# The End of Sacrifice: Reading René Girard and the Hebrew Bible

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# The End of Sacrifice

## Reading René Girard and the Hebrew Bible

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At a moment when René Girard's work is beginning to be known by a significantly larger public, a number of us who have been his students or colleagues for a number of years have begun to ask about the dimensions of its impact upon us, in particular, the way it has shaped our own approaches.[1]

For me, the question has discernible and entirely practical implications. In 1983, as an assistant professor of English at the University of Michigan (and recent Ph.D. student of René Girard in the Department of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo), I was invited to speak at Cerisy-la-Salle at a week-long seminar in his honor. Learning that he would speak (for one of the earliest times) of his relation to Christianity (and deciding that I should speak similarly about Judaism), I began reading in preparation the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, Maurice Blanchot, and others whose writings on Jewish topics had begun circulating to a wider audience. The paper I delivered on the Joseph story (and its staging of the mimetic, sacrificial, and anti-sacrificial structures

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from which it derives) was something of a departure from the teaching and writing I had been doing on Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, and a first step along the path I have followed since. As Girard delineated the ways in which the Christian Gospel in his view completed the analysis of the sacrificial that had been opened in the Old Testament, I explored the ways the Hebrew Bible already comprehended in full, within its language of anti-idolatry, the revelation of the sacrificial origins of culture. The analysis of the prophets from the sixth century BCE onward, it seemed to me, was little else.

Much of the work I have done since has continued that examination, working out the details of a theory of literary and biblical reading consonant on the one hand with the insights Girard developed, and on the other with the understanding of the rabbis. How might we read the Hebrew Bible from a Girardian perspective, I asked myself. To read from a Girardian perspective is to read anti-sacrificially. In the language of the Hebrew Bible, that means anti-idolatrously. But reading anti-idolatrously may be more difficult than it appears. Take, for example, Genesis 3. Girard has written that in contrast with mythological treatments, the theme of expulsion has surfaced here within the text, although it is not man expelling God but God expelling man; the expulsion of God by man in his view awaits the texts of the Christian Passion.

What would the rabbis say? That the "idolatrous" is to be understood diachronically rather than synchronically (as a "moment" rather than as one "thing" in contrast with another); that the particular moment it describes is already the moment when the sacrificial and the violent have become inextricably confused; and that the idolatrous shows up within the text "as" the text, that the text, in short, is a "scene of instruction." After the destruction of the Temple (and the end of sacrifice), the rabbis say, we pray and read.

In what follows, I would like to examine this opening passage of Torah and ask how precisely it might be read as a scene of instruction. In my conclusion, I will return to my initial questions.

* * *

By the beginning of Genesis 3, God has completed the setting in motion of creation, including the creation of human beings. A commandment has been issued to the human (*ha'adam*) concerning the eating of the fruit from one of the trees. A "side" of the human is extracted and built up to form a woman (*ishah*). And now a new development ensues (Gen. 3:1).

*Now the snake was more shrewd than all the living things of the field*
*that YHWH, God, had made.*
*It said to the woman:*
*Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the*
*garden . . . !*[2]

This is the first appearance of "the snake" (*ha-nachash*). Fox's translation of the Hebrew as "snake" rather than as "serpent" (which is how many commentators translate it) emphasizes its quotidian quality, its nonmythological, nonstartling features. In the biblical text at least, this is not *ha-satan,* the Accuser, the Adversary, who speaks with God in Job (although the midrash will occasionally introduce *ha-satan* in this context). Nor is it some ancient equal and opposing force from Mesopotamian history or mythology. If this agency proves evil, it is the banality of its manifestation that is emphasized here, not its uniqueness.

Why "shrewd" (*'arum*)? The same word (*'arumim*) was used a moment earlier (Gen. 2:25) to qualify the status of the *iysh* and the *ishah* vis-à-vis their clothing.

*Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude* ['arumim],
*yet they were not ashamed.* (2:25)

Nudity in this context is nakedness, defenselessness, openness, akin perhaps to what Emmanuel Levinas identifies with the face.[3] Does the *nachash* in Genesis 3:1 use openness, seeming lack of guile, in a guileful manner? Is guile defined by seeming openness?

The *nachash* speaks to the woman. Why not to the man, the *iysh*? And why, moreover, are the man and the woman referred to as "the human and his wife" (note that the Hebrew in 2:25 is *ha-adam*, which Fox translates as "the human," rather than *iysh*, which Fox translates as "the man")?

