

Holy Acceptable Violence?
Violence in Hockey and Christian Atonement Theories

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Résumé

L'hockey et le christianisme sont souvent considérés des activités spirituelles pour leurs disciples et participants. Cet essai, écrit d'une perspective morale féministe, examine plusieurs types de violence qui caractérisent l'hockey professionnel au Canada, incluant la justice économique, la marchandisation et la sexualisation des athlètes, le dévouement et l'héroïsme, les dommages physiques au cours des jeux, l'abus sexuel, et une mentalité dualiste qui rend les autres joueurs non-humains. Des parallèles entre ces types de violence et des théories chrétiennes classiques d'expiation sont établis, avec attention aux conséquences. La normalité de la violence des théories chrétiennes classiques d'expiation et dans l'hockey professionnel au Canada est discutée et critiquée.¹

Abstract

Hockey and Christianity are described as ways of being spiritual for followers and participants. This essay is written from a feminist ethical perspective and examines violence characterizing professional Canadian hockey including: economic justice, and commodification and sexualization of athletes; self-sacrifice and heroism; on-ice bodily harms; sexual abuse; and a dualistic mentality that alienates and negates the other. Parallels between this violence and classical Christian atonement theories are drawn, with attention to consequences. The normativity of violence both in classical Christian atonement theories and in professional Canadian hockey is argued and critiqued.

Introduction

[1]Several scholars have argued that organized sport functions as a religion or is, literally, a form of religion. Certainly hockey exhibits many characteristics of a religion: players are like gods and goddesses, or heroes and heroines; devoted followers ritually observe and participate in (with ecstatic responses) their chosen team's games; there are hockey shrines including a recent one honouring Maurice Rocket Richard at Canada's Museum of Civilization in Ottawa; and the Stanley Cup and other lesser awards are similar in terms of how they are regarded by some devotees to religious icons.² Considering that

more than 4 million Canadians (out of a total population of approximately 31 million), not including fans, were involved in amateur hockey in 2002,³ and that *Hockey Night in Canada* is the longest running show in the history of Canadian television,⁴ if Canada has a sport that functions as a popular religion, it is hockey.

[2]The question of whether sport functions as, is, or is definitely not a religion is one with which several scholars have wrestled. Some, perhaps most notably Joseph L. Price and Michael Novak, have argued strenuously that sport *is* a religion. Others have mounted what I think are more persuasive arguments against sport being a religion. These arguments tend to be based more on issues of faith in the transcendent, questions of holiness, and intentionality of addressing the meaning of life.⁵ As I have argued elsewhere,⁶ sport *can* serve as a spiritual discipline if it is pursued in a way congruent with such disciplines, but it need not be. Similarly, faith group membership *can* serve as a spiritual discipline but not necessarily is one, as one can attend church, for example, but not be faithful or faith-filled.

[3]Others claim that sports such as hockey cannot function as a popular religion *because* they are violent.⁷ Yet, violence colours most cultural institutions and dynamics, including religions. Religions and other ways of being religious are marked by violence and other distortions, yet this usually neither stops people from participating in religious organizations, nor from passionately defending the ones to which they subscribe. However, this passion can blind followers to recognizing—let alone critiquing—that which is held sacred. As many scholars, such as Clifford Geertz, have argued, religions,

including Christianity, are both informed by and inform wider culture. In this essay, I will begin such a critique of the assumed normativity of violence in hockey by identifying and examining ways in which hockey is violent, and drawing some connections to concrete consequences of this normativity. Because violence has indeed become normative, the mere identification of these forms of violence is a political act; it is unclear what constitutes violence and, perhaps most significantly, what violence is morally wrong, morally ambiguous or morally good. As theologian Hans Boersma well argues, “The underlying assumption in many discussions of divine violence appears to be that violence is inherently evil and immoral ... [W]e need to ask whether violence is, under any and all circumstances, a morally negative thing.”⁸ This examination will demonstrate and argue the moral ambiguity, harms and even benefits of some violence. Christianity, as the religious tradition to which the majority of Canadians subscribe,⁹ is the religion that I will examine in this essay alongside hockey as an example of a widely accepted possible avenue to spirituality.

[4] Because most of the critiques of the violence in Christianity, and many of the studies regarding violence—particularly that of a sexual nature—have been written by feminist or pro-feminist scholars, the methodological approach I take in this essay is a feminist ethics approach. Both hockey and Christianity foster, or participate in, the negation of embodiment and sexuality, especially regarding women. These are interconnected themes—violence, embodiment, and sexuality—that arise in an examination of hockey as a way of experiencing a subjective sense of spirituality, and violence. In exploring this issue, I acknowledge that the dominant forms of both are neither the only forms nor

interpretations experienced by followers and participants. I will consider a variety of forms of hockey, several forms of violence, and will focus most of my ethical analysis on dominant professional hockey.

[5]I offer the following working definition of violence posited by Boersma: “[violence is] any use of force or coercion that involves some kind of hurt or injury whether this coercion be physical or nonphysical, personal or institutional, incidental or structural.”¹⁰

This definition encapsulates systemic violence as well as more individual acts of violence. It does not restrict or conflate violence with physical acts nor does it remove individual accountability. Also, very significantly, it does not pronounce a moral assessment of all violence. Instead, it makes room for instances in which violence can be understood as morally ambiguous or as a moral good. For example, pushing someone out of the way of oncoming traffic or amputating a hopelessly infected limb are arguably violent acts and are judged, generally, to be beneficent acts. Ethically, the defining of violent actions is a complicated issue. For some, any and all violence is morally wrong while for others this is not the case. For some subscribing to the former contention, an act judged beneficent, such as the aforementioned case of pushing someone out of the way of oncoming traffic, is therefore not violent by definition.¹¹ Since it seems to me that drawing a line between beneficent acts that can be considered either violent or that include unintended potential harmful consequences, and violent acts, is unclear at best and relies largely on subjectively discerned motive, I will not draw such a line in this essay and will, instead, acknowledge the moral ambiguity of some violence. The relevance of this definition of the issue to Christianity and, more particularly, atonement

theories, will become clear.

[6] Regarding Christianity, I will focus my attention on Jesus' crucifixion and theological claims related to this event. I have chosen this focus for two reasons. First, the cross is generally understood to be of great significance to, and by some the defining moment of, Christianity.¹² Although I could choose from any number of violent atrocities committed *in the name of* Christianity including the Crusades, the Inquisition, the genocide of Aboriginal peoples, and the Salem witch trials as examples of ways in which Christianity has been used to promote and/or justify clearly morally evil actions, I am more interested in the theological convictions central to Christianity that have provided the fodder for these repeated atrocities. Theologian Chris Deacy discusses the "inextricable link between Christianity and violence, [and posits that] ... the heart of [this link is] the explicitly violent symbol of the cross."¹³ Deacy is not alone in this contention. Second, and most importantly for my purposes, the cross is arguably one of the most violent Christian stories that concerns embodiment.¹⁴ This immediate relation to embodiment is relevant, of course, to a theological analysis of sport as sport clearly concerns the body. Further, as Deacy and several theologians who have written on the significance of atonement theories contend, there are lived consequences to prevalent theological interpretations.¹⁵ In more recent decades, theologians and particularly feminist and womanist theologians have argued that these consequences include the systemic perpetuation of sexual and physical abuse in addition to the list of mass atrocities named above. Others have pointed also to the possible reinforcement of suicidal inclinations by at least one interpretation of an atonement theory.¹⁶ Contemporary reexaminations of

atonement theories have been prompted largely by an emergent concern regarding the consequences of this relationship between atonement theories and violence.

[7]By drawing some parallels and connections between interpretations of this central Christian event and the violence of Canadian hockey,¹⁷ I will demonstrate the normativity of violence in both and begin to analyze the nature and consequences of such violence, some of which is neither essential to nor congruent with the central values of either. At the same time, there is a tendency to negate the possibility of profound love or joy in an event that also clearly is violent. This tendency is an outcome of the aforementioned assumption that violence is all and simply bad. Both hockey as a way experiencing spirituality and Christianity as a spirit-filled religion, for some people, have at least some intrinsic violence but this violence does not negate their respective promotions of life.

