



Healing and Transformation: Lonergan, Girard and Buddhism

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Abstract

This paper presents some comparative themes examining the anthropologies of Bernard Lonergan, René Girard and the four noble truths in Buddhism. It also engages some specific aspects from the Tibetan lineage of Buddhism represented by Pema Chödrön (Canada), following her teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche.

The approach of the paper invokes the structure of John Thatamanil's *The Immanent Divine*: diagnosis, etiology, prognosis, prescription (solution) as an organizational way of presenting material on such diverse thinkers. Following an overview of these thinkers, I will highlight some of the themes such as suffering, violence, healing, compassion, and the role of affectivity in its relation to desire. It should become clear that such a practical approach to Buddhist-Christian dialogue provides a fruitful starting point and underscores the value of learning other religious traditions.

Keywords

Buddhism, Girard, healing, Lonergan, suffering

'It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.'
Pope Francis

'If we cannot stop, we cannot have insight.' Thich Nhat Hanh

Introduction¹

Shortly into his new pontificate, Pope Francis declared:

One of the titles of the Bishop of Rome is Pontiff, that is, a builder of bridges with God and between people. My wish is that the dialogue between us should help to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced! . . . and so this dialogue between places and cultures a great distance apart matters greatly to me, this dialogue between one end of the world and the other, which today are growing ever closer, more interdependent, more in need of opportunities to meet and to create real spaces of authentic fraternity. In this work, the role of religion is fundamental. It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God [genuine religious value]. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions . . .²

While Pope Francis went on to emphasize the dialogue with Islam and also with nonbelievers in the secular world, his remarks set a tone for his papacy making dialogue with other religions a priority. To date, the dialogue with Buddhism and with Asian religions in general has not been championed by the papacy. John Paul II stated ‘the doctrines of salvation in Buddhism and Christianity are opposed.’ He went on to suggest that the spirituality of John of the Cross embodied the essence of Buddhist teachings.³ Inadvertently, this might lead some to conclude such dialogue is not necessary or even possible. In a French interview with *Le Monde*, Pope Benedict (speaking then as a Cardinal and prefect of the CDF) made some pejorative comments about Buddhism although he seemed to be aware of its growing influence. He declared that the biggest challenge to Christianity in the twentieth century ‘would not be Marxism but Buddhism.’⁴ Interestingly, the pioneer of interreligious dialogue

¹ The content of this essay was derived from a course I developed as a participant in the final cohort of the Luce Summer Seminars in Comparative Theology administered by the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, 2013, 2014, 2016. I am grateful to John Thatamanil and Francis Clooney for their organizing leadership in those seminars. A draft of this paper was given at the Ecclesiological Investigations Conference, Christianity in Asia, Chinese University of Hong Kong, July 21, 2016. I am grateful for the feedback I received, especially from Peter C. Phan. Phan was also honored at the conference for his life work and deep theological reflection navigating the metaxis of two continents.

² The Pope went on to say that these dialogues need to be particularly directed to Islam and to secular non-believers. Pope Francis I, Catholic New Service, March 22, 2013.

³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 85.

⁴ See Leo D. Lefebure, ‘Cardinal Ratzinger’s Comments on Buddhism,’ *Buddhist Christian Studies* 18 (1998): 221-223. Lefebure believes Ratzinger was expressing his personal opinion and not speaking for the Church, 221.

Thomas Merton, who had a much more favorable view of Buddhism, came to a similar conclusion when he declared ‘Christianity and Zen are the future’.⁵

The importance of interreligious dialogue goes hand-in-hand with the rise in comparative studies during the past century. More recently, comparative theology distinguishes itself from comparative religion in that comparative theologians are ‘insiders’ in one of the traditions they study.⁶ They do not aim to simply present what each tradition in their comparison understands or believes, but they take a stance as a believer from inside one of those traditions and try to probe and compare the deeper theological realities with one another. Just exactly why they are comparing in the first place or what the goal of such comparison is in the broader context of systematic theology, remains to be clarified as the discipline develops. Nor is it clear to what extent comparative theologians will be influenced by the tradition they study other than their own. Paul Knitter, for example, is a Christian theologian who claims outright that Buddhist practices make him a better Christian.⁷ He has taken the Bodhisattva vows and so by virtue of these commitments is in some sense a dual religious participant. Although it should be said that for many Buddhists it is not technically a religion, but a set of practices to heal human suffering. On this view, the question of dual religious belonging does not apply as it might for example in the case of, say, someone who claimed to be a dual believer in Christianity and Islam.

On the other end of the spectrum one can consider a pioneer of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, William Johnston (d. 2005), author of almost a dozen books on the topic. In his autobiography, he concluded that Buddhism and Christian approaches to mysticism and mystical experience were fundamentally different.⁸ At best, Buddhism was useful for helping develop Christian meditation

⁵ Cited in Joseph Quinn Raab, *Openness and Fidelity: Thomas Merton’s Dialogue with D.T. Suzuki, and Self-Transcendence* (Thesis for the degree of Ph.D. in Theology, University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, 2000), 95.

⁶ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9-10; Fundamentally, theologians presume and ask different types of questions. Comparative religionists limit their questions to understanding a specific tradition while theologians engage the realities understood as real claims. It is one thing to understand the difference between the teachings about Jesus or the Buddha, it is another to affirm the claims of one or both of these respective teachers or traditions as true. One cannot affirm their claims as true without venturing into the theological. See John Dadosky, *The Structure of Religious Knowing: Encountering the Sacred in Eliade and Lonergan* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 33-39.

⁷ Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). Pertinent to this discussion is Peter C. Phan’s *Being Religious Interreligiously* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), chapter 3 especially addresses multi-religious belonging.

⁸ William H. Johnston, *Mystical Journey: An Autobiography* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 137-38, 152-53.

practices, but he would not have called the meditation practices he taught for many years Buddhist practices. Perhaps without intending it, Johnston came to the same conclusion as John Paul II in his *Threshold of Hope*. Johnston, a Jesuit who preferred Carmelite spirituality to his own Ignatian spirituality, would not have completely agreed with John Paul but would have been sympathetic to some aspects of it. However, Johnston was convinced at least that Christianity had something to learn from Buddhist practices and so he specifically developed Christian mediation practices in light of what he had learned from them.⁹

What is the value of such a dialogue and how is it to be carried out? In this paper, I will demonstrate some of the value of the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. Given the complexity of the theological and methodological issues involved in comparative method, John Thatamanil provided a straightforward approach to comparative theology in his book *The Immanent Divine*.¹⁰ In that book he compares the thought of Shankara (788-820 AD) to the modern theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965). In a creative manner, he orders the range of topics in these two towering figures by invoking the medical model: diagnosis, etiology, prognosis and prescription/therapy. While no model is perfect, it enables him to begin a dialogue at the theoretical level by emphasizing the practical contribution of religions to understanding and addressing the ultimate problems of our existence.

