

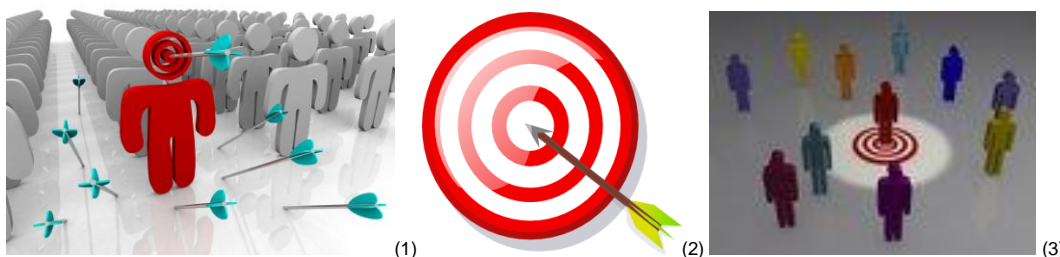
Becoming 'Beloved Community'—or—Beyond Targeting Each Other

The Rev. Theophus "Thee" Smith, Ph.D., Department of Religion, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322

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Prof. Theophus "Thee" Smith, Emory University. Autumn 2010

I. 'Target Practice': Ruling Metaphor of Our Inhumanity



These images combine to illustrate our ubiquitous targeting of each other, from the schoolyard to the war room. From a nonviolent or anti-scapegoating perspective (e.g., the mimetic theory of René Girard), any kind of targeting convenes objectified or 'I-it' forms of social interaction (cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*) versus the intersubjective or 'I-thou' relationships alternatively represented by Miroslav Volf's metaphor of 'the embrace.' (1) "Targeting Your Customer—Arrows" by Iqoncept, www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-targeting-your-customer-arrows-image7205077a (2) "Target with Arrow" by OCAL, www.clipart-target-with-arrow.html (3) "Target Marketing Concept" by Aydindurdu, www.dreamstime.com/stock-image-target-marketing-concept-image9627581. Accessed 10/11/2010



The Stoning of Stephen. See New Testament, Acts 7.58-60. This representation of the first Christian martyrdom provides a vivid depiction of 'sacred violence.' Conventional definitions narrowly focus on killing 'in the name of God.' More precise is *any use of destructive force with the intent to 'save' or redeem.* Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* and Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*. Image: 19th Century stained glass window, Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany. Glazier unknown -- (photograph by Raimond Spekking) from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Accessed

7/10/2010 at <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54257om>.

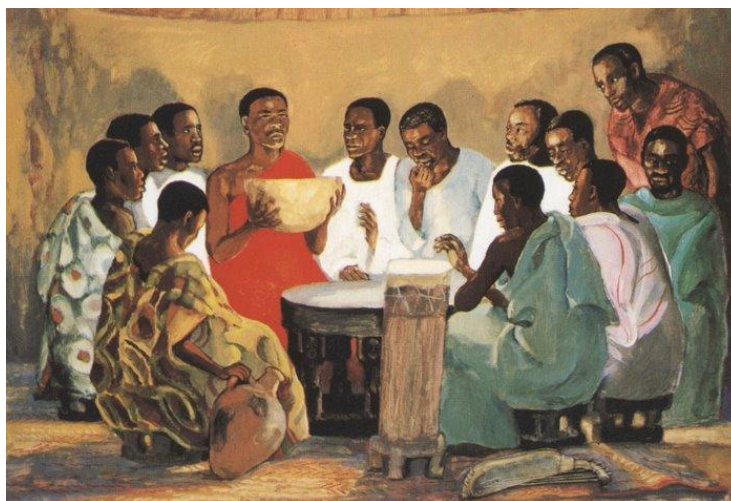
The Lottery. Compare the 1948 classic short story by Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery," first published in the June 26, 1948, issue of *The New Yorker*. In a small village children gather up stones as townsfolk assemble for the annual event practiced to ensure a good harvest. The magazine and Jackson herself were surprised by the negative reader response. Many readers cancelled subscriptions and hate mail arrived throughout the summer. The story was banned in the Union of South Africa. Since then it has been accepted as an American classic and taught in schools for decades. Jackson responded: "I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village to shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lottery. On violence as sacred see also the Colloquium on Violence & Religion, www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/. Accessed 10/6/2010.

