

Overcoming Violence and Death in East Timor: The foundations for a new nation

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Abstract: The paper explores the nature of the 2006 crisis in East Timor, a predominantly Roman Catholic nation located in South-East Asia, and how Christianity provides concrete ways for (re-)constructing social unity and communion. Specifically, the paper argues that Christian faith provides a basis for the promotion of the common good, as Benedict XVI discussed in his latest encyclical letter, by actualising fully personal relationships of solidarity and the mimetic, transcendent capacity of human beings in forgiveness, hope and love. This is done through the lens of a story during the 2006 crisis in which the father of a deceased policeman took a stand for forgiveness and non-violence. The paper draws on the anthropological insights of French theorist, René Girard, as they provide ways for understanding the nature of violence and faith. The *remembering* of the East Timorese victims and martyrs with the crucified and risen victim, Christ, inspired the faith of the East Timorese to challenge and resist the powers of vengeance and death that sought to overwhelm the new nation of East Timor.

The Optimism of a New Age and the Church's historical role in East Timor

This May (2010) is officially the 8th anniversary of the independence of the small half-island of East Timor located between Indonesia and Australia. After more than four hundred years of Portuguese colonisation, twenty-four years of Indonesian occupation and three years of United Nations administration, East Timor officially became independent on 20th May, 2002. It has been a hard and difficult eight years in this Roman Catholic country that has over 95% of the population subscribing to Catholicism. Many Timorese people had been optimistic that the independence of East Timor would mark a golden age of peace and prosperity. Yet, the evidence is that most post-conflict societies like East Timor descend back into violence, which is what occurred in 2006. During 2006, a "crisis" occurred which started from a dispute between the government and some members of the military and eventually led to widespread conflict culminating in the attempted assassination of the President and Prime Minister in February, 2008. The optimism of a new age was overcome by the effects of

trauma, envy, resentment, greed, rivalry and widespread violence. This crisis resulted in much upheaval with people seeking refuge in the Catholic Church and much introspection on what was thought to have been the successful beginning of a new nation.

The new government of resistance hero, Xanana Gusmão, has given back some of that lost optimism by managing the crisis after 2006 and focusing on development. Yet, this optimism remains tinged with the trauma, hurt, resentment and despair of the past. So, where was the Catholic faith of the people in all this conflict? Where were the Church and Christ in all this? As became clear in discussions with Timorese for my doctoral study (2009) and for other projects, when no one was interested in them and they were cut off from the world by a violent Indonesian regime, one of the lessons the Timorese learnt was to leave aside human optimism and place their faith in the hope that Christ gives: the sometimes slow, but always present power of God who himself became a suffering victim to show the way out of violence and death.¹ The power of the Christian narrative and faith for the Timorese is demonstrated by Carey (1999, 82) when he spoke of the deep bonds that were forged between the Church and the resistance during the Indonesian period, which the resistance leader, Xanana Gusmao, described "as the very 'backbone of the resistance'". These bonds included the sharing of information and resources, moral and spiritual assistance and care for the families of the resistance. Both the political resistance and the Church were transformed by the experience of oppression that brought them closer together and closer to the people (though there were still various abuses by the resistance of the people).

Moreover, the Church herself, particularly her clergy, was transformed from an aristocratic, semi-colonial institution to one that spoke for the rights of the people and gave them hope (Archer, 1995, Carey, 1999, 82-3). The experience

¹ See the various books and articles that have been written about the Catholic Church in East Timor, e.g. Archer (1995, 120-33), Carey (1999, 77-95), Deakin (1998), Durand (2004), Lennox (2000), Lyon (2006, 131-48), Kohen (1999, 2001) and Smythe (2004), as well dissertations that have commented on the Church's role in East Timorese politics and culture, e.g., Wise (2002) and Guterres (2006).

of oppression and victimisation led to an important identification amongst the Timorese with Christ as self-giving victim. Based on this identification, the Catholic Church became a space of resistance and communion that allowed the Timorese to imagine and live beyond the violence and death perpetrated by the Indonesian regime. For example, in my doctoral study (2009), I relate how a group of Catholic religious sisters confronted a mob, which was supported by the Indonesian military, during a massacre. By analysing how the Sisters peacefully faced the mob, it was clear that their Christian faith enabled for them a different type of communion from that of the mob. This faith was informed by the identification with Christ as victim, making it possible to live and see beyond death and violence.

Based on the identification of Christ with the Timorese people and the peoples' burgeoning faith in the self-giving love that Christ reveals in suffering, the Church "was the *only* local institution capable of communicating independently with the outside world and of articulating the deep trauma of the East Timorese people" (Carey, 1999, 85). Speaking to the trauma of the Timorese, resistance to state-sanctioned violence and oppression was supported by the Timorese Church's connection to the Roman Church authorities, which gave it independence, active support and offered a 'cultural [and] public space' free from the Indonesian authorities (Archer, 1995, 127). The Church was pivotal not only in providing the Timorese with a voice but also with a language, Tetun (in preference to Indonesian). Tetun was used for liturgical and official occasions. Most importantly, as Carey (1999, 86) shows, the Church gave the Timorese people a "personal commitment", more so than the generation educated under the Portuguese at which time Catholicism was partly a sign of social status. This personal commitment mixed Timorese nationalism with a firm faith in Christ that became the centre of community life and was the "backbone" and substance of the resistance.² As I will discuss, it was the re-learning of the lessons of faith

² The central nature of the Catholic faith led the Timorese populace to choose Catholicism as their official religion. Despite continual harassment and abuse as Bishop Belo (in Carey, 1999, 87) described the unofficial policy of "Islamisation", the people actively participated in their faith: "There are many ways: their presence in the Church, in the Eucharist, in the chapels. They also pray in their own homes, [use] the rosary

during the crisis of 2006 that made present the power of Christ in the lives of the Timorese in a concrete way: to give up on the power of violence and death in preference for Christ, who in this way provides solid foundations for the lives of persons and communities in a pacific mimetic transcendence.