[8]My analysis will begin with a brief summary of some influential Christian atonement theories. I will then explore some of the roots of the dominant Canadian cultural valuing of professional organized sport over play. The next steps in the ethical clarification of this issue are the identification and analysis of forms of violence characterizing dominant Canadian hockey. I will argue that these forms include: economic justice, and the commodification and sexualization of athletes; self-sacrifice and heroism; on-ice bodily harms; sexual abuse; and an us/them dualistic view that alienates and negates the other.

[9]I will consider some parallels to atonement theories with the purpose of demonstrating not only a similar cultural tendency to assume the normativity of violence in both a

clearly defined and recognized way of being religious—Christianity—and in hockey as a popular cultural spirituality for some participants and followers, but also to identify some of the consequences related to this normativity. Just as theologians rightly have been concerned with the unexamined possible violent ramifications of atonement theories, equally rigorous examinations of alternative and popular ways of being “spiritual” or “religious” must be undertaken. This essay is but a modest beginning.

Christian Atonement Theories and Violence

[10]Popular interpretations of historical atonement theories have been soundly critiqued by numerous theologians including Rosemary Radford Ruether, Marie Fortune, JoAnne Marie Terrell, J. Denny Weaver, Rita Nakashima Brock, Barbara Andolsen and several others for the harms such theologies have caused and continue to cause within relationships located in a global context of systemic power imbalances; systemic patterns of injustice are reinforced and exacerbated by theological claims that can be interpreted to evaluate suffering as a moral good. Most notably, atonement theory interpretations that not only accept but glorify violence and suffering have been critiqued for promoting many types of relationship abuse including sexual and physical abuse. However, there are other contemporaries who understand the violence of traditional atonement theories differently. Some such as Hans Boersma and Cynthia S. W. Crysdale (arguably Terrell’s theology also fits this description), while convinced that the cross is violent, are equally convinced that this violence in no way negates the love and the promise of life in the cross. Further, they raise questions regarding the moral quality of this violence.

[11]There are many atonement theories including but not limited to: Christus Victor, ransom, satisfaction, penal substitution, and moral influence.¹⁸ Each has difficulties as well as redemptive pieces depending upon one's interpretation and experiential lens. I will provide a brief overview of these theories with attention to violence.

[12]The Christus Victor theory—the classical view of the atonement—was prevalent among early Christians and held that God came to earth in Jesus to overcome the powers of evil that hold the world and humanity in captivity. These powers of evil are too strong for humanity to overcome alone without God. The clearest limitation of this theory is the assumption that there are exclusively good and bad forces in the world. This dualistic approach not only oversimplifies the complexity of humanity and God, but also sets the stage for the presumption of one's own goodness and righteousness as contrasted with the then necessary evil of those with whom one disagrees. Some, including Boersma, argue that a more accurate interpretation would not lead to the conclusion that one must be inhospitable to those with whom one disagrees; rather, "Divine violence is not always opposed to divine hospitality but may well be a suitable instrument in ascertaining the hope of the entire cosmos being embraced by the hospitable love of God. It is the resurrection—the eschatological future of absolute hospitality—that allows us to call the atonement an act of unprecedented hospitality."¹⁹ His point, and the point of others including theological ethicist Beverley W. Harrison, is that anger and even wrath can be parts of love particularly in terms of caring enough to be angry at injustice and to work for change that is predicted on the well-being of all with keen attention to the marginalized.²⁰

[13]Perhaps the central issue here is, again, how one defines violence. If violence is understood to always cause greater harm than good, then Harrison would not agree with the possibility that anger can include or issue forth in redemptive violence. In fact, redemptive violence would be an oxymoron. Yet, if Boersma is correct in arguing that violence includes acts such as pushing someone out of the way of oncoming traffic, or standing in solidarity with a marginalized who group who risk acts of civil disobedience as resistance to systemic abuse. The way in which an issue is defined is central to ethical analysis and the shaping of ensuing moral discourse; it is a political act.

[14]The later morally problematic theories of ransom or deception to explain how Jesus defeated the devil, were not developed by Irenaeus but were added by Gregory of Nyssa who built on Origen's (183-253) conception of Jesus' death as a ransom paid to the devil by God to secure humanity's return to God.²¹ According to these later explanations, Jesus' humanity served as a veil to trick the devil so that the devil would take the ransom offered, and God then was able to triumph. Jesus did not really die. His suffering was an artful illusion and led to mastery over evil. Some interpreters of this theory have concluded that Jesus' humanity was only important as a tool of deception.²² Related to this is the message that suffering is only temporary and, in some ways not real; it precedes triumph, be patient. Also, the theory potentially allows humanity to relinquish all responsibility for evil if evil is seen as purely part of the cosmic struggle with God—a struggle that God has already won. This last point is also problematic since if one believes that evil has been defeated *once for all*, there is no ongoing evil to be addressed in the world. Thus, the violence and oppressions that do exist can be accepted as illusory

or insignificant. Others have understood that it was not evil that was defeated *once for all* but sanctioned divine violence.

[15]The satisfaction theory is often associated with Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). Anselm more thoroughly developed this theory which was generated by Tertullian (late 2nd to early 3rd century BCE) and, arguably, in some New Testament texts. This theory removed the devil from the equation entirely. Instead it proposed that the shedding of Jesus' innocent blood was willed by God for the ultimate good and salvation of all humanity. Thus, this theory understands God as both the agent and object of the sacrifice, but since Anselm placed the emphasis on Jesus Christ as object of the sacrifice necessary to restoring God's honour, therefore it is known as an objective atonement theory (e.g. the change occurs primarily in God not primarily in humanity except insofar as Jesus was fully human, too).²³ Only the fully human/fully divine Jesus could serve as an adequate "substitution" to "satisfy" the demands of God for blood sacrifice as payment for humanity's sins. Both Tertullian and Anselm struggled with how finite and mutable humans could render adequate and acceptable satisfaction to a wronged and infinite God. Tertullian's theory was shaped by his context of Roman patronage while Anselm's was shaped also by a system of responsibilities: the medieval European feudal system. Accordingly, each was shaped, respectively, by contexts that required satisfaction for violations of the patronage or feudal system. Reparation must be made for sin otherwise there is no order or law to safeguard against injustice. As womanist JoAnne Marie Terrell puts it,

if injustice is forgiven out of mercy alone, then injustice is more at liberty than justice. This would make injustice resemble God, since God alone is

subject to no one's law. To fulfill the demands of the rational order and redeem God's plan for creation, justice requires either punishment or satisfaction ... Although it was incumbent upon humankind to satisfy the demands of the Infinite, only a God could actually accomplish this; thus it was necessary for God to become human in order to restore the honor due to Godself.²⁴

The devil is given no "due" in this theory, instead God is given "due honour."²⁵ As theologian Daniel Migliore writes, one of the problems with this theory is that "grace is made conditional on satisfaction. But is conditional grace still grace?"²⁶

[16]Peter Abelard (1079-1142) proposed the moral influence theory (which arguably has roots in Irenaeus) in response to Anselm's theory. Abelard argued vehemently against the ransom theory, claiming that "the notion of a price for release of captives is incoherent."²⁷ Instead, he posited a theory that is often misunderstood and reduced to a subjective exemplarist model. Although it has a clear subjective component: through the Passion, Christ delivers us from our sinful desires by inspiring us with God's incomprehensible love; it also has a clear objective component: Christ takes punishment on our behalf in order to reconcile us with God. Thus, as Thomas Williams argues, "Abelard explicitly teaches a theory of penal substitution"²⁸ (as discussed below). This theory removes proprietary rights over humanity by the devil, and it emphasizes God's unconditional love and grace. Often criticized for a neglect of human sin and lacking "any thick description of the cross,"²⁹ Abelard clearly was very concerned with the effects of original sin on human relationship with God. The Passion, he claimed, set humanity free from this sin and estrangement from God. Through the Passion, we are able to desire out of love that which is consistent with God as Love. To follow godly desires remains our choice and responsibility, through God's grace.³⁰

[17]A feminist and womanist critique of this model has been that this blood sacrifice of Jesus is understood as the ultimate model of love that is only fully realized when humanity is so moved by this love that humanity then responds in similar self-sacrificial ways.³¹ Williams explains that Abelard saw the Passion as not

merely . . . an example to emulate. It is the event that above all others reveals to us the nature, the supreme and unstinting love, of God himself. By showing us the incomparable goodness and love of God, it shows us how much God deserves to be loved—not merely because of what he has done for us, but because of who he is.³²

However, the violence of the killing of Jesus remains upheld as the divine model. The same critiques that have been applied to the penal substitutionary theories, as discussed below, can be applied to Abelard's theory. Love remains somehow intertwined with violence of undeserved suffering and killing in this theory; if one truly loves, one will be willing to sacrifice fully one's body. While the intent of this theory may be to uphold a love that does not abandon even in the most dire of circumstance, Abelard's theory is easily distorted as encouraging suffering that does not value love of self as much as love for the possibly sinful desires—through grace rejected—of others and/or self.

