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The Unbearable *Humanum*: Reflecting Back, Working Forwards

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Abstract

This article, "reflects back and works forwards", by thinking together the three "sorrowful mysteries" of the last one hundred years; three marked and irrevocable steps of escalation and complexity in the history of international conflict. Along with so many others in this centenary year, we commemorate: its causes, and the lessons to be learned. What are the continuities between the Great War, 1914–18, and the second "sorrowful mystery", the advent of nuclear weapons? This brings us to the specific challenges that face us in the present: globalized violence in the name of religion, the reactive "war on terror" and the development of "smart" technology, remind us that our context too is unprecedented and uniquely dangerous. Explanatory avenues opened up include discussion of the moral and political implications of unmanned weapons, or drones. Here is an example of the crisis of sacrifice associated with René Girard, while Girard's own recasting of Clausewitz's notion of the "escalation to extremes", and the *humanism* in Edward Schillebeeckx are also examined.

Keywords

Catholic Social Thought, Just War, René Girard, Sacrifice, Drone Warfare, Edward Schillebeeckx.

It has been the hope of many people that the 2014 commemoration of the Great War will go further and deeper than has previously been the case, in sounding "the length and breath, the height and depth" of public remembrance. The Catholic Theological Association conference, focusing upon both remembrance and collusion, is an attempt to do precisely this by marshalling the resources of Catholic Social Thought and other theological insights. What, then, should we be looking for?

To begin with a broad historical thesis. Hannah Arendt observes that the "danger of violence" is precisely its unforeseen and implacable tendency to escalation. It possesses a destructive momentum that

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will quickly overtake even the self-restraint of limited, non-extremist goals, and infect the entire body politic: "[t]he practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world."[1] She notes this dynamic as a characteristic of the Cold War, indeed the atomic bomb represents a kind of culmination of a process with an earlier genesis:

> But the phenomenon of force predominating at the expense of all other political factors is older; it first appeared in World War I, with its huge mechanized battles on the western front. It should be noted that this disastrous new role for force, which developed out of itself and constantly grew among all participants, caught unprepared nations, politicians and public opinion totally by surprise. And in fact the growth of force in the public, governmental sphere had, so to speak, taken place behind the back of those acting in that sphere, during a century that might be counted among the most peaceful, or, let us say, least violent in history.[2]

The unpreparedness of the participants which Arendt notes here has echoes of the charge of "thoughtlessness" that she lays against totalitarian systems, as personified by Adolf Eichmann. Her judgment that the 1914–18 conflict represents a qualitative turning-point in the history of human conflict, on account of the unprecedented mechanization of fighting, is commonplace. It is well-captured by the opening to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller" that speaks of the moment when human "experience" ceased to be a guide for existence and communication:

> For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanized warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.[3]

The term "paradigm shift" is a tired one, but three significant mutations should be noted. Firstly, the change within Catholic Social Teaching itself, with regard to the ethics of warfare. At least one paper at this conference will address the theme directly, so there is no need to say much here, except to note a general transition: from consideration of the circumstances under which war was legitimate (a reflection rooted within the just war tradition), in the direction of an increasing pacifism that questions whether any war under modern conditions can be regarded as legitimate. Certainly, there is a complex balancing required, between rejection of war as a “scourge” on the one hand, and the right to legitimate self-defence and the need to protect the innocent on the other. Nevertheless, there is an unambiguous assertion that war is “the failure of all true humanism” and “always a defeat for humanity”.

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[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*. (New York, Schocken, 2007), p.177.

[2] Hannah Arendt, *ibid.*

[3] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", in *Illuminations* (London, Pimlico, 1999).

Though much is still to be worked out satisfactorily, the just war tradition has established criteria for *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bellum* – for going to war in the first place, and for restraint upon the conduct of adversaries once conflict is under way. More recent discussion has looked to expand the tradition by attending to moral criteria for a *jus post bellum,* i.e. for the aftermath of conflict. In each case the teleology of military action (i.e. it aims at promoting a genuine peace) is significant, while the principles of discrimination (the need to distinguish between military targets and innocent civilians), and proportionality are clearly inscribed in both CST as well as in secular international law. Within this framework, a respect for non-violence is part of Catholic tradition, even if an unequivocal commitment to nonviolence is absent.

