

NIETZSCHE'S TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY ON GOD'S MURDER AS ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract

This article evaluates Nietzsche's tragic philosophy on the death of God. The forefather of modernist radical humanism, Nietzsche put Jesus' historical crucifixion at the center of philosophy to exile the notion of a transcendent God from philosophy. Meanwhile, discarding theology as metaphysics and replacing it with an anthropology of how human persons become divinized, Nietzsche contributed to unearthing the scapegoating mechanism as a god-making device at the center of human culture. Nietzsche's focus on the murder of God, rather than Their death, suggested René Girard's martyrdom's crucial role in the foundation and the preservation of culture. Following Girard, I read the madman's parable of God's death in *The Joyous Science* alongside paragraph 1052 of *The Will to Power*, where Nietzsche recognized that the difference between Dionysos and the Crucified can only be seen clearly from the perspective of Calvary.

Key words: philosophical anthropology, metaphysics, Nietzsche, martyrdom, mimetic theory.

1. Introduction

After centuries of colonising the world under the pretext of spreading the true faith, European Christianities now appear to traverse a secular age of widespread religious indifference. Nixey laments that the early Christian temples of Antiquity were raised upon the ruins of the Greco-Roman temples ransacked by the fanaticism of rising Christians once they stopped being scapegoated and adopted the standpoint of perse-

cutors instead.¹ Soon enough, their theological disputations fuelled heretics' hunts. In contrast, churches in our secular age are being discretely repurposed rather than destroyed by the iconoclastic passions of ransacking mobs. Frequently, churches are sold to compensate for clerical abuses. As the modernist theologian and champion of the Gospel's demythologisation Rudolf Bultmann famously pointed out,² the spiritual teaching of the Scriptures seemed outdated in the XX century. It appeared impossible to believe in «the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament» in an age of electricity and radio.³ Over a century has passed since the demise of the prophet of God's death, Nietzsche. In the eyes of Albert Camus, Nietzsche, a forefather of literary and theological modernism, found God «dead in the soul of his contemporaries».⁴ Now, the triumph of secularism appears almost complete in a Europe that spread Christianity worldwide. Now that the secularisation hypothesis is being challenged, noting that secularisation as the decline of religious institutions' public and private authority occurred simultaneously as a religious revival marginal to established religions during the twentieth century,⁵ Nietzsche's prophecy seems to us as something that is long ago fulfilled. The challenge to the secularisation thesis appears to offer no more than archaeological interest in a post-metaphysical epoch. Metaphysics' anthropological turn led to Nietzsche's formulation of God's death as a prophecy of our «secular age»⁶ of radical or exclusive humanism, artificial intelligence and nuclear power.

God may be dead, but philosophical theology dies hard. The formulation of the death of God philosophical theology, at the heart of modern religious and philosophical normative and epistemic crises, is as closely related to the rise of secular, radical humanism as it is to the simultaneous religious revival of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The death of God problem, first stated by Hegel, is unprecedented in the earlier philosophical tradition. For instance, premodern scholastics clearly distinguished between philosophy, a rational endeavour, from revealed theology, which required reason but could not be attained by reason alone. As any scholastic would have, Thomas Aquinas considered Christian mysteries beyond the grasp of natural reason and, therefore, beyond philosophical elucidation.⁷ Unlike metaphysical topics, such as

¹ Cf. Catherine NIXEY, *La edad de la penumbra: Cómo el cristianismo destruyó el mundo clásico*. Madrid: Taurus, 2018, pp. 125-128.

² Cf. Rudolf BULTMANN, *New Testament and mythology and other basic writings*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴ Albert CAMUS, *The rebel: An essay on man in revolt*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991, p. 34.

⁵ Cf. Pericles LEWIS, *Religious experience and the modernist novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 28.

⁶ Cf. Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 19.

⁷ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles. On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Book One: God*. New York: Image Books, 1955, II, § 2.

God's existence, simplicity, or unity, which Thomas Aquinas considered preambles of faith proven by natural reason, the Christian mysteries ensuing from God's Incarnation – the central Christian tenet – had conventionally been addressed within the realms of the ecclesial magisterium and revealed theology.⁸ Žižek has remarked on the centrality of Hegel's role in the metaphysical tradition.⁹ By heeding the Incarnation from a metaphysical standpoint, Hegel's Absolute idealism denotes «a clear break between before and after, and (...) one can argue that Hegel already announces this break».¹⁰ Subjecting God's death to philosophical inquiry, Hegel had to develop an apt framework for the inquiry and tragedy offered to him its *catharsis* and *theoria* on dying gods. Parting from Hegel's revalorisation of tragedy, Nietzsche's philosophy on God's murder is the ripest fruit of Hegel's tragic philosophy.

The present article evaluates Nietzsche's tragic philosophy at the heart of Modernity, Modernism, and Postmodernity's religious and philosophical crises. My analysis will show that the German philosophy of the nineteenth century, responding to Kant's transcendental idealism, did not exile God from philosophy, as the modernist radical humanists would do in their turn during the twentieth century. Instead, following Hegel, Nietzsche put Christ, and Christ on the Cross, at the centre of philosophy, thus developing an anthropological tragic philosophy that seems more suited than the previous metaphysical tradition to evaluate the impact of the Christian revelation in history. Ironically, the modern evaluation of Christ, Christianity and Christendom in the philosophical discourse reflects the secularisation brought about by an increasingly generalised persuasion that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures constitute but another myth, like those conveyed by the rest of the sacred scriptures. Regarding the sacred texts as literature that could provide scenery for our rituals, whether religious or secular, allows for the sobriety of a scientifically oriented, philosophical approach when discussing philosophical, rather than revealed, theology. From an exclusively anthropological standpoint, post-metaphysical theologies are but discussions about the ideal projection of humanity.

The tension surging from the rivalry between a strictly philosophical account of the secularisation of Christianity, like Kant's or Hegel's, and the tragic, and therefore, anti-sacrificial and religious dimension of the Christian narrative of history was perceived by no one more acutely than Nietzsche. Hegel impelled philosophy towards heeding the rumour of God's death. He had sought philosophy's coming to terms with

⁸ The doctrinal disputation of such mysteries as Christ's double nature, the Trinity, Jesus' death, descent into hell, resurrection, and ascension, or the coming of the Holy Spirit had been previously mostly discussed amongst theologians and their disputes gave rise to various doctrinal definitions promulgated throughout several councils.