The 2006 Crisis and the Power of the Mob

During May 2006, a political crisis developed between the government and some members of the army that eventually led to widespread violence in the capital, Dili. The military, police, gangs of youths (mostly based in martial arts or criminal groups) and political parties were involved in the conflict, which caused large internal displacement of persons, property damage and deaths.³ An international military force led by Australia intervened, which eventually led to a new United Nations mission in East Timor with an international police and civilian presence. During the initial stage of the crisis, a policeman was killed by a mob that had gathered outside the district office of a politician in a town in the western part of East Timor. This policeman was part of a rapid response team that was deployed to the town accompanying some politicians to negotiate with civilians who had demonstrated in the town in response to a supposed massacre that had occurred in Dili.⁴ This was an important incident as it brought together and revealed the agendas and actions of some significant players in the crisis of 2006 – the government, the Church, police, military dissenters, tribal and ex-

[and] organise processions with a statue of the Virgin, which they carry from house to house. . . . [But] other kinds of group meeting, to sit down together to read the Bible and to pray is not allowed because the [Indonesian] military don't trust them. They think they will discuss politics— this is not allowed. But really, the Catholic faith for the people is a kind of symbol to unite them, it is a way to express the fact that they are Timorese, they don't like any other religion [and] they [certainly] don't like Indonesia.'" As I point out in my study (2009) and as Carey (1999 87-89) notes, the foundational contribution of the Catholic faith for Timorese resistance eventually led it to be targeted by the Indonesian authorities, firstly politically and later with physical violence. This targeting of the Church showed a deep frustration on the part of the Indonesian authorities and reflected the substantial impact of the Catholic faith on the Timorese.

³ See Kingsbury & Leach (2007).

⁴ See the "Report of the United Nations Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste" (2006, 30-31) for more details and background to this incident and the crisis in general. The massacre was found to be a rumour, though there was a conflict occurring between military and civilian factions.

resistance leaders, and civilian rioters – in one of the most tumultuous districts in East Timor (Ermera). It also showed the volatile nature of the civilian population, who were seemingly being provoked by certain groups trying to achieve their own political goals. The nature of the conflict in this district would reveal major underlying problems amongst the government, which miscalculated the political climate and mismanaged relationships and situations (like the one to be described below); the police, which had major divisions and command issues; the military dissenters, who were dissatisfied with the government and some of whom were stoking violence; and amongst the civilian population, which was still suffering the effects of trauma from the Indonesian period and who were not satisfied with their own position and the state of the nation (particularly amongst groups like the youth, rural leaders and ex-resistance fighters). Along with the already existing tensions and protests in Dili, the result of this incident would set a precedent for future conflict and mob violence and would unleash forces of tension, trauma, rivalry and violence that would not be calmed for many months and still remain unresolved in many ways.

While this team of police and politicians were sent by the government and the police to deal with the situation in Gleno, they were unable to address the situation either with political negotiation or with appropriate force. The excited and frenzied mob had taken control of the town and surrounded a government building in which the police and politicians had taken shelter. There was much damage to the building and local vehicles as the mob became more excited. In taking control, they began to target certain people for their outrage. They had allowed the policemen from the west of East Timor to go free but surrounded the police from the east.⁵ The police from the west, then, deserted. During the 2006 conflict, an old, relatively dormant tension between easterners ("*lorosae*") and westerners ("*loromonu*") in East Timor had been catalysed.⁶ This division is not

⁵ One of the main accusations levelled against the government and police commanders after this incident was why they had sent a predominantly eastern taskforce to this western town when east-west tensions were running high and when these east-west divisions were in many ways being used as a rallying call to violence.

⁶ The "west" of East Timor extends over a large area and is usually said to include about 10 of the 13 districts in East Timor. The "east" of East Timor includes the remaining

an ethnic division but is a legacy of tribal divisions exploited by Portuguese rule that sought to divide-and-conquer the Timorese peoples. The eastern policemen took shelter in the office of the local state official. Some members of the mob complained about the rapid response team's heavy-handed tactics in dealing with civilian protests in Dili. The local priest, some ex-resistance commanders and other local leaders eventually negotiated a settlement with the mob to let the police go free on the condition the police were disarmed. The policemen were, then, ushered out of the building and past the mob into a four-wheel drive car. However, some elements in the mob attacked. Two of the policemen either fell off the car or were pulled, and were stabbed as the car drove off. The other policemen recovered the two victims.⁷ The victims were taken for medical treatment, but one of the victims later died. As the policeman died, it was reported that he had said: "Why did they do this? What had I done to them?" The body of the victim was brought back to Dili.

After the body of the dead policeman had been examined in Dili, police colleagues and family members of the deceased threatened to protest because of the circumstances of the death. There was much outrage amongst members of the policeman's extended family and former colleagues, who threatened to escalate the violence in the capital. At this point, the general unrest that would

three districts. What had started as a Portuguese-division re-emerged in 2006 with claims that they was discrimination against westerners in the military. This catalysed arguments about the Indonesian period concerning how the easterners had borne much of the weight and responsibility for the resistance in Indonesian time – and so were now populating the higher ranks of the military – while the westerners were harshly oppressed by the Indonesian military and sometimes sided with the Indonesians.

⁷ The details of this incident are also related in the "Report of the United Nations Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste" (2006, 30-31). Media reports (e.g., from the Dili newspaper, *Suara Timor Lorosae*, 2006) and the UN-commissioned report (2006) cast serious doubt on operational decisions that allowed these eastern policemen to be sent into the situation in Gleno. There were strong allegations by the family and others that the policeman was sent to his death by higher authorities in the police and interior ministry; and, were killed as a result of an incompetent Government decision to send politicians and a small number of police into the riot. The policeman who was killed was an outstanding officer who agitated for political and managerial reform of the security forces. His stance was later justified when the security forces disintegrated under the corrupt leadership of the soon to be jailed Interior Minister. The policeman was posthumously promoted to Inspector; a promotion the family knew he deserved but did not accept.

occur later in Dili had not yet been fully catalysed. The mood for vengeance and violence was strong amongst some as returning the violence done to their family and police member is a usual reaction, particularly as the honour of the police, tribe and family had been offended. René Girard⁸, a literary-critic and cultural anthropologist, argues that violence and vengeance are overwhelming forces in human communities as they catalyse in a distinctive way that which is unique to human beings: their *mimetic* or imitated desires. Through literary and anthropological analysis, Girard has proposed that humans are uniquely structured by their imitated or *mimetic desire*, i.e., humans desire according to the desire of another.⁹ Humans are brought into relationship by shared desires that form human identity. This desire also forms the basis for the inherent transcendent movement of human being in which fulfilment, relationship and happiness are sought in the movement beyond the self. However, this mimetic, transcendent movement can be distorted into rivalry and conflict when common objects of desire are fought over. The accumulation of these conflicts results in cultural breakdown.