The problematization and subsequent reshaping of the contribution of Catholic Social Teaching, including the just war tradition, arise to some extent through the advances in military technology, which make it virtually impossible to fulfill the conditions for a legitimate conflict. The complex interplay between technology and law has played out since the invention of the cross-bow; with regard to the twentieth century, however, the questions have been raised by new practices which clearly fail to abide by proportionality or discrimination. The challenging developments include: trench warfare, the use of chemical weapons, and the mass aerial devastation of civilian populations, by firebomb or nuclear device.

To some extent “Hiroshima” would seem to stand as a *terminus ad quem*, with the just war tradition virtually useless as a paradigm for encompassing such destructive potential. Here, it is the ethics of possession and deterrence which take centre-stage, since the actual deployment of such weapons is simply incompatible with the teleological criterion of peace. It is recognition of this which has no doubt contributed to a greater prominence of non-violent voices and activists in the Catholic tradition, and a more explicit resistance within that tradition as a whole, to the acceptability of war.

As we have seen, Hannah Arendt notes a continuity between these phases of a “disastrous new role” for force, whose autonomous momentum causes it to predominate at the expense of politics; the mechanized devastation of World War I is only “one short jump” away from the new possibilities in the atomic age. Nevertheless, there seems to be a qualitative difference, not least in the paradox of deterrence noted above: that the *telos* of nuclear weapons, the definition of their success, as it were, is a kind of stasis, their non-deployment enabling a terrified coexistence under the shadow of Mutually Assured Destruction. Paradoxically, actual war is "unthinkable" – a possibility too monstrous to be realized, though the paradox lies precisely in the fact that such a scenario has indeed been thought through and prepared for.

In our own context, the situation is different once again, with new challenges to discrimination and proportionality, above all with the phenomenon of terrorism. Here, too, the interplay of technology and law presents new *aporias*. With the development of weapons which are allegedly more "humane" in their capacity to strike against "smart" targets, war has become "thinkable" once again. These are weapons that can in fact be used; indeed in many respects their use is more desirable than the alternative technology, they represent an "advance". The most prominent example, drone technology, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), presents new ethical challenges, to the extent that we can discern here a further paradigm-shift.

I will seek to explicate these two shifts – in Catholic Social Teaching, and in a specific "humane" turn in recent weapons technology, by means of a third paradigm, the "escalation to extremes", which is implied in Arendt's work cited above and in the later writings of René Girard. It should be clear that I am using the term "humane" in an ironic sense to convey the sense that highly destructive weaponry has acquired new respectability and acceptability, which need to be reflected upon ethically and even theologically.

What might such a reflection look like? It may be a question of underlining more clearly the principle of humanity that has been cited (along with discrimination and proportionality) as a further criterion for legitimate warfare. "Humanity" becomes an expression of the *telos* that should prevent ends (law) being subjugated to means (technology). But it is precisely the notion of "the human" which is being perverted and contested here, in the sense that certain kinds of lethal weaponry may nevertheless be more "humane" than others. Precisely here, therefore, a robust statement of the Christian understanding of the *humanum* is required. I offer the description of the *humanum* from the late Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx as a guide, which seeks especially to hold in tension an anthropological and a Christological pole. Schillebeekx has recourse to the term "Christomorphic" to describe the orientation of the human pole towards transcendence. Only an understanding of the *humanum* that is thus oriented can be considered as an authentic delineation of the human.

The invocation of Schillebeeckx and his Christological understanding of "negative contrast experiences" may serve to highlight an important *aporia*. For all that we are seeking to explore continuities between the three "sorrowful mysteries", and for all that it is possible to offer a theo-political account of these continuities, there seems to be a sharp line when it comes to discerning the face of Christ. It is possible to offer a "Christomorphic" reading of the tragedy of the First World War: one thinks of Stanley Spencer's paintings, or of the Christological meditations in the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Owen's rendering of the ordinary soldier as the Son who is sacrificed to an inscrutably wrathful divinity, however unorthodox, nevertheless affirms the presence of Christ in the trenches. The same is true of the heroic frontline ministry of Catholic chaplains, which has been justly celebrated in this commemorative year.

It feels much more difficult, somehow, to offer a Christological reading of Hiroshima, or of the Cold War; or, for that matter, of the post-9/11 war on terror. All these events exemplify the recrudescence or "return" of the primitive sacred; they are indeed "negative contrast experiences" that highlight the breach between what is and what ought to be; and yet the face of Christ in these realities is hard to discern.