⁹ Cf. Slavoj ŽIŽEK & John MILBANK, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, edited by Creston Davis. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

the «historic Good Friday» by the formulation of the «speculative Good Friday».¹¹ Building upon Hegel's tragic philosophy, Nietzsche stressed the murder, rather than the death, of God. He introduced this metaphor as a moment of a more comprehensive process, which was his concern: the rise of the overman and its overcoming of nihilism. In this respect, I understand Nietzsche's philosophical wager for radical humanism as the prophecy of nihilism and its overcoming by a new type of human person – one without recourse to God. However, due to his familiarity with myths and the Gospels, he also recognised the founding murder as a moment in the formation and preservation of human communities. In so doing, he turned theology into anthropology, following Feuerbach.¹² Conceiving the overman as a model of the new and consciously human-made god, Nietzsche seems to have considered a human self-fashioning akin to classical virtue ethics. However, I will argue that Nietzsche's philosophical explorations of sacrifice as an element crucial to all religions and civilisations, and of the opposition he recognised between the Crucified and Dionysos in particular, helped Rene Girard's mimetic theory unearth the violent consequences of resentment politics, the scapegoat mechanism's economy of violence, and their sacrificial deviated transcendence.¹³ Nietzsche's anthropological considerations on sacrifice – whether secular or religious – attempted to revindicate the heroic values and sacrificial economy of violence transvalued by Christianity. However, Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, which decries historical Christianity's weaponizing of Jesus' Cross, may indirectly make a point in favour of reinstating the economy of violence employed by the traditional sacrificial model of archaic or pre-axial religions as a more cautious solution to mimetic rivalry than the alternative unresentful opposition of the Crucified unresentful victim to scapegoating and human sacrifice, which stands for the post-traditional sacrificial model promoted by axial religions.

Despite all his arguments against peace and in favour of war's natural necessity and «war as a remedy»,¹⁴ most of which ought to be read considering his conception of life as struggle inspired by Greek tragedy and its aristocratic ideals,¹⁵ Nietzsche did not seem

¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Faith and Knowledge: An English Translation of G.W.F. Hegel's Glauben Und Wissen*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1977, p. 190.

¹² Cf. Ludwig FEUERBACH, *The Essence of Christianity*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989.

¹³ René Girard developed the concept of «deviated transcendence» in his works such as *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Cf. René GIRARD, Jean-Michel OUGHOURLIAN, Jean-Michel & Claude LEFORT, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1978. There, Girard argues that human societies use religion and other forms of symbolic or cultural systems to deflect and channel violent impulses away from the community and onto designated scapegoats.

¹⁴ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, II, § 187.

¹⁵ Cf. George Burman FOSTER, «Nietzsche and the Great War». *The Sewanee Review* [Sewanee], 28/2, 1920, pp. 139-151.

to endorse militarism, sheer violence, nor the rule of repressive elites or warlords. Instead, he seemed to live by and promote the type of aristocratic virtue ethics that reminds us of Aristotle's ethics concerning virtues' cultivation. When he participated in the Franco-Prussian war, he did not serve as a soldier but as a medical orderly.¹⁶ However, Nietzsche often spoke at odds with how he lived. It has been remarked that Nietzsche was as much anti-Semitic as he opposed antisemitism.¹⁷ A contemporary reading of his oeuvre reveals that his hyperbolic stylistic excesses have been sadly too literally interpreted by the Nazi regime as an ideology promoting crude genocidal warlords; few, like René Girard, oppose the «pious efforts to exonerate the thinker from the consequences of his own thinking».¹⁸ The now standard reading of Nietzsche makes a strong case for his disassociation from such scapegoating phenomena as the *Shoa*. Despite having established an uneasy relationship with Christianity and Judaism, Nietzsche's admiration for the historical Jesus, paradoxical as it was, cannot be eclipsed. Moreover, Nietzsche's Christocentric philosophy would be impossible to grasp without the comparative background of the classical myths and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

The last books have a taste of testament. Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ*, his last book prepared for publication, offers one of the most sober and conventional renditions of his ideas.¹⁹ It provides a secure footstep as an introduction to Nietzsche's tragic philosophy. As it transpires in *Anti-Christ*²⁰ and *On the Genealogy of Morality*,²¹ Nietzsche broadly follows the Hegelian model of a historical narrative of Christianity's self-undoing, albeit interpreted differently. In *Anti-Christ*, for instance, when Nietzsche explains the transvaluation of the ancient world's values operated by Judaism and made far-reaching by Western Christendom, he biting remarks on the extent to which his contemporaries do not realise the length to which their antisemitism is a consequence of the development of Judaism to its radical denial of this world's masters' values.²² In the Judeo-Christian fundamental opposition to human sacrifices, Nietzsche appreciates the workings of *ressentiment*, «the interiorisation of weakened vengeance»²³ exerted against master morality. The case Nietzsche makes against the historical closely knitted

¹⁶ Cf. Rüdiger SAFRANSKI, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 67.

¹⁷ Cf. Robert C. HOLUB, *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem. Between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.

¹⁸ René GIRARD, *The Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, p. 251.

¹⁹ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Anti-Christ*. In: *Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

²¹ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998.

²² Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Anti-Christ*, *op. cit.*, § 24.

²³ René GIRARD, *The Girard Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

strands of Neoplatonic and Pauline interpretations of Christianity springs from his contempt for the divorce from earth with which he charges its doctrine, which, in turn, sacrifices life on the altar of a promised eternal otherworldly life and its priestly imposition of the bad conscience of conceiving ourselves as sinners. He also holds against Christendom its hypocrisy for not living to Christ's anti-sacrificial standards and, instead, enacting violent politics of resentment.

After this brief general exposition of Nietzsche's salient ideas, I will close read the parable of the madman in *The Joyous Science*²⁴ from a Girardian perspective. Interpreting the madman's radical humanism, I will argue that Nietzsche's central concern in this passage is the collective murder of all too human gods as the foundational sacrifice of religions, which steered him to his illuminating opposition between Dionysos and the Crucified in his polemic posthumous book *The Will to Power*.²⁵ Due to the revalorisation of values Nietzsche stood for, he developed a sensibility for comparative theologies – and, therefore, anthropologies. Nietzsche's revalorisation of classical values, first prompted by aesthetic considerations in *The Birth of Tragedy*,²⁶ led him next to consider the overcoming of Christianity as morality in *On the Genealogy of Morality*²⁷ and, at last, to compare, in *The Will to Power*, two opposing interpretations of founding murders – those of Dionysos and the Crucified. Nietzsche's posthumous book holds the key to the centrality of sacrifice for religion and of the Crucified in deciphering the scapegoat mechanism on which the foundation and preservation of religion and culture depend in a traditional sacrificial model of civilisation.