Girard (1977, 145) noticed that mimetic desire became pathogenic and distorted as objects of desire were fought over. Denial of the other occurs when the model becomes a rival as the subject wishes to acquire what the model desired by grasping at the object of desire. In this circumstance, the subject asserts the ownership and priority of his/her desire over the other's desire (Oughourlian, 1991, 18). According to Oughourlian (1991, 20), recognition of mimetic desire is

⁸ René Girard is a French academic who has taught at various American universities and finished his academic career as Professor of French Language, Literature and Civilisation at Stanford University. He has received numerous honours, honorary doctorates and awards, including a chair in France's most prestigious academic body *L'Académie française* ("The French Academy"). Various groups and scholarly associations, such as the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), have developed to explore, critique and apply Girard's insights.

⁹ The brief introduction in this section uses a basic threefold division of Girard's work that is commonly used to introduce Girard's thought. It draws on Girard's works (1965, 1977, 1978, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 2000, 2001 & 2007), and introductions to his work. For fuller expositions consult these works: Alison (1998a, 1998b & 2001), Bailie (1995), Fleming (2002 & 2004), Golsan (2002), Kirwan (2004), Oughourlian (1991 & 1996) and Schwager (2000 & 2006). See also Simonse's (1992) anthropological work in Africa and his application of Girard's insights. For full reference details, refer to the bibliography.

a difficult process – one with which human beings in general has struggled. Oughourlian (1991, 20) calls this recognition, *reconnaissance*:

...every glimmer of recognition (*reconnaissance*) of the interindividual relation is therapeutic for the holon [the psychological being] and confers on him identity and unity because it consists in taking the other consciously as a model. ...all obstinacy in the misunderstanding (*meconnaissance*) of that relation and of the mimetic character of desire impedes the development of identity, and that taking the other as a rival produces in the holon a dissociation and pathology commensurate with that rivalry.

In the context of rivalry and mob violence, this misunderstanding and lack of recognition is pathogenic to the point of inflicting fatal violence where the victim is believed to deserve death so the subject can achieve the object of desire. The mob in both Gleno and at the funeral sought to achieve their frustrated desires. The cycle of violence was being fuelled by the mob seeking to achieve what they supposedly didn't have: justice and retribution for wrongs and for a share in the prosperity and status that others (whether westerners or easterners) supposedly had. Ultimately, the subject's attempt to grasp at the other's object of desire is an effort to gain the ontological depth which the model seems to have in possessing a certain object (Girard, 1987b, 296-7). Girard (1987b, 296-7) calls this "metaphysical desire" where the radical distortion of mimetic desire from a pacific and autonomous relation with the model-other to rivalry over a common object of desire results in the denial of the other and the insistence on the priority of "me." In the process of building identity and being, I acquire the other's desire which I then mistakenly try to grasp because I believe I should be the only one to have it. In this grasping, there is angst and fear originating from the sense of ontological "lack" in human being that drives the subject to assert itself and grasp at that which the other seems to possess: "ontological density" and wholeness of being (Henri de Lubac in Bailie, 1997, 132). This is what the book of Wisdom (2:24) calls "the devil's envy" that causes a vicious cycle of violence originating from the inability to acquire what the other has in order *to be like or better than the other* :

Once he has entered upon this vicious circle, the subject rapidly begins to credit himself with a radical inadequacy that the model

has brought to light, which justifies the model's attitude toward him. The model, being closely identified with the object he jealously keeps for himself, possesses – so it would seem – a self-sufficiency and omniscience that the subject can only dream of acquiring. The object is now more desired than ever. Since the model obstinately bars access to it, the possession of this object must make all the difference between the self-sufficiency of the model and the imitator's lack of sufficiency, the model's fullness of being and the imitator's nothingness (Girard, 1987b, 295-7).

This rivalrous violence is not consistent with the inner workings of mimesis itself, but is a distorted possibility that results from the denial of the anteriority of the other's desire (Girard, 2001, 15-16). Mimetic rivalry results from a pathological self-deception based on a false view of the self and one's desire; a self that cannot pacifically come to terms with the other *and so must assert itself over against the other*. Violent rivalry is used to fill the hole created by the human inability to pacifically come to terms with the other, resulting in a violent mechanism that builds distorted identity.¹⁰

Girard (1977, 148) argues that, while mimetic rivalry gives the human a sense of identity built over against the other, rivalries aggregate in human groups and eventually result in collective violence. This collective violence, according to Girard (1977, 68-88, 1986, 12-23, 1987, 24-5, 2001, 24), is resolved through the expulsion or killing of a victim.¹¹ This act of "victimage" unites and reconciles

¹⁰ The biblical book of Genesis describes this situation in the scene in which humans reject loving *communio* with God (the complete mimetic triangle) to grasp at the object of their desire. This desire is stimulated by the serpent, which precipitates the human's (*adam*) envious denial of its own mimetic creatureliness¹⁰: "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5; italics added). Good creation is distorted by envy in which humanity grasps at its desire to be like and better than its Creator and model. The human beings' attempt to grasp the object of their desire in a false autonomy based on the imitation of the serpent results in their rejection of the communion with the Other. This false autonomy results in the formation of self-identity and consciousness, though in a distorted and violent form that becomes ingrained in human culture.

¹¹ Through studying ancient literature such as the Greek tragedies, Girard (1977 & 1987b) discovered the same mimetic interactions in ancient literature as in modern literature, but also noticed the added feature of collective violence centred on sacrifice and victims. He began to observe how human culture has tended to be characterised by violent, rivalrous webs of human relations based on misunderstanding and denial. The distorted mimetic formation of the human self in its relation to others is resolved through

human desire through the transformation of acquisitive mimesis into conflictual mimesis, i.e., from the acquisition of desire to the conflict over desire which may eventually lead to the unification of desire against some object or other (Girard, 1987, 26). According to Girard, this cycle of violence convenes human culture by stabilising the ontological and mimetic transcendence at the heart of human relations.