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II. Atonement Theory: The Problem of 'Beloved Community'

In the concrete circumstances of humanity, what the new unity of humanity looks like is the beginnings of the gathering of penitent persecutors around the body of the self-giving victim, whose forgiveness made their new perception possible, and the creating of acts of worship of the victim, both in celebration and in acts of fraternal service. —James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong* (unpub. Dissertation; n.d., n.p.)



"The Lord's Supper." Jesus Mafa. Art in the Christian Tradition, project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48272>. Cf. also <http://www.jesumafa.com/anglais/pagetprod2.htm>. Accessed 10/11/2010

The term "beloved community" was popularized in the United States in the mid-20th century by the celebrated civil rights activist, **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** It was coined in 1913 by American philosopher **Josiah Royce** in his magnum opus, *The Problem of Christianity*. There Royce elaborated the term as a framework for exploring and analyzing human loyalty. Negatively he described the absence of beloved community as our chronic betrayal of such loyalty. No matter how horrendous the betrayal, however,

No baseness or cruelty of treason so deep or so tragic shall enter our human world, but that loyal love shall be able in due time to oppose to just that deed of treason its fitting deed of atonement. —Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 1913/2001, 186.

The perennial "problem of Christianity" is the challenge of creating "beloved community" everywhere through such atoning deeds. As interpreted here, communities are beloved insofar as they endeavor to encompass everyone through atoning deeds of "loyal love" and care. Moreover, Royce concludes,

The world, as transformed by this creative deed, is better than it would have been had all else remained the same, but had that deed of treason not been done at all" (Royce 2001 [1913], 180)¹

The following practicum provides an experiential framework for first imagining, then rehearsing or pre-enacting such remediating deeds.

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III. Practicum: Rehearsal for 'Beloved Community'²

Groundrules: 1) keep confidentiality & 2) civility; 3) stretch your safety zone; 4) cooperate with leader.

1) When was a time you or your group acted in 'loyal love' toward another person(s) or group, institution or tradition? Go ahead: show-off with appropriate pride, elation, honor. Celebrate!

2) When was a time you or your group failed to do so, by betraying another person(s) or group or by acting in treason to beloved community? Defy shame or blame to tell the story. Grieve, if you're able.

3) When was an early time in your life or the history of your group when you/the group were betrayed by someone(s); by their failing to show loyal love to you or your group? Express vigorously what you would've said or done in that past situation. Vent freely if you're able.

4) How is incident 2 related to incident 3; that is, how does your targeting-out at others relate to your being targeted; &/or relate to your targeting-in based on past betrayal by another(s)? Share freely & invite insights from others (remembering our confidentiality agreement).

5) How would you redress incident 3 by re-playing or role playing it differently; that is, what is a 'fitting correction' of the betrayal or treason exhibited in that incident? Exult in the freedom to re-imagine ourselves and re-create our world!



¹ Parker, Kelly A., "Josiah Royce", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2004 Edition), E.N. Zalta (ed.), URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2004/entries/royce/> accessed Oct. 11, 2010. Cf. "What is forgiveness over against violence? . . . willing the well-being of victim(s) and violator(s) in the context of the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violation. As such, forgiveness holds the possibility of breaking the chain of violence." Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence* (Continuum, 1995; p. 144).

² Adapted from Cherie R. Brown & George J. Mazza, *Healing Into Action: Leadership Guide for Creating Diverse Communities* (Washington, DC: National Coalition Building Institute, 1998), p. 49f. Contact: www.ncbi.org

*This adaptation is a project of **Thurman Reconciliation Initiatives**, Inc.; not affiliated with the Thurman family or estate. TRI is the independent consulting corporation of Emory University Prof. Theophus "Thee" Smith. Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman were among the first African Americans to meet with Gandhi to promote nonviolent U.S. race relations; founding the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in 1940s San Francisco and mentoring leaders in the 1960s freedom movement.