



An End to the Vicious Cycle of Violence! An Introduction to Dramatic Theology and Its Relevance in the Indian Context

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Today it is nearly impossible to avoid the constant bombardment of violence which affects people of all ages, genders, religions and socio-economic hierarchies.¹ India, since gaining independence in 1947, has been a secular state. However, now the greatest danger to the nation's extremely strained social fabric is religious fundamentalism or fundamentalist politics which grips much of India's population. In the name of God religious intolerance and hatred have seized India and a campaign waged to destroy mosques, temples and churches, and thereby leading to religious riots is blatantly noticeable throughout the whole country irrespective of whether South or North, East or West. Such instances of vicious violence claim thousands of innocent lives in addition to damaging social stability, economic growth and public and private property. Although Christians have always maintained a peaceful flavour in the social structure of India, they have frequently been recipients of violent movements over allegations of conversion. Churches have been burned down, missionaries physically attacked, priests brutally murdered and tens of thousands of Christians have been forced flee their homes.

This context of unjustified violence calls for a theological consideration of the situation from within.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis reminds, “Our world is being torn apart by wars and violence, and wounded by a widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being.”² Against violence and evil forces the societies, cultures and religions have developed its own laws and mechanisms. India has enacted a number of progressive laws to address different kinds of violence, but the data from the National Crime Records Bureau³ warns that violence is increasing day by day. How can we get rid of violence? Is there a theological guideline to resolve the question? When we search in the Bible for answer to these complex situations of violence, things are getting more complicated. More than one thousand passages in the Old Testament spell out of divine violence and also detect a language of vengeance and retribution which outcrops an archaic substrate.⁴ Yet, it is a fact that the references to violence in the Bible are often either overlooked by scholars or inappropriately addressed without offering systematic answers to the question of evil resulting from violence. In effect, the issue of divine violence remains unresolved. The complacency towards the issue of divine violence puts theology to a great extent aside to the corners of academic world with the effect that theology fails to make a noticeable impact in the modern digital world.⁵ Raymund Schwager exposes a privileged entry point to this theological debate on the paradoxical images of God’s love and God’s justice or anger and brings a “dramatic lens” to read the salvation history in order to understand its relevance in the problematic context of violence today. The purpose of this short article is, therefore, to trace Schwager’s new dramatic theological approach to the problematic of divine violence through a dramatic reading of the life of Jesus and how it could be applied to the Indian context.

1. Raymund Schwager and Dramatic Theology

The dramatic theology was initiated by the dogmatic theologian Raymund Schwager and a group of theologians at the theological Faculty of the Leopold-Franzens University in Innsbruck. Raymund Schwager was born⁶ in an agricultural family as the second of seven children on 11th November 1935 at Balterswil in Switzerland. After primary and secondary school, in 1955 he joined the Society of Jesus. He did his philosophical studies in Pullach, Germany and theological studies in Lyon- Fourvière, France. On 31st June 1966 he was ordained a priest. He completed his doctorate in 1969 in Fribourg, Switzerland with a thesis on *Das Dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola* (The dramatic understanding of the Church by Ignatius of Loyola). Schwager became professor of dogmatic and ecumenical theology at the faculty of catholic theology at the Leopold-Franzens university in Innsbruck, Austria in 1977 and was dean in the years of 1985-1987 and 1999-2003. He was also a co-founder and first president of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion,⁷ and since 1999, an honorary life-member of its advisory board. He gained international recognition for his “Dramatic Theology” through the comprehensive research program “Religion - Violence - Communication - World Order”⁸. Schwager was preparing for his retirement in 2004, when he unexpectedly died on 27th February 2004. He was not only a theologian who lived and grounded in the experience of the Ignatian exercises, but also an intuitive thinker. In his main work *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* Schwager presents the life and ministry of Jesus in a dramatic way and explores the message of a radically non-violent God, which is the main focus of this article.

In the history of Jewish people, their God-experience is radically transformed through violence they faced and they committed.⁹ They perceived God as perpetrator of violence par excellence;¹⁰ however, the victims of violence as well as perpetrators were they themselves. The drama of Jesus testifies this situation with particular poignancy, hence, according to

Schwager, the Old and New Testaments of Bible played out a single drama between God and human being.¹¹ Based on the categories of Rene Girard's theory,¹² Schwager presents a new biblical hermeneutic in his *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?* (Must there be Scapegoats?). The perception of YHWH as the perpetrator of violence par excellence was being undone step by step through progressively presenting a non-violent image of God. Through presenting a radically non-violent God, Schwager proves the divine violence as only an illusion. Schwager was also influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar¹³ and presents drama as the tension between uncreated and created freedom within the process of salvation history. We are not neutral spectators in the drama, but co-actors and we are fully responsible for how the drama develops.