These words have a history. *Ha'adam* was created in Genesis 1:27 ("So God created mankind" [*yayivra elohiym et-ha'adam*]) and the act is rearticulated in 2:7: "YHWH, God, formed the human, of dust from the soil, he blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living being," a *nefesh hayah.* The human, *ha'adam,* is formed from the "dust from the soil" (*afar min-ha'adamah*), and the word *adam* is said by the rabbis to derive either from *adamah* ("ground" or "earth") or from *dam* ("blood"). And from the perspective of at least some of the rabbis, *ha'adam* is bisexual, hermaphroditic,

a condition that conforms for them with 1:27 and 5:2, "male and female He created them."

> R. Jeremiah ben Eleazar said: When the Holy One created Adam, He created him hermaphrodite [bisexual], as is said, "Male and female created He them. . . and called their name Adam" (Gen. 5:2). Normally, *androgynous* means one who has both male and female genitals; but here it means two bodies, male and female, joined together. Thus Adam was originally male and female.[4]

This idea plays havoc with the birth of *ishah* in Genesis 2:23.

> *So YHWH, God, caused a deep slumber to fall upon the human, so*
> *that he slept,*
> *he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place.*
> *YHWH, God, built the rib that he taken from the human into a*
> *woman*
> *and brought her to the human.*
> *The human said:*
> *This-time, she is it!*
> *Bone from my bones,*
> *flesh from my flesh!*
> *She shall be called Woman* / Isha,
> *for from Man* / Ish *she was taken!* (2:21–23)

God's original intention, we hear, is for the human to find a helpmate among the animals. When that project fails, God goes to "plan B": to separate the human into parts. "So YHWH, God, caused a deep slumber to fall upon the human" (2:21).

How is the division of the human described? Fox follows the traditional view in translating the Hebrew: God "took one of the ribs . . . and built up the rib . . . into woman" (2:21–22). But in conformity with the idea that *ha'adam* is hermaphroditic, other, older rabbinic readers render *mi-tsalotav* as "his sides," as if perhaps the human had two sides, a male side and a female side, that God separated.

> R. Samuel bar Nachman said: When the Holy One created Adam, He made him with two fronts; then He sawed him in half and thus gave him two backs, a back for one part and a back for the other part. Thus Eve was created out of half of Adam's body and not out of a mere rib (Leon Nemoy).

> Someone objected: But does not Scripture say, "And he took one of his ribs (*mi-tzalotav*)" (Gen. 2:21)? R. Samuel replied: *mi-tzalotav* may also mean "his sides," as in the verse "And for the second side (*tzela*) of the Tabernacle" (Ex. 26:20) [Gen. Rabbah 8:1].[5]

Are we extracting more than isolated facts from primordial history? If we say that God takes one of the sides of *ha'adam* and builds it up into woman, it could be argued that the woman is the pinnacle of creation, the last created being, formed or manufactured like *ha'adam* itself from earlier materials, but further refined and endowed with additional divine construction. After the extraction, *ha'adam* (minus his, or "its," female side), exclaims:

> *This-time, she is it!*
> *Bone and from my bones,*
> *flesh from my flesh!*
> *She shall be called Woman* / Isha,
> *for from Man* / Ish *she was taken!* (2:23)

*Ha'adam* retains the capacity to speak, to remember what happened a moment before with the animals, to remember that earlier still it had the capacity to name, and to understand (if vaguely) the new creature's origin. *Ha'adam*'s remark pays heed to the positive qualities of the new creation. The attempt at finding a helpmate earlier ended without a solution, but "this-time, she is it!"

But there is another aspect to this examination that is potentially even more unsettling to men than such a revisionist feminist history. *Ha'adam* it would appear also misunderstands his (or her, or its) relation to that new creature. "*Yikarei ishah ki mei'iysh l'kachah-zot*" (2:23), he says. "She shall be called Woman / *Isha,* for from Man / *Ish* she was taken." But she was not taken from man, from *iysh,* since *iysh* ("man") did not in fact exist as yet. She was taken from *ha'adam,* the human, with male and female sides, if we follow the rabbis. The word *ishah* appears before *iysh,* which appears for the first time in this passage. If *ha'adam* after the breach had declared, for example, "from *ha'adam* she was taken, and as a result I, *ha-adam,* shall be called Man / *Iysh,* and she shall be called Woman / *Ishah,* because she came from my former status as *ha'adam*," the problem would be diminished, although not eliminated, since even in that case, the male creature (who names himself *iysh*) assumes a continuity between past and present that is at least questionable.