In this essay, I borrow from Thatamanil's method and apply it to a dialogue invoking two Christian thinkers. I then engage some of the basic tenets of Buddhism, and in the final section, explore an application through some of the practices of Pema Chödrön, abbess of Gampo Abbey in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Specifically, I show how these can assist in the healing of dramatic bias as proposed by Lonergan and the healing of violent mimetic relations in Girard.

In one sense the approach in this essay is not novel since from its origins Buddhism has always been about the diagnosis of and prescription for human suffering. However, given that the methodology of the medical sciences is more delineated than in previous ages and because comparative theology is still exploring methodologies, Thatamanil offers a salient approach as he invokes it particularly as a method in comparative theology.

In general, Buddhism has a positive anthropology and is very practical in its aim to alleviate human suffering and ignorance. In contemporary Buddhism, Pema Chödrön and Thich Nat Hanh are both

⁹ See his book, *Christian Zen*, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 15-20.

¹⁰ John J. Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

specialists in communicating Buddhist teachings to Westerners. They both emphasize the four immeasurable ones (*apramāṇa*) or Abodes of Brahma (*brahmavihāra*) but Chödrön, through her teacher Chogyum Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987), has been teaching the ancient Lojong teachings. These teachings are effective in helping people to grow in compassion, charity and consideration of others.

Among Christian thinkers, Lonergan's anthropology has a basically positive starting point, although he crystallizes the basic problem of sin in his notions of progress, decline and redemption. By contrast, Girard's anthropology is basically negative but he succeeds in clarifying deviations of religion and their connection with violence, which are very relevant to our contemporary situation. Both thinkers offer necessary complements to a Christian anthropology.¹¹ Both emphasize something unique about Christianity and its solution to the problem of evil.

3. Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984)

Bernard Lonergan was formed in the Thomistic intellectual tradition, but he strove to integrate Aquinas's medieval theological achievement with those of modern philosophy, science, history, *Religionsgeschichte*, etc.

Human beings are created in the image of God and therefore are basically good. God gives fundamental desires to human beings which orient them towards transcendence over their limitations to a certain extent, although de facto creating a perennial tension between the self as transcended and the self as transcending. These desires are more like basic natural orientations in the world. He mentions four: the desire to know, the desire for justice, the desire for happiness, and the desire for immortality.¹² Most of Lonergan's intellectual career addressed the first one, the desire to know, and later, the desire for the good, so I will focus on these two.

¹¹ A comparison between Girard and Lonergan, while fruitful, will not be the focus of this essay.

¹² Bernard Lonergan, *The Redemption* ('Supplement to *De Verbo Incarnato: De Redemptione*,' unpublished manuscript) revised translation (2000) by Mike Shields, SJ, for the Lonergan Research Institute, Regis College, Toronto; Neil Ormerod presents a nuanced account of Lonergan's notion of desire by distinguishing natural versus elicited desires. He then raises the question whether the latter distinction is needed in Buddhism. See his 'Questioning Desire: Lonergan, Girard and Buddhism,' *Louvain Studies* 36 (2012): 356-71. While it is unclear whether he actually dialogued with Buddhists on the matter, in my conversations with them, it is clear to me that both notions of desires are present in Buddhism. Moreover, Lonergan's nomenclature of *desire* can be a source of confusion, because it does not communicate the basic nature or fundamental orientation of it. For example, when I put on my coat because I am cold, I am responding to a basic desire for happiness, comfort, contentment.

Our basic human questioning should be unobstructed and free reign to our natural curiosity should be fostered. Questions arise from the data of our senses and the data of our consciousness. To the extent we attend to our experience, questions emerge and they are answered insofar as we advert to our experience as pertinent to the specific queries. Questions for intelligence ask ‘What is it?’ and so from experience one moves to understanding. As those questions are answered intelligently, the critical questions for reflection arise and ask ‘Is it so?’ To the extent that those questions are answered reasonably one arrives at true judgments. Consequently, questions of deliberation arise. These questions are routinely practical: ‘What should I do?’, or they can become habitually automatic with respect to established routines based on previous choices. In limiting circumstances, the questions can address our existential condition as when one asks implicitly or explicitly, ‘Who am I to be?’ In the latter question, one seeks to discern the true value over satisfaction and these choices are made in accordance with a preferential scale.¹³

In short, Lonergan’s anthropology contains a presupposition of basic goodness and inner natural law. Given all things being equal, to the extent one asks questions, is attentive to one’s experience, intelligent in one’s understanding, reasonable in one’s understanding and responsible in one’s decisions, then one is authentic, one is being true to one’s basic goodness so to speak and in harmony with the will of God for the created order in the divine plan.

However, this presumes that one gives free reign to one’s desire to know and/or is not prevented from doing so. ‘Besides the love of light,’ Lonergan states, ‘there can be a love of darkness.’¹⁴ He will not provide an ultimate answer as to why some people love darkness and why others love the light. For Lonergan, sin and evil are ultimately unintelligible and it is feeble to try to understand something that ultimately cannot be understood. However, we can understand the dynamics of one’s subjectivity. The basic problem of human existence he calls the *flight from understanding*. Keep in mind, his analysis is in view of the first basic desire (to know) and does not preclude an analysis of human suffering based on the other three desires. The *flight from understanding* involves the obstruction of knowledge, but it is inextricably linked with the obstruction of the other basic desires, especially the desire for happiness and justice.

The *flight from understanding* is rooted in bias. Its effects are individual, collective and historic. The four kinds of bias are dramatic,

¹³ See Chapter 2 of Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Lonergan, *Insight*, 244.

egoistic, group and general biases.¹⁵ Dramatic bias pertains to a psychological wound or blind spot that prevents one from attending to relevant data in an inquiry. To a certain extent many human beings have some mild expressions of dramatic bias. The Jungian psychoanalyst Robert Johnson claimed that he never had a client in therapy that did not at least initially resist his probing of the psychological depths of the psyche.¹⁶ However, the more extreme forms of dramatic bias, such as post-traumatic stress, can bring harm to oneself or to others.

The next three biases have more explicit moral implications. Egoistic bias is selfishness, choosing one's own needs over that of the group. Group bias is the preference of one group's needs over the needs of another group. General bias is the refusal to ask questions of theory and to prefer short-term solutions while neglecting long-term solutions. These biases can interpenetrate and effect communities, countries, and civilizations. The cumulative effects of bias at various levels of society bring about decline—war, famine, societal collapse, and climate change are some of the ramifications. The shorter cycles of decline can reverse themselves, as when one political party is replaced by another. The longer cycle of decline is more serious, sustained and progressive. The effects of bias and both cycles are cumulative and dramatic. He explains:

There are the deviations occasioned by neurotic need. There are the refusals to keep on taking the plunge from settled routines to an as yet unexperienced but richer mode of living. There are the mistaken endeavors to quiet an uneasy conscience by ignoring, belittling, denying, rejecting higher values. Preference scales become distorted. Feelings soured. Bias creeps into one's outlook, rationalization into one's morals, ideology into one's thought. So one may come to hate the truly good and love the really evil. Nor is that calamity limited to individuals. It can happen to groups, to nations, to blocks of nations, to mankind. It can take different, opposed, belligerent forms to divide mankind and to menace civilization with destruction. Such is the monster that has stood forth in our day.¹⁷

The etiology of *the flight from understanding* is ultimately unknown in terms of why human beings ultimately decide to rebel against God. There is, of course, the story of Adam and Eve which comprises the basic archetypal account of the original disobedience of human beings against God. Although Lonergan does not invoke

¹⁵ On the biases see Lonergan, Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, CWL 3, ed. F.E. Crowe and R.M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), chapters 6 & 7.