Schwager's detailed presentation helps us to understand the whole history of salvation as a dramatic process of revelation in which God the Father, Christ the Son, the Holy Spirit and different human beings played their own specific roles just as the actors in the drama and it clarifies the image of God.¹⁴ Schwager divided the drama of Jesus into five acts. Each act is formally differentiated by an agent who offers the initial stage for the actions and on the other side the reactions of all other agents; materially the events develop further and challenge the image of God communicated through the drama; finally the image of God is contested, transformed and settled;¹⁵ and this new non-violent and unconditional loving image of God will come into sharper focus as we follow Schwager through the acts of the drama.¹⁶

171.1 First Act: Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

According to Schwager, Jesus entered into the scene after baptism in Jordan with the announcement that; "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk.1:15), is the starting point of the first act in the drama where God inaugurated a new shift. Jesus' whole message and mission were within the framework of kingdom of God. By presenting the kingdom of God, Jesus was trying to reveal the picture of God who is an unconditionally

merciful and loving God. Jesus called God “my Father” and for Schwager, this is the most plausible basis of his proclamation.¹⁸ Everything flowed from this “Abba-experience” (Mk.14:36) which was beyond the Jewish messianic expectations.

Jesus through his words and deeds affirmed the messianic announcement of Isaiah 61:1-2; “To bring good news to the poor, to announce liberation to captives, and to give sight to the blind” (Lk. 4:18). Jesus turned toward sinners, tax-collectors and prostitutes (cf. Lk. 15:1-10; Mt. 9:10; 21:31; Mk. 2:13-17). The poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame and all were invited to God’s great banquet (cf. Lk. 14:15-24) where there were no divisions or discriminations. His approach and dealing with people gave them a different picture of non-violent God and of a loving father. Healing of the sick, the forgiveness of sins and the miracles performed by him showed the unconditional love of God and declared that the kingdom of God was “not merely as near at hand, but as *already dawning and present*.”¹⁹

In order to create a new community characterized by love and forgiveness (Mt. 5:39), where violence was no longer the determining factor, Jesus exhorted his contemporaries to establish peace and justice among humanity. His Sermon on the Mount, according to Schwager, was a radical call to a life conforming to the norms of the kingdom of God which describes exactly what is necessary for human behavior, so that the new community might be different from the old violent evil actions which were in the history of Israel and might finally be conquered through these new norms of non-violence.²⁰

1.2 Second Act: Rejection of the Kingdom of God

For Schwager, the second act of the drama of salvation is people’s rejection of the message of kingdom of God and Jesus’ reaction to it through judgment sayings. The peculiarity in Jesus’ message that a non-violent image of God who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust”

(Mt. 5:45) broke the traditional religious thinking of Israel. The new community which Jesus proclaimed was completely distinct from the old laws and mechanisms of the human world. By uniting the will of God with the will of the people he envisaged to make them as brothers and sisters (cf. Mk. 3:31-35; Mt. 12:46-50; Lk. 8:19-21) in a loving community. But initial reaction was directly opposed to the will of Jesus and the people stood clearly against it (cf. Mt. 23:37).

Schwager explains that the reason for the rejection of the unconditional call to the kingdom of God was the old hidden satanic forces that were still working in them which had lead them to kill even the prophets.²¹ Jesus warned against their unwillingness for conversion and their desire to stay in their own old world of satanic forces. "Get behind me Satan! For you are not on God's side but do what men want" (Mk. 8:33). Jesus' words and deeds were to expose these hidden forces of human behavior, which are for Schwager, bases of human societies and cultures. Schwager says, "His coming uncovers the deep-seated tensions already present and thus provokes open enmities. He seems like a sword and a troublemaker because he un.masks as delusionary the familiar forms of human harmony."²²

The contradiction between Jesus' unconditional love and his judgment sayings are unresolved problems in the theology of redemption. Schwager believes that Jesus' judgment sayings reveal not the harshness of God but the self-made punishments which people made themselves as the result of their own evil doings. In other words, the judgment sayings reveal not the harshness of God but people's inner dimension of rejection. "For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mt. 7: 2). For Schwager wherever people are willing to forgive and accept, there they will be given more and even they will become able to give themselves. Wherever people are unwilling to forgive and accept, they will remain trapped in the norms of payment and repayment. There they will lose even what they have received, and they hand themselves over to a process of judgment based on repayment and

payment down to the last penny.²³ God is always a loving father, who meets sinners with anticipatory love, but the sinners notwithstanding the experience of loving grace stick to their own criteria of judgment and they imprison themselves in them. However, “the judgment sayings are not a sign that God has a double face, but they bring out with great seriousness that people possess no power to save themselves and God carries out against them no ‘violence to compel love.’”²⁴ In this way the sinners cling fully to their passions by which they themselves keep aloof from God and their fellow beings. The chance of experiencing God’s love and grace is always there, but rejecting this grace there is also every chance for them to be judged by themselves for their own actions. Thus, for Schwager, the judgment sayings are the self-made consequences of people’s non-graceful life.

