

# Violence, Trauma, and Religion

R.Ruard Ganzevoort

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Few issues in the public dimension of religion have become as prominent and troublesome as its connection with violence. In recent decades, we have become aware of the structural presence of domestic and sexual violence in religious families and in churches, and we now witness the impending bankruptcy of dioceses over claim settlements. Recent government research shows that up to 45% of Dutch people have suffered non-incidental domestic violence, a quarter of whom reported physical harm and half of whom reported violence to have spanned over five years (Van Dijk et al. 1997). There are no signs that religious families in general show lower rates, and contradicting outcomes regarding the specific influences of religious dimensions (cf. Elliott 1994; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson 1999; Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri 1992).

Meanwhile, our societies are marbled with many forms of violence, the exceptionally religiously USA being among those countries with the highest percentages of crime and imprisonment (Walmsley 2003). And then there is the recent geopolitical history with its continuing and unprecedented struggle with terrorism, justly or unjustly interpreted as religiously inspired (Selengut 2003). What is this uncomfortable connection between religion and violence, seemingly so at odds with the proclamations of love, reconciliation, and peace heard over and over in places of worship around the world?

Probably one of the first responses to this question should be that it represents a one-sided positive view of religion. In reality, the proclamations in places of worship and the teachings worded in religious books, pamphlets, and Internet sites not always convey a message of love, reconciliation, and peace. In each religious tradition we find fundamentalist currents that endorse hate, discrimination, and violence (Appleby 2000; Jürgensmeyer 2003; Selengut 2003). Right-wing evangelicals support anti-abortionist violence and uphold websites like [www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com). Islamic fundamentalists draw on the language of Jihad in their cultural conflict with western Christianity. Hindu extremists have been found to destroy churches and attack Muslim minorities in India, and Zionists engage in militant action for the Promised Land. But it is not only these religious extremes that refute the image of peaceful religion. Mainstream believers in most religious traditions believe that theirs is the only road to salvation and that full and equal acceptance of others would be a betrayal of their deepest religious

convictions, as is evidenced in the hot-tempered debates on homosexuality, marriage, and ordination.

A second response to the question would be that general statements about the connection between religion and violence are false by definition. Until now research has yielded contradictory results about the impact of religion on the occurrence of violence and the responses to it. The 'ambivalence of the Sacred' (Jürgensmeyer 2003) is precisely that religion seems to be a powerful contributor to violence as well as a unique source of reconciliation and peacemaking. If we try to unravel this complex relationship, we have to account for the variety in and between religious traditions, the different effects of dimensions of religion, and the many forms, causes, and effects of violence. Furthermore, we have to explicate the perspective we take in addressing the question. The psychological perspective taken in this chapter will result in answers that may differ from sociological, economic, or theological perspectives.

There is one final differentiation that will guide the present approach. Especially in a psychological perspective, we strive to account for individual differences. In the case of violence, this implies that we have to distinguish between the various positions involved. To investigate the violence-religion-nexus is different for victims than it is for aggressors or bystanders (Ganzevoort & Veerman 2000; Twemlow 2000). These three positions are similar to the three roles in the Karpman 'drama triangle': perpetrator, rescuer, and victim. The assumption is that these roles cannot be reduced to one another, and that individuals may shift roles in their relational transactions. In the analysis of violence, the roles of the aggressor, victim, and bystander imply one another and eventually they can only be analyzed in their interactions. For a psychological understanding of the connection with religion, however, we will need separate analyses to discover the intricacies. The psychology of aggression and violence is different from the psychology of traumatization or of witnessing violence. Religion will prove to play a different role in each of these perspectives.