Girard's account of violence contrasts with conventional views. Girard (1997) says the conventional view of violence is that it is a spontaneous act of aggression from a subject to an object. Girard (1997) argues that this is a superficial view, which allows a violent person to be identified as different and deviant from the rest of "peace-loving" humanity (Girard, 1997). Girard (1997) claims that, in fact, violence comes from competition and rivalry over common desires, which implicates all humans in violence, not just "deviants".

Moreover, Girard (1997) argues that violence and rivalry are not caused by differences between human beings, such as differences over culture or religion or between "good" and "bad" people. On the contrary, violence displays a lack of difference between desiring subjects and models. The fear (discussed above) of having nothing in one's self – that we have no ontological density but are only disguise – leads us to grasp for being through that which animates being, desire. This fear – which McCabe (2003, 70) says is a "disbelief in oneself" – is accentuated (as Girard points out) when we encounter the other and realise the lack of difference between oneself and other; that there is nothing definitive that differentiates "me" from you and makes me better. In particular, Girard (1987b, 12) shows that when the distance and distinction between the subject and model collapses in the pursuit of the same object, the two rivals become undifferentiated as "doubles" imitating each other's desire in the pursuit of the same object, which usually results in conflict. This conflict starts as an attempt to acquire an object and transforms into a crisis of identity and difference characterised by a competition to establish power and status. The establishment

the unification of desire against a victim. The ontological confusion at the heart of human being and culture is resolved by victimage.

of a victor is the beginning of difference, which serves to obscure the fact that all humans are the same; that they contain no original desire or identity apart from that formed with the other.¹² Differences are used as a means to define one's self or group over against the other and control competing desires, as can be seen in the Timor crisis in 2006 when factions developed to blame others for their problems because of frustrated desires and agendas. As was seen in Timor, the reasons for crisis soon become forgotten in violence and crisis is exacerbated in rivalry until one party is victorious:

As rivalry becomes acute, the rivals are more apt to forget about whatever objects are, in principle, the cause of the rivalry and instead to become more fascinated with one another. In effect the rivalry is purified of any external stake and becomes a matter of pure rivalry and prestige. Each rival becomes for his counterpart the worshipped and despised model and obstacle, the one who must be at once beaten and assimilated (Girard, 1987b, 26).

Thus, once the conflict and rivalry are established, the object is usually forgotten and the rival becomes the focus of *scandal* for the subject. Girard (2001, 16) calls this state of rivalry the *skandalon*, in which the rival becomes a block to the subject's desire so that the rival takes the subject's focus, rather than the original object.

The way in which rivalry overtakes the consciousness of the subject and the model was evident in Timor in 2006 when violence and conflict broke out between certain groups with aims that increasingly became less clear and in which victory became the imperative.¹³ The rapid crystallisation of factions

¹² When difference ostensibly leads to violence, such as between cultural or religious groups, it usually masks the fact that there exists a crisis of difference and identity within the groups involved. In other words, the groups have begun to lose their own identity as feel that it is threatened and need to re-define it over against others. In the Timorese case, there is no real difference between east and west. Although there were some political grievances, it is questionable whether the east-west divisions were at the heart of these political problems and that in fact this division was just being used to re-define each group's identity and further some political agendas in the midst of crisis. Nevertheless, there was discrimination in the military and government based on familial and tribal divisions, yet this discrimination was not always easily defined in terms of the east-west division.

¹³ This kind of focus on the rival was also evident in the Indonesian occupation, in which the Indonesian military became fixated on destroying the resistance movement

(based on divisions between east and west) in Timor-Leste in 2006 was a surprise to many commentators, some of whom remarked that these divisions were not deep or permanent. This east-west division, while having historical causes, seemed to manifest itself as social tensions and divisions arose during the crisis. The polarisation of East Timor during 2006, which for example resulted in the policeman's death in the story described above, seems to imitate the cycle that Girard describes: that as tensions rose (particularly between the government and military over conditions and perceived discrimination against westerners), divisions solidified in which westerners started making claims to what easterners supposedly had (such as government favour and positions) eventually leading to conflict and the accusation of an innocent person in order to satisfy the frustrated desires of the western mob. A relatively dormant rivalry had been re-activated as frustrations heightened at the government for being inflexible and not providing for all groups in Timor. Moreover, the crisis also brought forth underlying civil frustrations in a number of areas, particularly at the lack of development and employment especially amongst the youth and the insufficient response to trauma and injustice during the Indonesian period. The crisis also provided the opportunity for the polarisation of political rivalries between certain elites and parties who were willing to manipulate the crisis for their own perceived benefit.¹⁴

The escalation of rivalry and violence in Timor, like that in Gleno, eventually resulted in what Girard calls the state of *skandalon*, where the object of desire is forgotten and mimetic rivalry dominates, resulting in a "collapse of difference" (Girard, 1977, 49-79). The rivals become "doubles" in what Girard (1977, 49-79) calls the "crisis of differentiation". The collapse and crisis of difference

disproportionately to the threat that the resistance posed to the Indonesian rule. In terms of the 2006 crisis, the nature of the rivalry and violence does not mean that there were not important political issues that needed to be resolved, particularly in the proper functioning of the government in relation to the military and police. This analysis is only meant to serve an understanding of the nature of the senseless and persistent violence that occurred in Timor in 2006.