We will return to this. Firstly, let us reflect upon UAVs/drones, the "weapons of choice" for fighting terrorism, in the light of what has been said, and in particular whether they conform to Hannah Arendt's description of an autonomous force, augmenting itself and tending towards ever-greater violence. Such a view, if correct, runs counter to the enthusiasm for such weaponry as a refined means for targeting (i.e. restraining) violence. Drones mark not simply an advance in the technology of weaponry, but a new era for International Humanitarian Law (also *ius in bello*, or the law of armed conflict). Organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch have condemned them as a violation of the principles of discrimination and proportionality. In actions of asymmetrical urban counter-insurgency (such as many of the recent and current campaigns involving US military), civilians and enemy combatants are often indistinguishable. If this is the case for soldiers making judgments on the ground, it applies *a fortiori* to autonomous weapons, unable to assess the human intentionality of a situation.

Judgments of proportionality likewise depend upon split-second assessments by the individual soldier of the human cost of his/her action. The argument runs that a human agent is required to make judgments about the enemy's intentionality, and about the calculus of suffering, which enable discriminate and proportionate action. Drone warfare is insidious because it removes important human factors from military conflict. Another aspect of drone strikes is the involvement of non-military personnel in their operation. Questions are raised here about the legal status of such personnel, specifically their right to protection under international humanitarian law. Civilians such as CIA personnel are vulnerable, both as legitimate targets for combatants, and as potentially liable to prosecution for murder. Here, and elsewhere where civilians are used in military operations, the classically-understood relationship between the soldier and the state has changed utterly.

Bianca Baggiarini has investigated some of the implications in a forthcoming article in which she summarises the future of militarized violence as a constant transcending of the vulnerabilities of the citizen-soldier.[4] Along with the increasing use of private military corporations (PMCs), drone technology take us further in the obsessive quest for "clean" bloodless warfare. The figures are striking: at certain points during the US conflict in the Middle East, private contractors have outnumbered US troops; since 9/11, drones have been used in 95% of the US's targeted killings, and the Air Force now trains more drone pilots than fighter and bomber pilots.

Baggiarini notes also that the enhanced sight and interpretation of data associated with the new technology reduces the importance of the politicised act of human "witnessing", understood as eye-witness testimony and the production of truth. The military application of drones, and the privatized outsourcing of violence, together signify "a troubling of embodied combat, citizenship and sacrifice" (p.7). More precisely, there is an erosion of the synthesis of citizenship and sacrifice which is distinctive of modern conceptions of citizenship. She cites Julian Reid (2006: pp.2–3) to the effect that "liberal regimes [which idealize peace] have now committed to war without end, temporally, spatially, and politically."[5]

Ian G.R. Shaw and M. Akter write of the "unbearable humanness" of UAV weaponry in the tribal areas of Pakistan.[6] They are among a number of commentators who note President Obama's levity, when he controversially made a joke about "Predator" drones at a White House dinner in 2010, as symptomatic of this technology's dehumanizing effect. A further symptom is the familiar disquiet that similar "skills sets" are required for operating drones and for playing video games (even as the distancing that this analogy suggests is belied by the rates of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by operatives). Shaw goes on to explore the particular imaginative geography of "targeted killing"; the link between vision and strikes which are "accurate, efficient and deadly", reaches its apotheosis in the post-Hiroshima rendition of the entire globe as a grid "targets", to be destroyed as soon as they are visualized.

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[4] Bianca Baggiarini, "Drone warfare and the limits of sacrifice", *Journal of International Political Theory*, Special Issue on "Mimetic Theory and International Studies", October 2014. See also Baggiarini, "Remaking Soldier-Citizens: Military privatization and the biopolitics of sacrifice". *St. Anthony's International Review* 9 (2) 2014: pp.9–23; and I.G.R. Shaw and M. Akhter, 'The unbearable humanness of drone warfare in FATA, Pakistan'. *Antipode* 44 (4) 2012: pp.1490–1509.

[5] Julian Reid (2006), *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity, and the Defence of Logistical Societies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Peter Singer, "Outsourcing War". *Foreign Affairs* 84(2) 2005: pp.119–133; Keith Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[6] I.G.R. Shaw and M. Akhter, "The Unbearable Humanness of Drone Warfare in FATA, Pakistan", *Antipode* 44 (4) 2012: pp.1490–1509.

"Exceptional technology" is being deployed in "exceptional territory"; Shaw draws on Agamben's discussion of exceptionality to comment on the geo-political factors which make this area of Pakistan a highly abnormal space. The outcome is a fetishization of the drone, presented to the world in mystified and masked form as an autonomous agent. Shaw quotes a US Air Force colonel: "It's kind of like having God overhead. And lightning comes down in the form of Hellfire" (quoted in Shaw, p.1502).