[18]Later, John Calvin developed what has become the most prevalent Western atonement doctrine. Sometimes called the penal substitution theory, this theory was informed by elements of both the ransom theory and mainly the satisfaction theory. In the context of the Reformation, human sinfulness, particularly as it was found to have corrupted institutions and particularly the church, was accorded priority over merit as the assumption behind salvation; Jesus took the punishment that sinful humanity deserved in

order that we might be saved. The penal substitutionary model assured Christian that even the greatest of sins had been paid for by a just God who also loves humanity unreservedly.³³ Certainly, we continue to see evidence of the strong influence this penal theory continues to hold, even in popular culture. For example, Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* depicted this interpretation graphically.

[19]In 1931, theologian Gustaf Aulén published what was to become a very influential work entitled *Christus Victor—An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*.³⁴ In it he indirectly argues for a return to and recovery of the classical Christus Victor theory. The penal model arose out of a particular context and it is time, he argued, for the early church's Christus Victor theory to be revisited. Aulén leveled an important critique of the satisfaction theory regarding the description of the relationship within the Trinitarian God: since the debt is paid by the Son to the Father, and thus "the act of Atonement has indeed its origin in God's will, but is, in its carrying out, an offering made to God by Christ as man and on man's behalf, and may therefore be called a *discontinuous* Divine work," unlike the act of atonement as understood by the Christus Victor theory which depicts "continuous Divine work."³⁵

[20]Some twenty years after Aulén's book was published, the satisfaction theory and its derivatives were critiqued soundly primarily by feminists and womanists for perpetuating claims of Christ's surrogacy and sacrifice. These theological claims have been used to perpetuate slavery and other forms of racism and sexism, by upholding suffering and extreme self-sacrifice as moral goods in and of themselves. In fact, similar to the allure

perhaps of extreme sports, Mel Gibson's *The Passion* has helped make clearer the message that the greatest (the best) suffering (e.g. that of the "sadistic savagery of the Passion") is the greatest (the best) sacrifice.³⁶

[21] More recently, theologian J. Denny Weaver has built on Aulén's work, arguing that a revisioned form of Christus Victor has much to offer as a viable atonement theory. Weaver deepened Aulén's critique of the satisfaction theory, particularly regarding its Trinitarian discontinuity, in part owing to work done by feminist and womanist theological critics who have raised the issue of divine child abuse. The God of the satisfaction and penal substitutionary theories requires the blood sacrifice of the meek and mild Jesus, the innocent sacrificial lamb. Jesus submits willingly, out of love, to crucifixion in order to appease God the Father and reconcile God with humanity. As Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker write, "it is precisely this sanctioning of suffering which is the legacy of the satisfaction theory of atonement."³⁷ Further, the belief that God the Father willed the crucifixion of "His only Son" has led to a charge of divinely sanctioned child abuse.³⁸ This argument assumes that two "persons" of the trinity can act in "discontinuity." More recently, this claim has been challenged by theologians including womanist JoAnne Marie Terrell who calls for an interpretation that does not presume that "Jesus was other than God."³⁹ Weaver agrees but then argues that if we can get past the problem of divine child abuse in the satisfaction/penal theories, we are left with another ethical problem: "Divine suicide."⁴⁰

[22] Perhaps the most obvious point of departure between Weaver and Aulén is Weaver's

emphasis on Jesus' life and ministry as compared to Aulén's more traditional emphasis on the cross. Weaver calls his "nonviolent atonement" theory the "narrative Christus Victor" theory to make clear this emphasis.⁴¹ Weaver rejects "all standard images of atonement" as they all "have problematic violent dimensions that render them unacceptable." He argues that Anselm's model as well as the later penal substitutionary model assumes and is built on retributive justice norms meaning that punishment is required for justice instead of searching for other ways to promote healthy relationship such as those proposed by restorative justice theorists. Further, these models "depend on God-induced and God-directed violence."⁴² Weaver sees the early church's Christus Victor theory as congruent with pacifism if relevant scripture is revisited and reinterpreted. For Weaver, his narrative Christus Victor theory portrays Jesus accurately as active and "confrontational," undeterred by powers and principalities and triumphant "nonviolently through death and resurrection," with the violence of his death being "neither God's nor God directed."⁴³ Others such as Boersma take issue with Weaver's position and understand the denial of divine violence as incongruent with the biblical story and also disagree with Weaver's reduction of violence to moral wrongness, rather than seeing some violence as a necessary part of hospitality or love.

[23]While some such as Weaver and Brown and Bohn reject traditional atonement theories because of their intrinsic violence, others such as Aulén, Boersma, and Terrell have argued that there are salvific elements in each of theories and, while parts must be rejected, the theories as a whole ought not be rejected as they offer elements that have been salvific for people. Terrell argues that there is "something of God in the blood of the

cross” but the something is not in the sanctioning of ongoing violence including surrogacy interpretations but it is the promise, understood by the early church, that Jesus’ death on the cross was “the pouring out of God’s own life, ending sanction for sacred violence, *once for all...*”, together with the ongoing presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ Thus, in Terrell’s view, it was not evil that was ended *once for all* but the sacred sanction of violence. Similar in some ways to Weaver, Terrell favours pieces of the early church’s Christus Victor theory:

Perhaps the cross is central to black Christian identity because black Christians suffer, like Jesus and the martyrs, unjustly. ... I do not think that the problem is with the imagery per se; the cross, in its original sense, embodied a scandal that something, anything, good could come out of such an event. Seen in this light, Jesus’ sacrificial act was not the objective. Rather, it was the tragic, if foreseeable, result of his confrontation with evil.⁴⁵

[24]Theologically, Jesus’ death on the cross continues to raise questions and debate regarding purpose and meaning. In our contemporary context these questions often are generated out of concern for their approaches to violence and suffering. My position is that Jesus’ crucifixion was first an act of terrible violence of which, as has been demonstrated repeatedly, humanity is capable. Somehow God brought something salvific out of that horrible moment and has also demonstrated that in the midst of our own horrors, we are not alone. Tragically, largely due to the reality of systemic oppression and participation in these systems, historical interpretations of the cross have been understood and/or used to justify and perpetuate abuse and other violence that does not in any way contribute to the work of love in mutual relationship. Violence is a highly complex and ethically problematic concept.

[25]I contend that much of the violence manifested in high performance Canadian hockey is a prominent example of the perpetuation and continued acceptance of the cultural normativity of violence even or especially in, what are for many, ways of being spiritual or religious. There is no clear line between violence that is justifiable and perhaps even positive, and violence that causes more harm than good or is gratuitous. The assessment of harms and benefits that are linked to violence, as some theologians such as Terrell have well argued, is complex and depends to a significant degree on personal and communal narrative out of which contextual meaning is often made. Nonetheless, critical reflection is necessary as religions, and those cultural expressions including Canadian hockey that are popularly conceived to be linked to spirituality, propagate and encapsulate values that are typically upheld as morally good. Such an implicit and sometimes explicit acceptance and even glorification of violence raise questions regarding popular understandings of virtue.

