

W.M.G. Eggen : **Emulating a kindhearted incarnation**

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Summary

The gospel's message of Incarnation contains a belief in the double action of God, who both creates a world full of beings with conflicting interests and saves the victims of the conflicts. Luke's gospel uses the Greek adjective *oiktirmones* to describe the Father's compassionate perfection, which Jesus' disciples are to imitate. The summit of divine compassion is Jesus' request from the cross for forgiveness for his persecutors, because he views them as part of a larger structure whose principle is a struggle all of us share in. Contrary to Nietzsche, who regards compassion as a weakness dangerous for mankind, the author indicates that sharing the burden and effects of evil-doing in the spirit of truth and unity may count as an expression of real faith and even as 'will to power'.

Introduction

The Holy Year of Mercy launched by pope Francis on December 8, 2015, hinges on two interrelated, yet apparently opposite motives. While God's Mercy for the repentant sinner ranks prominently in devotional papers, the pope's emphasis is rather on the believers' compassionate answer to the desperate cries for help worldwide. This tangle may cause a confusion that is deepened by the fact that both aspects run up against different yet related censures. The mortifying theme of sinfulness is scorned by many as a church-driven cause of slave morality that paralyzes the feeble minds in society; and the corresponding call for charitable compassion not only counts as a danger that weakens the drive to progress, but also as contradicting the very principle of life's evolution. With the help of René Girard's insight in the Gospel message, I shall try to answer these objections and integrate the two aspects.

1. Biblical source

Before looking at the anthropological claims, we first note that Christ's counsel to emulate the Father's perfect compassion actually reformulates the old Jewish "Shema"-ideal in which God tells his people to "Listen" and gratefully respond to their delivery. Originally this may have been a call for ritual fidelity, but in Deuteronomy and various prophets the ethical care of the needy came to prevail. The delivery from Egypt's slavery obliged Israel to look after the destitute in their midst. Jesus' counsel to emulate God's

perfect compassion, as quoted by Matthew and Luke in slightly different words, and further elaborated by Luke's parables, shows indisputably that Jesus connected mutual forgiveness and caring empathy to a repentant conversion. He criticizes the elder son's unwillingness to forgive his brother and lauds the Samaritan's care of the robbed. Opposing this to the old understanding of the Torah, Luke follows the line of Paul who stresses that God's grace envisages less the forgiving of past sins than the removal of blindness causing evil. The Greek word used for compassion envisages an action that is far removed from the condescending and humiliating approach of charity that religious traditions have often been accused of.

3. Evolution and kindness

Anthropology has invested much study on the origin of religion and morality in mankind's evolution. Given their irrational and anti-logical ilk and their heavy social costs, they became the butt of numerous intriguing hypotheses notably on the nature of spiritual essences. The basic quandary was how to align their mitigations to the gains of the fittest deemed to be life's principle of evolution. Compassion for losers in obedience to orders from the invisible seemed illogical and could hardly be presented as an adaptation to the problems mankind faced. Some have therefore pointed at the workings of exaptations, in which an item develops along imprevisible lines. Amidst the proposed hypotheses there was Nietzsche's radical debunking of religion as the result of resentment by the weak notably in the Biblical tradition leading to the slave-morality. Instead of a Satyr-like joy over the victorious sight of defeated victims, humanity had given in to its weaker side and submitted to the dangerous compassion ordered from above. The weak nation of Israel, in particular, sought its survival in a humble subordination, translating gratitude for existence into moral rules of charity that feebled the human will to power. Nietzsche's scathing critique of the churches' hypocritical combination of social clout and earth-despising sermons led him to cry out that God had been murdered by disciples that shortly after Christ's death resigned from his greatest utterance of will to power, being the pardoning of his murderers on the cross. This curious twist in Nietzsche's logic may shock, but will below be aligned with Girard's view reached via an opposite argumentation.

But first we need to consider the very concept of compassion that most Western languages present as a word that blends the heart and misery: *misericordia*. At the

question whose heart is miserable or poor, it must be stressed that it is both the sufferer and the helper. The English word 'kindhearted' captures this, since 'kind' derives from 'kin', being of the same group. The idea that the needy is to be helped by someone of a different kind must fade before the awareness that the will to power of both is faced by hardships that all have caused jointly and to an equal degree. But this requires a sense of victory that outdoes the satiric, Satyr-like joy of dominance over the rival. In search of the kind of victory meant here we shall consider Girard's mimetic theory.

