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Cooled Down Love and an Overheated Atmosphere

René Girard on Ecology and Apocalypticism
in the Anthropocene

PETRA STEINMAIR-PÖSEL

At the beginning of his last comprehensive work, *Battling to the End*, the renowned cultural anthropologist René Girard characterizes our present world as an apocalyptic era—a time when both the threatening and saving potentials of humanity are dramatically increasing. Though his main focus is not the destruction of human habitats, such as rising sea levels or extreme weather events resulting from anthropogenic global warming, but rather violence escalating to the extremes, his prophetic voice nevertheless contributes to understanding the ambivalent role of religions—and especially the Judeo-Christian tradition—in the Anthropocene.

In this article I advance this hypothesis in four steps. First, I give a very brief introduction to crucial aspects of Girard's mimetic theory. Second, I turn to Girard's diagnosis of our time as apocalyptic and specify his understanding of apocalypticism. Third, against this background, I elaborate

on the ambivalent role of Christianity in the Anthropocene, illuminating the explanatory surplus of mimetic theory in relation to other approaches. Finally, in my conclusion, I argue for a profound connection between Christian social ethics and spirituality.

MIMETIC THEORY IN A NUTSHELL

Briefly, Girard's theory can be examined in three steps: mimetic desire,¹ the scapegoat mechanism,² and the role of the Judeo-Christian tradition.³ The foundation of Girard's thought—chronologically as well as systematically—is the insight that as human beings we are deeply mimetic. This does not simply mean that we learn by imitating others on a superficial level—something that can be shown easily with children learning to speak, etc. Rather, our mimetic nature causes us to desire what we perceive or suspect others to desire. Feeling deeply a lack of something but not knowing of what, we turn to others, hoping that their desires will indicate what we should seek to satisfy this lack. This mimetic turn to the other readily engenders rivalry: striving for the same things, humans are not only models for one another, they also become obstacles to achieving or possessing the desired objects and thus become rivals. Again, an example involving children may illustrate this point: imagine a group of children playing in a room, where each child receives one of an identical set of balls. Despite each having an identical ball, the chances are high that conflict will arise because two or more children want to play with one particular ball. In short, most of the time we do not desire objects because of their intrinsic value but because of their social significance.

According to Girard, this conflictive aspect of mimetic desire would have caused violence to escalate until whole populations were annihilated if there had not been a mechanism to stop the mounting violence. Girard calls this the scapegoat mechanism. Drawing on ancient myths, he finds traits of this mechanism at the roots of different cultures. In every case, it is a single victim on whom all the aggression and violence of a group is—unconsciously—projected. Consequently, this individual appears monstrous, responsible for all the evil that threatens the group, and is killed. With all the aggression transferred to this single victim, the group experiences itself miraculously healed from their violence after the victim's death—the

1. Girard gave a first comprehensive account of mimetic desire in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

2. See Girard, *Violence*.

3. See Girard, *Satan*.

extinguished victim is suddenly recognized not only as monstrous culprit but also as divine savior who brought peace to the previously conflict-laden community. In this way, the archaic sacred is born and with it archaic religion with its myths, (sacrificial) rites, and taboos. According to Girard, sacrificial rites are attempts to reproduce the mysterious event that miraculously brought peace to the community. Myths are the way perpetrators remember what happened when the single victim was killed in what Girard describes as a founding murder. Thus, archaic religions, which stem from this event, put fetters on the escalation of antagonistic and undifferentiating mimetic desire. Religious taboos try to safeguard against anything that might provoke the spread of mimetically fueled violence. These are, according to Girard, not only the roots of all archaic religions but also the origins of cultures and judicial systems. Humanity would not have survived without them.