The Professionalization of Hockey

[26]The development of hockey as a profession has changed the sport in some ways. At the least, it has increased the value placed on performance and, particularly, performance as it contributes or does not to winning. The winners (often defined with an emphasis on individual performance, not the team) are the athletes who perform well enough to be drafted into major league hockey. Advertising dollars are won by the winners of the Cups; insofar as winning increases profit, it is valued greatly. With the focus of big time hockey on making money, athletes become regarded as commodities hired to sell the game. A willingness to do what it takes to win, to sacrifice one's body if need be, and to

suffer for the team, is expected and bought: the greater the suffering, the greater the commitment. As John Dominic Crossan has argued regarding Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, the popular conception of the most laudable sacrifice seems to be that the more dramatic the act and the greater the suffering involved, the greater the good.⁴⁶ If a player is not highly skilled and willing to invest "110%," then their commitment and love are not adequate and someone else will be bought. An appreciation of these root dynamics is necessary to an understanding of the types of violence that will be identified and discussed in the following pages.

[27]The professionalization of the sport has meant aligning it with the dominant cultural values of making money and winning, often insofar as winning contributes to making money. Clearly, a pro team does not need to win in order to make a huge profit. The Toronto Maple Leafs, for example, have not won the Stanley Cup since 1967 and yet their followers tend to be very loyal (as evidenced by ticket sales) and refuse to give up the hope that their day will come. At the same time, the players are taught that they must win-at-any-cost if their dreams of becoming "the best" by making the NHL draft are to be realized. In this way, profit and the drive to win-at-any-cost become comingled. It may or may not be the case that primary motives for players seeking the "big-time" are the big salaries and potential advertising dollars.

[28]Hockey that is experienced as play without the pressures to achieve glory by winning the Stanley Cup, earning top dollar advertising contracts, and locking in that multi-million dollar contract, is often a different game. As writer Lawrence Scanlan notes, "old-

timer hockey—often played at odd hours in empty arenas—recalls ‘the silly joys of childhood’ and continues to offer ‘a temporary balm against the pressures of the week and the march of time.’ The game played for money on hockey nights in Canada is something else.”⁴⁷ Professional hockey, at least from a management perspective, usually is aimed primarily at profit and winning if winning enhances profit. From a player’s perspective, if he is driven to achieve NHL status, winning must become a primary, if not the only goal; pleasure, communal engagement, life lessons in how to lose and how to win, self-discipline and all other virtues of the sport can become lost as secondary consequences—laudable but unnecessary outcomes.

[29]Similarly, it seems to me that in Christianity, Jesus’ life and ministry can become lost as secondary goods by a penal substitutionary focus on the necessity and critical importance of his death on the cross. Clearly the significance of Jesus’ life far exceeds any significance of hockey but the parallels in popular interpretations of both, particularly given the subjectively identified spiritual experiences of hockey proponents, is not accidental.

[30]Professional sport is more entrenched in and reflective of dominant cultural values than is less organized sport (for example, house league or pick-up) —often derided as play—that does not uphold winning as its primary purpose. Highly organized and competitive sport has become an indicator of our dominant values. Historian Steve Overman shows how dominant religious-cultural systems have influenced, shaped, and distorted play and sport. He traces much of America’s defining of play back to a Puritan

value system. As he summarizes, “The Puritans feared human appetite and were uneasy with unrestrained human movement. The body was construed as an object to be subdued in the quest for spiritual enlightenment and personal salvation. ... Anything containing an element of play was viewed as a sin, or a temptation to sin.” Thus, play was only morally laudable when it was structured to serve a “worthy end”—“sport” was defensible in that it helped to maintain health and the ability to work productively at a waged job. This Puritan heritage was continued and supplemented by Victorian “standards of professionalism” and, later, capitalism and seemingly unlimited technological advancements.⁴⁸

[31] Hockey as an organized sport has become conflated with the National Hockey League as big business and big money.⁴⁹ Professional sport closes the gap between work and play without questioning the dominant cultural meaning of work.⁵⁰ Work and sport have become defined largely by performance and money.⁵¹ When work is defined this way and sport is conflated with work, then the other moral goods of sport become secondary at most. For example, the value of relationship and community becomes an acceptable and even positive consequence of hockey if it helps a team to win and make money. In and of itself, community is not an end. As Christian ethicist Dietmar Meith observes,

In Christian tradition the person is not unrelational but becomes a self through relationships, and therefore in a communicative process.

Sport is wholly a locus of communication. ... The more sport comes under the rule of goals, success and achievement, the more one-dimensional is the possible communication of the participants, and the more it obeys the will to achievement of the industrial society or of the performance society. Everyone does his or her job.⁵²

Hockey primarily as play continues to exist. There is more opportunity for this latter type of hockey when the interests of big business are removed or at least lessened, but there is no romantic guarantee.

Economic Justice, Commodification and Sexualization of Athletes

[32] There are several consequences and ethical issues that arise from the professionalization of hockey that are morally ambiguous. For example, the need for marketing and advertising has helped some marginalized groups to be taken more seriously as athletes while at the same time it has reinforced their marginal status. Women athletes have experienced both increasing opportunity and pressure to expose their bodies to attract viewership and, therefore, sponsorship money. On the opportunity side, as Professor Emeritus of Physical Education and Recreation M. Ann Hall points out, the sexualization of women's sports in media images (for example, naked or partially clad female athletes) "help send a calculated message that women can be both athletic and feminine, especially in sports that still carry the stigma that women who excel in them are somehow unwomanly."⁵³ Concrete potential benefits of this approach include greater funding for women's sport, and probably, in the case of hockey, more and better ice-time. In turn, these athletes have greater opportunity to improve their skills, play more, receive more and better scholarships, and to more deeply challenge the already far-from-complete male hegemony in Canadian organized sport. Further, as Hall indicates, sexualized images of female athletes counter the myth that athletic women cannot be sexually attractive by dominant cultural standards of heterosexual beauty.⁵⁴ Women, simply by playing sports, disrupt the normative identification of sport with men. Similarly, although some have used/understood atonement theories to justify either

inflicting or experiencing abuse, others including oppressed peoples have found these same theories to be encouraging, comforting, and liberating.⁵⁵

[33]Although the sexualization of female athletes has helped to dispel the stereotype that athletic women are unattractive, it also has led critics to “a new wave of ‘dyke bashing,’”⁵⁶ and enforced heterosexism; the use of a cultural tendency to commodify and objectify women athletes as sexual objects has reinforced cultural norms regarding heterosexuality and the linking of women with sex. As Mathisen observes, “Women ... are overwhelmingly absent as televised-sport role models, while male sport commentators prefer to dwell on female athletes’ physical appearances and or on their own biased assumptions of traditional femininity”(30). By using these cultural systemic norms, even for primary purposes of changing normative conceptions of women, they also are reinforced. A more humorous and satirical media example from an episode of *The Simpsons*, has Homer responding to his daughter Lisa’s continued plea to play ice hockey: “Lisa, if the Bible has taught us nothing else, and it hasn’t, it’s that girls should stick to girls’ sports, such as hot oil wrestling and foxy boxing and such and such.”

[34]Women in sport, similar to other marginalized people in sport including people with disabilities, people of colour, people of limited economic status, and people who are openly LGBT, challenge the dominant myth of white, heterosexual, middle-upper class male hegemony in “real” sport but this challenge at explicit as well as implicit levels does not always transform the normative oppressive power systems. Rather, such challenges usually yield ambiguous results that are similar to those results from some athletic

women's challenges of the assumption that they must be un(heterosexually) attractive and, also, unworthy of adequate equipment, ice-time, and financial investment. The two assumptions go hand-in-hand—bodies and value. The exclusion of women and other systemically marginalized people from normative professional and other organized sport⁵⁷ remains a violent norm in professional and junior hockey (although it is gradually being challenged) as it does in the wider cultural context. Hence, any argument for the moral good, or even moral ambiguity of such commodification, hinges on the uncritical acceptance of this violence as normative in sport.