2. The madman's radical humanism Gospel

Parting from a close reading of one of the most celebrated passages of philosophy's history, penned by Nietzsche, I will now discuss his philosophical theology on God's murder – and how, for him, it inaugurates a path towards humanity's self-divinisation, thus deriving an anthropology from his naturalistic approach to comparative mythology. In Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, God's murder reveals an alternative anthropo-

²⁴ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*. London: Penguin Books, 2018.

²⁵ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*. New York: Vintage Books, 1968. The current scholarly understanding is that Nietzsche's sister transmogrified Nietzsche's philosophical legacy. The philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, curated and edited Nietzsche's manuscripts. She secured her late brother's rights, withheld some unpublished works, and rewrote them before editing and publishing them, often forging sections expressing ideas at odds with Nietzsche's. She distorted Nietzsche's ideas and the readers conception of him. She infamously harboured a Teutonic strand of white supremacy and promoted ideals very near the heart of antisemitic fascists under the guise of her brother. Public access to Nietzsche's manuscripts after her dead has allowed scholars the production of new revised editions without the spurious passages introduced by his sister.

²⁶ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁷ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *op. cit.*

logic model for humanity's life to the one offered by Christianity. The passage of «The Madman» in *The Joyous Science*,²⁸ to take the most famous instance of Nietzsche's position on God's death, echoes Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures as much as traditional Christian theology does. The madman carrying a lamp in plain daylight alludes to Diogenes of Sinope.²⁹ However, the madman also mirrors the prophet Elijah's mockery of Baal's priests amidst a ritual animal and human sacrifice contest. Where else could the self-declared philosophical «hammer of idols» who attempted to shatter Christianity's «hangman's metaphysics» acquire his distinctive tool for testing and shattering sacrificial false transcendences?³⁰ More so than by philosophy, the demythologisation of the Ancient polytheistic theologies was brought about by the fundamental Abrahamic distinction between the transcendence of the monotheistic God and the intra-historical false horizontal or deviated transcendence of the idols. YHWH or Allah's worship not only prohibits that of other gods but demands the intellectual acquiescence of their condition of false gods – mere idols (Ex 20:3). In Elijah's mockery of Baal's worship, parallel to the madman's tone and demythologising preaching, the idol is shattered and breaks in anthropomorphic pieces: «Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened» (1 Ki 18:27). Nietzsche's allusion to Elijah's God's triumph over Baal reveals what is at stake in this passage. It is not only about a rivalry amongst conceptions of divinity but about the centrality of the sacrifices' deviated transcendence in forming religions and preserving civilisations. Nietzsche's philosophy of God's murder discusses the founding murder of all civilisations from which, by its ritualisation, cultures spring. It is a discussion on which sacrifices are necessary and, therefore, a matter of anthropology as much as theology.

Girard's distinction between vertical and horizontal transcendence is illuminating in this respect. He first developed it in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.³¹ Horizontal tran-

²⁸ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Amongst other happenings whereby the cynic philosopher rebuked other philosopher's doctrines, mocking Plato's intelligible realm, he once carried a lamp in plain daylight searching for the authentic man among his neighbours. Diogenes Laertius tells us in his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* VI, § 6: «Having lighted a candle in the day time, he said, "I am looking for a man"». DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. London: Bohn's Classical Library, 1853.

³⁰ Cf. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*. In: *Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, The Four Great Errors, § 7. Aside from Heraclitus, Plato, and Lucretius, Nietzsche has been one of the most accomplished philosophical writers due to his provocative employment of literature to articulate and illustrate his thought. Following Hegel's attempt to develop a new language to discuss God, Nietzsche resorted to classical and scriptural literary models. Besides those offered by the Scriptures – especially the passion cycle – Nietzsche investigated the Greek tragedies inspired by the myths that carried the poets' theology in search of literary models for the development of a new language to discuss God. There, Nietzsche – a psychologist suspicious of supernatural explanations – found two alternative and opposing moral valuations.

³¹ Cf. René GIRARD, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965.

scendency is a matter for metaphysics and mystical theology concerning God's Being's separateness from being – how They infinitely exceed Being beyond any possible category knowable to human reason. False transcendence denotes the diversion of that glory to any being. Girard also calls false transcendence “horizontal” since it deviates divine glory to a finite being. Girard approached this distinction from the vantage point of desire. Whereas God is the ultimate object of human desire, what characterises horizontal transcendency is the deviation of the desire for God into another object. To explain how desire is always mimetic, shaped by a model, he compares it to the vanishing point in visual arts. The focal point is that point in the distance where parallel lines seem to converge. Christianity, Girard claims,

directs existence toward a vanishing point, either toward God or toward the Other. Choice always involves choosing a model, and true freedom lies in the basic choice between a human or a divine model. The impulse of the soul toward God is inseparable from a retreat into the Self. Inversely the turning in on itself of pride is inseparable from a movement of panic toward the Other.³²

In line with the Biblical derision of idolatry, false transcendency is also called «deviated» since it improperly attributes beings a feature of God's Being beyond Being. In that respect, the study of the choice between vertical and deviated transcendency concerns (philosophical) anthropology and ethics.

The God-seeking madman's confrontation of the positivists, «who did not believe in God», is received by them with the same ironic amusement that Elijah reserved to Baal's priests: «Is He lost?», asked one. “Did He wander off like a child?”, asked another. “Or is He hiding? Is He afraid of us?” “Has He gone to sea? Has He emigrated?”³³ Nietzsche's worshipers of science, more refined and prudish than Elijah, making a scatological remark concerning the divine digestion of an inexistent god, refer to a type of end of times: that of a god's worship due to the lack of belief in it. The positivists are talking about the twilight of the idol who had defeated the idols. They refer to the death of the aged Christian God. Like Kant, they are adults in an age of reason. Their atheistic persuasion that there is no God resembles Elijah's derision of Baal. In the positivists' response, Nietzsche aptly retains the apocalyptic language of the idols-shat-

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

³³ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*, *op. cit.*, § 125. Such ironic analogies between God and men reveal the disbelief in an anthropomorphic God of modern people. It reminds of the scorn with which Dionysius the Areopagite discredits those who make idols out of the images that the Scripture uses to talk about God without interpreting them allegorically, at the *Divine names* or the beginning of the *Celestial Hierarchy*. For instance: «We cannot, as mad people do, profanely visualize these heavenly and godlike intelligences as actually having numerous feet and faces. They do not have the curved beak of the eagle or the wings and feathers of birds...». PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *Celestial Hierarchy*. In: *The complete works*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987, II, 137A.

tering prophet. These rhetorical questions allow the madman to declare his sacrificial catechism: not only is God dead, but «*We have killed Him* – you and I! We are all His murderers!».³⁴

While Nietzsche is generally held to have been the prophet of God's death, the novelty of his utterance lies in stressing *our* active role in God's *murder*, which the madman emphasises employing anaphors that insist on the necessity of deriving rituals from the modern mob's lynching of God:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?³⁵

Nothing about the announcement of God's death ought to be shocking for the positivists the madman is addressing. Insofar as they are atheists, they do not believe in God. For them, naturalists, God died of old age when its lost explanatory role rendered its postulation unnecessary; as for an actual transcendent God, nothing like that has ever existed since there is only matter. What is perplexing, then, is that the blame for God's *murder* falls immediately at the positivists' feet. It is more outstanding to see that the God-seeker prophet also partakes in the blame next.

