of his sacrifice.

6. Conclusions from the Third Cycle

Loren Johns writes that,

if the Apocalypse understands Jesus' death as faithful, consistent, nonviolent resistance to the point of death, and if it intends to connect such resistance with the faithful martyrdom of the believers, one would expect to see a clear connection between the language of victory (*nikao*) won by Christ through his death and the language of victory won by believers in their own faithful, consistent, nonviolent resistance to the point of death. Evidence for such a connection abounds in the Apocalypse.⁴⁷⁷

Even at a cosmic scale, a Girardian reading of Revelation understands that nonviolence goes all the way up. It is not merely a strategy that hastens the overthrow of evil; it is the means through which the lie of the founding murder and the powers and principalities that serve to keep it hidden are exposed. That victory must inevitably take shape here on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). The nonviolent triumph over the dragon is the key to understand the images that follow in this cycle. The *νικάω* of the Lamb is not a battle but is instead the refusal to drive Satan through violently and thereby affirming his reign in the world. Once the non-violence of Jesus takes hold and is imitated by the church, Satan has nowhere to go but to choose his own withdrawal and consignment to impotence. Though the principalities attempt to draw the faithful back into violent conflict, the narrative demonstrates that these powers are not worthy of imitation and are

⁴⁷⁷ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 176.

destined to self-destruction. As the community overcomes through nonviolent imitation of Christ, the new world inevitably emerges (Rev 21:1). Dividing lines that create distinction and cause for mimetic desire are removed (Rev 21:25) and the place of sacrificial violence is banished from the new order (Rev 21:22). As Girard writes, “making gods by killing victims is the human gesture par excellence and, each time that they do it, human beings widen the gap between themselves and the true God a little more.”⁴⁷⁸ Through the work of Christ, who is not bound by a debt to violence, that gap between God and humanity is overcome, and the historical triumph of the Lamb becomes the eschatological New Jerusalem.

⁴⁷⁸ Girard, *When These Things Begin*, 77.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis has intended to constructively read Revelation through the lens of René Girard's theories. While this is only one possible reading strategy, it demonstrates the robust nature of Revelation's ability to stand up to emerging critiques even as "previously ignored forms of violence"⁴⁷⁹ are brought into the conversation. Starting from the conviction that Jesus was thoroughly non-violent in his earthly ministry⁴⁸⁰ and that his presence in history is the clearest image of God available to humanity, it moves the reader to continually evaluate images of Jesus as our understanding of violence evolves.

Revelation finds much of its power in the subversion of generic expectations. However, "it is not as if 'conquering' has become a code word for a narrowly conceived spiritual triumph"⁴⁸¹ in Revelation. The author intends to speak of the transformation of the world through God's victory over the social structures that bind humanity and it is here that Girard and Revelation have profound overlap in their agendas.

For Girard, it is only the divine Son of God, who bears no allegiance or debt to violence, who can awaken humanity from its enslavement to the scapegoat mechanism. For Revelation, it is the naming of violence and our thirst for it that allows us to draw a contrast between Jesus and our desires and, therein, discover the freedom his nonviolent mimesis offers. Both acknowledge the necessary instability the loss of these controlling mechanisms will have on the world and the outbreaks of violence that follows the unveiling of what has been hidden. However, both also

⁴⁷⁹ Violence can be defined as anything that "violates the personhood of another in ways that are psychologically destructive" M. Desjardins, "Peace, Violence and the New Testament," *The Biblical Seminar* 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 12.

⁴⁸⁰ see Appendix A

⁴⁸¹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 179.

envision an eschatological end that must inevitably result in the durable peace that has eluded our social structures built on controlling violence.

Due to the expansive nature of Revelation and the limitations of this thesis project, many images were left unexplored. In particular, the image of the New Jerusalem provides Revelation's imagination of Christ's work made complete in the geo-political realm. Though it is not an image that contains problematic violence, and therefore outside the scope of this thesis, the opportunity to explore the eschatological hope of Revelation through Girard's ideas would be worthy of continued work.

As well, while it may be that Girard's work struggles to provide a comprehensive image of the atonement, a specific reading of atonement imagery in Revelation through Girard's theories would present unique opportunities. As cited in Chapter 4, Loren Johns' work on the distinction between slaughterhouse and temple language in Revelation would provide an area for further exploration, particularly if compared to Girard's evolving views on sacrificial metaphors in his Christian understanding.