[35]Commodification also leads to wider distributive justice concerns: is the allocation of resources to pro sport in Canada just? If this question is not considered as part of the forgoing analysis of potential harms and benefits of commodification for women and other systemically marginalized groups in pro sport, then the underlying status quo of Canadian capitalism is implicitly accepted. The lack of resources to feed the poor and to provide adequate affordable housing, dental care, affordable day care, etc., suggest that our society places greater value on pro hockey players than on adequate social services.

[36]Similarly, theological dualistic claims regarding not only the negation of women, but also of the body and sexuality (most closely linked with women) must also be examined. The sexuality of Jesus, an embodied, often depicted as naked, man on the cross, has reinforced and/or reflected a link between sexuality, pain, and violence.⁵⁸ Christian theologies regarding the cross have been interpreted in ways that foster negative attitudes towards women and sexuality. An oft asked question by feminist theologians has been:

Can a male saviour save women?⁵⁹ If one believes that only a male could represent God, die on the cross, and so save humanity, then one believes that at the least men are somehow closer to God or that God is literally male. If God is male this raises not only anthropomorphic concerns but concerns around the place of women as secondary humans. The creation theology claim that all humanity is made in the image of God must raise questions regarding the full incarnation of Christ as a male and not a female. Some have hypothesized that humanity, because of our prejudices, simply could not have recognized a woman. Others have concluded that the maleness of Jesus is irrelevant to his message.⁶⁰ Male normativity too often has left women often on the edges of Christianity.

Self-Sacrifice and Heroism

[37]One of the most highly prized values in hockey is loyalty; commitment to and involvement in one's team—both players and fans, but especially players—are very important. Community is fostered by team travel, working together against the same adversaries, and the nature of the game itself: the sheer pleasure of feeling the puck slap against your blade as you receive a pass from behind from your teammate who instinctively knows where you are and you them; the euphoria of “clicking” with your team; and the letting go of all else. Through such experiences, most players learn that they have limitations, strengths, and need each other. Fans too can appreciate this, but players have immediate experience of their interdependence.

[38]For both players and fans anything can seem possible. In this liminal space all else stops and the previously impossible need not seem so hopeless. Many things may be

wrong or lack colour in one's world but there is always the ritual of *Hockey Night in Canada* to look forward to—a moment of respite into a world larger than one's individual life—a chance to be part of a quest for hockey's Holy Grail, the Stanley Cup. This may seem trivial to some who are not part of this devoted coterie but to those who are followers, they understand that as fans they are members of a larger following who believe that their team and heroes can do anything.

[39]However, the hockey community is not always inclusive or fostering of individual players' well-being. When a player's or coaches' prima facie duty is assumed to be winning, then some would-be-players are excluded because they are not skilled enough; extreme self-sacrificial behaviour is lauded as taking-one-for-the-team or simply for being tough; and a select few heroic figures are valorized while other lesser mortals expected to take unnecessary risks for the heroic figures.

[40]High performance Canadian hockey is built on the presumption of heroes. Heroic figures give one models for which to strive⁶¹ and inspiration, but can also encourage a tendency to locate the goods of hockey in only a few select individuals rather than the team. This tendency is congruent with a culture that prizes extreme individualism, rather than one that equally appreciates a diversity of abilities. At the same time heroic figures do inspire and serve as role models, particularly for young people. Heroes offer hope that anything is possible, even the least can achieve wonders. They send the message that anything is possible: if you try hard, apply yourself, and never give up, no door need be closed. While this message is not entirely true, it gives hope and fosters encouraging

dreams.⁶²

[41]An important ethical question concerns the lengths to which one will go in pursuit of these dreams. Different sorts of dreams and aspirations are fostered in different cultural contexts. In Canada, the dream associated with hockey usually is to succeed by achieving pro stardom. Less common are dreams of empowering others, or learning to skate but these are primary motives for some.

[42]To achieve the dominant dream of stardom, for both males and females (although for females lots of money is not part of the tempting package!), forms of self-violence are not uncommon. Such violence includes the pursuit of excessive thinness particularly for female athletes,⁶³ the use of performance enhancing drugs and genetic modification technologies,⁶⁴ and the commitment to play “through” injury and overcome pain by continuing to play regardless of the much greater risk of permanent or serious injury. Many are familiar of the legend of Toronto Maple Leaf hero Bobby Baun leading his team to Stanley Cup victory on a broken leg; the act of scoring the winning goal while clearly in much pain sent Baun’s star profile into the stratosphere. More common perhaps but with no open approval is the willingness to use banned substances to increase muscle mass or physical stamina. Most of these banned substances have known and unknown risks of harm, but because they can potentially increase an athlete’s performance and, therefore, marketability, many players and coaches, on players’ behalves, are willing to take those risks.

[43]There can be a fine line between giving the best one has to the team and accepting some physical pain and risk, and causing unnecessary or lasting harm to oneself. The glorification of self-sacrifice and pain and suffering is certainly found in traditional atonement theories, as well as in hockey. Although no one would claim that a hockey player's injury, or in very extreme cases death, constitutes any salvific promise, the blood sacrifice of Jesus traditionally has been assumed to be a moral good just as the blood sacrifice of a hockey player often is lauded as the loftiest indication of loyalty to one's team. Culturally, the abilities to overcome physical pain and demonstrate dedication to one's community even at significant cost to one's well-being, are highly valued, just as they are in the historical interpretations of the death of Jesus on the cross.

[44]Theological ethicists, such as Barbara Andolsen, argue that suffering for the sake of suffering is not redemptive. The satisfaction and related penal substitutionary theories depict Jesus as the self-sacrificing hero and innocent lamb who obeyed his father's will for him to suffer great physical agony and death. Several feminist ethicists offer alternative understandings that value Jesus' lack of innocence and his commitment to life and justice.⁶⁵ Interpretations of the cross that celebrate Jesus' willingness to suffer for humanity instead of lamenting his suffering and glorifying his commitment to life and justice for all, especially the marginalized, risk encouraging the marginalized to participate in their continued suffering rather than in acts of resistance. So committed to life was Jesus that he continued to work for justice even as it became clear that there was possibility that a consequence of this commitment might be torture and death. It was community and justice that he chose, not suffering and death; these latter were, rather,

not unforeseen but horrible consequences of his life-committed values.⁶⁶ And sometimes radical hospitality requires the acceptance of the possibility of violence—both arising from the outrage of the one offering the radical hospitality at injustices and barriers to right relationship, and from those who resist this offer of justice.⁶⁷

[45]The acceptance of some degree of physical discomfort or even pain as a potential consequence of putting the well-being of the team as a top priority or *prima facie* duty is a virtue similar to what is taught by formal religions. However, consistent with feminist theological critiques, lasting harm sustained by any one player is harmful to the team as a whole; suffering for the sake, only, of winning a game fails to value adequately the community as a whole as well as the individuals' well-being. The glorification of the ability to sustain pain, as distinct from seeking the good of both the individual and community and accepting some pain as part of the game but not an end in itself, invites serious injury and, therefore, harm to oneself, the team, and others who will invest resources into the recovery of that player. The glorification of one's ability to sustain pain is more in keeping with an ethic of extreme individualism whereas a commitment to community is in keeping with an ethic that prizes more than the self.

[46]In a related vein, it has been argued that Jesus is not the sole locus of salvation and incarnation; rather, Jesus maintains uniqueness as the one who was *fully* human and *fully* divine but all participate in the realization of salvation and all are incarnate of the Spirit.⁶⁸ A parallel approach to hockey can be found in those teams that appreciate their best goal scorers and also appreciate, for example, those who try but are not as skilled, are good at

passing but not scoring, or good at encouraging others but not skating.

On-ice Bodily Harm

[47]There has always been some degree of violence in hockey simply due to the nature of this high-speed, competitive contact sport. Hockey is played with an edge and some degree of physical contact is part of the game, even in non-contact hockey. The risk of injury and the attendant opportunity to push oneself to and sometimes beyond one's physical limits are part of the attraction of the sport. Hence, some risk of violence to self and others is accepted by players as part of the game. The difficulty is in drawing the line between acceptable violence and unacceptable violence.