¹⁴ This description is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of the 2006 crisis, which comprised a number of causative factors, but is seeking to show how the phenomenon of rivalry was catalysed on a large-scale during the crisis.

causes the illusion of autonomous human desire to disintegrate resulting in the "undifferentiation" of the rivals (Girard, 1977, 49-79). In this circumstance, desire is no longer differentiated through levels of cultural difference and power in which models are separated from the subject of desire in case the subject attempts to acquire his desire by force from the model. Instead, the subject and model become mirrors of each other's violence; of which they become increasingly aware and which drives them even more to achieve victory in order to avoid the realisation that one's self is the same as one's rival. When acquisitive mimesis multiples, this causes numerous subject-model rivalries, with increasingly no distinction between subject and model, and leads to collective violence. This escalation of violence can be seen in the mob violence that was directed at the police in Gleno and in the gang violence that occurred generally in the 2006 crisis, in which rivalries escalated in imitation of the other's violence. In this way, the mimetic *contagion* of violence snowballs and spreads like a disease that collapses cultural institutions and structures (Girard, 2001, 21-4): "...in its perfection and paroxysm mimesis becomes a chain reaction of vengeance, in which human beings are constrained to the monotonous repetition of homicide. Vengeance turns them into *doubles*" (Girard, 1987, 12).

Girard says that the way that vengeance and mob violence give satisfaction to our desires, and so fulfilment to our sense of being and identity, is at the foundation of group and personal identity. Vengeance and mob violence seek to recover a loss of identity and being by imitating the violent desires of the other (for status and victory) and inflicting that violence back onto those accused. According to Girard, these kinds of rivalries are resolved in the unification of desire that occurs in scapegoating a rival or victim, like in the mob violence that some in the funeral procession were threatening against westerners in East Timor. This scapegoating produces a newfound cultural unity and order built on the lie of unanimous violence that the victim is guilty, like the accusation that westerners were at fault for the death of the Timorese policeman. This cycle of vengeance and mob violence threatened to overwhelm the capital and the nation of East Timor in 2006.

Standing with the Victim in Forgiveness

After exploring the effects of mob violence in Timor and examining its nature, I now turn to explore how Christian faith operated in this circumstance of violent crisis. I will do this in reference to what occurred after the mob threatened retribution during the funeral procession of the dead policeman. The then-Prime Minister, who visited the family and the police, gave the policeman a state funeral. The policeman, a man of Catholic faith, was identified as an innocent victim who had selflessly served his people and who was targeted by the mob. Betrayed by his fellows and dying defencelessly at the hands of the mob, he was regarded by his family as a martyr who had innocently and selflessly sacrificed his life for others. The last words of the policeman on his death clearly point to his innocence and they were remembered as a sign of his unjust death and sacrifice. In the long funeral procession from the capital to his home in a rural village, some members of the policeman's family and others wanted to arbitrarily take vengeance against some people and policemen from the west of East Timor. These people were spuriously identified with the killers and were accused of not supporting the deceased. The general context of East Timor at this time may have contributed to this act: there were high tension and political unrest which was provoking old memories, fear and trauma. In the high emotions of the funeral procession and the crisis, many were looking for an outlet of violence. The tense and violent nature of situation heightens the unusual and extraordinary nature of what occurred next.

The funeral procession was a highly charged mimetic atmosphere with wailing, shouting and an underlying feeling of retribution and vengeance. The father of the deceased policeman, Mateus (not his real name), sought to intervene as emotions ran high and retribution was sought. Mateus went before those who wanted vengeance to plead for restraint. He knelt down before the mob pleading for them to not shed any more blood but to forgive as God has forgiven them all. Before the mob, he said: "It is enough death. Let it go. God forgives."¹⁵ The mob was shocked. They had sought to right a wrong in the course of tribal and group

¹⁵ Translation from Tetun.

retribution but the father was not with them. Instead, he defended those accused. Instead of vengeance, Mateus knelt before them like Christ. The mob could not take the action they desired and were frustrated by Mateus.¹⁶

But why did the mob stop before Mateus? They not only respected him as a family member and father of the deceased but they were reminded in their conscience of what they were about to do to an innocent victim. Their conscience was awakened, however briefly, by an explicit appeal by Mateus to their Christian faith. Girard helps to make sense of Mateus' appeal as he shows that the recognition of the innocence of our victims is an important result of the death and resurrection of Christ. In his analysis of ancient and modern literature and culture, Girard found that the scapegoating that lay at the heart of human culture was discussed in a different way by the Bible than that seen in comparable myths. Girard argues that the victim's role in culture and myth is steadily exposed by the Hebrews and is definitively revealed in Christ, who is killed as victim and is claimed to reveal God as his forgiveness exposes the distorted cycle of desire and violence. Christ breaks through violence and death with an alternative to the vengeful desires of the mob in self-giving love, which definitely overcomes violence. Jesus' words on the Cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34; King James Version), highlights the burgeoning Christian consciousness of the victim in forgiveness and the mob's amnesia in violence.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mateus had stopped a similar incident from occurring in the capital where some people wanted to take vengeance for his son's death.

¹⁷ Furthermore, Girard (2001, 103-36) argues that the anthropological and interpretative power of Jesus' death and Resurrection is reflected in how the Gospels contrast to and deconstruct conventional mythic stories of the gods. Girard (1986, 1987, 2001) makes this claim by outlining important distinguishing markers between the Gospels and ancient myths. These include: the representation in the Gospels of the unanimous and overwhelming power of mimetic violence, which even encompasses Jesus' followers; the death of Jesus as a human (not as a monster or supernatural god); the lack of supernatural power exercised by Jesus, particularly surrounding his death; Jesus non-involvement in the cycle of mimetic rivalry and violence; Jesus' Resurrection not being immediate and not a direct result of the mob violence; Jesus' return from the dead not as a vengeful god but as loving human being; the repentance from and recognition of mob violence after the Resurrection by the small minority who had abandoned Jesus; the lack of demonisation of Jesus by this minority, who recognise his divinity in his loving self-giving and pacific being; the demonisation of Jesus by a majority who deny Jesus'

The Resurrection, according to Girard (2001, 123), vindicates Jesus as the innocent victim. This vindication is not a violent, exclusive act but an inclusive one: it offers humanity a way out of violence through non-violent love. By dying on the Cross and being raised, Jesus is believed to be making present God's gratuitous mimesis to all humanity. In other words, Jesus' return from the dead is not as a vengeful god but as loving human being, whose divinity is recognised in his loving self-giving and pacific being. According to Girard, this encounter with Jesus' perfect loving self-giving develops a new understanding about mob violence, ritual and myth amongst the early Christians grounded in a new form of mimesis that establishes self-sacrifice for the other as the perfect mimetic model, rather than sacrifice against the other. The incomplete Hebrew revelation of the forgiving victim overcomes its final hurdle: mob violence and death. The Gospels are showing that death does not have the ultimate say over the victim, nor is violence the ultimate arbiter of human life. Instead, the victim is revealed and humans are shown that they can be live without violence, which most importantly subverts the power of the mob by disrupting its unanimous support:

The essential factor ... is that the persecutors' perception of their persecution is finally defeated. In order to achieve the greatest effect that defeat must take place under the most difficult circumstances, in a situation that is the least conducive to truth and the most likely to produce mythology. This is why the Gospel text constantly insists on the irrationality ("without a cause") of the sentence passed against the just and at the same time on the absolute unity of the persecutors, of all those who believe or appear to believe in the existence and validity of the cause, the *ad causam*, the accusation, and who try to impose that belief on everyone (Girard, 1986, 109).