¹⁶ Robert A. Johnson with Jerry M. Ruhl, *Balancing Heaven and Earth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009, Kindle Edition, 141-142).

¹⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 39-40.

this story explicitly in *Method in Theology*, he undoubtedly presumes it given his commitment as a Christian theologian. It is interesting in the biblical account that the reason for the rebellion was the desire to have knowledge of good and evil—the same knowledge that God possesses. The problem was not that Adam and Eve desired such knowledge, the problem was the way they went about it—deliberately being disobedient to God.

The prognosis for the infection of the flight from understanding lies outside of human hands. The situation is hopeless without some higher solution beyond the limitations of human beings. The solution entails the acceptance of the offer of God's grace through the divine plan of salvation: the two arms of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit working together towards the redemption of the entire created order. The solution to the problem of evil occurs in *lex crucis*, the law of the cross as established in the death and resurrection of Jesus. 'In short, the law of the cross is the principle ennobled by the teaching, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that provides an ongoing solution to the problem of suffering and evil for those who adhere to and practice this law of self-sacrificing love.'¹⁸ It entails the extension of charitable love not only to one's loved ones, but to one's enemies. Countering hate with love and praying for one's enemies is the only principle to reverse and heal human bias and decline. This entails the offer of God's love in sanctifying Grace, the presence of that grace is signified by the habit of charity (For Lonergan, God wills for all to be saved). This charity enables human beings to transcend their affective limitations and mediate God's love to others. This also heals and elevates human beings' intelligence and ability to cooperate with God and disposes them to respond in creative ways to seemingly impossible difficulties. The law of the cross effectively encapsulates Lonergan's notion of religious conversion, or being in love with God in an unrestricted manner in that it is a fruit of that conversion.

While this type of conversion is the most fundamental, three other aspects of conversion are important. There is an intellectual conversion which corrects the myth that knowing is just a matter of taking a good look; by contrast it affirms that knowing is a compound matter of experiencing, understanding and judging. There is the healing of blocks in moral development, or moral conversion. It heals blocks that prevent one from choosing true value over the satisfactions of the appetites or over-privileging one value to the neglect of others on the preferential scale of values. Finally, there is the healing of dramatic bias, traumatic wounds, distorted self-concepts, harsh

¹⁸ John Dadosky, 'The Transformation of Suffering in Paul of the Cross, Lonergan, and Buddhism.' *New Blackfriars* 96/1065 (September 2015), 553.

self-criticism and destructive self-behavior, all the effects of dramatic bias, through the various forms of therapy that bring about a psychological conversion of the subject.

In conclusion, short of the Eschaton, human beings live in a world permeated by the presence of three conditions simultaneously: progress, decline and redemption. Progress refers to the innate abilities of human beings to develop, create and respond in their world in a manner proportionate to their natural abilities. Decline refers to the limitations and interference of progress through bias and sin both individual, collective and social.¹⁹ Redemption refers to the harmonious healing and elevation of the roots of decline in a way that ennobles and guides human beings in a manner so as to cooperatively assist in bringing about God's divine plan of salvation for the entire created order. The important thing to keep in mind is that these three principles are all operative simultaneously throughout history until the end of time. The law of the cross promotes self-sacrificing love for one's neighbor and one's adversaries. It is the only permanent solution to the problem of evil and it is made possible through sanctifying grace and the habit of charity.

4. Girard

Rene Girard (1925-2015) is one of the most provocative religious thinkers in recent times and specifically for Christians. He is also a controversial thinker. His assessment of human beings forms a basically negative anthropology but it is not one without hope. Still, Girard was not a philosopher nor a theologian but a literary theorist.²⁰ Therefore, we must not be surprised if his insights stand in need of some philosophical and theological clarifications.

The basic diagnosis of the human situation is that human beings are inherently competitive with each other, or in terms of Girard,

¹⁹ See Bernard Lonergan, 'Healing and Creating in History,' *A Third Collection*, CWL 16 (eds.) R. M. Doran & J. D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 94-104.

²⁰ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (tr.) Yvonne Freccero. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1965) [*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. Paris: Grasset 1961]; *Violence and the Sacred* (tr.) Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) [*La violence et le sacré*. Paris: B. Grasset, 1972]; *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort* (trs.) Stephen Bann (Books II & III) and Michael Metteer (Book I) (London: Athlone, 1987) [*Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde; recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort*. Paris: B. Grasset, 1978]; *The Scapegoat*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) [*Le bouc émissaire*. Paris: B. Grasset, 1982].

they are naturally prone to mimetic envy.²¹ The covetous desire for something either a neighbor desires or a neighbor possesses is the root of all human evil. It leads to the original mythic act of violence as recorded in the Bible, when, after imitating his brother's offering and failing to obtain the same blessings, Cain kills his brother Abel.²²

Mimetic desire can spread quickly through a community and Girard even uses the phrase *contagion*, a metaphor for a disease or infection, to capture the distorted and destructive nature of the desire. In order to relieve the tension of the rivalry between two or more parties or communities, the rivals displace their frustrations and fears onto an innocent third party by way of sacrificing them as a scapegoat. This is known as the single-victim or scapegoat mechanism. It can be performed explicitly and formally in a society, particularly ancient societies, or it can be acted out in milder forms as in modern day office politics. It can be as dramatic as murder and violence, or more passively aggressive as in shunning, ridicule, or the termination of employment. The cycle of violence as rooted in mimetic rivalry is the basic human problem of existence. Left unchecked, the cycle repeats itself throughout history and concurrently wherever communities of human beings reside.

Etiology

The desire for what another possesses has its roots in the human condition. The account of Adam and Eve reflects the awakening of this desire, albeit with some qualifications. God forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but nevertheless the desire for that knowledge awakens in them.²³ God has something that they do not possess and the prohibition against eating the fruit makes them aware of this fact. Once the desire is awakened, they seek to be 'like' God in having the knowledge that God possesses. In a sense, they envy God. However, what Alison and Girard miss here is an important qualification, attempting to be like God is really an issue of pride rather than envy. They are correct in that what is awakened in Adam and Eve is a mimetic desire, but they do not distinguish between a vertical mimesis, trying to be more than one's nature (pride), and horizontal mimesis, imitating others in

²¹ René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, (tr.) J. G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) [*Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle. 1999]

²² This theme is explored in James Alison, *Raising Abel: The Retrieval of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

²³ See James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

order to appropriate something (envy). I believe Girard and Alison conflate these two simply into envy.²⁴ Strictly speaking, pride, the desire to be more than one's nature, is a competition with God, but I will not explore that further here.