4. Pardoning the rival

René Girard criticizes Nietzsche severely on the ideal of the Superman's joys, but his view of religion seems similar, since he locates its origin in the victory over a common scapegoat or victim. He argues that amidst increasing rivalries the original humanity learned to devolve all tension onto one 'culprit', whose death brought peace. They enthroned the victim as 'hero', and eventually as law-giving deity. But this theory is more complex than the case of Nietzsche's Satyr-like individual enjoying the victim's defeat. The joy over this victim is a collective and ambivalent affair, due to a suppressed awareness of common guilt, for which Girard uses the term *méconnaissance*. Mankind owed its survival to a murder, which it hid behind sacrificial rites, myths, and laws that eventually would be unmasked. Girard holds that the bible's prophetic message is about this process of unmasking. It reached its apex in Jesus, with a bottom-line being that the misery of the victims is the victors' doing. While most religions view mishaps as the gods punishing a victim's mistake, the Bible turns this around. It means that, in line with the fact of *méconnaissance*, the victim may state that his persecutor does not know what he is doing. Pardoning the enemy, therefore, as Jesus did in his ultimate hour on the cross, may count as the highest expression of faith and the ultimate feat of the will to power, by taking the evil's cause upon himself.

5. Enlightened catastrophism

That Nietzsche and Girard arrive at this shared vista, though, is no reason for Christian pride. In fact, the Bible's empowerment of the individual came along the strange lines of resentment and the glorification of victimhood that were not without making new victims. Resentment against the Absolute has led the drive for power and knowledge into many science-driven dangers, both in the social and technical areas. The combat

against heteronomous limitations as unjustified victimization has led technology to excessive risk-taking. What has been dubbed the Promethean hubris must be recognized as an excess and derailment of the Bible's rejection of the sacrificial logic. Compassion with those bearing the effects of catastrophes caused by such derailments should imply an acknowledgment of one's own guilt. Here, environmental calamities due to climate change come to mind, but also the rise of epidemics, the surge of jihadism, refugee crises, and social upheavals. Enlightened catastrophism means forestalling the menacing dangers through the awareness of one's own causal role, and in a Christian spirit of unity with God's Incarnational option of a kenosis, siding with the victim.

6. Conclusion: incarnational kindness

The Bible cites many cases of God's regret over his creation and of threats of punishments that He often retracts. This compassion implies a recognition that the act of creating opposing entities is, in fact, a cause of rivalry and conflict. The gospel message of Incarnation contains an ultimate belief in God's twofold action of both creating reality and delivering the victims of the conflicts that ensue. The spiritual unity of these two sides is the Trinitarian truth underpinning the perfect compassion, which celebrates the creative power and the unreserved will to heal the ensuing conflict. Paul formulates this as the readiness of God's Son to carry our sins. Rather than cursing or shaming his persecutors Jesus excuses them, as being part of a bigger construct of strife that exceeds them.

Instead of a condescending forgiveness for the sinners, or a haughty gift of mercy to the needy, perfect compassion is an imitation of Christ's emulation of the Father by sharing the burden and its guilty causes in an enlightened spirit of truth and unity. This evangelical option of compassion carries huge implications in view of the wars and menacing catastrophes. Gainsaying such philosophers as Derrida that call any disinterested help impossible since every gift indebts the receiver and obliges gifts in return, the kenotic empathy that God urges us to emulate is the kind solidarity of sharing Christ's willing 'descent into hell', not as a step toward a glorious resurrection, but as a supreme utterance of the will to power. For, to forgive and refrain from scapegoating instead of descending from the cross and shame the opponent is a true act of *kenosis* and self-sacrificing willpower that, in a non-condescending way, takes the sins of the world upon oneself. It needs God's merciful grace to rise to that level of humble greatness, the

work of his Spirit. This vision of sharing in the divine compassion, clearly, rests on a Trinitarian theology that cannot be further elaborated here.

[Follows the full version, Ibid. p. 99 -110]

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Emulating the kindhearted incarnation

The Holy Year of Mercy launched by Pope Francis on December 8, 2015, hinged on two interrelated, yet apparently opposite motives. While God's mercy for the repentant sinner ranked prominently in devotional papers, the Pope's own focus was rather on the believers' compassionate answer to the desperate cries for help worldwide. This tangle was bound to cause confusion, which was worsened by the fact that both aspects run up against a range of criticisms, notably in view of the gospel's demand to imitate God's own mercy.