[48]Competition is neither a moral harm nor a moral good. Rather, how one evaluates competition morally depends on one's values and perception of right and wrong. If one approaches hockey and prizes it primarily because it offers possibilities of deepening relationships, strengthening community, and sharing power, then neither winning nor profit will be the primary moral goods but could be pleasurable secondary consequences. Most amateur, house-league, and even champion and Olympic hockey has much less fighting than the NHL and boys' junior hockey.⁶⁹ For example, women's hockey—even at the highest competitive level of Olympic hockey—has a great deal of “grit” and “edge” but is not noted for physical violence. As Scanlan puts it, “What edge there exists in the women's game, and at times there's plenty, is tempered by something. Former women's Olympic team captain Cassie Campbell ... believes ‘It's an issue of respect. There's an unwritten rule in women's hockey. People have to go to work the next day. Male hockey

players, though, are bred. It's almost cultish. At a young age, they're taught that hockey is do or die.' She said that fighting in women's hockey is rare, and given the full-face cages and masks they wear, quite senseless. ... In any case, a player who drops her gloves risks banishment for a quarter of a season."⁷⁰ When fighting is heavily penalized, the message is clear: do not fight, it is not wanted. On the other hand, when the penalties are not that severe as is the case in the NHL, the message is different: fighting sells and physical violence attracts money.

[49]Referring to junior and pro hockey, Wayne Gretzky (quite possibly *the* Canadian hockey god) lamented, "[Hockey] is the only team sport in the world that actually encourages fighting. I have no idea why we let it go on. The game itself is so fast, so exciting, so much fun to watch, why do we have to turn the ice red so often?"⁷¹

There are at least two related significant impediments to imposing such a ban in pro hockey and junior hockey:⁷² first, on-ice violence sells and, second, violence under certain conditions often is glorified as virtuous in itself. Consider, in the first case, that in "1975 the National Hockey League Players' Association urged the league to consider a trial year of a ban on hockey fighting. Each player who threw a punch would be banished from that game and the one to follow, with more suspensions for repeat offenders. The Players' Association voted twenty to four in favour of the plan and presented it to a June meeting of the owners. The proposal was flatly rejected."⁷³ Physical violence sells; the perception of the owners is that many fans want to see such violence and pay money for it. Until it is no longer a money-maker, violence will be urged upon professional players.

[50]The definition of physical violence, as with other forms of violence discussed above, is morally ambiguous. For example, from a casuistic perspective, while it is clear that Todd Bertuzzi's much publicized punch from behind (2004) that resulted in an opponent's broken neck was physically violent, there is not as much consensus that a "good, clean body check" that results, possibly as an unintended consequence, in a player being hospitalized, is violent.⁷⁴ For example, if a player has her/his head down while watching the puck, an opponent will know that this is an opportune time to throw a body check and take possession of the puck. However, the opponent will also in all probability realize that when a player is hit with their head down, risk of injury greatly increases. So, even though it is an unwise move to have one's head down, the opponent, in throwing the check will also know that not only is it probable that they will take possession of the puck. It is also probable that the player who has their head down will sustain some level of injury. Thus, even if the primary motive is to take the puck, the opposing player is accepting that the greater good is winning the game rather than avoiding an increased risk of injury. In other words, violence becomes defined as acceptable or even desirable (or simply not violent) depending upon one's motive, in the interests of winning. The question is one of competing values: avoiding injury, increasing one's chances of winning and/or personal success by throwing the check, or enjoying the opportunity to engage in league sanctioned physical violence.

[51]Not only has physical violence occupied a place of prominence in hockey, it attracts attention and sometimes fascination in theology. Often understood as the central defining act of Christianity,⁷⁵ some theologians have queried how the cross could possibly be

understood as salvific given its intrinsic extreme violence. While some theologians understand the violence of the cross as necessary, others see it as an unintended but probably foreseen risk of Jesus' life and ministry, which is the authentic locus of salvation.⁷⁶ Important questions arise regarding God's relationship to violence: does God sanction violence?, or is there indeed a *once for all* dimension of the divine violence in the cross?, or was God not in any way involved with the violence of the cross? Clearly, there are conflicting and passionate views on this matter. Also clearly, as long as there is a demand for violence, the game (or theology), at a popular cultural level will not change. The large amount of attention given to Gibson's *The Passion* is telling and raises age old theodicy questions into greater relief: what parts of humanity are made in God's image? If we accept that there is indeed a widespread human fascination with violence (certainly one must wonder about the lure of such graphic, drawn out sadistic violence even if—or perhaps especially if—it is real, in Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' flogging and crucifixion), were we created with this propensity? Is God violent? Is God all good? Is violence all bad? This brings us back to the twofold question of what is violence and is violence reducible to moral unambiguity. As has been argued thus far, violence is widespread and multifaceted and is not reducible to single moral assessment. However, this complexity does not imply a libertarian ethic; rather it points to the necessity of greater responsibility and critical analysis of motive, values, principles, and potential consequences.

Sexual Abuse in Hockey

[52]A further type of violence that can result from distorted community is sexual and other abuse by those in positions of authority. The more professionalized and highly

competitive hockey becomes, the more powerful those in positions of authority tend to become. This great power imbalance opens the door to abuse. An extensive 1996 research study “confirms that sexual abuse [and harassment] of high performance athletes, particularly female athletes, is a major problem in Canadian sport” (Kirby et al., 2000). High performance sporting culture can teach youth to reduce their intrinsic value to how well their coaches, general managers, and agents think they play. In 1997, a Canadian study that found that 22.8% of male and female Canadian national-team athletes “had had sexual intercourse with a person in sport in a position of authority over them. One-quarter of those described also being slapped, hit, kicked or beaten by that person.”⁷⁷ A much publicized case was that of Graham James, the coach who sexually abused NHL player Sheldon Kennedy on more than 300 occasions when he played pro junior with the Swift Current Broncos.⁷⁸ The hockey world was shaken when Kennedy went public with the abuse during the 1996-97 season. James was a winning coach—his team had won the coveted Memorial Cup—and no one wanted to believe that he sexually abused his players. It took a high profile NHL star to break the silence and end years of sexual abuse of his players. For a “tough” hockey player, no matter the age, admitting to being abused also means claiming vulnerability, resistance to suffering, and need.⁷⁹

[53]Not only do athletes learn that they are objects but this can become a pattern of relating to others over whom they have power. In a recent book entitled *Crossing the Line—Violence and Sexual Assault in Canada’s National Sport*, Laura Robinson explores the “rape culture” of the male hockey locker room in which females are often perceived as available and contemptible objects. This learned understanding of women as sexual

objects, according to Robinson's study, extends beyond the locker room to the players' relationships with women in all aspects of their lives.

[54]Any theological claim interpreted as celebrating suffering or encouraging martyrdom can reinforce the silence around sexual abuse. Most traditional Christian theology has failed to uphold sexuality as good and, consequently, silence is reinforced by a conception that anything related to sexuality is bad—regardless of victimization. As discussed earlier in this essay, atonement theories—particularly the satisfaction theory and its derivatives—that require and even glorify suffering demonstrate a normative acceptance of suffering and violence. The interpretation of the penal-substitutionary theory as divine child abuse can sanction abuse of the vulnerable. These connections to the possible reinforcement of abuse rarely are deliberate but the existence of theological convictions that can function in this way speaks to at best a dangerous level of ignorance regarding the possible implications of theological theories. Similarly, the widespread sexual and other physical abuse of hockey children and youth by those in authority, speaks to a lack of critical awareness, accountability mechanisms, and somehow an acceptance or denial of the horrible violence that is inflicted on those who experience such abuse. Part of the issue concerns how violence is defined in this context. In particular, sexual interaction with those whom one has power over must be understood as non-consensual and, therefore, exploitative, violent, and a clear moral harm.

Nationalism and an Us/Them Attitude

[55]An additional form of violence fostered in some hockey communities is an us/them

mentality that casts the opposing team as the enemy who must be defeated and/or punished. Some coaches encourage players to frame the opposition as despised enemy in the hope that this will prepare the players psychologically to place winning above all else. International hockey can deepen this dynamic.