The Judeo-Christian tradition plays a special role in this whole setting. While in the archaic religions the perpetrators believed in the guilt and monstrosity of their victims (indeed, they never perceived them as “victims” but only divinized them after their death), the Bible talks about victims very openly and in a different way. Here, for the first time, the victim is described as innocent—from the victims of the psalms of lament to the ultimate victim, Jesus. The text does not side with the crowd, like in the myths, but with the victim. Thus, the text reveals the victim’s innocence and suspends the scapegoat mechanism, since: “A scapegoat remains effective as long as we believe in its guilt. Having a scapegoat means not knowing that we have one. Learning that we have a scapegoat is to lose it forever and to expose ourselves to mimetic conflicts with no possible resolution.”⁴

In this sense, though resembling archaic religions, the Judeo-Christian tradition puts an end to sacrificial religion. Even though in history we find intermediate forms, like sacrificial Christianity, which interpreted Jesus’ life and death in terms of archaic sacrificial religions, in the long run the Judeo-Christian tradition rendered this kind of violent containment of violence ineffective. And all of the social institutions that are somehow rooted in the scapegoat mechanism, like the law and our economic system,⁵ are doomed to suffer the same fate, but not without, in the process of diminishing, asking for more and more victims as the scapegoat mechanism loses its effectiveness for taming violence.

4. Girard and Chantre, *Battling*, xiv.

5. On law, see *ibid.*, 108.

LIVING IN APOCALYPTIC TIMES

This is where Girard's diagnosis of our time as an apocalyptic era is relevant. Girard describes our period as a time marked by an "escalation to the extremes," a notion he finds in the writings of the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz. He attributes this development to a certain reception of the Judeo-Christian tradition: "By revealing the founding murder, Christianity destroyed the ignorance and superstition that are indispensable" to archaic religions;⁶ in doing so, it "made possible an advance in knowledge that was until then unimaginable."⁷

Freed of sacrificial constraints, the human mind invented science, technology and all the best and worst of culture. Our civilization is the most creative and powerful ever known, but also the most fragile and threatened because it no longer has the safety rails of archaic religion. Without sacrifice in the broad sense, it could destroy itself if it does not take care, which clearly it is not doing . . . The process of education away from violent sacrifice is thus underway, but it is going very slowly, making advances that are almost always unconscious. It is only today that it has had increasingly remarkable results in terms of our comfort, but has also proved ever more dangerous for the future of life on Earth.⁸

Against the background of these developments, the apocalyptic texts in the New Testament gain a new importance and meaning for Girard. This despite the fact that, as he critically observes, two world wars, the invention of nuclear weapons, multiple genocides, and the impending ecological crisis have not sufficed to convince most of humanity that these apocalyptic texts, though not exact predictions, nevertheless address the very threats we are actually facing. As an example, Girard quotes Matt 24:6-12, which talks about impending social and natural catastrophes:

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs . . . And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

6. *Ibid.*, xiii.

7. *Ibid.*, xiv.

8. *Ibid.*

Far from being obsolete, exactly those biblical texts, which until recently seemed to be most naïve and mythical by conflating natural and cultural phenomena, prove to be clear-sighted and realistic. And—with respect to, e.g., the accumulation of violent outbreaks in regions with water shortage or crop failure resulting from anthropogenic climate change (ACC)—it is hard not to notice some analogy between these biblical texts and the present time. Girard argues: “The confusion between nature and culture . . . is becoming unexpectedly relevant.”⁹ He talks about a form of “violence that has been unleashed across the whole world, creating what the apocalyptic texts predicted: confusion between disasters caused by nature and those caused by humans, between the natural and the man-made: global warming and rising waters are no longer metaphors today.”¹⁰ This very mixture of impending social and natural disaster, of human violence and ecological devastation, is in his view the misconceived truth of the biblical apocalyptic texts.

To understand Girard on this point, it is important to note that he speaks of violence in a broad sense. Based on the analyses of von Clausewitz, Girard understands the modern economy, especially with respect to trade, as being deeply related to violence. He even talks about an “equivalence between war and monetary exchange,” as both “*concern the same reality*”¹¹ and “if smooth settlement of exchanges degenerates into furious competition, a trade war can become a real war.”¹² Briefly summarizing his comprehensive arguments on this topic, we might say: trade and economy are ways of containing violence in a twofold sense—they limit violence but they also include it, like the archaic religions did. In the course of furious economic competition costs are externalized. Mostly, these costs concern natural resources like “raw material deposits, ecosystems, species and soil, bodies of water and thermal environments.”¹³ The terminology of “externalization” draws attention to the larger point: somebody or something is externalized, excluded in order to foster the well-being and growth of the collective. While in sacrificial religions the victims were sacrificed as scapegoats, in the context of modern economy the natural environment is sacrificed to maintain the flourishing of the economy. And flourishing in our present economy means growth, a continuing increase of sales and profits, a constant excess. Again, we are faced with an escalation to extremes. Thus,