Before we move on to the discussion of these specific positions, we have to address the difficult question of defining violence. This is a complex issue for several reasons. First, the common reduction in definitions of violence to observable physical injury fails to capture the many forms of mental or spiritual oppression and the power of symbolic desecration (e.g., the pulling down of Saddam Hussein's statue by US Marines). This is all the more at stake when we investigate the connections with religion. This reduction also ignores violent structures and cultures. Second, the application of any definition of violence to actual events is more than grouping phenomena into objective theoretical categories. It is also a social construction in which moral judgment and social powers are expressed. To define an act as violent is a performative action, grounded in the power of definition. The difference between liberationist actions and guerilla violence is after all a matter of perspective. Third, in my view violence cannot be defined by a higher-order category. Human behavior, for example, does not satisfy as such, because violence is not only present in behavior, but also in

structures, texts, and so on. It is no coincidence that religion, myths and literature have often described violence, or evil, as being superhuman, supernatural. I therefore take violence, like for instance love and religion, as a concept *sui generis* that can be indicated but not defined conclusively. Our efforts to define violence are necessary in discussing it, but they stop short of decisively capturing the nature of violence. There is something surpassing the conceptualization, that Girard (1977) called 'originary violence'. I will return to that at the end of the chapter. As a working definition, rather than a conceptual comprehension, let me suggest that violence at least indicates the exertion of force and the infliction of harm. This meager definition will suffice to discuss the three positions of aggressor, victim, and bystander.

## THE AGGRESSOR

The question how and why people come to commit violence has been the topic of much psychological research and theorizing. Tedeschi & Felson (1994) and Wiehe (1998) have provided insightful overviews of such approaches. A biological explanation of violence is often discarded as oversimplified, but that does not rule out the biological factor. Research suggests that violent behavior and stress reinforce one another at the neurophysiological level (Kruk et al. 2004). In other research, clear relations are found between violence and hormone levels (especially testosterone; Soler, Vinayak, & Quadagno 2000), and between violence and brain function in particular areas (Raine et al. 2000).

Psychoanalytic theories of violence usually take some sort of frustration as their starting point, focusing on early parental relationships or later experiences. Whether or not frustration leads to violence is thought to depend on facilitating and inhibiting factors (Tedeschi & Felson 1994). The fact that many aggressors have antecedents of trauma and neglect is interpreted as illustration of the frustration-thesis (cf. Fonagy 2001). As a case study for a combination of psychoanalytic theories, Twemlow (2000) described the Columbine High School massacre, in which two victims of bullying and rejection, possibly inspired by violent videogames (Doom), turned into cold-blooded murderers.

This case study includes an element that is focused on in a third type of explanations for violence, social learning theories. Bandura (1973) claimed that aggression results from the learning process called behavior modeling. In this view, violence is not innate or resulting from injurious experiences but modeled after observing others, either personally or through the media and environment. An important factor in this is the belief that aggression produces reinforcements, such as the reduction of tension, financial rewards, the praise of others, or self-esteem. Although social learning theories still play a significant role in the discussion (Lehner-Hartmann 2002), research shows that watching violence on television affects only a limited number of individuals (Tedeschi & Felson 1994).

The fourth type of theories builds on the notion of reinforcements and gratification. In these theories, sometimes inspired by Rational Choice Theory, the

aim of violence is understood as being the gain of status, possessions, or power. Tedeschi & Felson (2004) developed a social-interactionist theory in which violence or coercion serves specific social purposes: a) influencing others to achieve something; b) expressing grievances and establishing subjective justice; c) enhancing or defending social identities. The decision-making process resulting in coercive actions is influenced by the position of power, the cost-benefit analysis, and the use of alcohol.

These four theories represent different positions on the nature-nurture continuum. They also reflect a different take on the relationship between the individual and the social context. Whereas psychoanalytic and social learning theories focus on the impact of the social context on the individual, biological and social-interactionist theories stress the actions of the individual toward the social context. Combinations of these approaches are probably the most fruitful avenues to investigate violence.

In the end however, all these theories regard individual violence. A much-needed complement is therefore found in theories of collective violence often originating in sociology or social psychology. Genocides and terrorist attacks cannot be interpreted satisfactorily by individualistic theories (Suárez-Orozco & Robben 2000). Covert violent processes like racism, sexism, and homophobia are likewise of a collective rather than individual nature. Systems theories address collective violence at the micro level of families and small groups. To account for violence that is not located in particular actions, but operates through unequal structures and disadvantaging social institutions, Galtung (1969) coined the term 'structural violence'.