But *ha'adam* after the breach does not identify himself even in that fashion. "He" says only, "She shall be called Woman / *Isha*, for from Man / *Ish*

she was taken" (2:23). Is there a translation problem? On this point, the rabbis are agreed. *Iysh* has not appeared prior to this moment in the biblical text, either in name or in reality. The former human, now bereft of its female side and auto-assigned the name "man," misunderstands its own priority (or lack of priority) vis-à-vis the woman, *ishah. Ha'adam* preexists *ishah,* but *iysh* does not. The creation of *iysh* is literally subsequent to the creation of *ishah.* First came *ha'adam;* then *ishah;* then *iysh,* the name for an altered version of *ha'adam,* the remainder or the leftover after *ishah* was removed, and the hole (or wound) closed. If the *iysh* would like to imagine he was first, or continues to think of himself as *ha'adam,* or even *adam* (and if we think so along with him), he is reverting to the earlier perspective from a later point in the story, and appropriating that former status as his own.

Is he right at least linguistically? Linguistically the news is no different. Etymologically, biblical scholars derive *ishah* from *insh* (meaning "be inclined to, friendly, social"), from which word *iysh* may or may not also derive. But opinion is not divided on the first point: *ishah* is not derived from *iysh.* If *iysh* thinks he is first, or that *ishah* derives from him, it is because he "remembers" the world as *ha'adam,* prioritizes that memory, and represses the female side with which he once shared creaturely status.

We understand his dilemma. God decides it is not good for man to be alone. Think of Gilgamesh, who finds a mate among the creatures who run with the animals (Enkidu is spurned by the animals, we learn, only after he has interacted with Gilgamesh). God causes a deep sleep to fall upon *ha'adam,* extracts from him the side from which the woman is built, closes up the hole or gap, and when the creature awakens, there she is: "Now it's right; my bones, my flesh, she's an extension of me."

But that is no more the entire story than to say that *ha'adam* is an extension of the dust of the earth (from which he came). *Ishah* remains an independent creature whatever her origin, and whatever *ha'adam* was before the extraction, *ha'adam* is now changed as a consequence, if for no other reason than as a result of that removal. If he continues to call himself *ha'adam,* if he names himself "man" or *iysh* (and identifies *iysh* with *ha'adam*), if he slips into saying that *ishah* was taken from *iysh* (meaning that *ishah* was taken from *ha'adam,* whose identity he imagines he retains), and if we make the same imaginative leap, that innocent misunderstanding will have consequences far beyond the context in which it is posed. It will contain within its confines the entire problem of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

Do we learn anything further about the relationship of these two creatures? In fact, surprises abound. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his

mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." The original relationship between *ha'adam* (post-extraction) and the newly formed *ishah* is that of a "clinger." Bereft of his female side, the human that remains clings to others and to his past; he becomes among other things a misunderstander, an egoist (we might say, using modern phenomenological language), one who derives the other individual from oneself, one who substitutes the other for the Other, an Other who is in fact genuinely independent of him, as independent of him as he is from the animals.

Is it surprising, then, that it is with the woman, *ishah* (and not *iysh* or *ha'adam*), that the *nachash* speaks, as if it is with the highest order of creation that the *nachash* wishes to engage, or alternatively, as if he need only speak with *ishah* in order to be assured that *iysh* will mimetically follow suit. If we have thought otherwise, if we have assumed that it was with mankind in general (*ha'adam* pre-extraction) or with the man after the female side had been removed (*ha'adam* post-extraction, or simply *iysh*) that the *nachash* engaged, we have misunderstood the narrative before us no less than the *iysh* himself has done.

Everything that follows depends upon this shift. Let us return to the exchange:

> *The snake . . . said to the woman:*
> *Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the*
> *garden . . . !*
> *The woman said to the snake:*
> *From the fruit of the* (*other*) *trees in the garden we may eat,*
> *but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden,*
> *God has said:*
> *You are not to eat from it and you are not to touch it,*
> *lest you die.* (Gen. 3:1–3)

The woman makes three mistakes. First mistake: God never said anything about touching. Here is the passage in which the commandment is given:

> *YHWH, God, commanded concerning the human, saying:*
> *From every* [*other*] *tree of the garden you may eat, yes eat,*
> *but from the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil—*
> *you are not to eat from it,*
> *for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die.* (2:16–17)

She makes a second mistake: she appears to get the tree wrong.