9. Ibid., 114.

10. Ibid., x.

11. Ibid., 57.

12. Ibid., 59.

13. Scherhorn, “Nachhaltig wirtschaften,” 51.

with Girard, economy can be understood as an institution which should repress violence, but, as Michael Northcott argues, it represses violence at the expense of nature and those who suffer “raised sea levels in the Maldives, or of flooding in Bangladesh, or of rising food prices and declining crop production in Africa and the Arab world.”¹⁴ And as its effectiveness in taming violence diminishes, it produces more and more victims—and may even cause the end of the world as we know it.

In all of this, Girard’s apocalypticism is not due to some exaggerated pessimism or fascination with doom. It is an attitude similar to the “cosmic patriotism” described by G. K. Chesterton in his book *Orthodoxy*: beyond the pessimist’s resignation and the optimist’s naiveté, the realistic and deeply loyal view of the “cosmic patriot” seeks to raise hope and bring about change¹⁵—and this is exactly what Girard attempts to do.

Girard’s apocalypticism also resembles the attitude of the Old Testament prophets, who by their doom-saying wanted to wake up the sleeping consciences of their contemporaries and call them to *metanoia*. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, a French philosopher drawing on Girard’s work—by analyzing the sayings of the Old Testament prophets as well as Günter Anders’s re-narration of the biblical tale of the flood (which presents Noah as a prophet of doom who has grown tired of announcing a catastrophe that never comes)—has developed the notion of “enlightened doomsaying.”¹⁶ Without going into the sophisticated philosophical details by which he develops a whole new metaphysics of time, which he calls *projected time* in contrast to our everyday concept of *occurring time*, Dupuy’s notion of “enlightened doomsaying” can be described as

a ruse that works to wean humanity from its own violence, by making violence its destiny—a destiny that has neither intention nor purpose, but that threatens to make civilized life on earth extinct. The ruse consists in acting *as if* we will all be its victims, while at the same time keeping in mind that we alone are responsible for what happens to us. This double game, this stratagem, may be our only hope of salvation.¹⁷

14. Northcott, “Girard,” 298.

15. See Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.

16. Dupuy, *Short Treatise*, 9. Again, Dupuy’s purpose is similar to that of the Old Testament prophets as well as Girard. Referring to his earlier book *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé: Quand l’impossible est certain*, where he developed the notion of enlightened doomsaying, he writes: “Several years ago I wrote a book sketching the outlines of a philosophical attitude, which I call enlightened doomsaying, aimed at helping us protect ourselves from ourselves.”

17. Dupuy, *Short Treatise*, 56.

While Girard does not explicitly refer to the philosophical sophistry of Dupuy's "enlightened doomsaying," he very much acts like an enlightened doomsayer, urging "us to seize the opportunity presented by our ability to recognize systemic evil" and to abandon false securities and ineffective strategies to save ourselves.¹⁸

Thus, Girard argues that in order to find a way out of the crisis it is necessary to let go of some illusions, which I only briefly mention here. The first is the illusion that politics can save us. In contrast, Girard is convinced that the notion of a "trend to extremes" denotes exactly "the inability of politics to contain reciprocal, in other words, mimetic, increase of violence."¹⁹ Therefore, he claims "that we have entered an era when anthropology will become a more relevant tool than political science."²⁰ In practice, this means to leave behind the biased trust in the power of rationality, acknowledge the significance and radical character of violence, and, on the basis of that recognition, constitute an alternative kind of rationality.

A second illusion, connected to the first, is the hope that law will save us. On the contrary, Girard calls attention to the fact that legal systems originate in sacrifice and, therefore, that the weakening or abolition of sacrifice by the Judeo-Christian tradition eventually makes law crumble as well. Consequently, he doubts that we still live in a world where force yields to law. He perceives law to be finished: it "is failing everywhere, and even excellent jurists, whom I know well, no longer believe in it."²¹ While Girard does not plead for the abolition of the law or the constitutional state, he is reluctant to expect a solution to contemporary challenges through legal regulations and arrangements alone.