All these approaches can contribute to our understanding of the connection of violence and religion. As for the biological dimension, our knowledge of the neurological basis of religion is still very limited (Newberg, D'Aquili, & Rause 2002), so that the biological connection between violence and religion cannot as yet be established. In this perspective, religion may at least serve as one of the cultural factors mitigating innate aggression. Social learning theories can be applied to both religion and violence, and the interaction involves at least the religious models both of peacemaking and of violence. As indicated above, many religious traditions offer an ambiguous message when it comes to violence. In fact, some of the most important stories from these traditions are utterly violent, and it is precisely these religious stories that may function to model the religious roles we take up and the intervention of God we anticipate (Sundén 1975).

Specific research on the religion-violence connection in aggressors can be found in several areas. The first is strong evidence for the correlation between religion and prejudice. Although prejudice in itself does not equate violent behavior, it can be seen as being in the same range. Besides some data showing that religiosity correlates with prosocial behavior, there is much more consistent proof that religion correlates with ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, dogmatism, and prejudice

against particularly Jews and blacks. This relation seems to be curvilinear, with highest levels of prejudice for the moderately religious (Wulff 1991).

It is no surprise that the same correlational pattern emerges in several studies of perpetrators of violence. Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri (1992) found that religious involvement as measured by church attendance was related to spousal violence in a weak curvilinear way. Differentiating involvement and tradition in her investigation of victims of sexual abuse, Elliott (1994) found lower rates of abuse for religiously active conservative Christian families, and higher rates for religiously non-active conservatives. Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer (2002) found an inverse correlation between church attendance and intimate partner violence. Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson (1999) also discovered an inverse correlation between church attendance and self-reported perpetration of domestic violence. Men who held much more conservative theological views than their partners were also more likely to commit domestic violence. Brutz & Allen (1986) found that in Quaker subjects high levels of peace activism (related to religious commitment) correlated with low levels of marital violence for women, but with high levels for men. This suggests that a gender factor should be taken into account (cf. Bowker 1998 ed.; Liddle 1993). In other studies alcohol related problems (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer 2002) or spousal interaction factors (Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri 1992) seemed to be stronger predictors of violence, questioning the effect of religion per se. Benda (1995) found no relation between religion and crimes against persons for adolescent subjects. To summarize, there seems to be no relation with religious tradition, and only a weak (possibly curvilinear) correlation with religious involvement.

The second area of research can be found in social psychological and sociological studies of religious violence. These researchers claim that religious violence can only be understood properly if the religious dimension is taken seriously. Even if in general the correlation between religion and violence is weak or disputed, and contrary to religious people's tendency to distance themselves from the militants by claiming that true religion excludes violence, specific case studies show how the religious dimension is inextricable from the complex of violence. Selengut (2003) has identified some key elements in the understanding of religious violence. The first is the basis for the justification of violence in the religious texts of the religious traditions. These texts provide a frame of reference for holy warriors that is stronger than the social or legal barriers to violence. For the second element, the psychological one, Selengut mentions selectively the Freudian unconscious, Girardian mimetic desire, and cognitive dissonance theory. The third element is the apocalyptic self-understanding of certain religious groups and cults, resulting in utopian communities and a propensity to violence. The fourth element is Huntington's 'clash of civilizations', in which group identities are symbolized at the religious level. The fifth element, touching on the psychological again, is the notion of suffering and martyrdom that may easily stimulate victims to endure violence rather than resist it. For Juergensmeyer (2003), the unifying concept in interpreting religious violence is performance. The performance

dimension of violence resembles religious ritual and builds on the tendency of religious imagination to become absolutized. Religious violence takes place in a battle on symbolic power and truth and is grounded in a metaphysical perspective of a cosmic war between good and evil, involving martyrs and demons (splitting).

To end this section, we cannot conclude to a direct effect of religion on violence in general. Aggressors, especially in situations of patriarchal power, may use religion as a justification for their actions. In religiously inspired violence, religion obviously plays a much more direct role.