*YHWH, God, planted a garden in Eden / Land-of-Pleasure, in the east*
*and there he placed the human whom he had formed.*
*YHWH, God, caused to spring up from the soil*
*every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat,*
*and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden*
*and the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil.* (2:8–9)

"From the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden"? In this text, that is clearly the "Tree of Life." Is the "Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil" also in the middle of the garden? Possibly. But only the tree of life is so specified. The only tree that we know for certain is "in the midst of the garden" is the "Tree of Life." She may be referring to the wrong tree.

There is a third mistake: she was not there. It is not as if she was off somewhere else at the time; she simply was not created as yet. The conversation in which "YHWH, God, commanded concerning the human, saying: From every (other) tree of the garden you may eat," takes place in Genesis 2:16. She is created in 2:21–22. She may have "heard" the commandment just as the *iysh* (the male side of *ha'adam,* or *ha'adam* bereft of the female side) "heard" the commandment. But neither *ishah* nor *iysh* was separated from *ha'adam* as yet. The conversation takes place between God and the human, *ha'adam,* before the division.

As a result, the *nachash* learns three things: one, that she exaggerates; two, that she may make errors of accuracy (or is willing to make assumptions about a whole on the basis of partial evidence); three, that she is mimetic or appropriative. She is willing to take over the viewpoint of another as if it is her own, whether or not she has an appropriate basis for evaluating it. The human had the conversation with God; therefore, it remains her own view now as well.

The *nachash* seizes a perceived opportunity.

*The snake said to the woman:*
*Die, you will not die!*
*Rather, God knows*
*that on the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened*
*and you will become like gods, knowing good and evil.* (3:4–5)

She appropriated the view of the human or of God. Perhaps she will appropriate the view of the *nachash*. If she makes mistakes about which tree is in question, perhaps she is willing to accept the possibility that she made a mistake about whether or not she will die. And if she exaggerates, perhaps she will accept the possibility of exaggerating the consequence of violating the commandment.

The *nachash* offers knowledge in exchange for a relationship. "God knows," he says. Implicitly, that means, I know that "God knows." And as a consequence of eating, you too will know. You will have what I have and what God has. Like God, you will have eyes that are opened, and you will not die. Your *'arum* will be God's *'arum*. Knowledge is substituted for a relationship, and as a consequence, knowledge becomes desire.

> *The woman saw*
> *that the tree was good for eating*
> *and that it was a delight to the eyes,*
> *and the tree was desirable to contemplate.*
> *She took from its fruit and ate*
> *and gave also to her husband beside her,*
> *and he ate.* (3:6)

Suddenly, the sensorial aspects of the scene predominate. The "woman saw that the tree was good for eating." Calculations are now based upon perception rather than person. Physical qualities assume the first rank. "The woman saw that the tree was . . . a delight to the eyes." And perception assumes a new form: an internal image, an object of contemplation, an object of desire. "The woman saw that the tree was . . . desirable to contemplate."

And so she appropriates the fruit as she appropriated *ha'adam*'s view. Exaggerating its positive qualities (do we have any basis for believing the fruit was a delight to the eyes?), deducing the whole from the part (how does she know it is good to eat? on the basis of seeing it? what if it is a poisoned mushroom?), she seizes the fruit and ingests it. From one appropriation comes another.

Where is her husband, the *iysh,* the clinger, the misunderstander (who thinks *ishah* derived from *iysh*) throughout this interaction? The text says he is "beside her." Why does he not speak? Because he is a clinger? Because whatever his wife, *ishah,* says, he "clings" to, or appropriates? Did he hear the entire conversation with the *nachash* without entering it (and if so, what was he thinking?), or has he entered the scene only at this moment?

In any event, she takes the fruit, eats it, and then gives fruit to her husband beside her, and he does what she does. Like woman, like man.

*The eyes of the two of them were opened*
*and they knew then*
*that they were nude.*
*They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.* (3:7)

The language of the text echoes the opening of the sequence. Before this, "the two of them . . . were nude" (*'arum*). Now "they knew . . . they were nude" (*'arum*). Consciousness has been replaced by self-consciousness. Knowledge regarding themselves has replaced their relationship with the divine. And in their new condition, they give priority to their own needs rather than to their relationship with the divine.

But we have not yet reached the climax of this scene. All this is about to become even more complicated, in what could be dubbed "part 2" of the sequence.

