

Introduction

Formulating the subject

Violence and Sacrifice, two very different phenomena at first glance! One could wonder whether it should make sense to look out for a relationship between them. We encounter violence as a reality of life in our daily work as pastoral counsellors very often, and we know from our studies and from our faith the deep meaning of sacrifice in the religious sense of the word, rooted in a sacred realm and a sacred act. But should there be a relationship between the two?

The German language e.g. has just one word describing both, violence and power (Gewalt), and just one word to describe sacrifice and victimisation as well as 'the victim' and 'the offering' (Opfer), too. In this combination the relationship between violent power and its victims, or the process of victimisation is obvious!

Some cultural anthropologists in their studies approve theories of a deeper relationship between all those phenomena. Can these interpretations of the phenomena concerned possibly help us to better understand the everyday appearance of violence and violent power in different cultural and social settings? Can they possibly help us to find ways out of the mere application of violence and violent power?

The tradition of Christian theology has always acknowledged the relationship between violence and sacrifice, however, in a very special way: the relationship was underlined by pointing out that the death of Jesus was not just a tragic example for the result of violent human behaviour, but also and at the same time a 'sacrifice', thereby breaking the spell of violence, injustice, and death that binds us human beings. On the other hand, the death of Jesus was seen as the final sacrifice, once and for all. All new phenomena, even if they were claiming to be religious sacrifices, consequently had to be regarded as phenomena of nothing but just human violent actions.

Again, here we have to raise the same question: does this theological interpretation help us in the field of pastoral care and counselling to detect violence and to stop it? Today there are quite a few female and male theologians

who point out to the opposite, i.e. that by sticking to the idea of the sacrifice, existing power structures were enhanced and legitimised.

The 11th International Seminar on Intercultural Pastoral care and counselling

Using the headline "the emergence and pacification of violence – the multiple meaning of sacrifice" the 11th International Seminar on Pastoral Care and Counselling, taking place in the Evangelical Academy of Mülheim/Germany from 8 - 13 Sept. 1997, dealt with the issues described above.

The frame of reference for the lectures and discussions was the theory on sacrifice as it was developed by the French born cultural anthropologist René Girard. In his very elaborated theories Girard describes how in archaic times violence emerged by mimetic behaviour, how, by means of sacrifices, this violence was in a way pacified again and again (the function of the scapegoat), and how these mechanisms function until today. With his theory Girard offers a model that does not only clarify the relationship between violence and sacrifice, but also offers a number of theological implications.

The purpose of the seminar was

- To have everybody there enter in a dialog between Girard's theory and one's own faith and theology,
- To test the relevance of this theory in applying it to case studies from the field of pastoral care and counselling,
- To reflect on the specific cultural, social and political forms of violence and sacrifice,
- And to think about consequences for one's own work and life.

In the course of the seminar there were many situations where the fruitfulness of Girard's theory could be underlined. However, there was strong opposition to the way in which this model is sometimes seen (by Girard or even more by others), to finally have an overall, general theory of human violence, embedded in an overall general theory of

the development of human culture(s). Human experiences of violence as well as the meaning of sacrifices (including the 'classic' Christian theology of sacrifice) are obviously much more differentiated in reality. Hence, it is difficult to appropriately explain them with a mono-causal theory. In this regard the reports and experiences from other than Western cultures were very helpful, admonishing us to more open-mindedness.

The articles - an overview

This publication collects articles most of whom were presented (if sometimes in a slightly different form) and discussed at the seminar mentioned:

1. Violence, sacrifice and religion: the theory of René Girard

The first part of this issue is primarily dealing with explaining and discussing the theory of René Girard:

Raymund Schwager (Austria), in his first article, is giving a description of Girard's starting point: In light of the findings of the different sciences, Girard's interpretation is able to explain to a fully the specific ambiguity of the sacrifice, simultaneously being destructive and bringing salvation. By means of this interpretation it is obvious that according to Girard the Christian understanding of sacrifice has (or should have) a function of its very own in the critique of sacrifices and the ideologies surrounding them.

Hans-Martin Gutmann (Germany) is also giving an introduction into the theory of Girard. He is specifically analysing methodological aspects in Girard's work, thereby pointing out the enlightening function in which Girard sees the Gospel: "The gospel exposes the myth of the holy sacrifice as a simple lie. The victim is innocent... And God is being described as a God removed from all violence." Gutmann critically adds the question whether Girard is already using the pacifying potential of the Gospel to a full extend. He is also asking, whether the aspect of this enlightening function of the Gospel might be sufficient enough to cut off the vicious circle of sacrifice and violence.