A third illusion is the idea that one can tame violence by constructing defenses. For Girard, this turns out to be a fatal error: the "one who believes he can control violence by setting up defenses is in fact controlled by violence. This is very important."²² Thus, by applying violence to defend oneself, one does not master violence but rather becomes its servant.

A fourth illusion that Girard calls his readers to let go of is the belief in human autonomy. In the context of mimetic theory, the human being turns out to be a creature that is profoundly and essentially related to others. Thus, mimetic theory even "tends to relativize the very possibility of

18. *Ibid.*, 58.

19. Girard and Chantre, *Battling*, xi.

20. *Ibid.*, 2.

21. *Ibid.*, 108.

22. *Ibid.*, 17.

introspection: going into oneself always means finding the other, the mediator, the person who orients my desires without being aware of it."²³

Finally, yet another illusion has to be overcome: the belief that one can escape mimetism. Girard himself admits that in certain phases he succumbed to this illusion, but in *Battling to the End* he finally states that we

cannot escape mimetism; we always participate in it in some way, and those who acknowledge it interest me more than those who try to dissimulate it. I became aware of this obvious point only gradually. I long tried to think of Christianity as in a higher position, but I have had to give up on that. I am now persuaded that *we have to think from inside mimetism*.²⁴

Thus, according to Girard, the solutions put forth to come to terms with unleashed violence and with the escalation to extremes, which in the economic realm lead to the externalization of costs and the increasing sacrifice of natural resources, "can no longer be military or political" nor can they consist in legal means or a deliberate escape from mimetic entanglements. In this situation he calls for "a new ethic."²⁵ But how can such a new ethic be achieved?

Girard asks us "to return to this exit out of religion that is only offered from within the demythified religion."²⁶ This demythified religion he finds in non-sacrificial Christianity. The way that would lead out of the crisis consists in following Christ and adopting the behavior recommended by him: "abstain completely from retaliation, and renounce the escalation to extremes."²⁷ In his earlier book, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard presents the imitation of Jesus as the only way to escape mimetic rivalry. Following Jesus can keep us away from mimetic rivalry because Jesus himself renounced any form of violence, retaliation, or striving for power or influence. Having kenotically emptied himself in order to be the perfect image of God, he asks us to imitate him and to act likewise. Thus, Girard asks for nothing less than profound conversion. According to him, only this conversion and radical discipleship can prevent the self-destruction of humanity.

23. *Ibid.*, 10.

24. *Ibid.*, 82.

25. *Ibid.*, 24.

26. *Ibid.*, 25.

27. *Ibid.*, 24.

WHAT GIRARD'S THEORY UNIQUELY OFFERS

Faced with this extremely ambitious and challenging hypothesis one may ask what more Girard's theory could offer in relation to other models dealing with the present ecological crisis. As representative of many other approaches, I discuss two here, with the awareness that all of this must remain vague and schematized in the short space available.

Like Girard, the renowned American economist Jeffrey Sachs says that humanity at the beginning of the twenty-first century is standing at an abyss, facing enormous opportunities but also huge challenges.²⁸ In his analysis, he largely agrees with the apocalyptic perspective of Girard, while also pointing to the fact that in order to overcome the impending catastrophe into which our current political and economic course is leading us, we have to overcome our rivalries. And although ecological problems take more precedence than with Girard, Sachs also talks about an amalgamation of ecological and social crises, pointing explicitly, for example, to violent outbreaks and wars caused by water shortages and droughts caused by ACC.²⁹ However, the two differ over the solution to these problems. Sachs optimistically trusts that humanity can save itself,³⁰ while Girard suggests that only under certain preconditions could humanity save itself. To do so, humanity would have to appropriate the insights offered by the Judeo-Christian tradition on the dangerous aspects of mimetic desire. In contrast, Sachs relies solely on his (admittedly good and reasonable) strategies: if humanity would only make the right, rational decisions and take appropriate measures and individual and political actions, it would be saved from the abyss. But, one may ask, if it is only a question of rationality and there are appropriate strategies to solve our problems, why have we still not solved these problems that are so severe as to threaten the well-being and survival of so many people and even that of our own children and grandchildren? Or does the problem rather consist in the fact that we are not as rational and autonomous as we suppose and that our actions and decisions are profoundly influenced by other factors as well? If that is the case, then Girard's notion of the mimetic nature of human beings and his hypothesis seem even more plausible: we have not solved our problems yet because we imitate the wrong models or because we imitate them in the wrong way.