## THE VICTIM

The second position in violence is that of the victim. Again, I am not simplifying violent exchanges by labeling individuals as either aggressors or victims, but describing the positions each person can occupy. For victims the most important psychological concept is traumatization. Considering the widespread use of the term, we may easily forget that in its current version it is a rather young concept. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was included in DSM only in the third edition (1980) and its description and criteria have since been changed a few times. For our purposes some general remarks about the contested concept and its application will do.

The history of the concept of traumatization shows alternating periods of attention and disregard (Herman 1992). Freud for example concluded from his research that hysterical symptoms were related to traumatic experiences, notably sexual abuse. Societal rejection of his focus on abuse and/or his own unease with the trauma perspective led him to abandon this theory in favor of a theory of infantile sexuality (Kleber & Brom 1992). It was only in the last two decades that feminist attention for sexual abuse revived the trauma-perspective for domestic and sexual violence. A second threat of investigations followed several twentieth century wars and the ensuing treatment of veterans. These two strands of trauma-research both have a major confrontation with violence as their starting point. When they converged and gained social momentum, a specific DSM-category was created for PTSD that differs from all other diagnoses in that it offers an external etiological dimension next to the phenomenological criteria. The description of the stressor has changed from "... recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone" in DSM-III to an event "... outside the range of normal experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone..." in DSM-III R to the much more specific DSM-IV description of confrontation with "actual threat or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others", further requiring that "the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror."

Criteria for PTSD fall into three groups of symptoms. The first group includes of reexperiencing the traumatic event through intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares and the like. The second group counts persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness. The third

group contains persistent symptoms of increased arousal. Reexperiencing and avoidance can be seen as complementary and mutually enforcing processes. Some researchers distinguish between two types of trauma. The first type can be characterized as incidental traumatization and can result in PTSD as described. The second type is structural traumatization, occurring within and through structures of domination and oppression, and possibly resulting in complex PTSD and a variety of other disorders (Terr 1991; Herman 1992).

Although the concept of trauma, more specifically PTSD, has become an important category, fundamental criticisms remain. It is argued that in many cases violence and other extreme stressors continue to dominate lives of victims, so that 'post' is actually a misleading prefix. The term 'disorder' is morally inadequate, in that it focuses on individual problems and suggests that the victim is disordered instead of harmed. It is precisely in this way that Human Rights violators use the term as a means of oppression and social exclusion (Becker 1995). The individual focus may also represent a western bias, as does the list of criteria (Summerfield 1995). Finally, the relation between the traumatizing stressful event and the ensuing syndrome is empirically not well established. In most samples of veterans and sexual abuse survivors, prevalence of PTSD did not reach levels over 10-25% (Kleber & Brom 1991). The postulated etiology is important in many social and legal contexts, but psychologically debatable (McFarlane 1995).

All this of course does not suggest that violence does not harm people. It merely challenges the uncritical use of concepts like trauma and PTSD. Victims of violence can certainly develop serious problems, but that depends on more than the severity of the violence. Among other variables, social support, style of attribution, and coping mediate the effects of violent experiences on trauma-symptoms (Gold et al. 1994). Cultural and religious influences may also influence resilience to the effects of trauma (Doxley, Jensen, & Jensen 1997; Maercker & Herrle 2003). A relatively new field of research seeks to identify possibilities of posttraumatic growth (Bonanno 2004; Calhoun & Tedeschi eds. forthcoming; Linley & Joseph 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996).

In these emerging fields, spirituality and religion are awarded a somewhat prominent place (Ai & Park 2005). The importance to integrate spirituality in treatment of victims is often stressed (e.g., Beveridge & Cheung 2004). Fontana & Rosenheck (2004) discovered that guilt and weakened religious faith are central to the prolonged use of mental health services and concluded that questions of meaning and spirituality deserve more attention in the treatment of PTSD. Connor, Davidson, & Lee (2003) found for survivors of violent trauma that general spiritual beliefs were associated with physical and mental health, trauma-related distress, and posttraumatic symptom severity. Cadell, Regehr, & Hemsworth (2003) found spirituality to be positively related with growth. Other researchers, however, found little or no effect for religion (Krejci et al. 2004). More research is needed to specify the conditions for religion to have a salutary effect.