By taking Jesus as the central reference point, Girard (1986, 1987 & 2001) argues that the Gospels expose and disrupt the unanimous power of mimetic violence in the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. The disruption of the mob by Mateus is enacting the same kind of witness as Jesus, based on the

divinity; and the development of a new understanding about mob violence, ritual and myth in a new form of mimesis that establishes self-sacrifice for the other as the perfect mimetic model, rather than sacrifice against the other (cf. Girard, 1987, 215-5).

forgiveness that Jesus gave as the revelation of God: "It is enough death. Let it go. God forgives." According to Girard, the association of God with the victim and forgiveness is a distinctively Christian belief as the divinity is usually associated with death and violence. For example, in the case of Jesus' crucifixion, violence encompassed all people, even Jesus' friends and fellow Jews, in what Girard defines as "false transcendence" (Girard, 1986, 105-6 & 150-64, 1987, 217, 2001, 96-8). This false transcendence even overcame the Israelites of Jesus' time, who were meant to be free from the violent idol worship of the surrounding peoples. This false transcendence of violence was exemplified in the disciples led by Peter, who were ready to fight for Jesus' Kingdom; and in the Israelite leaders who goaded Jesus to come down from the Cross to inflict his vengeful power. Girard (1986, 100-164, 2001, 19-31 & 121-60, 2004) explains that the Gospels disclose the power of mimetic violence through a number of events and themes: Roman Governor Pilate's lack of control of the crowd and his attempted appeasement of them, such as with a substitute victim, Barabbas; the crowd's satisfaction in achieving the guilt of its chosen scapegoat; the effect of the scapegoating cycle that overpowers the authorities and even unifies them, such as by making Pilate and King Herod into friends after being lifelong enemies; and, the unanimous nature of the scapegoating exemplified when Jesus' leading follower, Peter, denies Jesus. Girard (1987) also highlights important statements within the Gospels, some which draw on and re-interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. These statements show the Gospels' complete awareness of the scapegoat mechanism: "You fail to see it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed" (Jn 11:50) that highlights the nature of culture in victimage; "They hated me without a cause" (Jn 15:25) that shows the baseless nature of the mob's accusations and mimetic violence; "He let himself be taken for a criminal" (Lk 22:37; Mk 15:28) that shows Jesus' willing sacrifice in being accused of guilt by the violent human crowd; and, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:24) that expresses Jesus' faithfulness and self-giving to both God and humanity in the midst of victimisation and despair and shows the unconscious dictatorship of violence and distorted desire over human beings.

Thus, there are two important themes that Girard particularly highlights about the Gospels. Firstly, the Gospels' awareness of the mimetic violence of the mob that seeks a victim. Girard (2001, 128) says the "two words, *without cause*, marvellously describe the behaviour of human packs." Girard (1986, 111) also highlights a text from Acts of the Apostles that shows the ignorance of the mob: "Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea of what you were really doing." This last passage is from Peter, who after the Resurrection suddenly understands the cycle of violence that had occurred and preaches Christ crucified as God. Secondly, the Gospels' realisation of Jesus' conscious and purposeful sacrifice in which he accepted death on a cross *for* humanity. This realisation enabled them to see how Jesus lived outside of mimetic violence and offered a new, loving way of being to loose humanity from their "persecutory unconscious" (Girard, 2001, 126): "A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence – by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence" (Girard, 1987, 219). The Gospels' recognition of the injustice and self-sacrifice of Jesus' death, which led to their awareness of mimetic violence, saw them re-locate the experience of the transcendent Other in the non-violent love of Jesus, rather than in the violence of the mob (Girard, 1987, 169-70, 2001, 96-8).

In this new experience of loving and pacific transcendence, Girard (2001, 131) argues that Jesus' Resurrection provided the Gospels with the anthropological key to see the innocence of the victim and the lies of the mob. The mob's story is finally defeated because their distorted *belief* in violence and envy is overcome by the gratuitous mimesis of God as victim, who offers a new avenue for faith and human being in mimesis. For this reason, the Resurrection shows itself to be different from pagan "dying-and-rising" stories. It is not a miraculous event that involves subservience to an all-powerful deity, but a personal encounter with a gratuitous Other who brings humanity to a new understanding of life and new actions that are self-giving. For example, the Gospels particularly expose the false belief in the transcendence of the mob by contrasting what Girard (2001, 131-6) calls the false and true resurrections. In the Gospels of Mark and

Matthew, the story of John the Baptist's death is recounted in which Herod and others believe John has been "raised up" (Mk 6:16) (Girard, 2001, 134). The Gospels clearly show that Herod's belief in the resurrection of John is linked to his death because after Herod makes a statement of his belief, John's death is recounted in which Herod is involved (Girard, 2001, 134). Herod is afraid of John returning from the dead after having been involved in his death. The Gospels are giving a case of where the victim is divinised by his murderers in a false resurrection based on a sacred fear that the victim will return with vengeance. The Gospels show that this false resurrection is based in the false transcendence of the mob violence that divinises the victim as part of its persecutory unconscious (Girard, 2001, 126 & 134).