Triangular desire occurs when two people desire the same object and one or both parties begin to compete with each other for the same object—a rivalry forms. At some point the desire for the object is replaced by the one party's preoccupation with another. The desire is stirred in a person by the perceived value one sees in another person or object. Envy pertains more to human mimetic relations and so its connection with violence is more directly shown in the story of Cain and Abel. When Abel's murder is uncovered, God sends Cain off to another land and there a community is formed. This is significant for Girard because many cultures, if not all, originate upon a founding murder. The mythic story of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome is a clear example. However, for Girard it is not a myth *per se* but a crystallization or covering over of real historical events at some point that has been concealed by the myth.²⁵ This is universal for Girard and extends to creation myths of all cultures from Europe to pan-indigenous creation myths.

Hence not only are the seeds of violence awakened in the mimetic envy for what another possesses, or for what two competing parties desire, but societies attempt to develop ways to manage these mimetic rivalries in order to manage conflict and keep order. In the Hebrew scriptures, this occurs through the ten commandments (thou shall not covet, kill, etc.) and in the sacrifice of an actual scapegoat for the reparations of the community's disobedience. In the ancient Meso-American traditions, actual human sacrifice occurs in a highly-ritualized way. Such mechanisms and structures perdure to the present day in varying degrees and contexts.

Prognosis

With the confluence of weapons of mass destruction, the stakes of this cycle of violence are dire. The prognosis is hopeless without the grace of the redemptive action of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. For Girard, the historical death and resurrection of Jesus, a principal article of faith for Christians, constitutes an historical and eschatological reversal to the endless cycle of violence and the scapegoat mechanism against the innocent. As God incarnate, incapable

²⁴ See the argument in John Dadosky, 'Woman Without Envy: Toward Re-conceiving the Immaculate Conception,' *Theological Studies*, 72/1 March (2011), 28-33.

²⁵ Foundation myths and crystallization are explored in Richard J. Golson, *Girard and Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

of sin, Jesus Christ is the ultimate innocent victim. On the cross, Jesus forgives those who have persecuted him. This forgiveness is what makes the difference between the perpetuation of violence (e.g. revenge) and its transformation: a healing and reversal of the cycle. Girard has a lengthier analysis of the contrast between an account of the death of Dionysius and that of Jesus' death. In the former, when Dionysius is raised from the dead, everywhere he appears, the violence perpetuates.²⁶ Now, if the story ended at Jesus' forgiving his trespassers and his death, there would be no solution to the problem of evil. However, Jesus is resurrected from the dead and that message of hope lives on in his followers' teaching of the good news of God's love and the forgiveness of sins. There is a consonance here with Lonergan's notion of *lex crucis*, or the principle of self-sacrificing love that ameliorates the effects of evil.²⁷

Therapy-Prescription

The prescription for the cycle of violence means that Christians (literally 'little Christs') must imitate the example of Jesus in praying for one's enemies, returning good for evil, and praying for the forgiveness of those who harm them. It also means taking the side of the victim, the marginalized, and the oppressed. The prescription for the amelioration of the cycle of violence includes the self-scrutiny of the genuine person to examine their motives, particularly in relation to others where the presence of envy might be interfering with such relations. In terms of relations with others, this may mean breaking all contact with a mimetic double, someone who has become obsessed with one in a rivalrous manner and meticulously imitates or focuses on them in a neurotic manner. But the break in contact does not exempt one from the necessity of praying for the person who suffers from some internal feeling of lack to such an extent they become so obsessed with another. As we will see, this feeling of lack is analogous to the Buddhist source of suffering as a basic misperception into the nature the self.

5. A Buddhist Approach

There are many branches or lineages of Buddhism and so there can be a range of interpretations on the basic problems and

²⁶ See the final chapter of René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.

²⁷ Robert Doran, 'Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption', *Theological Studies* 71 (2010), 46-61.

solutions of humankind among these branches.²⁸ Yet despite the range of practices, ‘The unity of Buddhism,’ according to Sangharakshita, ‘consists in the fact that, through differences and divergences of doctrine innumerable, all schools of Buddhism aim at Enlightenment, at reproducing the spiritual experience of the Buddha.’²⁹ The spiritual experience of the Buddha is encapsulated by the four noble truths, which are foundational to Buddhist practice.³⁰ Consonant with Thatamanil’s approach, Roger Corless emphasizes the four noble truths as summarizing the Buddha’s teaching: ‘pain . . . its cause, its cure, and the treatment.’³¹ While discussing the four noble truths I will comment on some comparisons with Lonergan’s and Girard’s anthropologies.

Diagnosis

The first noble truth in Buddhism is that suffering exists (*dukkha*). Thich Nhat Hanh describes three kinds of suffering: 1) the suffering of pain, 2) the suffering of composite things and 3) the suffering of change.³² The three are intimately related in that the suffering of composite things anticipates that the constitutive elements of composite things will eventually break down and this is due to the reality of impermanence. In order to find such suffering one does not have to look very far, as the young Siddhartha, the future Buddha, discovered after leaping over the wall of his protected kingdom to discover the realities of old age, sickness and death as unavoidable realities from which no one escapes. Nhat Hanh encourages people in a meditative exercise to dwell on the fact that they will grow old, get sick, face death, and also lose their loved ones.³³ Fredericks suggests that even consciousness is suffering.³⁴ He emphasizes, however, that *dukkha* should not be seen as evil but just that ‘all things are

²⁸ See Roger Corless ‘An Overview of Buddhism’ in Bonnie Thurston (ed), 1-14, *Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness and Everyday Mind* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), 3-12.

²⁹ Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism* (Windhorse Publications. Kindle Edition, 2001), 378-380.

³⁰ There are many sources for this basic teaching. On the four noble truths, one may consult, James Fredericks overview, in his *Buddhist and Christians: Through Comparative Theology of Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 42-50 and Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddhist Teaching*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 9-18; Fredericks and Nhat Hanh both invoke the language of the diagnosis and the healing of suffering as well.

³¹ Corless ‘Overview,’ 1.

³² Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, 19-23.

³³ See his discussion of the five remembrances in Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 30-32.

³⁴ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 42.

unsatisfactory'. He does this with a bow to Augustine's restless heart.³⁵ Nhat Hanh cautions against absolutizing the notion of suffering and seeing everything as suffering. This is in keeping with general Buddhist logic that resists the tendency to absolutize anything. The tendency to absolutize concepts is a natural propensity of our minds.

In sum, we exist and we cannot stop time. We cannot purchase extra time on this planet and moment-by-moment, us and everything we love is passing. Our existence, therefore, entails pain and suffering.