The other side of the religion-violence interaction in victims of violence is the effect of traumatization on religiosity. Here again, the results are ambiguous. Falsetti, Resick, & Davis (2003) found in a DSM-IV field study that subjects diagnosed with PTSD were more likely to report changes in religious beliefs, generally becoming less religious. Traumatization was also found to affect representations of God as loving negatively, and representations as absent, or wrathful positively, but only in cases of severe traumatization or complex PTSD (Doehring 1993). Rosetti (1995) and McLaughlin (1994) found distinct negative effects of clergy sexual abuse on victims' spirituality and church attendance. A gender factor appears in the finding that sexual abuse is predictive for non-religiosity, but only in men (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Lewis 1989).

These findings are put into perspective by other studies showing less or contrasting effects. Kennedy & Drebing (2002) discovered a relation between experiences of sexual abuse and transcendent religious experiences as well as with feelings of alienation from God, but not with conventional religious behavior. Overcash et al. (1996) found only limited changes in religious convictions. Instead, the metaphysical religious assumptions seemed to have provided a framework for understanding and coping with trauma. Carmil & Breznitz (1991) investigated long term consequences of the Holocaust and found counterintuitively that survivors and survivors' offspring expressed greater belief in God and greater belief in a better future. Elliott (1994) found in a large sample of professional women that religious practice decreased for conservative Christians following sexual abuse (especially inside the immediate family), but increased for agnostics, atheists, and adherents of other religious faiths. Her hypothesis is that this differentiation may result from the different role of the father-image: problematic for conservative Christians and a viable alternative for others. The analysis of the narrative construction of male victims of sexual abuse supports this hypothesis in that these men sought to construe religious counterstories that might offer meaningful alternatives (Ganzevoort 2002). Based on their findings of an increase of post-trauma spirituality for a majority of their sample of sexually assaulted women, strongly correlated with well-being, Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor (1998) hypothesized that traumatic events reduce well-being, invoking an increase in spirituality to restore well-being. Obviously, these studies are too diverse in types of violence, severity of traumatization, measures of religion, and outcomes to provide a meaningful synthesis. We are only beginning to understand the different effects victimization may have on religion for different persons in different situations.

There are, however, other clues to the connection of violence and religion with victims. Building on the work of Parkes (1971), Janoff-Bulman (1992) has identified three fundamental assumptions or generalized representations that develop in early childhood through social interaction and govern our interpretations. These assumptions concern the meaningfulness of the world, the benevolence of the world, and the worth of the self. Traumatization shatters these assumptions and confronts the individual with utter fragility and vulnerability.



Severe and early traumatization causes more serious threats to the assumptions. The framework Janoff-Bulman has developed has great potential for exploring the connection with religion, because the three fundamental assumptions can be seen as three core elements of religion. The meaningfulness of the world parallels divine sovereignty and providence, benevolence parallels divine grace and relationship, and self-worth parallels being accepted. Eventually, God can be seen as a symbolization of the fundamental assumptions (Doka 2002). These parallels can help us understand the complexities of the interaction of violence and religion. As fundamental assumptions, religion tends to be a rather resistant system of meaning, accepting assimilation but withstanding accommodation. This means that even in traumatization religion tends to remain a resource for coping, unless traumatization is severe and mitigating factors and resources are lacking. In such a case, transcendent religious experiences may occur as well as loss of faith, two forms of accommodation.

To end this section, we conclude that the violence-religion interaction for victims warrants more research. Drawing on research in the fields of religious coping (Pargament 1997), forgiveness (Freedman & Enright 1996) and posttraumatic growth, we can move to more differentiated inquiries, accounting for the different dimensions of religion and the fundamental assumptions that are at stake. One avenue in this research would be the differentiation between violent traumatization and tragic events. If, as stated in the introduction, the concept of violence implies moral judgment, then we may expect that individuals who interpret their experiences as violence – or: malice – will turn to different religious coping strategies and invoke a different theodicy or cosmodycy than individuals who interpret their experiences as tragedy (Ganzevoort 2005a). such a distinction has not yet been made in religious coping research.