According to Schwager, people’s rejection of God’s unconditional invitation and consequently Jesus’ judgment sayings are making clearer the truth of salvation. “Only with the judgment sayings does it become clear what decision people are faced with and how disastrous the old and apparently proven ‘wisdom’ of retribution finally is.”²⁵ Therefore an affirmative response to the unconditional invitation of father would realize the new gathering more concretely. And through this new non-violent community he wanted to bring a blessing to the whole world, whereas a negative response to the invitation hinders the possibility of the realization of the new gathering and left the world in the hands of evil powers. Imprisonment in the diabolical circle of selfish ambition, envious rivalry and violent expulsion denied the unconditional offer of redemption.
(To be continued in the next issue)

¹ The *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014* states that more than 1.3 million people worldwide die each year as a result of violence in all its forms (self-directed, interpersonal and collective). According to the *World Report on Violence and Health 2002*, one of the most violent periods in human history

was the 20th century and it is estimated that nearly 191 million people lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of violence. Cf. *World Report on Violence and Health 2002*.

- ² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 99; Pope Francis warns religious leaders in his speech on interreligious meeting (in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 13th Jan. 2015) that religion should never be used to justify violence; He believes that the violence, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, restrictive approaches to fundamental freedoms, whether of individuals or of groups are some of the chief elements of poverty. And people remain indifferent to the cries of the victims of the inhumane and brutal violence in our next doors. Cf. Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014.
- ³ Cf. Official website of National Crime Records Bureau, India, <http://ncrb.gov.in>.
- ⁴ Cf. Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 55; cf. Stork, The Drama of Jesus and the Non-violent Image of God, 186.
- ⁵ Cf. Schwager und Niewiadomski, Dramatic Theology as a Research Program, 1.
- ⁶ For the biographical notes I have heavily depended on the introduction written by Niewiadomski und Palaver, *Vom Fluch und Segen der Südenbocke*.
- ⁷ In 1990, a group of scholars founded the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) with the aim to 'explore, criticize, and develop the mimetic model of the relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture.' It organizes a conference in every year devoted to the topics related to mimetic theory, scapegoating, violence, and religion. Girard is Honorary Chair of COV&R. Cofounder and first president of the COV&R was Raymund Schwager. Cf. <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/>.
- ⁸ This research project is carried out by several institutes in cooperation with the theological faculty in Innsbruck. It aims to relate social problems (like, mimesis, rivalry, violence, ostracism, authority, justice and law, order, peace) with the theological questions, cf. <http://www.uibk.ac.at/rgkw/index.html.en>.
- ⁹ Cf. Stork, The Drama of Jesus and the Non-violent Image of God, 187.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 53-135; cf. Niewiadomski, Das Drama Jesu, 32; cf. Stork, The Drama of Jesus and the Non-violent Image of God, 187.
- ¹¹ Cf. Niewiadomski, Das Drama Jesu, 32.
- ¹² Schwager encountered the person and works of René Girard (1923-) as the editor of Jesuit journal 'Orientierung' in Zurich, Switzerland. Girard is a French-born, American historian, literary critic, and philosopher of social science whose work belongs to the tradition of anthropological philosophy. According to him, mimetic desire is a deeply rooted tendency in human beings, i.e., to imitate the desires of others. This eventually leads to mimetic rivalry or mimetic conflict. A further development in this process is the victimizing mechanism as the solution to the crises it generates. This scapegoat mechanism is the origin of sacrifice and the foundation of human culture. Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 3-47; cf. Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 33-38. Schwager commits his own theological project to a critical application on the sacrifice of Girard's theory, cf.

Schwager, *Briefwechsel mit René Girard*; Cf. Moosbrugger, *Die Rehabilitation des Opfers*, 219-250.

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905 – 1988) in his *Theo-Drama* presents the Father as the author of the drama, the Son the primary actor and the Spirit the director. The main characters of the drama are God (who is responsible for the entire play), humanity (which is endowed with and condemned to freedom) and the mediator, Jesus Christ (who is the true character and a model for the others). Cf. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 5 vols.; Schwager's main theological concerns on *Theodramatik* has written in *Der Wunderbare Tausch*, 273-312; Cf. Steinmair-Pösel, *Gnade in Beziehung*, 78-86; Cf. Sroka, *Wer oder Was ist der Teufel*, 85-91.

¹⁴ Cf. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 196-229.

¹⁵ Cf. Wandering, *Drama and Conversion*, 1206.

¹⁶ For this section I have heavily depended on Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 29-158, and *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*, 32-182; Cf. Steinmair-Pösel, *Gnade in Beziehung*, 229-314; Cf. Kuzhippallil, *The body of Christ and the body of India*, 193-223; Cf. Sroka, *Wer oder Was ist der Teufel*, 120-135.

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¹⁸ Cf. Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*, 37.

¹⁹ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 32.

²⁰ Cf. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 41.

²¹ Cf. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 77. Schwager says, "Their insight into their father's bloody deeds and self-deception is not enough to warn them and guide them to true self-knowledge. On contrary, the warning serves only to hide even more the truth about themselves. They see the past unjust violent deeds, reject them, but do not notice that they are doing exactly the same." Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 150-151.

²² Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*, 155.

²³ Cf. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 67.

²⁴ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 81.

²⁵ Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, 67.