Similarly, Christians are never quite fully at home on this historical side of the Eschaton. They know that things of this world ought to be different and that all things are passing. For Lonergan, the basic desire for rectitude, a natural sense that things are not the way they should be, is a fundamental aspect of human beings' orientation in the world. It was this basic orientation or desire that caused Siddhartha to seek a solution to the existential problems of old age, sickness and death in the first place; because deep down in his heart, when confronted with these realities, he wanted things to be different. This reflects this basic desire for rectitude within him. However, Siddhartha would eventually find solace in the liberation from craving in the profound experience of Nirvana under the Bodhi tree. While as a Christian, for Lonergan the ultimate solutions to old age, sickness and death lie ultimately in the hope of the resurrection of Christ, the promise of eternal life and with Christians imitating Christ's teaching and witness in order to alleviate suffering in the world. In Buddhism, the improvement of the social conditions that cause suffering is a more recent development of Engaged Buddhism, spearheaded by Thich Nhat Hanh among others.

Girard is quite aware of the presence of suffering in the world. But his focus is more narrowly on how it relates to violence. Human beings are not only capable of imitating Christ, but they can collude with and/or even imitate 'the devil' when they participate in the scapegoating and violence against others. He will not have much directly to say about the problem of sickness and old age, save how they might be pertinent to the scapegoating mechanism. For Girard, human beings cannot escape the reality of violence and the suffering associated with it, but neither can they escape that the fact that they can be progenitors of it.

Samudaya (etiology of suffering)

The second noble truth, *samudaya*, clarifies that suffering is actually created by human beings. The painful facts of old age, sickness and

³⁵ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 44.

death are not themselves problematic, but rather the suffering that is inextricably linked to our craving, clinging and ignorance about the true nature of reality. All forms of suffering and violence follow from these causes. I deliberately use the word craving to distinguish it from the meaning of ‘desire’ in Lonergan’s more positive usage of the term.

Basic Buddhist teachings emphasize the transitory nature of things or impermanence.³⁶ Change is a perennial condition of our existence so that in the wake of such circumstances, in the words of Pema Chödrön echoing her teacher, we seek to get some ‘ground under our feet.’³⁷ We attempt to cling to something permanent in a myriad of ways, whether conceptually or physically, dramatically or subtly, consciously or unconsciously. Buddhist logic seeks to subvert the ways in which we cling to the illusion of permanence. While initially disturbing to one’s rationality, one can find a fresh liberation as one probes the depths of the limits of one’s conceptual worldviews since they are incomplete.³⁸

Such clinging is also connected with many Buddhist teachings emphasizing that technically there is no independent self (*anatman*). The latter teaching is inextricably linked with the one on impermanence (*anitya*). Thich Nhat Hanh states: ‘Nothing has a separate existence or a separate self. Everything has to inter-be with everything else.’³⁹ This fact is related to the doctrine of dependent rising, the ‘radical interdependence’ of all being. Everything is interrelated so that the notion of some separate self is an illusion—and the source of much suffering. A human being experiences oneself as the five aggregates: form or body (*rupa*), feeling or affect (*vedana*), perceptions (*samjna*), conditioning (*samskara*), consciousness (*vijnana*). The tendency to misapprehend this fact or to identify one or all of these aspects with a self is an illusion that causes suffering.⁴⁰ For example, the fitness and cosmetics industries exploit physical experience by promoting an identification of the self solely with the body or physical appearance. Culturally, we are quite aware of the suffering this causes especially for young women, prompting them to believe they are never good enough. Here Girard’s work matches well since the method of the advertising industry is to provide images of fit people, in order to illicit desire for something people perceive they lack. In a myriad of ways, the advertisements, which often pervade our daily

³⁶ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 45.

³⁷ Pema Chödrön, *Living Beautifully: with Uncertainty and Change* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2012). Kindle Edition, 162-163.

³⁸ See John Makransky, *Awakening to Love: Unveiling your Deepest Goodness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 37-38.

³⁹ Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddhist Teaching*, 133.

⁴⁰ Fredericks, *Buddhist and Christians*, 47-48.

lives constantly, communicate in subtle and not so subtle ways the message, 'Imitate Me!' This reinforces the message that something is lacking, hence perpetuating the suffering.

The frequent analogy invoked to illustrate this idea of no-self is that of a wave in the ocean. One's asserting of an autonomous self is like the wave, an illusion that there is a separate self, distinct from the sea. Another image sometimes used is that of an ice cube in a glass of water. The notion of the self is analogous to the ice cube, not essentially separate from the water in the glass. This ignorance of our true condition leads to craving, clinging, and to all forms of hatred and violence. Hatred, for example is traceable to an illusion, that the hated one, is not really connected to me, so we can vilify the other as an alien or simply succumb to apathy where their needs are concerned.

This idea of the interrelatedness emphasized in Buddhism is desperately needed in Western Christianity, permeated as it is by philosophical notions individuality.⁴¹ Neither is it foreign to Christianity, since the fundamental mystery of the Trinity teaches that the three divine persons *are* each simultaneously three divine relations (paternity, filiation and passive spiration).⁴² Indeed, it would seem that there is much harmony between Buddhists and Christians on the idea of relations.

On this point of no-self, I would argue that Buddhism can offer a further development of Lonergan's notion of intellectual conversion. For Lonergan, because human beings are also animals, their default philosophical orientation in the world is the myth 'that knowing is taking a good look', what is real is the 'already-out-there-now'. This purely extroverted form of knowing works for the raccoon, who does not know whether he rummages through a garbage can or a laundry basket but simply follows his instincts. Overcoming the myth that knowing is taking a good look requires an intellectual conversion to the realization that knowing is a compound of experience, understanding and judgment.⁴³ Now, the explicit emphasis on relations, interpersonal and otherwise are undeveloped in Lonergan's thought. Could it be that the Buddhist emphasis on inter-relatedness and inter-dependence promotes a further intellectual conversion that goes beyond just the conditions of knowing and engages the myth

⁴¹ Brian Bajzek, 'Alterity, Similarity, and Dialectic: Methodological Reflections on the Turn to the Other,' *International Philosophical Quarterly*, September 57/3 (2017): 249–66.

⁴² In general, Eastern Christianity focuses on the divine persons as relations while Western Christians focus on the divine persons *as* persons. The difference between the two is complementary reflecting a fullness to the Trinitarian mystery. For a more recent attempt to emphasize relationality and apply it to contemporary exigencies, see Gloria Schaab, *Trinity in Relation* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2012).

⁴³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.

of autonomous substances? As Leo Lefebure states: ‘Buddhists do agree that awakening to reality involves the insight that our ordinary sense of our self is an illusion.’⁴⁴ What the Buddhist can bring to an understanding of intellectual conversion is that there is a relational dimension to our ‘individual’ existence, wherein everything is interconnected and interdependent. It moves us beyond the myth of autonomous selves. As my primary expertise is not Buddhism I cannot comment on the extent to which the emphasis on no-self is rhetorical and to what extent it is ontological. There is bound to be a range of interpretations on this teaching. Fredericks states that the ‘I’ is often mistakenly associated with one of the five aggregates. ‘The ‘I’ is an illusion created by the dependent arising of the aggregates.’⁴⁵ Still, for Lonergan, there would have to be some kind of unity of consciousness, some instantiated being—a unity, identity whole, who is capable of intellectual and rational self-consciousness—a conscious unity who is capable of an insight into the fundamental interrelationality of human existence in the first place. So here, there would be a basic difference between the Buddhist and the Christian. But such a unity of consciousness would be one made of up various compounds whose very existence depends on a complex web of relations and probabilities in order to sustain life.