*Now they heard the sound of the YHWH, God, (who was) walking*
*about in the garden at the breezy-time of the day.*
*And the human and his wife hid themselves from the face of YHWH,*
*God, amid the trees of the garden.* (3:8)

"Heard?" "sound" of God? "walking about?" The "breezy-time of the day?" Where have all of these sensorial details come from? It is as if the text itself has taken over the perspective of the characters within the text, of *ishah* and the *iysh* after their eating of the fruit, and as if the text itself is now being written from within that perspective.

How, in other words, can we trust anything we read from this point on in the text? How do we know when something occurs in the text whether it is "really happening" or whether it only appears to be happening because the text has adopted a perspective available within the text, the perspective of one of its characters, a limited perspective, that is to say, whose limits we are able to observe? The text itself, in other words, has now become a distortion, and as a result the task of reading has become infinitely more complicated. If we define idolatry as the confusion of the divine with the human, then the text itself has become an idol. The task of reading has itself become a matter of reading anti-idolatrously. Rather than reading from some independent perspective, from the perspective of God on the perspective of human beings, for example, what we are reading now is what may itself be termed a "text of transgression."

What are the implications of this textual distortion? Potentially they are vast. Everything we read from now on in this narrative is in some way at once both happening and not happening. We need to assume that there is something there (that the reality it offers is not completely illusory) but also that what is there is filtered through the perspective of one or another of the characters within the text and so as a result it has to be deciphered or interpreted.

How should this interpretation be undertaken? By coming to understand in sequence what has taken place and the genesis of the perspective filtering it. For example, we are going to see that the text now begins to refer to *ha'adam* from his own perspective, as if he was *iysh* all along, and as if *ishah* was in fact created from *iysh*.

> *YHWH, God, called to the human and said to him:*
> *Where are you?* (3:9)

But "the human," as we saw before, was "male and female." Now suddenly even "God" adopts the perspective of the *iysh* and speaks as if "the human" and the *iysh* are one and the same. Is God also caught in this textual distortion? Is God a character? Is not God the creator of the universe? We have not spoken a great deal about God up to this point. God Himself, in other words, reads now (or is imagined as reading) from the distorted view of the *iysh,* of the one who has violated the commandment. He will say "to Adam," for example, because you have done this thing, "because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying: You are not to eat from it! Damned be the soil on your account!" as if there never was any ambiguity about which tree that was, or about who he was talking to.

God asks: Where are you? And "he," the man, the *iysh,* answers.

> *He said:*
> *I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid, because I am*
> *nude,*
> *and so I hid myself.* (3:10)

Now suddenly it is a matter of me and you. Sound, fear, what or where I am (or what or where I am not), the capacity to conceal myself—all these make their appearance for the first time in the language of the *iysh.* And God suddenly appears as a bad father.

*Who told you that you are nude?*
*From the tree about which I command you not to eat,*
*have you eaten?* (3:11)

One possible and accurate answer to God's current question is "No. I have eaten from the 'Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil' from which by your stricture I was permitted to eat, not from the tree in the midst of the garden."

But instead, the *iysh* assumes (and we assume with him) that the tree from which he was not to eat (as the *ishah* assumed) is the tree of good and evil, and moreover he assumes that God has made the same assumption. And in this text, in fact, God does do that. And this knowledge-based, or desire-based, or self-based, perspective (rather than a relationship-based perspective) leads straightaway to scapegoating on both parts, on the part of God against the humans, and on the part of the humans united against God.

*The human said:*
*The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree,*
*and so I ate.* (3:12)

You did it, the *iysh* says to God; and the woman did it. He blames the other, first God, then the woman. Martin Buber was one of the first commentators to note the differences between the *iysh*'s perspective here and Abraham's later. It is as if the progress from the first human beings to Abraham (in whose subsequent history the law, the Torah of anti-idolatry, will be given) is characterized by a move from scapegoating to the acceptance of responsibility. When the man is first addressed by God, he shirks responsibility, deflecting it either upon God (his interlocutor) or upon the woman (his other), in contrast with Abraham, who characteristically says, when he is addressed, *hineini,* "Here I am."

The rest of this chapter of Genesis follows from this structure. The question to the woman is different from the question to the man. If God asked the man, "Where are you?" he asks the woman, "What have you done?"

*YHWH, God, said to the woman:*
*What is this that you have done?*
*The woman said:*
*The snake enticed me,*
*and so I ate.* (3:13)

Her response is identical to the man's in one regard. Like him, she blames others. As the man blames the woman and God (who in the man's mind initiated the interaction), she blames the snake (who in her mind inaugurated the interaction).