Reading this passage, we are also implied in God's lynching violent mob. Absorbed into the first-person plural, «we» are revealed as «murderers of all murderers». It is «our knives» that sacrificed God. After God's sacrifice, the question of atonement immediately follows: «what sacred games shall *we* have to invent?». That these sacred games erected to clean us from the blood stains and restore order are of human invention is, then, pressed upon the positivists and us in the query. The madman's gory preaching of God's murder employs a religious vocabulary to deal with the central concern of all historical religions: the sacrifice of dying and resurrecting gods, the subject matter common to origin myths and persecution texts. The unbelievable accusations, the mob's undifferentiation, the persecution of a scapegoat and a horizon for the re-differentiation, the themes common to origin myths and persecutory texts, are present in this passage.³⁶ The adoption of tone and chosen vocabulary of Nietzsche's famous parable is generally held to be merely a rhetorical style to convey the modern loss of the supernatural and the fleetness of religious cults and civilisations with particular reference to the Christian God's death of old age, a prophecy of nihilism's rise because of

³⁴ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*, *op. cit.*, § 125.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cf. René, GIRARD, «Interview: René Girard». *Diacritics* [Baltimore], 8/1, 1978, p. 40.

this historical process and its future overcoming by the overman. I will contend, with Girard, that besides these commonly identified topics, Nietzsche's development of a philosophy on God's murder reveals the Passion cycle as a true myth that deciphers the scapegoating mechanism, despite Nietzsche's rejection of what it stands for and his wager for radical humanism.

3. The historical Jesus, the Anti-Christ and self-fashioning

For Nietzsche, who thought of the afterlife as a lie, the historical Jesus' murder – rather than Christ's – meant that: «The one God and the one son of God: both are products of *ressentiment* . . .».³⁷ For Nietzsche, Jesus denied that «there was any gap between God and man» and «*lived* this unity of God as man».³⁸ I do not take this assertion to be a confession of faith but a mere rendition of the fundamental content of Jesus' preaching. Nietzsche offers this doctrine to contrast it with his reading of the disciples' attitude after Good Friday. In Nietzsche's account, the apostles' *ressentiment* for their master's failure to bring about God's kingdom led them to use Jesus' figure to assert and hide their will to power instead of living and dying like him. Luther had identified the Anti-Christ with the papacy; Nietzsche would associate historical Christendom with the Anti-Christ. Nietzsche suggests that had the disciples interpreted Jesus' teachings earnestly, they would have imitated Jesus by dying with him:

But his disciples were far from being able to *forgive* this death – which would have been evangelical in the highest sense; or even more, from *offering themselves up* for a similar death in the sweet and gentle calm of the heart . . . *Revenge* resurfaced, the most *unevangelical* feeling of all.³⁹

That «forgive» and «offering themselves up» are stressed in the original, and opposed to their counterparts, «unevangelical» and «revenge», is significant. They signify two radically different moral valuations which stand for opposing types of morality, as Nietzsche progressively notes. That Christendom has failed to resist the unchristian resentment that leads to revenge was nowhere more clearly expressed than in Nietzsche's philosophy, which recognised in resentment the *actual motive* of Christianity's institutionalisation. According to Nietzsche, Jesus' disciples, who did not forgive him for his death, interpreted it oppositely to Jesus' teachings. Nietzsche charges early

³⁷ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Anti-Christ*, *op. cit.*, § 40. As so many of Jesus' fellow Jewish contemporaries, some of which make their case in the Gospel, where their position is rebutted.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, § 41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, § 40.

Christians for having found a justification for their *odium theologicum* in the Cross – especially Paul.⁴⁰

The theological polemics of Christians on the definition and valuation of Christ and Christianity, from the early Jerusalem's council, dominated by Paul's party, to the present, have fuelled uncountable feuds, some of which have scaled to the persecution of non-Christians and «heterodox» Christians alike, leading to factionalist schisms and religious wars. Nietzsche accuses Jesus' disciples, the founders of the Church, of weaponizing Christianity against their enemies, thus asserting their vengeance in a hypocritical imitation of the Sanhedrin who condemned Jesus. For Nietzsche, who distinguished between facts and interpretations, his disciples did not understand Jesus' death: they used it as an excuse to conceal their will to power. Unlike them, Nietzsche asserted, «there was really only one Christian, and he died on the cross», and that is the only «true history of Christianity».⁴¹ Therefore, for Nietzsche, the Christians' history is that of the Antichrist.

According to Nietzsche's narrative, Paul ascribed the doctrine of the soul's immortality to Jesus' preaching, which he interpreted from the vantage point of Christ's resurrection, associated with the resurrection of the dead in the flesh: «And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith» (1 Cor 15:14). Against Paul, Nietzsche denounces Paul and the apostles for making the most pagan interpretation of Good Friday and against the true meaning of Jesus' Gospel of the equal right of all men to be sons of God. To the Pauline soteriological doctrine that God gave his innocent Son as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of the guilty, Nietzsche interjects: «What gruesome paganism!».⁴² By separating Jesus from themselves as the Jews had separated their God from their cultural context, the so-called Christians exercised their resentment. Nietzsche departs from Paul's teachings and the Christian mystical tradition ensuing, from Dionysius the Areopagite to Luther and Hegel. Nietzsche interprets Jesus' death as a mere consequence of his anarchistic actions. As his condemnation attests, he died «for his own guilt»,⁴³ having opposed the hierarchical social, political and religious establishment. Furthermore, in this account, «in fact, Jesus had done away with the very idea of “guilt”»⁴⁴ by asserting his doctrine of divine filiation affirmed by the unity of God and men. In Nietzsche's book, the historical Jesus, whom Paul mostly ignored in his preaching, is a nuisance for the Apostle to the Gentiles – unless he is dead and nailed to a Cross. Only then can he preach that Christ was nailed to

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, §§ 40, 41, 44...