Girard would likely affirm the interrelationality of things, although his emphasis is on the negative aspect of human intersubjectivity. As stated previously, Girard has a negative anthropology in the sense that rivalrous relations originating within individuals who attempt to appropriate something that is not their right to possess. He calls these relations interindividual and they are the source of violence and likewise suffering. By contrast, the Buddhist approach to individuals is not one of suspicion, but more positively one that presumes a Buddha nature in others. When human beings stray from the latter belief, it’s because they succumb to misunderstanding or craving. Moreover, there is a paradox here in that the person enthralled with a mimetic rival, risks losing oneself in his or her attempts to be like rival or the model. But again, the Buddhist could trace this back to a feeling of lack, the illusion a person has about oneself that would dispose one to mimetic rivalry in the first place.

Nirodha (Prognosis)

The prognosis for the cause of suffering is hopeful given the possibility of nirvana.

⁴⁴ Leo D. Lefebure, *The Buddha and The Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 23.

⁴⁵ Fredericks, *Buddhist and Christians*, 46.

Nirvana is often referred to as ‘freedom’ or ‘extinguishing’—the freedom from and extinguishing of illusions about ourselves. Recently, while on a temple stay in South Korea, a Buddhist monk told me, ‘This is Nirvana, right now, you just don’t realize it.’ Or as Fredericks states: ‘The truth that is realized in nirvana is insight into the illusion of the self and insight into how our false views distort our view of the world.’⁴⁶ So if the healing of suffering rests on an insight that pierces through our illusions, how do we get that insight? The short answer is the eightfold path, which I refer to shortly.

Lonergan’s philosophy would be quite consonant with this notion of enlightenment as *insight* into the true nature of reality.⁴⁷ However, for Lonergan, this would not be a natural occurrence per se. He would understand this kind of experience in the context of a universal offer of God’s grace, the fruits of which are to be measured by Paul’s list of the fruits in Galatians (5:22). This universal offer of the gift of God’s grace is understood as a dynamic state of being in love in an unrestricted manner. It is the operative grace as understood in his study of Aquinas.⁴⁸ Moreover, whereas a Buddhist may refrain from answering questions of ultimate reality insofar as it takes one away from the more practical path to enlightenment, Lonergan acknowledges that we affirm God’s existence prior to any understanding of God’s existence. We can know that God exists through natural reason, but we cannot know the nature of God because that has been revealed—God is love. Revealed knowledge can be known through natural analogy but only in a limited sense. All this to say that this aspect of Lonergan’s thought as it is expressed in the apophatic mystical tradition is consonant with certain aspects of Buddhism, when the latter avoids questions of ultimate reality and opts for the silence of the Buddha. Such silence may indeed be construed by Christians as that of Holy Wisdom.⁴⁹

For Girard, the insight into the alleviation of suffering occurs first by the discovery of the scapegoat mechanism. The latter insight came through his study of great works of literature, and, more specifically, after moving to the United States, in his study of lynchings against African Americans in the South. However, the insight into the scapegoating mechanism is only part of the solution. He claims Nietzsche

⁴⁶ Fredericks, *Buddhist and Christians*, 49.

⁴⁷ On this account, see Charles Hefling, ‘Revelation and/as Insight,’ in John & David Liptay (eds.) *The Importance of Insight: Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 97-115.

⁴⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 107

⁴⁹ In his 1998 Chancellor’s Lecture at Regis College in Toronto, Louis Dupré suggested a complementarity between Buddhism and Christianity when he spoke of the silence of the Buddha prior to the uttering of the Word.

came to the same insight, but could not accept the solution.⁵⁰ The solution, as stated in a previous section, becomes possible historically in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus as an eschatological reversal of this scapegoating process. However, while Girard integrates the Christian solution into his overall theory of violence, he does not get to the practical techniques as such like the Buddhist does when outlining the eightfold path. At times, Girard was skeptical and even dismissive of Buddhist approaches to corroborate this theory of religious violence.⁵¹ Still, this does not preclude the overcoming of violence and sacrifice in the Buddhist traditions. For example, it was precisely due to the influx of Buddhist migration into Korea that put an end to the practice of live accompaniment, i.e. sending the servants of royalty alive into their master's burial tomb in the ancient city of Gyeonju. In this way, the Buddhists elevated the society beyond the mythic consciousness of human sacrifice in a way Girard would likely acknowledge.⁵² The Buddhist values and practices brought with them offered a remedy to the death of innocent people in a way that Girard claims occurs with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Girard was not a philosopher nor a theologian. The enthusiasm for his own discoveries, while bringing him back to his Catholic faith, meant that he only arrived at interreligious questions late in his career in order to address them adequately. The question of whether the solution to the problem of evil that the death and resurrection of Christ bears on other religions, and the extent to which this solution can be present in other religions, is a theological question beyond the scope of this essay and still a much-debated issue in contemporary theology.

Marga, The eightfold Path (Prescription)

The prescription for traversing toward nirvana and the ultimate healing of suffering is the fourth noble truth *marga*, the eightfold path. Many Buddhists divide the eightfold path into three groups: 1) Ethics (*shila*, not harming): right action, right livelihood, right speech 2) Mental discipline (*samadhi*): right effort (thinking), right mindfulness, right meditation (concentration) and 3) Wisdom

⁵⁰ See Chapter 14, 'The Twofold Nietzschean Heritage,' in René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 170-181.

⁵¹ Leo D. Lefebure addressed this early on and responded to this aspect of Girard's thought. See his, 'Mimesis, Violence, and Socially Engaged Buddhism: Overture to a Dialogue,' *Contagion*, vol. 3 (Spring, 1996): 121-140; See also his *Revelation, The Religions, and Violence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 162-64.

⁵² See John Dadosky, 'Ecclesia de Trinitate: Ecclesial Foundations from Above,' 94/1049 *New Blackfriars*, (January, 2013), 77.

(*prajna*): right view (Understanding), right intention (diligence).⁵³ Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, states that *samyak* or 'right' translates as complete, that is, 'right' without a concept of what is right. In other words, it means seeing things straightforwardly, clearly.⁵⁴ Those who seek the Buddha's solution, therefore, follow the eightfold path.

For Lonergan, the solution to evil, as pointed out previously, is wrought by Jesus and the establishment of the law of the cross. Self-sacrificing love and prayer for one's enemies provides the solution to the problem of evil and human suffering. Christians, as 'little-Christ's' seek to imitate the example and teaching of their founder. For example, the ancient Christmas carol Good King Wenceslas, based on the latter saint, contains a line with respect to his follower, the page. As the two ride through the wintry snow in order to give food to the needy, the song goes, 'In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay printed, each was in the very spot which the saint had dinted.' The carol emphasizes the goal of the Christian to imitate Christ in love of God and neighbor. While Christianity may not have a systematic structural formula like the eightfold path, the imitation of Christ is considered to be the signpost for marking the fullness of life.