Ronaldo Sathler-Rosa (Brazil), in referring to Gutmann's article, is raising critical questions from a Brazilian perspective, which Girard had been asked before by representatives of the "liberation theology": e. g. the question whether Girard is really and sufficiently aware of the violence within the structures of societies (especially modern economical structures), and whether he takes into account the positive meaning of sacrifice (in the sense of voluntary devotion).

The second article of *Raymund Schwager* is dealing with the specific Christological implications of Girard's theory. He is pointing out that Girard modified his interpretation of the death of Jesus in recent years. He is saying now that the death of Jesus should by all means be understood as a sacrifice, however in the sense of a 'self-sacrifice': "Jesus' offering of the self may very well be the most radical form of non-violence and love of the enemy".

Nieke Atmadja (Indonesia/Netherlands) in her response, emphasises the great impact which European problems and

their consequences have on Girard's theory. From her Asian perspective she insists to postulate that Christology must never be set apart from the question of redemption, for "in salvation, a human being cannot liberate himself as long as there is no hand of God that reaches him." Jesus is the victim as well as the sacrifice, through whom a reconciliation takes place and the relationship with God is restored.

James Farris (USA/Brazil) is warning of the violent consequences of a 'vertical theology' and a hierarchic and dualistic structure in theological thinking, for he claims that as a result of this general way of looking at life other human beings will be marginalised and turned into mere "objects" to whom one would not have a full relationships.

2. Experiences of violence as a challenge to pastoral counselling and therapy

This second chapter highlights questions with regard to the practice of pastoral care and therapy from the perspectives of different continents:

James Poling (USA) starts by reporting from his long experience in the therapeutic work with men convicted for acts of violence towards their own family members. He detects quite a few overlapping points with the theory of Girard, e. g. in regard to the phenomenon that violence apparently is acquired by mimetic behaviour. Moreover, he is judging Girard's "theory of power" to be a helpful and correcting tool against the "theory of love" which is used rather naively as a starting point of a lot of models of pastoral care and counselling. The de-mythification of violence should lead to protecting the victims and to clearly unveiling the responsibility of the perpetrators. It should never be glossed over in favour of a precipitate "empathetic identification" with the perpetrator.

Rose Zoé-Obianga (Cameroon) in her article is presenting a particular aspect of family violence caused by a specific culture and tradition, by analysing some problems of polygamy in Cameroon.

George Euling (Papua New Guinea) is describing the way in which the everyday violence in his country is growing, for reasons of cultural uprootedness, crass industrialisation, and thus, the widening gap between poor and rich. From his point of view anthropological theories do not give a satisfactory explanation any more. He sees sin, i.e. alienation from God, as the basic source behind this kind of violence.

Helmut Weiß is reporting a case study by *Rafalwen Saragih* and *Tetty Hutapea* (Indonesia): Rural exodus and urbanisation are causing a dramatic de-differentiation (R. Girard) in the Indonesian society, evoking violence and annulling traditional forms of finding compromises and peaceful arrangements.

3. Women as victims: perspectives of feminist theology

The third part of this publication presents two articles which are studying violence of men against women from a feminist perspective.

Nalini Arles (India) analyses the social-political interrelations in which women are made "scapegoats", by using the example of the burning of the widows and the persecution of witches in her country. She also shows the psychological consequences. At the same time she explains how women's movement organisations from very different backgrounds are joining together to become active against these forms of violence.

Ursula Pfäfflin (Germany) describes the phenomenon of the "mystification of violence" in the framework of the patriarchic structures of societies and families. She pleads for an alternative to this logic of violence in creating new structures in the areas of relationships and work, which should be based on mutuality, thereby avoiding and annulling the traditional, one-sided and linear differentiations of power.

4. Violence and power of God: a systematic theological approach

The fourth chapter finally contains the article of *Hartmut Ruddies* (Germany). From his systematic-theological perspective he is searching for the relationship between the "power of God" and "human violence". He reflects on the solutions that had been found in the Christian tradition, in order to follow up the biblical admonition to renounce violence in the midst of a violent world. Disputing the biblical and theological tradition Ruddies pleads for a form of "responsibility-bound-pacifism", which does not naively skip out the violent realities of this world, but which is constantly nurtured by the hope for reconciliation and which is unceasingly asking for ways to minimise violence.

We want to say thanks to the authors for letting us publish their texts: To Raymund Schwager, who was so kind to send us his first text as soon as we started our first considerations on the topic of the seminar; to James Farris, who wrote his article shortly before the seminar started; to Hartmut Ruddies, whose first version of his text was a lecture, given a couple of years ago in Düsseldorf/Germany at the annual meeting of the Association for CPE in the Church of the Rhineland. And of course: special thanks to all the other authors, who were presenters at the seminar – for their papers, and also for their intense co-operating during the whole seminar!

K.F.