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, § 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, § 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, § 27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, § 41.

the Cross as the sacrificial mediator between God and humans, who resurrected and awaits his followers in the afterlife...

The irony in Nietzsche's departure from Paul is that he is too much of an enemy of Paul not to become Pauline and Christocentric to a certain extent. Whereas Paul conceived the *mysterium iniquitatis* by which the Church, *casta meretrix*, would bring about the Antichrist, Nietzsche identified it nowhere more in its element than in Paul's doctrine. In Nietzsche's eyes, at the outset of the primitive Christian movement, Paul poisoned Christianity. Paul brought about the corruption of Jesus' teachings due to his interpretation of the Cross as the innocent's sacrifice for the guilty. Nevertheless, he was not alone. For Nietzsche, the Gospels «are invaluable testimony to the already inescapable corruption within the first congregation»; «the *opposite* of naïve corruption, they are refinement par excellence, they are psychological corruption raised to an art». ⁴⁵ With alike craftsmanship and lack of naiveté, Nietzsche had Zarathustra preach his gospel of the self-fashioned god: the overman, the type of person brought about by God's murder.

4. Dionysos vs. the Crucified

Nietzsche's post-moral horizon beyond good and evil is a post-Christian moral horizon. Therefore, Nietzsche is mainly concerned with overcoming Christianity as morality. To that effect, Nietzsche must tame Christian compassion in valuing sacrifice. Since the overman's horizon is post-Christian, it must identify what is Christian to depart from and challenge it with «more noble ideals». ⁴⁶ In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche proposes a transvaluation of Christian values, as the Cross had caused an inversion of the sacrificial religious orders' values. Once all values are deposed, there remains the value of the devaluer. ⁴⁷ The aristocratic ethics inspired by classical mythological heroes and gods allow Nietzsche to set a type that he uses as a frame of reference to consider modern European Christian morality and to value the life affirmation behind classical heroic values that shaped the virtue ethics where human life's goal is excellence. In the writings Nietzsche was preparing during his last sane days, he would seek to «overcome everything Christian through something supra-Christian». ⁴⁸ To that effect, Nietzsche recovered a symbol whose doctrine was opposed by the symbol of the Cross: the Greek God Dionysos, a «mysterious symbol of the highest world-af-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, § 44.

⁴⁶ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *op. cit.*, I, § 8.

⁴⁷ Cf. Eric von der LUFT, «Sources of Nietzsche's "God is Dead!" and its Meaning for Heidegger». *Journal of the History of Ideas* [Philadelphia], 45/2, 1984, p. 275.

⁴⁸ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, *op. cit.*, § 1051.

firmation and transfiguration of existence that has yet been attained on earth». ⁴⁹ In this regard, Nietzsche's thought is shaped by the narrative tensions between the models offered by the adversary conceptions of divinity, inspiring Christian saints and mythic heroes.

Nietzsche did not propose regressing to pre-Christian metaphysics and their theologies, nor did he preach the Crucified. As Williams aptly remarks, Nietzsche's investigation of morality was raised by the problem of pity, one of the two emotions that tragedy arises in Aristotle's account of it, and that could be rephrased in the language of Psalm 2:11: fear of God and trembling before Them. ⁵⁰ In choosing Dionysos' martyrdom as the model of his tragic philosophy over that of the Crucified, Nietzsche endorsed the sort of moral perspectivism inspired by the admission, under polytheism, of the simultaneous existence of incommensurable types of valuation judgments. ⁵¹ Nietzsche could not have endorsed any theology as revealed since he criticised such shelters of false transcendence as Platonism, Christianity, and Fatherland. Instead, Nietzsche attempted to cultivate a tragic sensibility inspired by the shocking symbol of Dionysos motionless, destroyed, and devoured in a cannibal banquet that stands against the Eucharist.

Paragraph 1052 of *The Will to Power* contains Nietzsche's most lucid comparison between myths and the Gospels. He presents it as the contrast between two types of religiosities resulting from two adversary conceptions of divinity and deification. Nietzsche considers the *pagan* type of thanksgiving and life-affirmation for which Dionysos stands in opposition to the life-denying decadence Nietzsche attributes to the typical religious man: «Must its highest representative not be an apology for and deification of life?». ⁵² Nietzsche favours the tragic consciousness that can redeem life's contradictions, affirming even the most brutal suffering. At the same time, he attributes the imitation of the Cross as an escape from this world's suffering into nothingness. Nietzsche presents two rival types of deification that arise from the interpretation given to the meaning of suffering: a tragic or a Christian reading of the meaning of sacrifice:

Dionysus versus the «Crucified»: there you have the antithesis. It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom – it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, and the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering – the «Crucified as the innocent one» – is an objection to this life,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Cf. Robert R. WILLIAMS, *Tragedy, recognition, and the death of God: studies in Hegel and Nietzsche*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 1.

⁵¹ Cf. Eric James BAUMANN, «*The Spirit is Willing*»: *T. S. Eliot and English Literary Religion*. [PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1998].

⁵² Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, *op. cit.*, § 1052.

as a formula for its condemnation. (...) The god on the Cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction.⁵³

Whereas Nietzsche seems to refer primarily to the tragic consciousness of life as a struggle when he speaks figuratively of rivalry, war, and power throughout his previous works, the explicit mentions of the collective murder of God in the madman's parable cannot be avoided considering this passage. In both instances, we find literal references to the founding murder. It is essential to realise that, after announcing the fundamental opposition between the Dionysos and the Crucified types, Nietzsche begins by asserting their martyrdom, which both hold in common. They share their condition of victims of a collective murder. Both are scapegoats offered in sacrifice. Both were considered gods and worshipped by their murderers. In synthesis, both were sacrificed humans regarded as gods. In these respects, we discuss the same story in both cases, which Nietzsche reads with the euhemeristic spectacles that recognise humans there where myths talk about gods.