But she does not blame the man. She does not blame the man, either for blaming her, or in parallel with his blaming of her; unlike the man, she is able to resist reciprocity. Blaming occurs, to be sure, but not reciprocity. For that, we await Kayin and Hevel, their children.

Is she imitating the man in blaming the snake? Or offering a response independently of him, one that just happens to be in part the same response? Is the text in that way highlighting for us the same unification potential that resides in the act of blaming, the act of scapegoating?

God also turns to the snake.

> *YHWH, God, said to the snake:*
> *Because you have done this,*
> *damned be you from all the animals and from all the living-things of the field;*
> *upon your belly shall you walk and dust shall you eat, all the days of your life.* (3:14)

But God asks no question of the snake. He just announces. Because you have done this, here is what will happen. You will live apart from the animals. You will not walk upright. Your relation with the woman will be forever damaged. Like the angels later in midrashic literature, the snake is pure deed: he is what he does. His behavior is hardly unexpected.

> *I put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed:*
> *they will bruise you on the head, you will bruise them in the heel.* (3:15)

And similarly, to the woman and the man, God will now make announcements regarding the future.

> *To the woman he said:*
> *I will multiply, multiply your pain (from) your pregnancy, with pains shall you bear children.*
> *Toward your husband will be your lust, yet he will rule over you.*
> *To Adam he said:*

> *Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife*
> *and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying: You are not to eat from it!*
> *Damned be the soil on your account,*
> *with painstaking-labor shall you eat from it, all the days of your life.*
> *Thorn and sting-shrub let it spring up for you,*
> *when you (seek to) eat the plants of the field!*
> *By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,*
> *until you return to the soil,*
> *for from it you were taken.*
> *For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.* (3:16–19)

To the woman, God responds with pain, pain in childbirth. The text repeats the words "multiply" and "pain," as if the text is imitating what it is saying, multiplying the words and the actions, multiplying the labor necessary to read those words, to understand those actions. The rabbis dub this construction "the Hebrew emphatic." And God introduces a new relationship: reciprocal power relations. As the man clung to the woman, so now you will be ruled by the man; desire and rule predominate.

To the man, the consequence of clinging, misunderstanding, and the failure to follow the commandment is "painstaking-labor," and then you die.

What is the response of the human, of *ha'adam* minus *ishah?* He exercises the one God-given capacity not implicated here: he names his wife.

> *The human called his wife's name: Havva / Life-giver!*
> *For she became the mother of all the living.* (3:20)

Is this another error? Is not God the "life-giver?" Why does he name the woman as the giver of life? The man specifically acknowledged God's capacity to give life to the woman in his accusation: "The human said: The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree, and so I ate."

Now God begins imitating the humans. As the humans a moment ago stitched clothing for themselves (3:7), so now God becomes a clothing maker.

> *Now YHWH, God, made Adam and his wife coats of skins and clothed them.* (3:21)

And God begins now to speak of the humans in the third person, as if he is talking to someone else about them.

*YHWH, God, said:*
*Here, the human has become like one of us, in knowing good and evil.*
*So now, lest he send forth his hand*
*and take also from the Tree of Life*
*and eat*
*and live throughout the ages . . . !* (3:22)

Who is God speaking to? Other divine creatures? Angels, for example? But none have been mentioned before. Is God now imitating the language of the *nachash*?

*So YHWH, God, sent him away from the garden of Eden, to work the soil from which he had been taken.*
*He drove the human out*
*and caused to dwell, eastward of the garden of Eden,*
*the winged-sphinxes and the flashing, ever-turning sword*
*to watch over the way to the Tree of Life.* (3:23–24)

God evicts the man—to work the soil with painstaking and sometimes fruitless labor. What about the woman? She is not even mentioned here. And the "Tree of Life," which surfaced on one occasion earlier in this narrative, suddenly reappears. The distinction between the tree of life and the tree of good and evil remains, it would appear, an operative one.

To what extent is the response of God to their eating of the fruit a distortion, a text of transgression? God becomes judgmental and punishing on the one hand, care-taking and a provider on the other. Like a parent, in other words, imagined from a child's perspective. And how do we separate that parental view of God from what is "really" taking place in this text? For there are now always two different perspectives that must be considered: what we are told is taking place in the narrative, and the extent to which the narrative itself is imitating what is taking place within it. Repeating what God said, seeing that the fruit is good for eating, a delight to the eyes, and so forth, and actually hearing the sound of God walking about in the garden in the breezy time of day. Is it possible that God has not expelled them, and that they only imagine He has done so because they read transgressively?