## THE BYSTANDER

The third position is dubbed ‘bystander’, to include a variety of roles witnessing violence. In the Karpman drama triangle this is the rescuer, seeking to intervene on behalf of the victim. In other cases, however, passing judgment, endorsing the violence, or merely witnessing the horrific may define the role of the bystander. In discussing the various roles of the bystander, I will focus on the religious community.

My discussion will start with watching violence. This is an area of scarce research but major relevance. The collection of essays “Why we watch” (Goldstein 1998 ed.) explores the meaning of watching violent sports, videogames, cinema, television, and religion. It is claimed that violence is and has been an important element in popular culture, evidenced by gladiator fights, medieval tournaments, action games, horror movies, and so on. Apparently, viewing violence – both real and fictional – has a certain appeal. A gender difference is found in that boys and men usually show more interest in watching violence than do girls and women. Several hypotheses for explaining the attraction of violence are passed in review:

thrill seeking (or even picking forbidden fruits), sex role reinforcement, mood management, and more.

The effects of watching violence are quite diverse. Research has consistently shown a correlation between watching violence and subsequent aggressive or violent behavior. There are also reports of subsequent apathy (Drabman & Thomas 1976) or heightened stress and possible traumatization following the viewing of violence (Schuster et al. 2001). These differences display how in viewing violence the individual can move from the role of the bystander to the role of the aggressor or that of the victim.

The connection of viewing violence and religion is not coincidental. To begin with, watching violence has a certain ominous quality that appeals and appals. It seems meaningful to understand violence as a dimension of the Sacred in its life-giving and destructive shapes. The *mysterium tremendum ac fascinans* (Otto) is found also in violence and it is here that taboos serve to control the encounter with the Sacred (Ganzevoort 2004). A second direct connection between watching violence and religion is found in the violent images and stories that characterize the religious traditions. Literal violence appears in stories of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the crucifixion, and the last judgment. It is also present in certain religious practices like (animal) sacrifice, initiation rituals (like circumcision) or religiously inspired terror. On the symbolic level, crucial rituals like the eucharist (sacrifice) and baptism (drowning) express metaphorical violence (Bloch 1998). Religious imagery is usually packed with violence, as we can see in the many saints and martyrs. This inevitably sanctions viewing violence. Notwithstanding the controversy it evoked, Mel Gibson's movie "The passion of the Christ" (2004) is therefore to be understood as fitting into a tradition of religious approval of violence (Interestingly, the movie reached a ninth position in box office revenues in the USA and only nr 64 in the rest of the world).

In a study of anthropological and developmental psychological aspects of blood sacrifices, Beers (1992) has attended to the gender dimension. He explores how narcissistic anxiety fuels rituals and social structures that subordinate women. This exploration starts by the observation that traditionally only men perform sacrifice. This gender specificity of sacrifice can be traced to gender-specific developments of men and women and is reflected in religions throughout the world. According to Beers, the male violence of sacrifice is related to other forms of male violence. He therefore claims that such religious rituals have a psychological function that diminishes and controls women.

The religious authorization of violence can turn into outright complicity (Gudorf 1992). The role of the bystander can function to maintain the structures of violence. In many cases, the aggressors can perform their acts of violence without consequences because they operate in a social system that endorses their position of power. As a consequence of this support, such acts are not even labeled as violence. This is central to the debate over patriarchy and domestic violence, as well as to research on clergy malfeasance (Shupe 1998 ed.). Although religious

communities like to think of themselves as bystanders in the role of rescuer or righteous judge, victims of violence may feel betrayed by their religious community and accuse it of being allies with the aggressor. In this turbulence, the claimed victim may become the scapegoat of the community, or the alleged perpetrator may become the object of an unbearable witch-hunt. Community responses to violence are sometimes even more violent (Ganzevoort & Veerman 2000).