Moreover, for Lonergan old age, sickness and death for the Christian are inevitable, but the resurrection of Christ anticipates the Christian's own resurrection and eternal life. For Lonergan, through the gift of God's sanctifying grace given, Christians do not only imitate but they also participate mystically in the divine relations of the triune God: paternity, filiation, active and passive spiration. With respect to old age, sickness and death, with the graced participation in filiation, or divine sonship, there is the promise and hope of healing, resurrection, and eternal life, just like Jesus. In reality, the line between imitation and participation cannot be neatly drawn, but rather they interpenetrate. Still, this does lead to a practical difference between Christianity and Buddhism. Since Christianity is dependent on hope, and this hope lies ultimately in the future, psychologically this theological dimension makes the Buddhist emphasis on the present moment a particular challenge, albeit not an unsurmountable one, for the Christian. Obviously, this future-oriented eschatology of Christians does not mean that they should not take responsibility for their current circumstances. More recent developments in political eschatologies in the past century make this point a central concern.

⁵³ Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 49.

⁵⁴ Chogyum Trungpa Rinpoche, *The Myth of Freedom and the Way of Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010), Kindle Edition, 119-20.

In many ways, Girard's emphasis on human beings' natural desire to imitate others disposes itself to a solution akin to the eightfold path—to follow the Enlightened One—to obtain what Shakyamuni obtained. The fact is, however, that Girard spent the bulk of his career focusing on the problem of human violence, and the negative imitative desire that was the source of that violence. While Girard identified the solution, in God's 'progressive' revelation in history culminating in Jesus testifying against and ultimately reversing the cycle of violence, still, the concrete practice of such positive imitation is not as clearly worked out. On this account, Girard's answer would likely be similar that of Lonergan, following a Thomistic tradition, the positive mimesis of those who successfully imitate Jesus.⁵⁵

Affectivity and Transcendence

In previous work this author highlighted two notions in Buddhism that resonate and complement Christian spiritual practices: the four immeasurable minds and the Lojong breathing practices to awaken the heart to greater compassion.⁵⁶ In this section, however, I will emphasize how the notions from the Tibetan lineage of *shenpa* and *klesha* play a role in suffering. In the concluding section, I will emphasize how it can interplay with and enrich an understanding of key aspects of Lonergan's and Girard's theories as outlined above.

Shenpa, a Tibetan word meaning attachment, refers to the underlying attachment that underpins the energy beneath the affectivity arising from such attachment. It is the energy that undergirds much affectivity, especially intense feelings (*kleshas*), whether those feelings are pleasant or unpleasant. When we are excited about our favorite sports team, our feelings (*kleshas*) exhilarate with the team's triumphs and fall with the teams' failures. This is due to our attachment or *shenpa*. The strength of such attachment increases the intensity of the *klesha*. The perpetuation of the *kleshas* as a way of escaping the basic anxiety of existence reinforces negative habits and continues the cycle of samsara (suffering). Chödrön states: 'The *kleshas* are our vehicle for escaping groundlessness, and therefore every time we give in to them, our preexisting habits are reinforced'.⁵⁷

In human relations, we can have intense attraction to some people or intense dislike of others. We attach scenarios to this underlying energy and that creates suffering. Examples such as those who are habitually addicted to human drama, have not yet gained the

⁵⁵ See Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, (tr.) Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 220-21.

⁵⁶ See Dadosky, 'The Transformation of Suffering,' 560-62.

⁵⁷ Chödrön, *Living Beautifully*, Kindle #254.

discipline to manage their feelings. At a certain level, they enjoy the ups and downs of their feelings, and the more intense the *shenpa*, the more intoxicating the ride of their emotions. At the root of *shenpa* is ego-clinging, a reaction to the fact that there is ‘no ground beneath our feet’. Trungpa Rinpoche, referred to this sense of ‘groundlessness’ as a ‘shaky tenderness.’⁵⁸ Again, the image of the perpetual Augustinian restless heart offered by Fredericks is apropos here. It can vary from a slight perennial hum to an earthquake in our emotions, as when tragedy strikes. But the tenderness is always there, and so the challenge is to identify it, withdraw from the conceptual story line associated with it, be mindful and breath into it; rather than try to ignore it or to ‘fill’ it in some way with all the various kinds of distractions. This, of course, invites an adroit comparison with Girard in the sense that a lack or void, represented in the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve as an archetypal and analogical symbol of the human condition, is at the root of mimetic desire. For Girard, this existential feeling of lack, gives rise to mimetic desire either to *be* like someone else or to appropriate what someone else possesses—to get out of oneself. Similarly, in Buddhist approaches, ‘shaky tenderness’ gives rise to craving in the sense that someone desires to flee rather than embrace this existential condition or illusion of incompleteness. For Buddhists, craving gives rise to suffering (one that can lead to and include violence), for Girard, mimetic desire gives rise to conflict and violence.

It should be noted that to understand this reality of our existence is one thing, to practice it is quite another. And while this requires a tremendous amount of effort and practice, even the most seasoned practitioners falter. The important part is that even a little effort can show fruitful results. Continual attentiveness to the reality of shaky tenderness is transformative, even in small increments of awareness.

Certain Buddhist practices seek to address the issue of *shenpa* due to the latter’s ability to distract one from the path of enlightenment. When *shenpa* increases, Chödrön, following her teacher Trungpa Rinpoche, emphasizes the need to shift one’s attention away from the concepts, scenarios and feelings as such, and focus simply on the physical sensation of the feelings or energy as it manifests in one’s body. This means breathing into the area where these sensations occur while mentally separating oneself from any ‘reason’ for the energy; content simply to be aware of it. This deflates the energy as it dissipates through the awareness and breath. She encourages this practice for short periods, even ninety seconds, in order to try to have a ‘direct experience of it, free of interpretation’.⁵⁹ We should

⁵⁸ Expounded upon by his student Pema Chödrön in *Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 51.

⁵⁹ Chödrön, Kindle Edition, #254.

not attempt to make judgments about the feeling nor to have any concepts or rationale for the feeling. Existentially, it brings one into direct contemplation of the impermanence of life, or as Christians might understand it, 'This too shall pass.'

Chödron equates ego with 'fixed identity'. Our fixed identity about ourselves and our fixed beliefs about other people separate us from them and this can occasion the negative feelings that bring about separation, a lack of compassion and even hatred and violence. The practice of a direct experience with *shenpa* on a daily basis will enable one to reverse such a cycle and move one further along the path of enlightenment.

Learning from Buddhism

Finally, I would like to illustrate how *shenpa* and *klesha* can help shed light on the role of attachment and affectivity in the healing of dramatic bias as Lonergan understands it, and in the danger of envy in interindividual relations in Girard's theory.