In the end, though Girard himself rarely interacts directly with the text of Revelation, his work provides an approach that compliments the hybridized genre of Revelation well, as both derive their power from the subversion of expectations. It is Girard's interdisciplinary approach that gives him the freedom to think so creatively, and it is Revelation's hybridization of genre that enables it to challenge our reading continually.

Appendices

Appendix A

1.1. Nonviolence in the Gospel According to Mark

Ched Myers' political reading of the gospel of Mark connects the Jesus of that narrative to the suffering servant of Isaiah⁴⁸² and describes the cross as "the embodiment of the way of non-violence"⁴⁸³. Reading Mark as a pre-70CE product of Roman Palestine, Meyers asserts that, "we must learn to appreciate the forms of political expression available to the uneducated and poor majority who were structured out of the dominant mechanisms of social power."⁴⁸⁴ In light of this, he interprets Mark as a portrait of Jesus "from below"⁴⁸⁵—specifically in contrast to the dominant philosophies of Jesus' time, which he identifies as the priestly aristocracy, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots. Meyers argues that the themes of Davidic/Messianic restoration in Mark refer not to institutional power and privilege, but to the *in-situ* perceptions of the poor as a symbol of justice and equality.⁴⁸⁶ He poses the question, "What if a prophet arose who advocated a strategy that distends the collaborationist aristocracy *and* Romans equally, and who repudiated Qumranite withdrawal *and* Pharisaical activism on the grounds that neither addressed the roots of oppression in the dominant symbolic order?"⁴⁸⁷ In response, he articulates the gospel vision of Jesus as a resistor to the political climate as a thoroughly nonviolent martyr. Robert Beck concurs with Myers' conclusions but builds a reading of Mark that focuses on the narrative structure of the book. He writes that "the conflict is indeed violent: as early in the story

⁴⁸² Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 124–127.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58. Of note is the fact that there are scholars who reject a pre 70CE dating of Mark cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, The Anchor Yale Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 39.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

as Mk 3:6, Jesus' opponents resolve to "destroy him." Without withdrawing his resistance, the protagonist, Jesus, refuses to adopt the violent methods of his opponents. This deliberate combination of active resistance with the refusal to use violence"⁴⁸⁸ is the writer's purpose in structuring the narrative as he has.

1.2. Nonviolence in the Gospel According to Matthew

In the Gospel of Matthew, we find one of Jesus' most enigmatic statements about nonviolence. Jesus encourages his followers to turn the other cheek (Mt. 5:39), hand over their coats (Mt. 5:40), and to go a second mile (Mt. 5:41) in an effort to *not resist* an evil person (Mt. 5:39). Walter Wink says of this passage that "human evolution has provided the species with two deeply instinctual responses to violence: flight or fight: Jesus offers a third way: a nonviolent direct action."⁴⁸⁹ Through these statements, Jesus declares that violence will not achieve its objective as he challenges the social caste, satirizes the economic disparity of the rich demanding tribute from the poor, destabilizes the internal security of an oppressor by refusing to be defined by victimization, and calls his disciples to follow in this non-violent direct action. Wink notes the use of ἀντιστῆναι in the phrase "do not resist" is primarily indicative of violent struggle and therefore indicates that the thrust of Jesus' teaching is that we should "not react violently"⁴⁹⁰ in the face of oppression. Similar to Wink, Hans Dieter Betz concludes that Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount has done away with the expectation of redeemer vengeance.⁴⁹¹ In the larger structure of verses 22 to 44, Ulrich Luz argues that "by arranging nonviolence and

⁴⁸⁸ Robert Beck, *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 18.

⁴⁸⁹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers. Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 175.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁹¹ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, SRM (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 281.

surrendering one's rights in the entire section of the six antitheses as he does, Matthew associates them with love."⁴⁹² However, in all of these nonviolent interpretations of Jesus' words, no one denies that Jesus is advocating for an active response to evil. This response is explicitly tied to both his earthly life and the nature of the Father (Mt 5:48).