In the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus urges his followers to emulate God's own perfection and compassion (see Mt 5:48 and Lk 6:36). But there is the theological objection that emulating God cannot be demanded of humans, and besides there is an anthropological view that such a conduct is actually harmful for the human species and incompatible with its very constitution. The prophets are known to have declared God's ways and thoughts to be radically different from human's doings (see Is 55:8). How, then, can man be sensibly ordered to emulate God's perfect compassion?

Moreover, any mortification by expiating one's sin is scorned by many for being a church-driven cause of slave morality that paralyzes the feeble minds in society; and to top it all, the corresponding call for charity and compassion is said not only to involve a weakening of the drive to progress but also to contradict the very principle of life's evolution. For over a century, this criticism has mainly utilized the radical philosophical views of Nietzsche. With the help of René Girard's insight in the evangelic message, I shall try to answer these objections and to integrate the two aspects advanced by the papal initiative.

1. Biblical sources

Before looking at the anthropological claims, we first note that Christ's counsel to emulate the Father's perfect compassion actually reformulates the old Jewish *Shema*-ideal,

notably of Deuteronomy, in which God tells his people to gratefully respond to their delivery. Originally, this may have been a call for ritual fidelity, but in Deuteronomy and various prophets it was the ethical care of the needy that came to prevail. The delivery from Egypt's slavery urged Israel to listen and in turn take care of the destitute in their midst.

The counsel to emulate God's perfect compassion is cited in slightly different wordings by Matthew and Luke and further elaborated by Luke's parables. It indisputably shows that Jesus connects both mutual forgiveness and compassion to a repentant conversion. He criticizes the elder son's unwillingness to forgive his brother, while praising the Samaritan's care of the robbed traveller. Whereas Matthew tallies six specific refinements of the law, after spelling out the beatitudes and before concluding with the call to be perfect (*teleios*) like the Father, Luke's composition seems less structured, and his recommendation of compassion sounds much less as a final conclusion. But since this fine-tuning of the law linked to the beatitudes is found in both gospels, there is a strong case to be made for the existence of a written Q-source on which both drew. But this heightens the need to explain their differences. Why is emulating the Father – which Jesus saw as his own life's motto – called “compassion” by the one and “perfection” by the other? Can they be harmonized?

The adjective used in Lk 6:36 is a curious one; for its grammatical form is a present participle that does not derive from the verb *oiktirein*, to pity, but rather stems from the noun *oiktirmos* (grace, empathic help). Both this noun and the adjective, while less common in classical Greek than the corresponding verb, occur regularly in the Septuagint to express God's mercy. Church Father Justus Martyr, quoting Jesus' counsel in his *Apologia* (15:13), actually felt the need to add a synonym for the adjective: compassionate and kind. Since an adjective in the form of a present participle expresses a concrete involvement, it must indicate more than a simple forgiveness of guilt. It may be argued that Luke's own focus is influenced by his mentor, Paul, who often depicts God's grace as a universal compassion with mankind and all those excluded from salvation by the prescriptions of the law. This implies that God's saving mercy is not primarily concerned with the remission of some guilt. In fact, when he mentions God's intervention in his own life turning him away from his murderous hatred of Christ, Paul refers less to his moral guilt than to God taking pity of his blind groping in ignorant darkness.

Here is not the place to elaborate the curious twist this Paulinian vision has taken by modeling Christian salvation on the Gnostic idea of deliverance from ignorance. Yet, this is to be kept in mind, since we note that God's enlightening grace, the forgiveness of sins, and the compassionate relief of misery have often been interpreted as dealing with the areas of

knowing, ordering and caring respectively. Jesus' counsel to emulate the Father, though, as found in Matthew and Luke, is not to follow that trend.

In line with Paul's understanding of God's compassion, we will bring Matthew and Luke under the same denominator, by relating them to the apex of perfect compassion in Jesus' own words on the Cross. In praying that the Father forgive his enemies, as they are ignorant of what they are doing, he empathizes with their state of blindness that caused the murderous hatred, thereby connecting pardon to his commiseration with their miserable state of being in the grip of their mimetic rivalries. Thus, Luke's idea of compassion presents an action that is far removed from the condescending type of charity that religion has often been accused of.