Nevertheless, the meaning of their martyrdom is precisely the opposite: Dionysos stands for the will to annihilate; the Crucified for the will to suffer. Girard has credited Nietzsche with the most nuanced comparison of myths and Gospels, whose «irreconcilable opposition» had not been understood: «Nietzsche is a marvelous antidote to all fundamentally anti-biblical efforts to turn mythology into a kind of Bible».⁵⁴ When later positivists confronted the problem of dying and rising gods during the twentieth century, they did not see past the identity in the martyrdom of Dionysos and the Crucified. They found the foundation sacrifice. However, they could not unearth the scapegoat mechanism, as Nietzsche partially did, explaining all founding murders by which communities plagued by the violent consequences of mimetic desire defer the violence of all against one to preserve themselves. As Nietzsche recognised, the Cross has been revealing the scapegoat mechanism for over two thousand years. It has taken all this time for the victim's perspective to triumph against Dionysos, who stands for the eternal return of sacrificial violence in sacrificial religion. The Crucified is the bait that Dionysos, sacrificial religiosity, swallowed. While employing scapegoating, sacrificial religion has preserved and held communities together since the beginning, the Crucified, whose innocence the Gospels affirm, is the radical condemnation of the scapegoat mechanism that depends on the persecutor's unanimous persuasion of the victim's culpability. Opposing the Crucified with Dionysos, Nietzsche recognised that we can only see Mount Olympus clearly from the vantage point of Calvary.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ René GIRARD, *The Girard Reader*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

Nietzsche's exclusive disjunction between the cannibal banquet and the eucharist, irreducible to aesthetics, is correct. It is unnecessary to back Nietzsche's endorsement of the gods-engendering collective murder to admit that, by identifying the scapegoat mechanism at the core of all religious traditions and cultures, Nietzsche went further than moderns in understanding anthropology. In this respect, he reached a lucidity akin to that of a Hebrew prophet or a Father of the Church. Prior to Modernity, the fundamental opposition that Nietzsche saw between Dionysos and the Crucified had already been posited by the Christian tradition, as I will discuss next with reference to Augustine's formulation of their antagonism to offer another instance of Nietzsche's adversary divinities. The Christian doctrine on nonviolence revealing the vital possibility of a Christlike renunciation of resentment to the extreme of loving one's enemy has provoked Christians since the beginning. The New Testament attests to this in Jesus forgiving the mob that scapegoated him and in the early Church's conversion narratives. For instance, Paul's conversion narrative in Acts of the Apostles is centred on his realisation that he was partaking in the sacrificial religion's human sacrifice of innocents: «Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?» (Acts 9:4). That Christians have often failed to live up to the Gospel's doctrine is also attested by the scriptural account of Jesus' radical teachings and demands in contrast with the early Church's life, ripe in rivalries, factionalism, and treason. The parallel narratives of Judas' treason and Peter's denial of Christ, registered by all four canonical Gospels, are two cases in point. In these parallel and opposing narratives, Peter's later conversion is contrasted with Judas' resentment and murderous despair. Like Judas, Peter is first incapable of escaping the mimetic contagion of the collective persecution of Jesus. That Christians have often acted at odds with the Christian doctrine should not shock anyone familiar with the Bible; nevertheless, the Christians' largely failed attempts to emulate Christ have prompted them to distillate a typology of human divinisation or saintliness, which they have contrasted with alternative typologies in the way Nietzsche compares Dionysos and the Crucified.

Before Nietzsche's opposing types of Dionysos and the Crucified, Augustine spoke of two cities being created by two types of love reflecting on original sin and grace: «the earthly by love of self, extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self».⁵⁵ Augustine shaped two models of love, by which the object of desire determines sacrifices ensuing from its consistent pursuit. They both require a type of sacrifice: of oneself or God. Augustine's alternative of loving God may seem exceedingly abstract. It also seems to confirm Nietzsche's idea that Christianity demands giving this world away for another. However, we should consider the Johannine identification of loving the unseen God with loving the visible

⁵⁵ AUGUSTINE, *The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, § 28.

other: the neighbour, a sibling in Christ (1 John 4:20). It becomes apparent that Christ's imitation demands more than renouncing this world and its struggles as soon as Augustine's types of community are placed beside the Gospels' account of Jesus' synthesis of the Jewish religious tradition: «This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you» (John 15:12); that is: to the extreme of death (John 13:1). Martyrdom, as the Christian measure of love and saintliness, is something we should have present in conceiving Augustine's two types of love. Loving God does not preclude from loving the other; all the contrary, it makes it more urgent. As Nietzsche argues, Christianity as morality inverts the world's values, which are those of the master. Under this light, Augustine points out that there is a stage at which a master-like love for oneself entails contempt for others and vice versa.

On the one hand, the sacrificial implications of Augustine's two types of love are highlighted when put aside Nietzsche's opposition between Dionysos and the Crucified. Self-sacrifice – or better yet, self-donation out of love to others – is God-like only when compared to the Crucified. Conversely, an exclusive love of oneself in the guise of Dionysos' immanent transcendence uncovers its tragic consequences for this world's victims. On the other hand, the human person's religious nature and the source and goal of Nietzsche's two religious irreducible types are revealed by their association with Augustine's two paradigms of love. While loving the transcendent God seems inextricable from loving the other to the contempt of oneself, the love of oneself reveals that vertical transcendence does not cease to exist due to disbelief in God, but rather it is deviated and made horizontal, immanent.⁵⁶ It may be the case that there is no transcendent God; regardless, as Nietzsche rightly realised, human nature is mimetic and religious; that is, either adversarial or self-giving and, in any case, imitative. We divinise our heroes, which we erect into role models of our desire. Human desire is revealed, in turn, as metaphysical: the desire to become the models we erect into gods. While the twice-born god Dionysos represents the rivalrous aspects of mimetic desire and its imposition of order through a sacrificial economy of violence, the Crucified, as the forgiving victim, represents the self-gifting opposition to sacrifice and the instauration of a new interrelational order. Better than anyone before, Nietzsche realised how secularised forms of deviated transcendence would substitute sacrificial religion's economy of violence, but not human sacrifices or their deviated, god-making, intra-historical transcendence.