Once again the general issue is the interplay between law and technology, such that these weapons have the potential to undermine the international legal system's ability to preserve a minimum world order. The accusation of their "dehumanizing" tendency is strong: that as well as dehumanizing the victim, the perpetrators of violence are themselves desensitised, with a lowering of their moral and psychological barriers to killing. Drone technology, it is alleged, is uniquely destabilizing because of its violation of cardinal principles of International Humanitarian Law, and because of the systematic evacuation of the human element from warfare. This bracketing of the human is a concern for two reasons: firstly, it reduces the scope for decision-making within conflicts which would lead to minimization of innocent casualties etc.; secondly, the use of non-military personnel for waging conflict (to take the example of the CIA operatives) is a formal violation of the principle of discrimination, but more profoundly, a subversion of the traditional mode of being a combatant: someone whose behavior is rigorously codified and protected.

To put this concern into a religious or spiritual key: drone warfare allows for the disavowal of sacrifice, and the transcendence of the physical, moral and economic limits of the human body. Yet the body is essential in the imagining of sacrifice, since the latter requires humans (including perpetrators) to bear witness to violence.

Does this development herald therefore a postmodern "end of sacrifice"? It is not strictly true to claim this, not least since a number of commentators seem to regard drones as a high-tech expression of "pre-modern" violence. Baggiani suggests, rather, that what is demonstrated here is the increasing *unevenness* of sacrifice. In keeping with the basic mimetic theory of Girard, the imagery of sacrifice – meaning blood, transcendence and moral achievement through the destruction of the body – seems only to gain purchase when there is the need to regenerate a militarized consciousness. No such sacrificial performance takes place on the part of the West (at least with regard to its own victims; one might point to the fetishizing of the executions of Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein as examples). Both military outsourcing and remote warfare by drones strive to render sacrifice irrelevant.

Here lies a clue to the horrific and graphic barbarity of the executions, carried out and recorded by Islamic State extremists in recent months. It is clear that such acts are intended as a provocation, intended to incite a militarised response from the West. On a deeper level, the ritualistic resonances of such killings may be read as a counter to and protest against the invisibility and anonymity of remote-controlled killing, and perhaps even a reminder of the sacrificial link which the West seems intent on evading.

Let us consider the following testimony, from Michael Adebolajo, one of the killers of Lt. Lee Rigby outside a barracks in Woolwich, on 22ⁿ May 2013. Adebolajo describes himself as a "soldier of Allah":

> Allah commands that I fight those militaries that attack the Muslims . . . I don't feel that I have any choice. I obey Allah and I commit my affairs into his hands . . . We planned a military attack which obviously involved – sadly, it's not something enjoyable – the death of a soldier.
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> I am a soldier. I am a soldier. I am a soldier of Allah. I understand that some people might not recognise this because we do not wear fatigues and we do not go to the Brecon Beacons to train. But we are still soldiers in the sight of Allah and to me this is all that matters. If Allah considers me a soldier then I am a soldier. [I have] no animosity or bad feeling towards them, because every soldier has family, and his family love him just like me. My family did not stop loving me the moment I became a soldier, so I don't blame them. I killed somebody who they love and who is dear to them. At the same time, people who I love who are dear to me are killed as well. We are not the only ones who feel pain in this country. Muslims feel pain too. We love people too.

The words are of course chilling, given the manner of Lt Rigby's horrific death, but there is little to object to in the logic of Adebolajo's defence. It is an appeal out of and to the logic of codified warfare, in which the duty of the soldier is acknowledged as a terrible necessity, proportionate, fully cognizant of the human cost of doing his duty. It is not, as far as we can tell, cynical or manipulative; there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this appeal. We should also note the readiness of Adebolajo and his companion to die in the course of the violent action they undertook.

Adebolajo's reasoned defence of his action in killing Lt. Rigby is perhaps atypical of Islamist justification – certainly if we compare it to the pronouncements that have accompanied more recent atrocities by IS combatants. Nevertheless, the inversion here is indeed paradoxical; the presence within his testimony of the "normalising" and familiar logic of the traditional soldier – *dulce et decorum est* – by an Islamist extremist, and the increasing evacuation from the Western conduct of warfare of precisely this classical military mentality (which I have attempted to identify in the controversy regarding drone warfare). This is the second of the three paradigm shifts, which, I argue, needs to be thought through.