[56]A fierce community approach, typified by loyalty and strength, is embedded deeply in the Canadian identity and has often served to typify what it means to be Canadian; Canadians are tougher than most, we pride ourselves on being able to survive adversity and a harsh climate,⁸⁰ not complain, and be nice about it. In its genesis, Scanlan describes the connection between hockey and Canadian identity: “To embrace the game of hockey in the late 1800s was to show the finger to the powers that be. Hockey violence was thus not gratuitous at all, but revolutionary and subversive in its way—at heart, political. ...In its early days, hockey was condemned by the clergy as a ‘desecration of the Sabbath,’ but boys paid no heed and spent Sundays on frozen ponds ...”⁸¹; “We lay claim passionately to the birthplace of hockey (even though we cannot reach agreement on where exactly this occurred, we *know* it was in Canada).”⁸² Most Canadians who were old enough to watch the 1972 game where Paul Henderson scored the winning goal in the series against the Soviets can still remember where they were. While some pride in national identity is valuable, it can also contribute to an us/them mentality that at the least can depersonalize the opposing team as other or, at worst, demonize them as dangerous enemies.⁸³

[57]Similarly, as Carter Heyward makes clear, the classical Christus Victor theory can be interpreted as portraying Jesus as “adversary, fighter, and finally victor over his enemies,

the evil ones who oppose God. The christological image of a divine man who casts opponents into hellfires diminishes our capacity as Christians to imagine, much less experience, the healing power generated not through shame and demolition but rather through forgiveness.”⁸⁴ Yet, there are those who argue that Christus Victor is more properly revisioned as depicting an aggressive Jesus who did not shy away from confronting the powers and principalities in his ministry of justice and life for all, and did so nonviolently.⁸⁵ Additionally, other such as Terrell refuse to jettison the theory as a whole, although she rejects the violence that she understands as part of the theory, because it has served to give radical hope to people including the slaves with the promise that good will defeat evil. So long as there is any popular perception of Jesus modeling for humanity the triumph of “us” who are all good against “them” who are all bad, humanity continues to run the risk of simplistic dualistic thinking and approaches to conflict that polarize and justify the uncritical and often unacknowledged use of violent and destructive force by those who elect to designate them/ourselves as all good, unaffected by systemic prejudice that affects all except them/us. While relationships are nurtured within the same “team,” those on the other side are demonized which places them at greater risk for acts of violence.

Concluding Remarks

[58] Institutionalized cultural phenomena that hold transcendent meaning for followers or participants carry significant power of influence over the shaping of values and dreams, and vice versa, in that culture. Hockey, Canada’s national winter sport, can be an intensely spiritual experience for many participants and fans, and Christianity remains the

institutionalized religion most followed by Canadians. This essay explores the normativity of violence in these spiritual cultural phenomena through the consideration of historical atonement theories and professional Canadian hockey. Several relevant types and consequences of this violence and their attendant moral meanings have been analyzed.

[59] Violence evokes strong reaction particularly when it is associated with a religion or a way of being spiritual or religious—particularly when this religion or way is “mine.” The strong cultural association of violence with moral harm makes it tempting to deny or rationalize this violence. While the moral meaning of much of this violence is ambiguous, some is more easily identified as harmful (for example, sexual abuse) or beneficial (for example, Jesus’ violence of confronting and disrupting the powers of the status quo, or the violence of pushing one’s body to the max—while not incurring injury beyond satisfying muscle soreness and tiredness—in a hard played hockey game). However, if this latter violence is not recognized as violence, it becomes far more difficult to allow ourselves to be confronted by the possibility of moral ambiguity in other violence. This essay is only the beginning of a much needed discourse regarding violence in both sport, as a spiritual way, and religion.

Notes

¹ Special thanks to Ryan McNally for translating the abstract and for excellent research assistance.

2. For a similar and more detailed argument, see Joseph L. Price, “An American Apotheosis: Sports as Popular Religion” in Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (California: the Regents of the University of California, 2000), 204-5.

3. Lawrence Scanlan, *Grace Under Fire* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2002), 254.

4. Scanlan, 254. A further testimony to the widespread attraction of hockey was evidenced by the viewership of men's Olympic hockey: "An estimated eleven million Canadians—a CBC-TV record—watched the gold medal game in hockey at Salt Lake City in February 2002."(7)

5 Robert J. Higgs and Michael C. Braswell, *An Unholy Alliance—The Sacred and Modern Sports* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2004); and Joan M. Chandler, "Sport is Not a Religion," in Shirl J. Hoffman (ed.), *Sport and Religion* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1992), 55-62.

6 Tracy J. Trothen, "Hockey: A Divine Sport?—Canada's National Sport in Relation to Embodiment, Community, and Hope," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 35 (2006): 291-305.

7 Others including Michael Novak argue that male aggression is "natural" and that sport provides a much needed outlet for necessary violence. Further, the violence involved in this "natural religion," Novak argues, is no worse than the violence in religion and, therefore, the argument that sports such as hockey cannot function as a popular religion because they are violent, is untenable. (Michael Novak, "The Joy of Sports," in Charles S. Prebish, ed. *Religion and Sport—The Meeting of Sacred and Profane* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993], 151-172.)

⁸ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross—Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 43.

⁹ 2001 Canadian Census data.

¹⁰ John Sanders, ed. *Atonement and Violence—A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xii.

¹¹ For example, see J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). Boersma points out that Walter Wink makes a similar and at least as unconvincing an argument (Boersma, 46).

¹² For example, see Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*.

¹³ Christopher Deacy, "A Time to Kill? Theological Perspectives on Violence and Film" in Christopher Deacy and Gaye Williams Ortiz, *Theology and Film—Challenging The Sacred/Secular Divide* (Massachusetts/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell, 2008), 138.

¹⁴ See, for example, Joanne Carlson and Carol R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse—A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989); and Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right—Rethinking What it Means to be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 167-178.

¹⁵ These theologians include J. Denny Weaver (from the Anabaptist tradition and committed to nonviolence), and Rita Nakashima Brock and other feminist theologians who are concerned regarding the exacerbating effect of many violent theologies on abuse.

¹⁶ For example, see Carlson Brown, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Weaver.

¹⁷ Arguably much hockey played by some other countries, notable Scandinavian countries, is not violent to the same degree as is professional Canadian hockey.

¹⁸ Peter Schiechen identifies and examines ten atonement theories in his recent book *Saving Power—Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁹ Boersma, 201.

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- ²⁰ Beverley W. Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." in *Making Connections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).
- ²¹ See, for example, JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998, 105); Sanders, ed., xiii; Boersma, 187-193.
- ²² Darby Kathleen Ray reframes the use of deception as a resourceful approach to resist forces of evil in *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998).
- ²³ For further explanation see Aulén, 18-22; and Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail—Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 112.
- ²⁴ Terrell, 105.
- ²⁵ For example, see Terrell, 105; and Robert K. Johnston, "The Passion as Dynamic Icon: A Theological Reflection," 55-70, in S. Brent Plate, ed. *Mel Gibson's Film and its Critics—Re-Viewing the Passion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 62.
- ²⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 184. This was also one of Aulén's main critiques of Anselm's theory, and one of his main arguments in favour of the Christus Victor theory.
- ²⁷ Thomas Williams, "Sin, grace, and redemption" in *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard* eds. Jeffrey E. Brower and Kevin Guilfooy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 264.
- ²⁸ Brower and Guilfooy, 266.
- ²⁹ Johnston in Plate, ed, 64.
- ³⁰ Williams, 276.
- ³¹ Migliore, 184.
- ³² Williams, 275.
- ³³ For example, see Sanders, xiv.
- ³⁴ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor—An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (New York: MacMillan, 1931).
- ³⁵ Aulén, 21-22.
- ³⁶ John Dominic Crossan, "Hymn to a Savage God," in Kathleen E. Corley and Robert L. Webb, eds. *Jesus and Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ* (New York: Continuum, 2004, pp. 8-27), 25.
- ³⁷ Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 8.
- ³⁸ Brown and Bohn, 7-11.
- ³⁹ Terrell, 96.
- ⁴⁰ Weaver, 202.
- ⁴¹ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 22.
- ⁴² Weaver, in Sanders, 9.
- ⁴³ Weaver, in Sanders, 12, 21 and 25.
- ⁴⁴ Terrell, 122 and 142.
- ⁴⁵ Terrell, 142.
- ⁴⁶ John Dominic Crossan, 25.
- ⁴⁷ Scanlan, 23.
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⁴⁸ Steven J. Overman, *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997), 348. Of course, as discussed earlier in this essay, theories of the atonement have also changed according to historical context; in Reformation times there emerged a greater emphasis on human sin, contributing to the emergence of the penal substitutionary variation of the satisfaction theory.