Nietzsche's tragic philosophy radicalised Hegel's secularised and intra-historical philosophical theology, going beyond him in unearthing the anthropological centrality of sacrifice and its apparent inevitability for the foundation and preservation of political order. Nietzsche realised that even radical humanist ideals are not exempt

⁵⁶ Cf. Simon DE KEUKELAERE, «What Is Deviated Transcendence? Woolf's *The Waves* as a Textbook Case». *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* [East Lansing] 12/13, 2006, p. 195.

from taxing communities with sacrifice's deviated transcendence, a God-making mechanism. According to Girard, this process of scapegoating is a fundamental mechanism in the development of human culture and religion, as it allows societies to maintain social order by projecting and externalising violence onto a single individual or group rather than turning against one another in a destructive cycle of mimetic rivalry. René Girard's concept of «deviated transcendence» illuminates this phenomenon. It refers to how human societies use religion and other forms of symbolic or cultural systems to deflect and channel violent impulses away from the community and onto designated scapegoats. This way, sacrifices economise the violence that would otherwise menace the community's annihilation at its own hand in the *bellum omnium contra omnes*.⁵⁷ Deviated transcendence refers to how this process of scapegoating and violence becomes elevated and sanctified through religious and cultural systems, creating myths, rituals, and other symbolic forms that justify and legitimise the scapegoating process. Better than anyone else in his generation, Nietzsche realised that the apparent secularisation of Christianity could bring about a new valuation of the ancient sacred as an alternative to politics of *ressentiment*. There are but two choices concerning deification, as Nietzsche saw well: adopting the viewpoint of the persecutor or choosing the victim's perspective.

In choosing Dionysos type of divinisation as his model, Nietzsche wanted to take part in the aristocratic virtues that would warrant a prosperous, heroic future, regardless of its price – always paid for in the currency of the victims' blood. Girard retorts to Nietzsche's idea of human deification, reminding him that Heraclitus, his ancient rival in the art of epigrams, had already warned us that «Dionysos is the same thing as Hades».⁵⁸ Girard also shows the absurdity of Nietzsche's claim to elitism when he sides with the lynching mob instrumental to Dionysos deification: «lynchings are the work of a crowd».⁵⁹ Following Heraclitus in associating Dionysos with the Hell of mimetic contagion that constitutes the lynching mobs, Girard declares: «Dionysos is the destructiveness at the heart of mimetic contagion».⁶⁰ Nietzsche's last written words before going mad pose an eloquent synthesis of his life's journey and testify to the price he had to pay for choosing Dionysos: «*Condammo te ad vitam diaboli vita*».⁶¹ The ancient sacred economy of violence Dionysos represented offered Nietzsche his divinisation model.

⁵⁷ Cf. Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2009, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Quoted by René GIRARD, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Ossining: Orbis Books, 2001, p. 120.

⁵⁹ René GIRARD, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014, p. 52.

⁶⁰ René GIRARD, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶¹ René GIRARD, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, p. 159.

Girard explains why Nietzsche went further than other modern thinkers, grasping sacrifice's actual utility. Girard claims the ancients were closer to understanding the efficacy of the human sacrifices that baffle us than scientific researchers such as Sir James Frazer or Levi-Strauss. They at least understood that sacrifices appease the gods and reconcile societies, allowing them to thrive instead of reaching extinction. A victim's death may bring the community's fruitfulness and allow its flourishing.⁶² This efficacy is often represented by myths in their comparison of scapegoats to seeds. Hagiographer later reversed this metaphor to speak of the martyr's fertility in saving converts. Heeding Nietzsche's intuition of the fundamental opposition of Dionysos' martyrdom and that of the Crucified, Girard could realise they have the scapegoat mechanism in common. Once the scapegoat mechanism is unearthed, it may be appreciated that sacrificial religion serves a purpose: «The peoples of the world do not invent their gods. They deify their victims».⁶³ Moreover, the founding murder is mythologised and ritualised, providing the community a way out of future mimetic crises. By virtue of its mythologisation and ritualisation, sacrificial economy offers human communities an alternative to extinction. In this respect, Nietzsche offered a more accurate explanation of the fertility rituals studied by Frazer⁶⁴ and Jessie Weston.⁶⁵

The Bible's uniqueness concerning other myths is only perceived in comparing the Crucified and Dionysos. Girard charges the modern and postmodern approaches to comparing the myths and the Jude-Christian Scriptures for their inability to tell their similarities and differences.⁶⁶ While their similitude lies in the fact that the myths and the Gospels depict the historical event of an instance when the scapegoat mechanism has taken place, their difference lies in the narrator's perspective and interpretation. Girard ironically remarks that the anthropologists studying primitive societies recognised human sacrifices behind both accounts but remained oblivious to their different representations. Conversely, the deconstructionists simply ignored the facts, isolated in their interpretative solipsism.⁶⁷ In contrast, Girard has shown that the Gospels relate the event from the victim's point of view, whereas myths relate it from the persecutor's standpoint. God's death and resurrection myths narrate a mythic, or «satanic», cycle. This cycle has three phases: «crisis, collective violence,

⁶² Cf. René GIRARD, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-94.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁴ Cf. James George FRAZER, *The Golden Bough. A Study of Magic and Religion*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005.

⁶⁵ Cf. Jessie L. WESTON, *From Ritual to Romance*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2011.

⁶⁶ Cf. René GIRARD, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-120.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

and sacred revelation».⁶⁸ The cycle's last phase consists of the divinisation of the sacrificed victim. Notably, the Old Testament excludes the third moment every time. In contrast, the New Testament, instead of mythologising the Hebrew Scriptures in its account of the historical Good Friday, contains a crucial difference with respect to the myths: it revolves around the God-made man's *kenosis* instead of a man-made God's *theosis*. Myths and Gospels offer an opposing reply to whether the collective violence exerted against the victim is justified. «In the myth the expulsions of the hero are justified each time. In the Biblical account they never are».⁶⁹ In order to reduce the biblical to a merely mythological account, it is necessary to scapegoat the historical Jesus as Nietzsche does when he sides with his persecutors in affirming that Jesus died «for his own guilt».⁷⁰ The Incarnation, asserting God's fundamental innocence and Their opposition to sacrificial violence, marks the chief difference between myths and Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The Bible disclosed the victim's innocence.

Appraising Nietzsche's opposition between Dionysos and the Crucified, Girard realised the extent to which Nietzsche was right in remarking upon it. As a result, he could define the Christian revelation in anthropological terms. For him, the representation of the persecutory «mimetic convergence of all against one», previously hidden or falsified by myths, is what the Cross has been unearthing for the past two thousand years.⁷¹ Looked at from Paul's vantage point after his conversion, the Cross became the source of all knowledge for him and Christ's followers. In 1 Cor 1:18-31, Paul argues that the Cross reverses this world's wisdom. In Colossians 2:14, Paul further clarifies that the law's accusation has been nailed to Jesus' Cross. The scapegoat mechanism, which relied on remaining hidden for the persecutory mimetic contagion to take place, became exposed in Jesus' Cross. As Girard notes, «the principalities and powers themselves are paraded, in full public view, in the triumphal process of the crucified Christ, so in a way they too are crucified».⁷² In this respect, Girard follows Paul, for whom potencies and principalities were about their regular business of sacrificing humans to preserve the Roman *pax* when Jesus tricked them into showing their true colours. Little did they know that soon, their secret would be shouted from the world's rooftops, challenging the idol's false transcendence. The accuracy of these Pauline metaphors by which Christ and Satan are tied to the Cross together points to martyrdom's unity, as Nietzsche conceived it. However, Dante is right in his valuation at the point where

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Anti-Christ*, *op. cit.*, § 27.