In wording the recommended perfection in these terms I shall draw on the mimetic theory of René Girard, who applied his skills of a literary critic to Biblical texts. But before elaborating this vision of empathy, we need to scrutinize the critique that is commonly tabled against the notions of compassion and religious concerns in the constitution of human society

2. Evolution and kindness

Anthropology has greatly invested in studies on the origin and cultural role of religion and morality in human evolution. Due to the allegedly irrational or anti-logical ilk and the heavy social costs, they have been subjected to many different hypotheses, notably concerning the nature of deities and spiritual essences. The basic quandary is how to align their mitigations with the gains allegedly pursued by the fittest as life's very principle of evolution. Compassion for losers, in obedience to orders of the invisible above, seems rather illogical and can hardly be seen as an adaptation to the problems mankind faced. The religious demand to emulate a compassionate God as the essence of moral perfection has raised many an eyebrow, notably if spending resources on helping the weak is involved. Especially the adherents of evolutionary thinking, who see no place for a god either at the beginning or the end of mankind's trajectory and question the value of compassion in the logic of evolution have their serious qualms. While upholding the rule of evolutionary adaptation some may admit that cooperation and mutual help has had a role in collective hunting and other dangerous conditions. But a rationalization of moral rules by the sole principle of adaptation has failed so far, leaving the majority of practices and beliefs unexplained. Consequently, some have elaborated additional concepts to supplement the notion of adaptation, which explains novelties as responses to physical or social challenges

that require a rational answer. They have pointed at the role of exaptations, in which an item develops along unpredictable or even illogical evolutionary lines.

Amidst the critics, we note particularly Nietzsche's radical debunking of religion as a product of resentment by the weak, particularly in the Biblical tradition, leading to a slave-morality. Instead of a natural joy over the victorious sight of defeated victims, religious traditions urged man to follow his weaker side and to submit to a dangerous form of compassion ordered from above. The weak nation of Israel, in particular, sought its survival in a humble submission, translating gratitude for existence into moral rules of charity that weakened the human will to power. Nietzsche's scathing critique of the churches' hypocritical combination of social influence and earth-despising sermons led him to proclaim that God had been murdered by the disciples, who shortly after Jesus' death resigned from his greatest utterance of willpower, namely his pardoning of those who nailed him to the cross. In *Der Antichrist* he fiercely criticizes the duplicity of an allegedly loving God who proves to be wrathful, and who allows the beloved Jesus to be murdered for His own gratification. Recalling that numerous historians have pointed to the Constantine turn-about, when Christianity became State religion and ritualization soared, we may connect this to Nietzsche's ferocious attack on that tradition. This may appear to be a paradox in his views, as his first work *Birth of the Tragedy* had praised the esthetic pleasure of seeing the victim slain. Many have argued that this type of incongruity caused Nietzsche's eventual mental collapse. But we shall see the value of this position. We must appreciate that he rightly chastises the common piety of perceiving God as ambiguous and the fall of early Christianity of dropping behind Christ's remarkable demand to love one's enemy and be like God who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked (Luke 6:35).

His and our dilemma, however, is that this option runs counter to the principle of evolution by the will to power, since it rejects the devilish esthetics of watching the victim slain. I shall examine how this twist in Nietzsche's logic can be aligned with Girard's critique stemming from an opposite argument. For that we must look at the notion of forgiving in the latter's theory.

3. Pardoning the rival

While Nietzsche lambasts religion for encouraging submissiveness, René Girard (1923-2015) rather criticizes its core of victimizing violence. He denies that religion is inherently linked to empathy. Seeking to relate Darwin's idea of evolution with the Biblical

critique of sacrificial religions, Girard rejects the struggle for survival in its utilitarian reading, where divinities may figure as ploys that allow some to exploit the rest. In *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972) he argues that the burgeoning humanity, due to intense mutual imitation (*mimesis*), came to a level of devastating rivalries, which it learned to pacify and control by the accidentally discovered method of scapegoating by directing the collective violence against one victim. Whereas Nietzsche saw religion as the strategy of losers, Girard reads it as society's armory to ward off devastating internal menaces at the expense of innocent losers. This method of settling tensions by sacrificing scapegoats, which had already appeared in embryonic form among mammals, now became an instrument helping primitive humanity to build tight social bonds and sophisticated tools of control.