⁴⁹ For example, see Overman: “The Victorian Age gave birth to another phenomenon which dramatically altered the nature of sport and recreation: the fruition of the spirit of capitalism. Sport has more and more to do with making money. ... The money changers have entered the temple of sport”(350).

⁵⁰ Dorothee Soelle, *To Work and to Love—A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁵¹ Michael Novak, “The Joy of Sports” in Charles S. Prebish, ed., *Religion and Sport—The Meeting of Sacred and Profane* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 163, 165. Novak approaches play as a good that allows us to experience our humanity and freedom. He contrasts play with work and constructs play as “reality. Work is diversion and escape.” Of course, the more popular notion is to construct play as “diversion and escape”; Novak turns that argument upside down and claims that we are able to be most fully human when we play not when we work since work has become performance oriented and productivity based. Accordingly, he proposes that sport, as organised play, has become more similar to work than play. While there is truth in these claims, it is not helpful to elevate play as this merely reinforces the dominant dualistic paradigm. Similarly but more to the point, Tom Sinclair-Faulkner laments the erosion of “the formerly clear line [in Canadian society] differentiating work from play. ... Work is increasingly dissociated from its product; play is increasingly organized and disciplined” (Tom Sinclair-Faulkner, “A Puckish Reflection on Religion in Canada,” in Peter Slater, ed., *Religion and Culture in Canada/Religion et Culture au Canada* [Ottawa: Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses/Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1977, 384-401], 400). Also, Robert J. Higgs declares that “There is no doubt that play is closer to the idea of the holy than is sports competition” (Robert J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium—Sports and Religion in America* [Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 1995], 96).

⁵² Dietmar Meith, “The Ethics of Sport,” Gregory Baum and John Coleman, eds., *Sport* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 85.

⁵³ M. Ann Hall, *The Girl and the Game—A History of Women’s Sport in Canada* (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd. Hall, 2002), 197.

⁵⁴ Eleanor J. Stebner and Tracy J. Trothen, “A Diamond is Forever? Women, Baseball, and a Pitch for a Radically Inclusive Community,” in Christopher H. Evans and William R. Herzog II, eds., *The Faith of Fifty Million—Baseball, Religion, and American Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 169-176.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Terrell.

⁵⁶ Hall, 199, quoting Toby Miller, *Sportsex* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 113.

⁵⁷ For an excellent in-depth exploration of this topic see Michael F. Collins with Tess Kay, *Sport and Social Exclusion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). Several authors offer evidence that even widely accepted claims that women are simply not as

able athletically, for physiological and biological reasons, are unfounded. See Stebner and Trothen, 177-78; Ellis Cashmore, Professor of Culture, Media and Sport, provides an enlightening analysis of the official records of male and female marathon runners concluding that if conditions had been equal, historically, for both sexes, best running times would likely be very similar today. As it is, the gap is closing (*Making Sense of Sports* [3rd edn; London and New York: Routledge, 2000], 173-75).

⁵⁸ An in-depth analysis of this topic is beyond the scope of this essay but depictions of the crucified Jesus do suggest some similarities to the daily violence against women as sexual objects. See, for example, Doris Dyke, *Crucified Woman* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991).

⁵⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Christology: Can a Male Savior Save Women?", *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 116-138.

⁶⁰ There are many theologians who argue this well. For example, see Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), and Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What it Means to be Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Novak, for example, claims that to "have a religion, you need to have heroic forms to try to live up to" (162).

⁶² Yet, the heroic figures in pro hockey do not necessarily exemplify virtues that are consistent with inclusion, justice, or mutuality. For example, although Don Cherry clearly supports children and youth of all abilities, he also models a certain machismo that oscillates between supporting female hockey players and objectifying women and advocating fair play and prizing violence. In other words, achieving stardom as a player, coach, or colour commentator does not ensure any particular set of other virtues or values (Laura Robinson, *Crossing the Line—Violence and Sexual Assault in Canada's National Sport* [Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1998], 215).

⁶³ Lelwica, Michelle M., "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite", Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 180-200.

⁶⁴ Tracy Trothen, "Redefining Human, Redefining Sport: The Imago Dei and Genetic Modification Technologies", John White, ed., *Beyond Folk Theology: Systematic Reflections on Evangelicals and Sport* (New York: Edwin Mellen, in press).

⁶⁵ See for example, Rita Nakashima Brock.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics" in Lois K. Daly, ed., *Feminist Theological Ethics—A Reader* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 146-159. Weaver's Narrative Christus Victor proposal also is congruent with this argument.

⁶⁷ See Boersma.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Rita Nakashima Brock.

⁶⁹ Scanlan, 289.

⁷⁰ Scanlan, 239.

⁷¹ Scanlan, 205.

⁷² Adding to the problem is the ruling of the Canadian Hockey Association that checking is allowed for atom level boys—11 years and younger.

⁷³ Scanlan, 282.

⁷⁴ The principle of double effect allows that so long as the intent is other than causing harm (for example, clearing the puck out of one's end and playing the game well), then unintended bad consequences may be an acceptable, although clearly undesirable, part of the game. However, the principle of double effect has its limitations as several ethicists have posited. Lisa Cahill, for example, makes this point asking "is it so easy to distinguish and separate an outcome that is intended from one that is merely 'foreseen' and 'tolerated'?" (Cahill, *Theological Bioethics—Participation, Justice, and Change* [Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2005], 113).

⁷⁵ Daphne Hampson argues this position in *After Christianity* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996).

⁷⁶ Similar to the ethical justification of double effect used, probably at an implicit level, to justify some very dangerous body contact in hockey, the question needs to be asked: would it have been more salvific for Jesus, with the help of his followers, to have made a greater attempt to avoid the foreseen violence of crucifixion? Or, did the violence of the cross help to foster a dangerous memory that can lead people to denounce violence? Undoubtedly the former places an undue responsibility of the one who was victimized instead of locating that responsibility on those who participated.

⁷⁷ Laura Robinson, 217. (Referring to Sandra Kirby, Lorraine Greaves, and Olena Hankivsky, *The Dome of Silence—Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport* [Halifax: Fernwood Pb. Ltd., 2000]).

⁷⁸ Kirby et al., 11.

⁷⁹ Perhaps it is here that a reclaiming of a Christian theology that clearly shows Jesus as vulnerable to suffering *and clearly not willing his suffering* could model resistance to this morally unacceptable violence.

⁸⁰ As Bruce Kidd wrote, "Other peoples have played stickball games on ice, but the modern variant is our very own, codified in the commercial cities of central Canada and elaborated and loved on rinks and riverbeds across the land. Although today it's mostly played on machine-made ice in heated arenas, it evokes the settlers' triumph over the harsh, northern climate" (Sport, 69). Canadian feminist theologian Ellen Leonard expands on the theological significance of survival as a Canadian theme in "Experience as a Source for Theology: A Canadian and Feminist Perspective," *Studies in Religion* 19 (1990), 143-62).

⁸¹ Scanlan, 34.

⁸² Sinclair-Faulkner, 400.

⁸³ Also see Tara Magdolinski and Timothy J.L. Chandler, *With God on Their Side* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3-7.

⁸⁴ Heyward, 181. See also Tara Magdolinski and Chandler for an application of this theology to sports and international competition.

⁸⁵ See Weaver.