

Notes for an address at Prophet's Pulpit, St Martin's Collingwood.

26th August 2001

SLOBODAN MILOSEVIC

1991: launches his campaign to replace Tito as leader of all Yugoslavia.

- Slovenia secedes; Croatia secedes.
- Bosnia war between Muslims, Croats and Serbs.
- The West, led by the USA, various attempts at peace. Milosevic included.
- Milosevic turns his attention on Kosovo.
- Region is Serbianised.
- Loss of employment and power for the local Kosovar people.
- Serbian soldiers and para-military groups attack Kosovars.
- NATO bombs Serbia.
- Loss of civilian life and enormous damage to infrastructure.
- Serbian offensive in Kosovo escalates dramatically.
- A million people arrive in neighbouring countries in a few days.
- Milosevic no longer welcome at negotiating tables.
- Now labelled a war criminal.
- The West imposes solution on Kosovo and a sort of peace returns.
- In 2001, Milosevic handed over to the International Court of Justice in the Hague to answer for war crimes.

Once Milosevic was the mate of the West: Now he's the enemy. What's going on here?

FREMANTLE DOCKERS

Monumentally bad season, the Fremantle Dockers sacked their coach, Damian Drum.

Drum heard the news second-hand before the official word came from the club hierarchy. What's going on here?

JOE GUTNICK

Gutnick saved the Melbourne Football Club when the merger with Hawthorn failed.

So much appreciated—Club President.

After a few years falls out of favour

Sacked—or pushed—or resigned (take your pick).

Jewish and not fit the stereotype of a Melbourne Football club member (let alone President), of course had nothing to do with his removal.

When ABC commentator Tim Lane asked Alan Stockdale whether Joe's ethnicity was a factor, Stockdale exploded and threatened legal action. What's going on here?

GANG RAPE ARTICLE

Read it

RENE GIRARD

When cultures fall apart, they fall into violence: and when they revive themselves, they do so with violence.

The scapegoating mechanism.

As a society begins to fall apart, violence increases.

Prehistoric humans discovered a mechanism to get rid of the violence.

Blame a victim.

Victim is identified.

Accused. Made responsible for the violence in the society.

And killed.

Examples: Witch burning, French aristocracy, Jews in Germany.

Why does it work? When the victim is accused, the community finds itself of one mind. The social cohesion of the MOB.

There is enormous social cohesion and a kind of peace.

Examples: Football crowd behaviour, The demo, The after-film effect.

When the victim is killed, peace and stability returns to the community.

Girard not first to observe a link between violence and social solidarity.

A common phenomenon observed by sociologists.

Example: solidarity against a common enemy.

But Girard's insight is to see that the scapegoating mechanism is at the very heart of our modern society.

Why don't we see this more easily? Why has it taken aeons for such an insight to become possible?

Answer: (Part2) Myth works in society to obscure and reinterpret the violence. To make the unacceptable acceptable.

Example: Myth of Jewish manipulation of world finances. Poverty in Germany was caused by victor retribution. Nazis blamed the Jews.

Without myth, we would see what we had done. Myth obscures the truth of the event. Prevents us from saying Sorry.

Case Study: When we talk to people who got caught up in mob violence, they express contrition. Examples in Rwanda, South Africa, Bosnia. "How could I have done that?"

The role of myth is to extend the gap between the violence and the contrition.

What forms does myth take?

In ancient society, it took the form of religion.

The victim became a God. That effectively obscured their status as a victim!

But a God who demanded what? More victims. Human sacrifice.

Effect? To re-enact the scapegoating event with as much horror and blood as before. To re-create the sense of social cohesion that the mob murder of a victim creates.

In time, human sacrifice is transformed into what? Animal sacrifice.

Then into what? Symbolic sacrifice. Examples? Removal of leaders (elections, succession...); sport (“war without guns”—Orwell); ambition (victory over others in promotion); keeping up with the Joneses (which is really beating up the non-Joneses).

SUMMARY: Girard hypothesis—scapegoating mechanism creates social cohesion and myth sustains and maintains it.

But something is happening. The mechanism isn’t working too well any more. Israelis and Palestinians are scapegoating, and still their societies are riddled with violence.

Story of the 14th century French witch.

Is she guilty? Did the 14th century French people think she was guilty? Of course!

How do we know this? And why has it taken so long to have this insight?

Sympathy for the victim is a 20th century phenomenon.

Michael Ignatieff describes it as a “recent invention.”

Before the 20th century the majority view would have been that victims were guilty.

The scapegoating mechanism relies on a belief in the victim’s guilt.

So long as Robespierre could maintain the myth of the guilt of French aristocracy, he could hold the revolution together.

So long as Hitler could maintain the myth of Jewish guilt, he could hold the Nazi Reich together.

And interestingly, the corollary is also true.

So long as Milosevic could maintain the idea that the Serbian people were the perpetually innocent victims of the Turks, Austrians, Croats and NATO, he could hold the Serb people together.

Similarly, so long as the Jews see themselves as the perennially innocent victims, a form of social cohesion is maintained.

Why is it that stories like “The Scarlet Pimpernel” arose to puncture the idea that all the French aristocrats were guilty?

How is it that we no longer believe in the guilt of the Jews?

Hardly anybody, especially even in Germany and Austria, believe this today—even if they or their parents or grandparents may have once.

Why is it that Milosevic, who once held the Serbian nation together, is now handed over by them in exchange for the modern equivalent of thirty pieces of silver?

The answer, according to Girard, is Jesus. Cross.

Girard writes that the New Testament “is the essential text in the cultural upheaval of the modern world.”

And the central event in the New Testament is “a public execution, an act of official violence regarded as legally righteous by the political authorities and as a sacred duty by the religionists.” (Bailie p37)

THE MURDER OF JESUS.

In most respects, the crucifixion of Jesus is just like the official murders of thousands of victims before and since.

But in one respect it is very different.

“The Gospels tell of a perfectly typical story of victimisation with astonishing insight into the role of religious zeal and mob psychology played in it. Most importantly, and contrary to all myth, the story is told from the **point of view of the victim** and not that of the religious community of persecutors.” (Bailie p33)

The voice of the victim is heard.

We see the innocence of the victim.

And the scapegoating mechanism is unveiled.

And, once you know how scapegoating works, it doesn't work too well anymore.

Our minds have been “infected with a demythologising virus that the gospel has let loose on the world.” (Bailie p39)

And so we have been living, the last 2000 years, in a time when the scapegoating mechanism, upon which culture has relied for its security, is being systematically subverted by the message of the Cross.

The revelation of the Gospel “undermines these structures by *deconstructing* their justifying myths and awakening a concern for their victims that gradually renders these structures morally unacceptable and socially counterproductive.” (Bailie p40)

And so to the central modern dilemma:

“Empathy for the victim and the need for our rituals of victimisation are incompatible. Sooner or later one of them will have to prevail over the other.” (Bailie p45)

These are the times in which we live. How may we help the world to decide between empathy for the victim, and more and more victims being created?

between compassion for the oppressed, and the creation of more and more victims of oppression?

between acts of love, compassion and justice, and acts of exclusion, scapegoating and victimizing?

between societies built on the values of the Kingdom, and communities built on the values of a fallen and destructive world?