In terms of compassion, this religious set-up caused ambiguity, since it distinguished between the outlawed scapegoat that is readily sacrificed and the needy members of the group. But in this context, Girard advances the crucial concept of *méconnaissance* and its role in religious evolution. Humans willfully hide the fact that the system rests on the hoax of pacifying the mimetic rivalries via the sacrifice of scapegoats. This obedience to divine demands both hides and criticizes the underlying mechanism and compassion, therefore, serves both as its true anchor and its strongest critique. This was consistently stressed by many prophets and Christ himself, at the risk of their own demise and expulsion, as they stated that God wants justice rather than sacrifices.

By defining corpses as the victims of society's dubious actions, Girard criticizes the evolutionary approach by Nietzsche who hails the ego's will to power that satirically enjoys the victim's demise, while staying aloof. But in terms of logic that esthetic distance, actually, compares to what Girard perceives as primal man's reaction of hoisting his victim onto a throne, as the deity that procures a pacifying grace. Hidden in both is an ambivalent call for pardon. For, if the sacrificial will to power on which the entire evolution is said to rest can be gratified by the sight of bloody victims, the question arises if pardoning the executioner so as to make him repudiate his onslaught might not represent an even more gratifying experience. Could Jesus' pardon of his persecutors actually count as the saving act *par excellence*? Curiously we note that Nietzsche hails this act of forgiveness by the Crucified as the supreme Christian act he values. If we agree that the joy of overcoming our rival's threat by causing his remorse and repentance is an esthetic satisfaction for any will to power, could this mean that Nietzsche and Girard agree in seeing pardon of the opponent as the ultimate force driving the evolution? Or, in other words: is empathy aimed at converting one's rival into the divine

ideal which we are to emulate as being the Creator's driving force underpinning the world's order? Let us look closer.

Girard argues that, amidst the increasing rivalries, the original humanity learned to devolve all tension onto one victim, judged to be the cause of the chaos. Then this slain "culprit" was enthroned as the "hero", whose death had brought peace, and eventually came to be the law-giving deity. But the joy over this victim is an ambivalent affair due to a suppressed awareness of common guilt, which Girard termed *méconnaissance*. Mankind owed its survival to a murder, which it hid behind sacrificial rites, myths, and laws. The Bible's prophetic message was about the unmasking of this scam and reached its apex in Jesus, revealing that the victims' misery was the victors' fault. While most religions view mishaps as the gods punishing a mistake by the victim, the Bible undermines this dogma. But in line with the crucial notion of *méconnaissance*, the victim – which Jesus was in the highest degree – may rise above his persecutor by forgiving him "for not knowing what he is doing." Pardoning the enemy, therefore, as Jesus did in his ultimate hour on the cross, may count as the highest expression of faith and the ultimate feat of the will to power. After his triple refusal to descend from the cross because that would align him with the game his enemies were playing, his pardon was the ultimate act, as Nietzsche also agrees. But only for the specific reason that he took the evil's cause upon himself and did not pardon in a condescending way. This crucial fact, which underpins subsequent dogma, deserves explication.

4. Enlightened catastrophism

Let us return to the notion of compassion, which most Western languages present by a word that blends "misery" and "heart": *miser cordia*. The Polish *miłosierdzie*, too, implies a wholehearted commiseration with the pitiful. At the question: whose heart is in misery or poor, it must be clear that it is both the sufferer's and the helper's. Other European languages like the Scandinavian and Germanic *barmhartig* also connect the notions of "heart" and "arm" (poor); but they add an enigmatic *b* that is akin to the English *be* in "to befriend" or "bedevil". This leaves an ambiguity on the question if the ailing heart is in the giver or the receiver. Is compassion just a pitying of the miserable or also the recognition of a shared misery? Does Jesus' forgiveness imply a condescending and scathing disdain of his murderers for being ignorant boors or does he not rather pray for them, recognizing that theirs is his own

temptation too, in supreme and triple form, both here on the cross and earlier on in the desert?