The Pacific Transcendence of Christ & Violent Transcendence of the Mob

The effects of mimetic transcendence were evident in the situation of Mateus when he and his family were confronted with existential, mimetic crisis. It is common for humans to resort to the power of mob violence to answer their existential and mimetic crises, as was seen in the attempted mob violence at the funeral (and in the policeman's death). Mob violence, according to Girard (2001, 96-8), resolves these crises through "false transcendence", in which the "miraculous" mimetic movement and reconciliation of unanimous violence against a murdered victim gives mimetic satisfaction and is agreed to be sacred and divine. The all-encompassing nature of this violence receives a sacred or divine blessing because of its powerful effect to reconcile and structure human life. This violent transcendence, Girard (1977, 24) argues, uses violence effectively to stabilise relationships and form culture. On the other hand, there is the possibility for a different form of transcendence that I identify as occurring in the Mateus' experience in his faith in the self-giving victim Christ; which I call "pacific transcendence". Transcendence is firstly based on the nature of human desire, which is always relational and seeking outside of itself for fulfilment. In relationship, desire requires and gives rise to faith and trust with the other, i.e., with any person whom one is in relationship (or disbelief and violence against the other). Secondly, as desire and faith have this other-centred movement, both inherently involve a transcendent dimension. As desire leads humans to

seek fulfilling relationship with the perfect Other, faith acquires a transcendent dimension. In transcendence, the human seeks the definitive movement of their being in mimetic desire that takes them out of themselves into mimetic unity and reconciliation with the Other, and so, all others.

The experience of the Other – the crucified and risen Christ – as self-giving and forgiving victim (rather than violent and vengeful like the mob) provided motivation for Mateus to answer the crisis facing him with hope and forgiveness. As I have argued elsewhere (2009), as oppressed people who suffered under the wrath of a violent, conquering power, the Timorese began to see Christ in a new way: as victim who had stood before them in the place of violence and who continued to stand with them.¹⁸ The effect of the relationship with Christ was to induct East Timorese people into a different form of mimesis that contrasted with the violent mimesis of the mob leading them to belief, and ultimately, to stand with those being victimised. As they suffered the violence of the Indonesian regime, the lives of the East Timorese were informed by the pacific transcendence of their Christian faith that moved them to courageously stand alongside the victim.¹⁹ It was this same movement that was occurring in Mateus' case, yet it was directed at his own family and those who killed his son. Moved

¹⁸ It is important to note, the East Timorese did not equate themselves with Christ but identified their experience with him: Christ had gone through death and despair for them in order to make it possible to gain meaning and purpose beyond the power of violence. Furthermore, to be anthropologically correct, the East Timorese people in general are not victims until they are expelled or killed by a mob. However, in a general sense, they were oppressed as they occupied a losing position in relation to the Indonesians, as part of which they were threatened with the death at any time.

¹⁹ Based on this discussion of transcendence, there is an important relationship between faith and mimesis on the level of ontology that can be seen in which faith gives mimetic direction to the lives of those in violent crisis. For the Catholic East Timorese, their faith direction and stance with the victimised was founded on faith in the Resurrection. This faith in the risen Christ did not represent identification with a more violent form of justice than that of the militia. The significance of the Resurrection lay in its vindication of Christ as self-giving victim. If it was otherwise, Jesus would have been another in the long list of misguided messiahs crucified by the Romans. Jesus' life was not another "cause celebre". Its meaning lay in what he did and his authority in who he was, which was definitively revealed and vindicated by the Resurrection (Kasper, 1976, 124). In the Resurrection, Christ's self-giving way of being, which was consistently enacted in his life and death in accordance with God's will, is vindicated and revealed by God the Father who shares his life with His Son in self-giving love (the Spirit).

by Christ, Mateus stood with the victim, his son, and resisted attempts to continue the violence that had devastated his family.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of Mateus' appeal was heightened as he was not alone. He stood with and for those who did not want violence; particularly those in his immediate family who had stood against attempts to turn the deceased's death into a rallying cry for violence. His witness and stand was most powerful because his grief and role as father is of utmost importance, particularly in Timorese culture. Mateus was not alone in his extended family motivated by his faith to take action against attempts to catalyse violence from this incident. His wife also did not believe in taking vengeance and expressed this to some family members. Her sentiments were that: Violence would not produce anything beneficial and would not honour her son. She trusted in God's forgiveness. Other family members expressed similar views. Upon hearing of his death, the grandfather of the deceased immediately prayed for his grandson and for those who had killed his grandson. An aunt spoke directly to the government and the media asking for justice in the form of an inquiry. However, she warned those in her family against using their grief to take vengeance and, instead, try to forgive like Christ. An uncle tried to stop the media printing inflammatory remarks that reported his family wanting vengeance against the killers of the policeman. Some part of the deceased's family, who were not the closest relations, had expressed their desire for vengeance. As the uncle said, these views did not represent the whole family. The uncle knew that the newspaper wanted to provoke scandal and violence, while he wanted to avoid more suffering and violence. Further, the siblings of the deceased, like their parents, did not display the desire for vengeance and were able to avoid resentment. The aunt mentioned above offered a moving prayer for the killers that they would be forgiven. She repeatedly asked for calm and did not want any of her family members to seek vengeance. Though some of her extended family put great pressure on her and was angry at her decision, she would not give permission for this violence. Initially angry at the killers herself, the aunt remarked that forgiveness sets one free from the stranglehold of vengeance and bitterness, which enslaved the killers and other East Timorese people in the cycles of

violence as she said, quoting from the Gospel: “they probably did not really know what they were doing.”

The strong sense of Christian faith in the family seemed to form their response to violence and death. Their faith led to them to see the evil of violence (which Christ himself had suffered) and how it could be overcome through concrete actions of forgiveness that sought to stop or resist violence. This was exemplified by Mateus who vulnerably pleaded with the mob to not subject itself to violence but instead trust and *believe* in God’s forgiving love. In his grief, Mateus hoped that in appealing to the conscience of the crowd by taking a stand like that of the vulnerable and open Christ, he could save the mob from its own violence. By doing this, he was willing to suffer the consequences of the crowd’s violence as victim to stop it. Mateus’ act recalled his son’s innocent sacrifice, which witnessed to Christ and motivated him to stop any more violence. Mateus submitted to Christ’s forgiveness and the crowd eventually submitted to his witness to Christ and gave up on their efforts for vengeance. In making this act of submission to Christ and then to the mob, Mateus was willing to put himself in the place of his son’s killers and the mob’s potential victims to save them all from violence. He was enacting the responsibility or task of the oppressed and persecuted; a task which they have because they have access to what Andrew McKenna (1985, 4) calls “the victim’s epistemological privilege”, i.e., the ability to see what humans are really like in their distorted and enslaved condition and the possibility for them to be redeemed in Christ’s love:

“This is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. Only the oppressed can initiate this task.” [Paulo Freire] Similarly, Levinas says that “only the persecuted must answer for everyone, even for the persecutor.[”] “Only the persecuted” is similar to Freire’s “only the oppressed” – only they have the ability to free the other, oppressed and oppressor both” (Veling, 2005, 151).