In short, the change of emphasis in Catholic Social Thought is occasioned by and accompanies a profound shift in the nature of mass combat, which is different in kind from other technological developments, and which would seem to denote a "dehumanising" tendency within our conception of war (paradoxical as this may sound).

The discussion of sacrifice opens up an analysis in terms of the reflection on sacrifice and order in the works of, which Baggiarini sees a relevance here in the work of René Girard in her claim that drones are high-tech expressions of pre-modern sovereign violence. This leads us to ask about the significance of bodies in relation to sacrificial violence, and what is happening in the disembodied versions conflict which we are now witnessing, and which are exemplified in the two practices of outsourcing of conflict and using unmanned weapons. In the year of total warfare, we are experiencing a critical turning-point in the history of soldier-citizenship, sacrifice, and technological change.

A third shift can be discerned, therefore, which is to some extent a historico-religious account of the first two. In his later work, René Girard takes up from the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz the notion of an "escalation" or "paroxysm to extremes" in conflict. Author of the famous treatise *On War*, Clausewitz is generally credited with the assertion that "warfare is the continuation of diplomacy by other means". Such a formulation is forever incompatible with the assertion within Catholic Social Thought that war is always "a failure of humanity"; CST rejects the notion that war could ever be legitimately regarded as a dimension of statecraft.

What is significant, for Girard, is the prescience by which Carl von Clausewitz saw his own paradigm breaking down. In his last book,[7] Girard follows Clausewitz's argument that the mass mobilisation of populations for warfare – symbolised above all by the Napoleonic armies of 1806 – will lead eventually to a negation of war's *katechonic* function. The Greek term *katechon* here refers to the function of restraint of chaos and disorder, which, according to a line of interpretation from Augustine through Thomas Hobbes to Carl Schmitt in the twentieth-century, defines the political. War, the use of limited violence under strictly codified conditions, operates

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[7] R. Girard (2010), *Battling to the End*. Michigan State UP (French original, *Achever Clausewitz,* 2007).

"sacrificially", insofar as it affords protection for the majority of the population at the expense of the self-sacrificing few.

Under modern conditions, and specifically with the ever-escalating rivalry between France and Germany, this "sacrificial" channelling of violence became less and less effective. The mass of the population was no longer protected from destruction, as became evident in the twentieth-century, first during the World Wars, secondly during the epoch of the Cold War, and now under the threat from contemporary terrorism. Every citizen is a combatant, simply by virtue of living his or her life, taking public transport, etc. Conflict is both globalised and extended indefinitely in time: the "war on terror" has the status of a permanent state of emergency. Whether we decide that society is underpinned by a social contract, or by a balancing of "friend or foe", in both cases the presuppositions of an Augustinian or Hobbesian security no longer hold. The violence which was previously held in check by the institution of codified warfare, now globalised and loosed from its *katechonic* constraints, threatens to engulf us totally.

We noted above one US colonel's use of religious language in describing the God-like hovering of drone bombers, waiting to strike like lightning. Shaw notes that 'the drone performs the military logic of a "war without the war" to its extreme, which is to say, a war without bodies, a war of machines, and a war of discrete and surgical strikes from the sky' (p.1502). The Girardian scholar Jean-Pierre Dupuy offers a similar account of "the Bomb" during the Cold War period, an epoch which was one long act of homage to our externalised violence, a "false god", as implacable as the most destructive forces of nature. Dupuy notes with astonishment the trust which humanity placed in this deity – as the secret history of frightening near-misses makes clear, we have survived thus far by luck, rather than through the protection afforded us by the nuclear world order.

Girard, for his part, has explicit and unsettling recourse to the language of apocalypse and apocalyptic, though in his case the religious sentiment is in earnest. Specific aspects of our situation make it unique, and indeed uniquely dangerous. The decomposition of the sacred mechanism in the modern period shows up this ambiguity. How we react to the collapse of sacrificial safeguards will determine whether or not we have a future at all:

> [T]he Gospel does not provide a happy ending to our history. It simply shows us two options (which is exactly what ideologies never provide, freedom of choice): either we imitate Christ, giving up our mimetic violence, or we run the risk of self-destruction. The apocalyptic feeling is based on that risk.[8]

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[8] Girard, 2010: p.237.