Kindheartedness, the English synonym for compassion, actually captures this point, since “kind” derives from “kin”, “being akin”, “kindred”, of the same group. The idea that the needy are helped by me as someone of a different kind must fade before the awareness that our common willpower is up against adversities that affect all, albeit in unequal degree. Pardoning, for-giving requires a sense of victory that outdoes the satiric joy of the giver feeling dominance over the rival. It requires an enlightened sense of catastrophism that implies kindness, a sense of shared guilt. The concept of “enlightened catastrophism” has been introduced by Girard’s soulmate, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, arguing that we need to acknowledge an escalating drive to catastrophes due to our shared indulging in mimetic rivalries. Even the theological interpretation of the original sin as a rivalry with God’s power has provoked a so-called Promethean mind that drives Western technocratic progress to scapegoat nature and its Creator for any limits, and sucks all in an unstoppable, desire-driven push for innovations, which is bound to cause many victims in the process. The misery of the victims is the doing of the victors, as becomes increasingly clear in rising ecological and economic threats and catastrophes. Forgiving one’s opponent, therefore, is also the acknowledgment of a common guilt. Moreover, this should imply more than wiping past debts off a slate.

The fact that, from opposite anthropological angles, Nietzsche and Girard arrived at a similar reading of the Crucified’s supreme act should result in anything but the Christians’ boasting. Indeed, the compassionate empowerment of the deprived took a strange route of resentment and the glorification of suffering and victimhood that was bound to cause much harm. The resentment against the Absolute led the search for power and knowledge into many science-driven dangers, both in the social and technical areas. Future calamities due to things like the global warming with its devastating tornados, typhoons, inundations in populated coastal areas or droughts, but also a refugee crisis due to other man-made disasters, require a heightened sense of co-responsibility that is to modify the technical and social-economic “will to power” into a special form of kindhearted compassion.

The fight against natural limitations viewed as unjustified victimization by angry heavens has led technology to huge risk-taking. The so-called Promethean hubris is to be recognized for what it is, a derailment of the Bible’s prophetic fight against sacrificial logic. Compassion with those bearing the brunt of catastrophes is thus to be imbibed with an acknowledgment of one’s own guilt. Calamities due to climate change, but also the rise of epidemics, of jihad, drugs-related crime, and social upheavals ask for this enlightened

catastrophism that seeks to forestall the menacing devastations by an awareness of one's own guilt together with a solidarity that is inspired by the Christian spirit, combining removal of sin and relief of misfortune. In order to understand this as the emulation of God's perfect compassion we must translate the amazing agreement of Nietzsche and Girard into the dogmatic terms of the Trinitarian tradition and Christological *kenosis*.

5. **Incarnational kindness**

In the Bible we find many cases of God regretting His creation and His threats of punishment that He usually retracts after the people's penance. This mercy implies a recognition that the act of creating opposing entities may have led to the type of rivalries and conflicts that were not intended, but could not be prevented. In a sense, God is represented as responsible for the evil, similar to us. Man's creative power, too, causes unintended tensions, for which responsibility is to be taken. What each person experiences on personal level, finds itself reflected in the ultimate dimension of God's omnipotence. The gospel message of Incarnation contains the ultimate belief in God's two-sided involvement of both creating the differentiated reality and delivering the victims of the conflicts that ensue. The ultimate will to power, which is the very definition of God as Creator, and which itself was viewed by the late medieval scholar Cusanus as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, effectively causes the earthly differentiation with its regrettable rivalries. After many revoked threats of penalties, according to Scripture, God sent his Son in the final days to incarnate and, in *kenosis*, be totally at one with the rivaling and sinful human kind, except from partaking in that sin itself. This was God's perfect act of compassionate solidarity, in which He Himself bore the evil of his own creation and raised (resurrected) it into the victory over its sacrificial, scapegoating, and devastating logic. In a sense one may say that, in a generous and perfect solidarity, God owed up to his responsibility of creating a differentiate world of rivaling beings. The spiritual unity of these two opposing sides is the Trinitarian truth that underpins the perfect compassion and celebrates both the creative power and the unreserved will to heal the ensuing conflict. Paul regularly formulates this as the readiness of God's Son to carry our sins, without any sign of disdain. Rather than cursing or shaming his persecutors Jesus excuses them, as being part of a bigger process of strife that exceeds any of them. Instead of a condescending forgiveness for the sinners or a haughty gift of mercy to the needy, perfect compassion is, like Christ's, to emulate the Father in sharing the burden and its guilty causes by an enlightened spirit of truth and unity.