1.3. Nonviolence in the Gospel According to Luke

Luke presents a unique image of Jesus' nonviolence in his call for his disciples to sell their cloaks and buy a sword (Lk 22:35–38). This call to arms is set against the earlier instructions of Jesus, where the disciples are sent out in pairs (Lk 9:2–3). Though in the earlier circumstance they were sent without purse, bag, or sandal (and yet lacked nothing due to a warm welcome), that experience is now contrasted in the phrase “but now” as Jesus portends a shift toward hostility and even violence.⁴⁹³ However, as Joel Green notes, the image of a sword is one that has been used earlier in this gospel to speak of animosity (Lk 12:51–53). The “apostles manifest their dullness when they suppose that Jesus opposes his own extensive and emphatic teaching by encouraging them actually to possess (or to purchase) weaponry.”⁴⁹⁴ John Nolland agrees, writing, “it is unlikely that the Lukan Jesus expected any literal implementation of the new directive that he offers here,”⁴⁹⁵ and his emphatic response “that’s enough” (Lk 22:38) reinforces this view. In fact, when Jesus cites Isaiah 53:12 to say that he will be “numbered with the lawless” (Lk 22:37), Jerome Neyrey suggests that Jesus is speaking of his apostles, “an

⁴⁹² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible 61A (ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 277.

⁴⁹³ Geoffrey WH. Lampe, “The Two Swords (Luke 22: 35–38),” *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (1984): 335–351.

⁴⁹⁴ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 775.

⁴⁹⁵ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary 35C (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 1076.

indication that they are not fully in accord with Jesus directions.”⁴⁹⁶ Later Jesus will explicitly reject violence as an option, ordering his disciples to stand down and then healing the servant of the High Priest who had been injured (Lk 22:51). The fact that Jesus uses the image of a sword and then immediately rejects the use of a physical sword confirms that there can be “no thought [of using the violence either in the present or] in an anticipated eschatological armed struggle.”⁴⁹⁷

1.4 The Olivet Discourse

Before moving to the Fourth Gospel, we pause to reflect on the Olivet Discourse found in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 13, Mt 24, Lk 21). For all the nonviolent direct action of Jesus, this discourse gives pause to any nonviolent reading and can be read to shift retributive violence into a future eschatological reality. While Girard himself dismisses these passages as the creation of human authors who misunderstand the full message of God’s kingdom,⁴⁹⁸ it can just as easily be noted that Jesus is employing the very apocalyptic language that we intend to explore in Revelation. This means that we should reserve judgement on the violent content of these images until we have properly understood the nature of Apocalyptic intent.

For now, we can note that the violence described in these parallel passages is rarely attributed to any specific source. Taking Matthew as the example, Jesus says that nation will rise against nation and that famine and earthquakes will happen (24:7). People will be handed over to persecution and put to death (24:9). The abomination that causes desolation will stand in the Holy Place (24:15). However, similar to what we see in the text of Revelation, violence is

⁴⁹⁶ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 42.

⁴⁹⁷ Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1076.

⁴⁹⁸ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (trans; Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 185–190.

described but not ascribed to God. In fact, Jesus says that the one who stands firm through all of this turmoil will be saved (24:13) and that if those days were not to be cut short, no one would survive. God does cut them short precisely because of those who remain faithful (24:22). The only direct action ascribed to God in the prophecy is salvation.

Jesus does tell a gruesome parable coming out of this discourse where he warns his listeners to pay attention and watch for the day their Lord will come (Mt 24:42). However, even here Donald A. Hagner points out that the uniquely violent language of the wicked servant being cut in two (Mt 24:51, Lk 12:46) “is used similarly in 3ApocBar 16:3”⁴⁹⁹ indicating that the Apocalyptic genre is still guiding the language. Stanley Hauerwas adds that the fact “that the slave will at once be cut to pieces and yet still be able to join the hypocrites should be sufficient to alert anyone that Jesus is not using this language to describe an actual state of affairs.”⁵⁰⁰

Just as we see in Revelation despite the fact the Jesus employs violent imagery, it should not immediately lead us to conclude that his nonviolent life was anything less than representative of his eschatological convictions.