The second approach I would like to mention briefly is that of the German economic ethicist Gerhard Scherhorn. Like Girard, Scherhorn

28. See Sachs, *Common Wealth*, 5.

29. See *ibid.*, 115–38.

30. See *ibid.*, 5.

problematizes our current economic system and describes the accumulation of capital as one of its main problems, which prevents sustainable economic activity and leads to the externalization of costs. Thus, if our natural habitats are to be protected, our economic system has to be modified. To achieve this goal, Scherhorn suggests political approaches, asking for measures to preserve common property, to avoid the externalization of costs, and to conserve spaces of subsistence. Last but not least, he also asks for more distributive justice, since sociological studies show that an unjust distribution of income and resources leads not only to poverty and illness but also to rising aggression and violence. Therefore, more personal modesty in the consumption of goods, politically enforced measures to increase distributive justice, legally enforced protection of common goods, and compulsory recycling of raw materials seem, to Scherhorn, to be appropriate for preventing the impending crisis. Like Sachs, Scherhorn suggests a political solution. However, one may again ask: why have these rational measures not been implemented? Are we lacking rationality and understanding or political implementation structures? Once again, Girard's diagnosis of the "inability of politics" seems to provide an answer to these questions.³¹

In contrast to these authors, the political philosophers Paul Dumouchel and Jean-Pierre Dupuy have proposed an understanding of the logic of economy based on mimetic theory. In their book *L'Enfer des Choses* they show the deeper reasons for the economy's tendency to the extremes. Based on the axiom of scarcity, the logic of economy says that goods and services are not available in the amounts that would be necessary to meet existing human needs. Therefore, production has to be increased to be able to meet the needs of everyone, to avoid conflictive scarcity, and to pave the way for peace and satisfaction. If there are finally enough goods and services for everyone and scarcity is overcome, then there will be peace and happiness. Dumouchel challenges this notion of scarcity by pointing to the phenomenon of social scarcity. Especially in those societies where traditional hierarchies and differences are diminishing, positional goods and status symbols introduce new differences. Thus, in the mimetic struggle for social status marked by prestige goods, the gap between human desires and available goods will never be bridged, even if production rose to an infinite level. In this sense, Dumouchel argues that scarcity will not be overcome but, rather, perpetually regenerated. Thus, he demonstrates the engine of economic escalation to the extremes.³²

31. *Ibid.*, xi.

32. Dumouchel, "L'Ambivalence."

Against this background it becomes evident why good arguments and rational strategies are less successful at reducing the ecological externalities of our economic system than we would hope. Bruno Latour and Ulrich Beck talk about a “great abyss between the dimension of the phenomenon [of global warming] and the change of thought and action that would be necessary to come to terms with the crisis.”³³

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we may summarize Girard’s position on ecology and apocalypticism as follows. There is some truth to the position of those who argue that Christianity is responsible for the immense ecological problems we are facing today: although it is not as plain as some suggest,³⁴ Christianity, by taking away the mythical/ritual fetters to our unlimited desires, is responsible for the crisis we are facing. However, according to Girard, though responsible for the detrimental effects of this unleashing of desires, in Jesus Christ Christianity also provides a way to cope with our mimetic nature. However, this path is not an easy one; it asks us to completely abstain from retaliation and to “renounce the escalation to extremes.”³⁵

Today, we are at a crossroads, with the return path blocked: we cannot really go back to the world of sacrificial religion and scapegoating—and where we try to, this leads to an enormous multiplication of victims. The massacres and genocides of the twentieth century bear witness to this. So, we can either continue on the path of mimetically unleashed desires, which will very likely lead to self-destruction, or we can finally open ourselves to the path offered by Christianity (and other spiritual traditions).³⁶ This path is based on the cultivation of a different kind of experience: here, the basic feeling is not one of separation, fear, or scarcity but universal unity, belonging, and abundance. It is often described as mystical experience or deep conversion and based on this experience a new way of life becomes possible. This is not, however, something that can be achieved with rational-

33. Selchow, “Die Apokalypse.”

34. Among others, the German author and environmental activist Carl Amery has argued that with the biblical mandate to rule over the world the Judeo-Christian tradition demystified nature and handed it over to human exploitation and degradation. Amery, *Das Ende*, 122.