Our theological question is why God actually created disunity, while harmonious unity is not only simpler but also what was actually intended. In evolutionary theory this quandary is readily explained away by assuming an original chaos that was overcome by a mere chance development that favored the fittest (or most lucky) ones. But this is a most unsatisfactory answer and difficult to link to the emergence of moral and cultural ideals. The traditional images of a creator God, too, seemed contradictory, unless by connecting them with both Girard's mimetic theory and Nietzsche's esthetic vision, provided the latter's individualist focus is dismantled. The evangelic vision holds that the created differentiation will result in conflicting rivalry if mimetic desire and the love of individual gratification are allowed to hold sway over the will to love the other's identity and foster its full contribution to an overall harmony. Philosophers like Leibniz have stressed that any entity in order to exist must somehow know about the harmonious coherence of the whole, and feel a calling to contribute to it. It is here that the religious notions of 'compassionate mutual empathy' and 'forgiving', understood as the removal of the separating evils, are to merge.

Gainsaying such philosophers as Derrida, who deems any really disinterested help impossible, since every gift will indebted the receiver and obliges him to return in even superior ways, the perfect compassion God urges us to emulate is the sort of solidarity that shares in Christ's willingness to "descend into hell", as a supreme utterance of the will to power. Not because it is a necessary step toward a glorious resurrection and victory over death, but because it joins the creative will of God who differentiates in order to unite.

6. Conclusion: the pastoral imperative

The theological question raised by the two sides of "mercy" is a basic one. Not least because asking forgiveness for sins and the involvement in charitable assistance seem so different, if not contrasting, to a postmodern mind. How to conceive a Father God that frets over petty sins, who sustains the differences between beings, and yet regrets their inevitable rivalries? This vision seems to create not only intellectual quandaries, but also largely insurmountable pastoral dilemmas. A scientist may wonder if protons and neutrons are in God's mind as separate entities or rather as transcendently bonded parts of a harmony. But on a pastoral level the faith rather appears to create a yawning split. Are men and women God's concern as individuals or as fertile partners whose union is bound to face constant conflicts of interest and rivalry? Who is the merciful God, when structures in daily life are hurting?

These are urgent pastoral questions. Like earlier prophets, Jesus' main complaint was that the representatives of Israel's faith left the people like a flock without shepherd. Girard argues that humans developed a belief in gods as ambivalent entities who pacified the original scenes of rivalry, but did so by establishing codes and rules of social differences. So, if God is called the Father of perfect compassion, we must ask if this refers to the setting of rules or to the pardon for our breaking of those rules. Or should we believe that Jesus, as the Word that opts for the *kenosis* of total solidarity, shows a third way by his pastoral involvement in bringing the differences to fruition and a new harmony? Like a shepherd, he acts as a protector of the oppressed, while upholding the code of differences that caused their marginalization in the first place. His faith in God made him side with the wretched and yet uphold the will to impose differentiating rules. He refers to the Book of Genesis, which has rightly been named the Book of Separations, since it describes God's overcoming of the chaos by creating a differentiated order. Pastoral compassion should imply both sides. It removes the odium of suffering by solidarity not only in seeking solutions but also in sharing the blame for the causes of evil and turning them to benefits. The aesthetic delight of man's will to power rests in Jesus' manner of forgiving and changing evil into good.

The evangelic call to pastoral compassion is to focus on the gratifying harmony that recalls the poetic ode in Prov 8:25-31, describing the delight of wisdom at play before the Creator God. In the face of all the wars and menacing catastrophes, both on global and on personal scale, the embodied divine Word introduces into the cosmos a redeeming action that refrains from sacrificial scapegoating. He does not shame the opponent by majestically coming down from the cross, but shows a true *kenosis* of self-sacrificing willpower that, in non-condescending ways, takes the guilt of all upon himself. It needs God's merciful grace and the work of his Spirit for us to become his body and to rise to that level of humble solidarity, where forgiveness of sin means primarily joining the weak, who do not know what they are doing, in an enlightened struggle to remove the tangles of vile rivalries. Pastoral empathy is not just dressing the wounds, but making one's own the struggle the people are facing and removing the sin that is our common challenge.

This vision of sharing in God's incarnated *kenosis*, kindness and compassion rests on a Trinitarian theology that demands a further elaboration, which clearly is beyond the scope of this short article.

Keywords:

Biblical sources, evolution and kindness, pardoning the rival, enlightened catastrophism, incarnational kindness, the pastoral imperative.