It is not easy to acknowledge possible complicity or to address the question whether the community's religion has fostered violence. Churches (for example) are quick to pledge allegiance to victims of terror and domestic violence, sometimes even reworking their theology into a "preferential option for the poor". They usually refuse to see that violence is part of their tradition, community life, and religious heritage. Mainstream Christianity has developed an idyllic picture of humans of good will at ease with a benign God. Evil is usually limited to contingency, or located outside as in Pentecostal views of spiritual warfare or liberationist approaches to oppression. We have succeeded in dislocating, mystifying the violence within ourselves, our congregations, and our gods.

This idyllic view is exposed as an illusion when the stranger appears. Exploring this theme helps us to move from an understanding of responses to violence to insight in complicity to violence. A telling example is found in the position of gay and lesbian persons in the church (see the chapter by Horne & Lease). As initially invisible strangers, they often experience alienation and loneliness, especially when their community expresses rejection or patronizing pastoral mercy. To be treated as a stranger is for many tantamount to being expelled from the community. Although such actions and views of religious communities are authorized by their traditions, they are properly interpreted as cultural violence, parallel to what has come to be known as homophobia. Like racism and sexism, heterosexism or homophobia is a form of violence against strangeness. The sexual dimension of the conflict may be of secondary significance (Plummer 1999).

In terms of social psychology, group identity is built on the difference between ingroup and outgroup (cf. Brown 1988). Therefore, any group (religious community in this case) endeavors to increase inside conformity and decrease the similarity with the outside. Successful communities have a clear boundary and some sense of exclusivism (Stark 1996). The community always demands a minimum of exclusive dedication. Non-exclusive religious organizations can offer religious services, but they are not capable of creating a group or congregation. The exclusive organization, in contrast, has more to offer to its participants in terms of plausibility and validated religious experience and behavior. This exclusivism may be labeled violent because it forces its members to conform and to bring sacrifices: material offerings, intellectual adaptation, and a restraint of the freedom to speak or act. The religious community invokes divine powers to achieve this and the resistance to this force equals resistance to God. At the same

time, the encounter with the outside or with other religious groups represents a conflict of truth claims, a conflict of gods so to speak.

To end this section, in the role of the bystander the connection between religion and violence is usually rather opaque because complicity, social exclusion, outgroup aversion, and cultural violence are not acknowledged as such. Instead, bystanders claim a more neutral or beneficent role. It is, however, precisely in the role of the bystander that religion and violence may be most closely knitted together.

## INTEGRATION

The task in the remainder of this chapter is to search for an integrative framework that connects the insights from the three perspectives. I take my starting point in the work of René Girard (1977). In his study of violence and the sacred, Girard rejects the common Freudian interpretation that the sacred is based in the sexual and instead proposes a close connection between the sacred and violence, just like discussed in this chapter. This newer perspective parallels the recent view of sexual violence as being primarily violence and only secondarily sexual. Girard speaks of 'originary violence' that hides behind religion and appears in a mystified form in the category of sacrifice. According to him, mimetic desire is at the heart of human interactions: people develop their desires by imitating others in appropriating objects. This gives rise to mimetic rivalry because the model of desire turns out to be an obstacle in appropriating the desired object. As the model and the follower become more alike in their desire, rivalry turns into conflict and violence erupts. Violence itself is imitated as well in the form of vengeance, evoking a vicious circle of violence. Because rivalry and violence are contagious, societies need assuaging processes.

Ritual sacrifice, as Girard describes it, aims at diverting vengeance and thus at breaking the vicious circle of violence. For that purpose, it employs the precise means of the original violence: blood and killing. All the methods that cultural innovation has yielded serve to divert or mitigate this vengeance. To the degree that they become more effective, they obscure the fact that they themselves are forms of vengeance. The most successful in this respect is the legal system as we know it today. The – contested – abolition of the death penalty then may be seen as the final obscuration of the violence inherent to the system.

Religion is another system intended to break the circle of violence by mystifying and assuaging mimetic violence. The obscured connection between religion and violence as discussed in the previous section of this chapter may be an indication of this mystification. The only way to free religion from its violent dimensions would lie in the unmasking of this unholy alliance. In doing so, however, we would destroy the ritual assuaging potential of religion and thus give way to unbridled violence. At this point Girard claims that the Judeo-Christian revelation offers an exception to mimetic rivalry, but that remains a questionable claim (De Vries 2002). The empirical material reviewed in this chapter at least does not

warrant such a claim. For Girard then, religion does not deny or repress violence, but provides a lightning rod through ritualization. Where symbolic sacrifice does not work any more, real violence is needed to unleash the collective aggression.