To what extent, in other words, we may ask, is the imagining of God as having expelled the humans a misunderstanding of our own failure to keep commandments and accept infinite responsibility for the other individual, an alternative that, if undertaken, changes everything? Imagining, in other

words, that we are victims and expelled from Eden may be a midrashic extension of the distortion of our own perspective.[6]

* * *

We are a long way, at the conclusion of chapter 3 in Genesis, from being able to answer any of these questions. We will be able to answer provisionally in a few chapters, in the shorter narratives between this one and the beginning of the patriarchal history. In the story of Bavel in Genesis 11, for example, when the text makes available to us the idea that the failed ziggurat builders have rationalized (on their way out of town) the failure of their own civic projects, and the idea that "The gods are jealous of us, the gods are against us" has simply been projected backward and upward, so to speak, and shown up in the text itself as the text from the outset.

But about the larger, overarching narrative in which the Israelites come in Exodus 20 to receive the Torah from God (through Moses), and subsequently come to learn to read that Torah as the "blueprint of the world" in which they function (within the prophetic texts and the holy writings), there is a great deal more to say. In some sense, the rest of Tanakh—the five books of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the holy writings—will have to be examined in order for the question, the question of idolatry in and of the text, even to be approached.

But we can already understand the task before us. And if we ask again how this text might be regarded as a scene of instruction, the way is clear to making sense of that idea. We have been presented with four levels of understanding: a narrative sequence in which the plain sense of the text is offered to us and the characters do things; a level on which the misunderstanding of that narrative sequence by characters within it begins to govern for them their sense of things but need not govern ours; the textualization or textual appropriation of that same misunderstanding (as if the text itself, our text, the one that gives us their "reality," and even God as a function of that text, has become a characterized perspective and now joins in the hermeneutic fray); and on a final level of interpretation, the possibility that the reader retains of deciphering all of this narrative and reading activity (this narrative consciousness, self-consciousness, and textualization) through a close and patient diachronic perusal of its occurrence.

It is this fourth level that renders the text a "scene of instruction," that makes the task we are given one of reading, and that means that what is played out at this level is anti-idolatry. Formulated in this way, such a task

of anti-idolatrous reading is not a supplement or adjunct to biblical reading but its very heart; it is the place where commandment is to be understood, where it shows up in the text itself as its manifestation. "After the end of the Second Temple," the rabbis say, "we pray and read." And "the study of Torah is equivalent to the doing of all the commandments."

Is it possible that we have here in rudimentary form what the famous four levels of interpretation developed by medieval Jewish and Christian hermeneuts alike attempted to systematize: namely, a level of plain or simple rhetorical sense; a level of midrashic or allegorical sense; a level of ethical or moral sense; and a level on which the future, the prophetic, the messianic, the hidden, the mystical or anagogic sense of things is to be understood?

All this, I suggest, is what René Girard's thought will have taught us. We can already see how Girard's analysis of the sacrificial origins of culture has specified the nature of the endeavor. Girard's analysis of sacrificial violence and of the concomitant necessity to refuse violence is readable as Judaism's analysis of the idolatrous and of the anti-idolatrous as its corresponding ethical response. The reading of the Jewish text as about commandment, and commandment as about anti-idolatry, and the problem of anti-idolatry as showing up in (and as) the text, as the question of its reading, is, I would suggest, nothing else. As the "sacrificial crisis," to use Girard's term, enables us to read the great literary texts of our culture—Greek tragedy, for example—so the analysis of moments of idolatry in human culture and human relations developed within Rabbinic Judaism from the fourth century BCE to the second century CE (and especially the analysis of those moments in the modern world when the law of anti-idolatry is capable of becoming idolatry's newest form) enables us both to read and to formulate an ethical response to texts that have issued from similar crises within the Jewish world, above all, from the collapse of the first and second temples, from which contemporary and diasporic Judaism has sprung.

Can we go further? Girardian thought is based upon the idea that the sacrificial expulsion is at the origin of culture (as a way of managing the mimetic behavior that makes up the fabric of social life), and that when this mechanism of collective surrogacy breaks down (and a sacrificial crisis results), alternatives are developed. Jesus exposes the expulsive gesture at the origin of culture by enacting it and thereby enabling us to see it: here is where your violence is leading, the texts of his Passion tell us, in Girard's reading. Do you really want to go there?