Summary

I have identified three points of our history, three "sorrowful mysteries" – the Great War, the nuclear threat, and our contemporary situation – that perhaps need to be thought together, if our remembrance of the last century is to be effective and transforming. I have also suggested three areas that might be brought into alignment: firstly, the "corrective" aspect of Catholic Social Thought, a tradition which is constantly being renewed and refined, but which has moved unambiguously towards asserting the fundamental unacceptability of warfare as a means of human interaction. One can only hope that this shift has rendered it less probable that large populations of Christians will ever again be mobilized for conflict, as happened with the nationalism of the early twentieth-century.

Secondly, the transition from traditional modes of warfare to advanced weaponry such as UAVs (drones) represents much more than a challenge of new technology. What appears to be at stake is a refashioning of warfare itself; war is being "dehumanized", as the human agent – the combatant in the traditional sense – becomes obsolete. In the words of Peter Singer: humanity has enjoyed a 5,000 year monopoly on warfare, which is now coming to an end.

Thirdly, the Clausewitzian notion of the "escalation to extremes", taken up explicitly by Girard and implicitly by Arendt, provides a theological-historical explanation of the factors which have problematized the first two. The German-French rivalry which built up to a paroxysm during the nineteenth-century, culminating in global conflict one century ago, has left a world without protection from its sacred barriers. It might also be alleged that the evaporation of Cold War *Angst* with the fall of the Communist bloc in 1989 has allowed something of a "remission" of the escalation to extremes, such that it is possible still for world leaders to prolong the illusion of a salvific violence. Instead of a Cold War, we have "hot peace" with many more local disputes that look as they can be resolved by military means. The West's military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the calls to intervene in Syria and so on, witness to our persistent dream of a consummative, revolutionary act of violence, at once wholly modern and fully apocalyptic; "perfect" in the double sense of morally justified but also definitive and complete.

Given what we know of violence and its tendency towards escalation and autonomy, this makes our situation extremely dangerous; we are vulnerable to a "new" mode of violence which knows neither discrimination, nor proportionality, nor humanness. It is this which is at the root of Girard's "apocalyptic" sensitivity. For Girard, the only possibility for humanity's survival is a renunciation of its fetishized violence, and an embrace of God's peace.

I have also suggested that a richer account of the human, as one dimension of the *telos* that needs to be kept in view, is necessary in the face of the "humaneness" of modern technology, which seeks to restore the acceptability of new weapon types because they are "smarter". According to Schillebeeckx, the "vocation to/from the *humanum* is an extremely precarious and risky endeavour, since the human other is always a potential threat as well as the source of an ethical appeal. We can never be certain that "evil will not have the last word on our existence as ethically responsible beings" and that the final word on the lives of so many human beings is cruel absurdity. The *humanum*, by contrast, implies a fundamental reliance on reality as trustworthy and meaningful; a robust affirmation of the non-identity of what is and what ought to be. This fundamental trustworthiness – at the heart of creation faith in Schillebeeckx – is illuminated by a perception of Jesus as both "paradigm of humanity" and "concentrated creation". The death of Jesus is a radical experience of negative contrast, in which the unconditional love of the Father meets a definitive resistance and rejection on the cross.

It has been proposed that Christology is not the starting point for the theological anthropology or ethics proposed by Edward Schillebeeckx, nevertheless his vision of human life and our relationship with the cosmos is distinctly Christomorphic. A genuinely Christomorphic delineation of the *humanum* is needed, so that we can counteract the euphemistic and disingenuous approbation of the "unbearable humanness" of the latest and the smartest technology. The terror that froze us into stasis during the Cold War has now thawed, making warfare look like a reasonable option once again as a means for human beings to regulate their lives in common. Such a delusion is, of course, unbelievably dangerous.

Insofar as specific questions arise from these points of reference, we may want to ask the following questions. With regard to Catholic Social Thought: what theoretical and doctrinal resources are to hand for thinking through the transformed experiences of warfare and conflict over the last hundred years; what are the ways in which Catholic Social Teaching on warfare needs to be expanded or adapted in order to be such a resource?

With regard to theories of violence: is the notion of conflict as an "escalation to extremes", implied by Hannah Arendt and explored at length by René Girard, a plausible one? If so, does it need to be brought forward more clearly as a factor or criterion for the just regulation of conflict? How credible is Girard's thesis of the "desacralization" of war (i.e. its collapse as an institution for the ritualistic channelling and limiting of violence), and what might be its implications for a doctrine of war?

With regard to a systematic theological contribution: is there a need to develop a fuller description of "the *humanum* under threat", as an explicit criterion for just war theory (alongside proportionality and discrimination) in the hope that deceptive claims for the "humaneness" of new military technology might be contested? And can we envisage a Christology of contemporary warfare?

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