⁷¹ Cf. René GIRARD, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

Nietzsche is misguided concerning the significance of the victim mechanism's revelation by the Cross and its concealment by myths. Instead of glorifying scapegoating that he nevertheless revealed, as Girard points out, Dante shows the banality of these phenomena representing Satan nailed to the Cross in *Par XXXIV*.⁷³ According to Girard, in the Cross' triumph, Jesus gave humanity a choice between two forms of peace-making. We can either choose, like Nietzsche, to reconcile with the imposition of *pax* through scapegoating or choose God's loving nonviolence, which surpasses understanding –the peace about which Paul speaks in Phil 4:7.⁷⁴

Christianity's reappraisal of the innocent victim may either signify an opportunity for conversion and reconciliation or bring about humanity's extinction. After all, sacrificial order has kept human communities' extinction at bay every time interpersonal recognition and collaboration stop doing the trick. However, after the Cross, the conceit of the victim's culpability granting the sacrificial order is lost. Nietzsche's madman wondered if the «greatness of this deed» was «too great for us».⁷⁵ Nietzsche's new radical humanist religion posed the overman and Zarathustra as models for human flourishing. However, these idols were carved in the image of Dionysos. Behind their radical humanist atonement for God's murder is an attempt to restore the engine of eternal return fuelled by sacrificial violence towards random victims. As Girard warns in *Battling to the End*, his most apocalyptic book, the unveiling of eternal return «goes too far in the revelation and destroys its own foundations».⁷⁶ Girard sees Nietzsche's personal tragedy in that his attempt to undermine the Biblical revelation of the victim's innocence sabotages his wager for Dionysos. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's defeat before the enemy he attempted to bring down, Christianity's triumph as morality, does not warrant humanity's conversion. Instead, it has led to the realisation that violence «no longer has any meaning».⁷⁷ Attempts to reinstate the *pax* imposed by sacrificial order are doomed to lack their sanction of divine glory. By this, I mean that since we no longer believe such old lies as «it is sweet and appropriate to die for one's country»,⁷⁸ their power has lost grasp upon us. Regardless, we are not better than our ancestors, who have spilt the blood of the justs before us. We are not better, but we have developed mass-destruction nuclear weapons and perfected the ability to destroy ourselves on an industrial scale.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷⁵ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*, *op. cit.*, § 125.

⁷⁶ René GIRARD, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009, p. 96.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ HORACE, *The Odes*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008, III. 2., v. 13.

5. Conclusions

Nietzsche agreed with Hegel that, in a way, Christianity had triumphed. I have suggested that Nietzsche's philosophy is a challenge to the triumph of Christianity as morality, whose transvaluation of values he attempted to reverse inspired by Greek mythology and tragedy. Nietzsche criticised Kant for naturalising Christian morality as rational and departed from Hegel's attempt to resurrect God in the guise of the historical self-revelation of the Absolute. Opposing politics of resentment, which he recognised in axial religions and nowhere as clearly as in the Cross, Nietzsche's attempt to argue for virtue ethics and his attention to myth and tragedy led him to the discovery of sacrifice's centrality to religion and culture. Hegel's tragic philosophy influences Nietzsche's later understanding of God's death as a collective murder to a certain extent. Like Hegel rejecting God's vertical transcendence and impassibility, Nietzsche remains faithful to earthly horizontal transcendence, which he unearthed in its sacrificial consequences. I have pointed out how Nietzsche's exploration of sacrifice and self-sacrifice, in both secular and religious contexts, illustrates the economy of violence imposed by the conflictive aspects of mimetic desire and its consequences. Nietzsche thought that, despite appearances of the opposite, Christianity had triumphed as morality. The modern concern for the victims is the result of Christianity's triumph. For neopaganism, the alleged defence of victims must justify the persecution of some, reverting to sacrificial religion. For Christianity, divine nonviolence condemns any sacrifice. Nietzsche's challenge to Christianity's historical progressive realisation was the overman's radical humanism that he conceived as the prophecy of nihilism's overcoming. Completing the Enlightened challenge to Christianity, Nietzsche confronted the Cross with Dionysos.

I have argued that Nietzsche's post-moral horizon is post-metaphysical and post-Christian and that his philosophy's primary goal is to overcome Christianity as a morality. He attempted this by challenging Christian compassion and its associated values, using the symbol of Dionysos to replace the Christian symbol of the Cross. Nietzsche's thought is shaped by the narrative tensions between Christian saints and mythic heroes as human ideals, and his naturalist and psychologist investigation of morality is centred around the problem of pity raised by sacrifice, tragedy's crux. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy is inspired by the symbol of Dionysos, whom the prophet of God's death introduces as a life-affirming deity in contrast to the life-denying decadence of the typical religious man. Nietzsche's tragic consciousness can redeem life's contradictions, even the most brutal suffering, whereas Christianity's imitation of the Cross is seen as an escape from this world's suffering into nothingness. Nietzsche presents two rival types of deification arising from mutually exclusive interpretations of suffering and martyrdom's meaning: a tragic or a Christian reading of sacrifice.

Nietzsche's comparison between polytheistic and Christian types of morality and models proved that modern Europeans, even in seemingly post-Christian times, still endorsed Judeo-Christian values – or, else, they regressed to the ancient sacred, even if they disguised their religion as humanism. Christianity is not different to the rest of the sacrificial religions founded on sacrifices. Nevertheless, although Nietzsche opposes the cross' rejection of sacrifice, which he regards as life-denying, he goes further than the positivists in realising that the Crucified and Dionysos' identity in their martyrdom does not entail an identity in its interpretation. Nietzsche, who admired Jesus as a man, did not favour two world theories and decried the Christian's double morality, which he recognised transmogrified into democracy, nationalism, and such emerging lay religions and their idols, which he shattered to worship the overman. In these respects, Modernity entails an unlikely historical realisation of Christianity overflowing religious dikes despite the declared atheism that characterised the theological modernist challenge to the old-time religion: «Must we not become gods ourselves...?».⁷⁹

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⁷⁹ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Joyous Science*, *op. cit.*, § 125.

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