Standing for the Common Good: Forgiveness and Hope

The actions and faith of Mateus not only avoided violence but gave an example and spirit to the Timorese that could act as a strong (mimetic) foundation for

their new nation – he concretely sought the common good grounded in faith and forgiveness. Rather than claim what was seemingly his “right” to take vengeance, he actually mourned for and appreciated the life of his son – he recognized the innocent sacrifice he son had given and did not want any further violence. The mob were claiming that Mateus did not respect his son as he did not take vengeance, whereas it was revealed that, in fact, the members of the mob were just trying to cover-up their own grief and use it as an excuse for more violence. Mateus was actually properly constituting own hurt and resentment in his mourning: he wasn’t using his mourning for more violence, but saw it as a chance to remember and grieve for his son. This true mourning and non-violent action was made possible by appealing to the innocent and forgiving Christ, whose own victimhood and conquest over death reminded the mob of their true humanity before God. In mourning properly with forgiveness and faith, Mateus was actually honouring his son and acting for the common good.

The mob was seeking to avenge Mateus’ son, but were seeking to do so for their own (mimetic) reasons. As Girard shows, when violence and scandal develop, the object that is being sought provides initial motivation but is often forgotten under the mimetic frenzy of the violence itself. This cycle was occurring to the mob: initially motivated by the death of their relative, they soon became more interested in their feelings of revenge and partaking in the “high” of mob violence. In contrast, based in his personal relationship with his son (and with Christ), Mateus remembered his son and acted for the good of all. In other words, Mateus acted out of solidarity with his son, family and Christ by seeking to avoid violence and offer forgiveness. The seeming paradox is that having true human relationships – characterized by self-giving solidarity, charitable love and forgiveness that move one beyond the selfish dictates of resentment, envy and rivalry – is the basic building block of a healthy society and leads to the common good:

...to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other ... To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that

is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it *is a requirement of justice and charity*. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or "city". The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them (Benedict XVI, 2009, 13-15).

Mateus stood for the common good in solidarity by enacting a personal love that was focused on his son and which, through his belief in God's forgiveness, even extended to his son's killers. His actions, "animated by charity", show the power of faith to act for the common good. Both the professed efficacy of civic education and the regime of law and order were lacking in Mateus' case. In fact, civic feeling and the state's security apparatus crumbled before the 2006 social crisis that enveloped Timorese society in violent transcendence and distorted mimetic desires. Like during the Indonesian occupation, faith in Christ became a powerful way towards overcoming violence because violence can only be averted by substituting something more substantial; namely, the gratuitous mimesis enacted by Mateus in forgiveness and hope, despite his loss and despair:

...When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have. Like all commitment to justice, it has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action. Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the *earthly city* in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided *city of God* (Benedict XVI, 2009, 15-16).

Mateus' action is an example of charity building up the *polis* in anticipation of the heavenly city in one of the most difficult, frightening and heart-rending situations. Mateus stood to gain nothing from his actions, but freely stood for

forgiveness and the victims. Despite the powers of violence and vengeance overcoming Timor, the witness to forgiveness and its power over violence would be remembered and, later, would need to be integrated into the recovery of the new nation. This recovery, however, remains a complex and ambiguous struggle between trauma, violence, sin and forgiveness. Nevertheless, Christ was present to Mateus and remains so to the Timorese in their struggles – not in loud and violent ways but in helping them to *re-member* their true humanity in their victims and in the hope implicit in the gratuitous mimesis inaugurated by Christ:

Hope encourages reason and gives it the strength to direct the will. It is already present in faith, indeed it is called forth by faith. Charity in truth feeds on hope and, at the same time, manifests it. As the absolutely gratuitous gift of God, hope bursts into our lives as something not due to us, something that transcends every law of justice. Gift by its nature goes beyond merit, its rule is that of superabundance. It takes first place in our souls as a sign of God's presence in us, a sign of what he expects from us. Truth — which is itself gift, in the same way as charity — is greater than we are, as Saint Augustine teaches. Likewise the truth of ourselves, of our personal conscience, is first of all *given* to us. In every cognitive process, truth is not something that we produce, it is always found, or better, received. Truth, like love, “is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings”. Because it is a gift received by everyone, charity in truth is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits. The human community that we build by ourselves can never, purely by its own strength, be a fully fraternal community, nor can it overcome every division and become a truly universal community. The unity of the human race, a fraternal communion transcending every barrier, is called into being by the word of God-who-is-Love. In addressing this key question, we must make it clear, on the one hand, that the logic of gift does not exclude justice, nor does it merely sit alongside it as a second element added from without; on the other hand, economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the *principle of gratuitousness* as an expression of fraternity (Benedict XVI, 2009, 63-5).

The truth of Mateus' actions struck at the conscience of the mob and halted its violence. It was a truth grounded in charitable self-giving – not something extraneous to being human but that goes to the heart of our relational, mimetic existence; a way of living that “brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits.” The human optimism that we can build community and

fraternity on our own usually descends into the division of greed, envy and rivalry exemplified in East Timor in 2006, as the human desire for transcendent fulfillment becomes distorted. Yet, it is the big *and* small acts of decency, gratuity and forgiveness – ones that don't necessarily cause revolutions or make the news – that are the basis for communion and the common good. As Mateus' appeal shows, by enacting a self-giving and personal communion through Christ, an authentic human community can develop based on the hope that the "God-who-is-Love" (who became our forgiving victim) is bringing all to fulfillment, beyond the violence and death that humanity imposes on itself:

"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:17-20; Revised Standard Version).

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