But, if we understand the Hebrew Bible at least in its earliest chapters as a text of transgression, one in which we must learn to move from a distorted

way of knowing things to a more accurate one, then the expulsion at its origin may be the distortion in its most distorted form.

What if it turns out, in other words, that there was no expulsion, that we weren't victims, or that if we were victims, we were victims only of ourselves, and that we must move from themes of scapegoating, persecution, and victimage to themes of responsibility and ownership of our own role in violence against others?

In that regard, the spectacle of Jesus's death on the cross would graphically illustrate for a modernizing, Hellenizing, assimilating community the necessity of accepting that responsibility, a necessity that some have identified with a quality of the divine. As such, Christianity would constitute an episode in the history of Judaism, an episode that may not yet have concluded and within which we may to this day continue to think.

In other words, Girard writes that the Christian Passion completes the anti-sacrificial drift of the prophetic texts and the writing of the Hebrew Bible that emerges from that post-exilic period. But what if there was no expulsion, either at one end or the other? What if an even more evolved analysis would allow us to understand that not only is the victim not our enemy, and not only is God not the source of the expulsion from the garden (the Christian Passion allows us to see as much in Girard's view), but the expulsion, our victimage, is itself a myth? What if we ourselves are the only persecutors? What if the positive reading of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Passion is that our assignment of the status of victim to the other or to ourselves is equally a version of persecution, and that we need to give up victimage entirely and accept infinite responsibility for the other individual, responsibility, in other words, that not only falls upon the shoulders of the infinite, upon the shoulders of God, but falls upon our own shoulders as well; a radical abiding or suffering, in other words, in which the assignment of meaning to the suffering or violence of the other individual is always wrong, and in which only the assignment of meaning to my own violence, my own suffering, can provide the foundation for human groups?[7]

The Christian Passion, in this regard, would then function in the same way as the Hebrew Bible. It can serve to inculcate the myth: "as we were expelled," it can say to us, "so Jesus, our savior, rescues us from the future of the Old Adam, and purchases for us salvation independently of anything we need to do about it." Or it can serve, as we have tried to suggest the Hebrew Bible serves, to undo the myth, to ask us to give up scapegoating, to show us where our scapegoating violence is leading—an option that the Passion offers, appropriately enough, as a resurrection from death.

In this regard, the Girardian analysis and the prophetic analysis that the rabbis fashioned into a reading (via Talmud and other writings) of the Hebrew Bible are in accord. Christianity in this analysis is an episode within the history of Judaism, an extension of the midrashic ways of thinking evident in Rabbinic reading into Hellenistic and Roman arenas that Judaism for reasons of historical circumstance were not in a position to enter. The family origin of this anti-idolatrous reading for both Judaism and Christianity remains identical, even if this common fund of anti-idolatry has not always been appreciated throughout their common history, and even if at times this failed appreciation led to scapegoating, violence, and even expulsion in its own turn.

Are we entirely certain, in other words, that the Christian Gospels, from which Girard says he derives his own insights, and the young Jewish rabbi arguing with his peer group among the Pharisees (in the context of which debates the Gospel texts are collected) are entirely independent of the Jewish scriptural writings about which we have been talking? Could the Christian reading of the sacrificial as the completion of the law of anti-idolatry turn out to be a part of that larger and more ancient history, a working out of the inevitable consequences of anti-idolatry that proponents of Christian views think they have superseded and over which they have triumphed? In that event, the path upon which René Girard's work has set us would turn out to be a fruitful one indeed, even if supersessionism and triumphalism is sometimes mistakenly associated with Girardian analysis itself.

But such debates would take us far beyond the present discussions. And even raising such issues already begins to sound like the *iysh* imagining that the *ishah* was derived from him.

## NOTES

1. René Girard was initiated into the French Academy on 15 December 2005.
2. Everett Fox, ed., *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy,* vol. 1, *The Schocken Bible*, a new translation with introductions, commentary, and notes by Everett Fox (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from the Hebrew Bible are from this edition.
3. See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
4. Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitsky, eds., *The Book of Legends / Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken, 1992), 15, para 60.
5. Bialik and Ravnitsky, *The Book of Legends,* 15, para 60.

6. For a view of the ethical as infinite responsibility for the other individual, see Levinas's *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence,* trans. Aphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

7. For a development of this view, see Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other,* trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91–101.