35. Girard and Chantre, *Battling*, xiv.

36. While in *Battling to the End* Girard mainly refers to the Judeo-Christian tradition, I suggest his analysis can also pertain to other major religious traditions. However, justifying this broadening in a Girardian context would go beyond the scope of this article.

ity and willpower alone; rather, it relies on something the theological tradition calls grace. Taking the path of grace and shedding our economic fears of scarcity cannot be forced and institutionalized. Nevertheless, it suggests that to come to terms with the great impending problems like the ecological crisis in the Anthropocene, Christian social ethicists are well advised to rely not only on moral appeals and arguments but also to increasingly consider Christianity's spiritual resources.

In his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis shows he is well aware of this fact when—quoting the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew—he writes about the “spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms.”³⁷ Rather, “the rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity.”³⁸ This contribution does not consist in mere doctrine and theoretical teaching but in a spirituality, or rather a multitude of spiritualities, lived out and handed on by concrete people.

In other words, in the Christian spiritual tradition there is a great “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) for an alternative style of life: spiritual masters, women and men alike, who might teach us ways of taming our fears, channeling our infinite desires, and renouncing violence. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis draws our attention especially to Francis of Assisi, who approached nature with an attitude of awe and wonder that made him fall deeply in love with all that existed, such that he perceived every creature as a brother or sister profoundly united to him by a bond of affection and care. Pope Francis comments that this was the reason Francis “felt called to care for all that exists.”³⁹ He concludes that if we approach nature without this openness to perceive its wonders and to encounter it with awe, if we stop speaking the language of beauty and belonging in our relationship with this world, then “our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.”⁴⁰ And it is exactly this experience of being deeply united

37. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §9.

38. *Ibid.*, §216.

39. *Ibid.*, §11.

40. *Ibid.* The last sentence especially seems of utmost importance, as Girard believes that “innermost mediation” can demarcate the way out of the pitfalls of mimetic rivalry. He describes this “innermost mediation” as a “chain of positive undifferentiation,” a “chain of identity.” Girard and Chantre, *Battling*, 133.

with all that exists and that “everything is connected,”⁴¹ the experience that “everything belongs,”⁴² which spiritual practice can convey as one of its fundamental insights.

Apart from that, Pope Francis calls our attention to yet another aspect that should be considered as we face the challenges of the Anthropocene: the escalation to extremes through untamed consumption can never fulfill the endless desires of our hearts. Rather, in addition to the impending environmental and social catastrophes analyzed by Girard, it also gives rise to an imbalanced lifestyle, which drives people “to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride roughshod over everything around them”⁴³—and, we could add, even over themselves. In contrast,

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more.” A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.⁴⁴

It is this “attitude of the heart . . . which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift,”⁴⁵ that is taught by the great spiritual masters of the Christian tradition, as well as other religious traditions. It is, in short, an attitude of personal as well as political love.

41. *Ibid.*, §91.

42. See Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*.

43. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §225.

44. *Ibid.*, § 222.

45. *Ibid.*, § 226.

This, finally, takes us back to Girard's *Battling to the End*, where in the Epilogue he talks about "an indissoluble link between global warming and the rise in violence" even while "love has 'cooled down.'"⁴⁶ We might conclude, if the overheating of our atmosphere and the impending social and natural catastrophes brought about by ACC is indeed related to the cooling down of our love, which becomes manifest in our misdirected mimetic desire, envy, and anxiety, then the spiritual resources which help us cultivate an attitude of personal as well as political love are indeed indispensable to our planetary health in the Anthropocene.

46. Girard and Chantre, *Battling*, 216.

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