Although he was unfamiliar with the specifics of Tibetan Buddhism, the notions of *shenpa* and *klesha* would not be completely foreign concepts to Lonergan, formed as he was by an Ignatian tradition that encourages detachment, and the overcoming of one's affective resistance, such as in the *magis*, when one takes on an arduous task and in so doing overcomes one's initial resistance to it. More specifically in terms of Lonergan's theory, dramatic bias flows from a psychological wound but it is also spontaneous, unconscious and irrational. It can be conditioned to the specific circumstances surrounding the history of the psychological wound as its effects are generalized. A child attacked by a dog may grow to fear all dogs or have a dramatic reaction when she encounters one. One's reaction to a particular situation as conditioned by the bias, prompts one to misperceive, to overreact, to over emote. The blind spot or scotoma prevents them from seeing things the way they really are, hence, suffering emerges from the psychological wound. The person effected by dramatic bias is threatened more easily, affectivity is less manageable, and the person can even lash out, depending upon whether the dramatic affectivity impels one to fight or flight. At root of the dramatic bias, there is an attachment (*shenpa*), perhaps the memory of a painful event, repressed or otherwise. There are also dramatic feelings (*kleshas*) associated with the blind spot or misperception arising from the bias that cause people to overreact and which consequently bring about suffering to oneself or others. The misperception that dramatic bias occasions leads to suffering just as the Buddhist's claim that suffering arises from ignorance of the true nature of reality. However, the Buddhists are talking about a more basic perennial ignorance, an inability to see the impermanence and groundlessness

of the human existential situation. Lonergan's notion dramatic bias is a more 'dramatic' example if you will, of a more fundamental basic misperception about reality with roots in a psychological wound.

Robert Doran added a needed complement to Lonergan's notion of conversion and specifically addressing the healing of dramatic bias.⁶⁰ While his work explains how the dramatic bias is healed and in so doing it does imply the value of psychotherapy in the process, the Buddhists give concrete, 'on the spot' ways of addressing the dramatic bias. One is encouraged to bring their attention to those feelings in one's body, to breath into them until they begin to dissipate. One may also practice tonglan breathing (In Tibetan this word literally means to 'give and take') wherein one breathes in for everyone who may be feeling the same thing and breathing out 'relief' to them. Aside from offering almost immediate relief, this puts one in touch with the broader community of human beings and increases compassion for others and oneself. It should be noted, however, that this technique may work for milder forms of dramatic bias. In the cases of severe post-traumatic stress, other forms of professional treatment may be required first or in addition to tonglan techniques.

Shenpa and *klesha* are helpful in understanding the dynamics of mimetic desire and violence as expounded by Girard. The desire for what another possesses rests on a misperception that somehow one's life is lacking and the desired object would make one more complete. Perhaps it even rests on a misperception that somehow one's being is already inadequate or incomplete—not good enough. When one is involved in the throes of a mimetic rivalry one has been 'hooked', or attached. One feels threatened and so the mimetic rival becomes a preoccupation. The image or mention of the mimetic rival is enough to provoke a dramatic emotional reaction (*klesha*) from a *mimetic double* who perhaps is threatened by the rival or perceives the other as a threat. But the mimetic rivalry itself leading to interindividual competitive relations rests on a misperception that I am a separate isolated self from my rival who is completely other. The Buddhist teaching of no-self, emphasizes that such independent autonomy is illusory. Cain kills his brother out of jealousy. He suffered from the illusion that his brother was *not* intimately interrelated and interconnected with himself—his brother was expendable ('Am I my Brother's keeper?'). We are all interconnected, so the suffering inflicted onto another is suffering inflicted on and arising from oneself. One of the remedies to this illusion, as Pema Chödrön prescribes, is to advert to the rival in one's consciousness and say to oneself 'Just like me, this person wants to be happy. Just like me this person wants to be

⁶⁰ See Robert Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), chapter 6.

prosperous . . . etc.’ Such a concrete prescription is a helpful complement to Girard’s mimetic theory.

When such mimetic rivalry boils over into the scapegoating of an innocent person, as a collective of individuals vents or projects their frustrations upon an innocent third party, the *kleshas* are diverted to and projected upon the scapegoated. A false sense of temporary cathartic release ensues and the cycle of violence and suffering continues after a period of dormancy. This occurs daily in the school-halls, the work-place, and on the world stage.

Adverting to those individuals who bring us to the limits of our patience and tolerance or to those who spark a dramatic reaction or threat in us, according to Chödrön and her Buddhist lineage, provides concrete opportunities to overcome such challenges and grow in compassion. These opportunities are afforded when one trains oneself to be mindful of one’s emotional (over) reactions. Hence one of the Lojung teachings is ‘be grateful for everyone.’ To be mindful when one has been hooked (*shenpa*), to bring awareness to one’s affective stirrings (*kleshas*), and to breath into these moments, allow the feelings to dissipate and compassion to increase.

Finally, I have been attempting to illustrate how certain aspects of Buddhist practice can provide concrete solutions to the dramatic bias of trauma (Loneragan) and of mimetic rivalry (Girard). This is not to subtract from the Christian solution. For in terms of the healing of dramatic bias there is the role of grace, a theological notion that is, at the very least, not explicit in Buddhist worldviews.⁶¹ There is also the solution of praying for one’s enemies which also provides an amelioration of the problem of evil for Christians—what Lonergan termed the law of the cross. There is a basic Buddhist teaching of equanimity (*upeksha*) that aims to treat all people with equal love and dignity, a non-discriminating consciousness.⁶² The point is that we are often not given concrete and specific ways to pray for our enemies. In the Buddhist repeated practice of *tonglan* breathing, one becomes increasingly mindful of one’s own attachments and distorted affectivity. Simultaneously one grows in compassion for all beings. Taking on the difficulty in this way instead of fleeing from it, represents the sacrifice analogous to Christian *kenosis*. So, in this way, it could provide the Christian a concrete way of practicing love for one’s enemy. Lest we be accused of simply highlighting how these two Christian thinkers can be enriched in a dialogue with Buddhism, this is not to suggest that such dialogue is one-way. It should be noted that major Buddhist authorities have declared publicly how Christian

⁶¹ This is not to preclude the possibility of analogies of grace in Buddhism, but that is further question.

⁶² Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching*, 175.

social action has influenced Buddhists to become more socially active as in the emergence in recent years of engaged Buddhism.⁶³

We have not examined in detail how the seven deadly sins (e.g. deadly desires) for Christians are related to the craving that leads to suffering. Pride and envy in particular, since they are not reliant on sensitivity as are the other five deadly sins, are perhaps even more serious and can even give rise to, or rationalize one's excessive desire for, or occasion or accompany the other five sins.⁶⁴ For Christians, an antidote for pride is humility. Similarly, an antidote for envy is gratitude. If one is grateful for what one has, one is less likely to covet that of others. In all cases, however, charity is also an antidote to counter each of the seven deadly desires.

Pope Francis sought to set the tone of his papacy by invoking the image of a bridge builder between the Church and other religions. Taking that as a point of reference, we can see how a dialogue between Buddhists and Christians provides practical 'spiritual' solutions to the problem of evil and violence, and in turn, how each promotes tolerance, compassion, charity and healing.

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⁶³ On this see the interviews by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh in Paul Wilkes, *Merton, by Those Who Knew Him Best* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁶⁴ See Karl Rahner's essay, 'The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia,' *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1961): 347–382.