1.5. Nonviolence in the Fourth Gospel

While the Fourth Gospel provides us a unique perspective on Jesus, it nonetheless affirms the nonviolent postures that run throughout the Synoptics. Like the Synoptics, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is presented in politically active, though nonviolent, terms. In a structural analysis of the confrontation with Pilate in John 18, Tom Thatcher points to the discussion of power as the

⁴⁹⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 724.

⁵⁰⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 207.

central point of the narrative.⁵⁰¹ While interpretation often leans toward a view that John is attempting “to relieve the Romans of responsibility for the death of Jesus,”⁵⁰² Thatcher argues that John intends to establish a direct contrast between Jesus and Pilate as the representative of Empire.⁵⁰³ The seed for this confrontation has been established earlier in the gospel when Jesus claims that “the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again” (Jn 10:18). Thatcher argues that the apparent power of Pilate is dismantled piece by piece as the scene unfolds, until Jesus declares that Pilate has no power over him.⁵⁰⁴ Pilate declares that Jesus is innocent but proves himself impotent to act on this statement, and the Pharisees declare their allegiance to Caesar in contrast to their stated goals of worshipping God alone. While it has been argued that Jesus’ conversation with Pilate is an endorsement of the state’s power derived from God⁵⁰⁵, it is more likely that the scene is designed to contrast Pilate’s physical power to enact violence with another kind of power. Raymond Brown calls this kind of power “genuine” power.⁵⁰⁶ In his fictional account, the writer Mikhail Bulgakov captures this contrast in a scene from his work *The Master and Margarita*. In the mouth of Jesus, he places the statement that “all power is a form of violence exercised over people and the time will come when there will be no rule by Caesar nor any other form of rule.

⁵⁰¹ Tom Thatcher, *Greater Than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 67.

⁵⁰² David Rensberger, “The Politics of John: The Trial of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 103 (1984) 396.

⁵⁰³ Thatcher, *Greater Than Caesar*, 70.

⁵⁰⁴ John 19:11 as interpreted by Thatcher, *Greater Than Caesar*, 81.

⁵⁰⁵ Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7–21*, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* 64B (ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse, trans. Robert W. Funk; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 182.

⁵⁰⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, *The Anchor Yale Bible* 29A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 892.

Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice where no sort of power will be needed.”⁵⁰⁷ In this way, the Fourth Gospel retains its distinctive presentation of Jesus by moving beyond individual examples of violence to contrast the concept of coercive power with the genuine strength of defiant nonviolence. Nonetheless, it reaffirms the direct nonviolent action we have seen in each of the Synoptics.

⁵⁰⁷ Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (trans. Michael Glenny; London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1967), 16.

Appendix B

The Nicolatians are referenced in the letters addressed to Ephesus and Pergamum, and the letter to Thyatira condemns the church for tolerating Jezebel who teaches similar practices. A third name, Balaam, associated with the same practices of “Christians who thought it acceptable to eat food that had been offered to Greco-Roman deities”⁵⁰⁸ is also referenced in the letter to Pergamum. Based on the etymology of the names Nicolas (from the Greek “he conquers people”) and Balaam (from the Hebrew “he devoured people”), it has been posited that these are references to the same symbolic figure representing a collection of practices rather than to specific persons.⁵⁰⁹ Paul Duff argues that these various names, Nicolas/Jezebel/Balaam, refer to a single group.⁵¹⁰ A reference to the “so-called deep secrets” of Satan in the letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:24) has led to a linking of these three figures with the Synagogue of Satan referenced in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia. Ultimately, the figure Jezebel is said to be cast on a bed of suffering, her adulterers made to suffer intensely, and her children killed (Rev 2:22–23). Considering that these words come directly from the mouth of Jesus in the text, this is problematic for a nonviolent reading.

This is a notoriously difficult section of the text that provides no satisfactory reading from a Girardian perspective. While Girard himself had no qualms about assigning problematic passages to human authors who refused the true message of God’s kingdom⁵¹¹ I will briefly point to three ideas that may hint toward the reading against the text I believe is warranted once the full scope of Revelation’s narrative comes into view.

⁵⁰⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 262.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁵¹⁰ Duff, “‘The Synagogue of Satan’: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John,” 147. see in particular his ‘note 1’.

⁵¹¹ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 185–190.