How would the approach of Girard as outlined here account for the three perspectives as discussed? Space limits prohibit more than the indication of some elements that merit further investigation.

Firstly, the notion of originary violence suggests that aggression belongs to the natural order of things (Ellul 1969). This is not a normative statement, but a descriptive one. It implies that violent behavior is not the result of religion in general or of specific religious structures or elements. Although (ambiguous) correlations can be found between religion and violent behavior, it seems inadequate to treat violence as a variable dependent of religion. The ambivalence of the Sacred is maybe not that religion is the origin or source of violence, but that it offers a mystification and authorization of violence as well as resistance to it. This approach seems to do justice to the findings concerning the biological basis of violence. Girardian theory of mimetic desire and rivalry also neatly accommodates frustration theories and learning theories of violence. Modeling and the lack of desired objects are in Girard's view the key to violence.

Secondly, The weak and curvilinear relation between religion on the one hand and prejudice and violence on the other suggests not only that religion and violence are relatively independent, but also that the two are similar in certain respects. Conservatism, authoritarianism, prejudice (and possibly exclusivist monotheism) are attitudes in which religion and violence merge rather easily. For the moderately religious or the non-active conservatives, the particulars of religion do not withstand violence. For the religiously active there seems to be a clearer distinction between religion and violence. Fundamentalists, however, do not fit this picture. Their religious activity is framed in a mindset that cannot exclude violence. Perhaps they may be seen as enacting the ritualized violence Girard describes.

Thirdly, the effect of violence on religion in the victim can also be understood in this framework. The parallel between religion and violence seems apparent from the effects of traumatization on the fundamental assumptions, religious behavior, and God representations. The dissimilarity accounts for the possibility of posttraumatic growth and transcendent religious experiences. On the individual level as on the cultural, religion may offer a ritualized perspective of dealing with violence.

Fourthly, the role of the victim evoked a discussion about the adequacy of concepts like trauma and PTSD. The criticism connects to the Girardian notion of the scapegoat. This figure serves to divert the aggression and set society free from a vicious circle of violence. In many cases of domestic and intergroup violence, such mechanisms can be observed, but it seems that the concept of PTSD can have the same effect in blaming the victim for the violence inflicted by the aggressor. The symbolic and ritual potential of religion, and religious strategies

like forgiveness seem to provide viable alternatives to vengeance and resentment. They even seem to foster posttraumatic growth.

Fifthly, watching violent entertainment can in part be understood as a ritualized detour for the violent impulses, parallel to the violent rituals, images, and stories from the religious traditions. In both cases, however, this detour is no safeguard against the mimetic contagion of violence. If anything, it may foster violent behavior. The endorsement of religious communities for violent behaviors and exclusion of 'strangers' shows that religion is not necessarily harmless.

Sixthly, in all three positions examined, we encountered gender differences in violence and religion. To a degree, this may be related to the biological basis of violence, but it also begs further critical analysis of the ways in which religion serves to authorize masculine violence. More profound maybe would be the inquiry as to how both violence and religion are used to maintain masculine (heterosexist) dominance. Especially the combination of invoking religious claims and incidents of physical and cultural violence has served to oppress women and non-heterosexual men.

Seventhly, there is no aggressor without a victim or bystander, and the other ways around. These positions imply one another, and together make up the drama of violence and religion. The role-play of religious ritual symbolizes this drama parallel to violent interactions. Our insight into religion could benefit from the analysis of human interactions with the sacred as enactments of the aggressor-victim-bystander triangle.

## CONCLUSION

Far from presenting a clear-cut picture of the connections between religion and violence, this chapter has sought to offer some necessary differentiations. Aggressors, victims, and bystanders each deal with different aspects of the violent-religion nexus. For all three, however, an ambiguous yet intimate connection between religion and violence was found that can be interpreted in a Girardian perspective.

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