First, Adela Yarbro Collins imagines the violence of the text facilitating nonviolence by giving narrative voice to the violent fantasies of the readers. She argues that to maintain a conviction that Christ's lordship contains a socio-political dimension, the "solution of the Apocalypse is an act of creative imagination,"⁵¹² a cathartic release of frustration. In this, the depersonalized images of Nicolas ("he conquers") and Balaam ("he devours") along with the figure Jezebel pulled from Old Testament stories, represent not direct violence but an outlet for the still mimetically influenced violent imagination of the reader.

Second, the Synagogue of Satan, which may represent the larger category of all those "who have aligned themselves with Satan in opposition to the followers of the Lamb,"⁵¹³ is said to be made to come and "fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (Rev 3:9). The Greek δίδωμι, meaning "to give as an expression of generosity,"⁵¹⁴ could indicate that those who have persecuted the church "are 'given' in the sense of becoming converts to the Christian faith."⁵¹⁵ Caird prefers this more generous reading, referencing the post-exilic expectation of the redemption of the Gentiles.⁵¹⁶ Duff adds to this interpretation, suggesting that the language employed describing Christ's ability to make known his love to those who oppose him, fits within the Jewish tradition of paideia.⁵¹⁷ He writes that "presumably, after they have been disciplined and 'know the truth,' they will repent and be saved, along with the faithful of the εκκλησια."⁵¹⁸ If this is the case, the believer's latent expectation of retribution is transformed into the redemption of their oppressors, and at the same time, the transgressors' perspective of opposition to Christ is undone through his grace toward them.

⁵¹² Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 155.

⁵¹³ Philip L. Mayo, *Those who Call Themselves Jews: The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 200. contra Paul B. Duff, "The Synagogue of Satan," 157–58.

⁵¹⁴ BDAG, s.v. "δίδωμι."

⁵¹⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 102.

⁵¹⁶ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 51–53.

⁵¹⁷ Duff, "The Synagogue of Satan," 158.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

Finally, the simple fact that the children of Jezebel are given a harsher sentence than that of Jezebel herself should give us pause in our reading. We note that Jezebel's punishment on a bed builds off of the OT imagery brought to bear in her name⁵¹⁹ and adds to the figurative expectation in the reader. There is also an important distinction made between her adulterers and her children in the text. Since the most graphic image of punishment in Revelation, "the 'lake of fire,' is not for men [but instead] for the demonic enemies of God"⁵²⁰ and since the only divine weapon present in Revelation is the sword that comes from the mouth of Jesus (a symbol of truth Rev 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21), this may indicate that the children of Jezebel should not be identified with any group of people at all but instead with lies that oppose God. This is reminiscent of Jesus' description of the Devil as the father of lies in John 8:44 and returns us to Girard's approach to that text in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. There Girard says that "if we don't see that the choice is inevitable between the two supreme models, God and the devil, then we have already chosen the devil and his mimetic violence."⁵²¹ If there are only two supreme models, and if the ultimate goal of Christ is the rehabilitation of all those who have imitated the Father of lies, then it is his children, that is his lies, that must inevitably and only be destroyed. That Jezebel's children are the only ones put to death in this passage (Rev 2:23) may hint that even through these violent fantasies of revenge, the text's undercurrent remains true to the nonviolence of Christ's unveiling.

It is true that I am grasping at hints in the text to align this passage with Girard's ideas. However, as Girard asks, "why does the spirit of revenge, wherever it breaks out, constitute such an intolerable menace? Perhaps because the only satisfactory revenge for spilt blood is spilling

⁵¹⁹ Matthew J. Streett, *Violence and Nonviolence in the Book of Revelation* (ProQuest, 2009), 71–73 cf. 1 Kgs. 21:17–29; 2 Kgs. 9:30–37; 10:1–11.

⁵²⁰ Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, 260.

⁵²¹ Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, 43.

the blood of the killer; and in the blood feud there is no clear distinction between the act for which the killer is being punished and the punishment itself.”⁵²² For God not to be drawn into a place where the distinction between Godself and Satan disappears, God must remain thoroughly distinct in our imagination. This distinction will only become clearer as the scope of the successive cycles expands.

⁵²² Girard, “Violence and the Sacred” reproduced in *Girard Reader* (ed. Williams), 84.

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