

# CWR*m*agazine

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



## TWO ARRIVALS: DALLAS & JERUSALEM

GREG ALBRECHT



# TWO ARRIVALS: DALLAS & JERUSALEM

## GREG ALBRECHT

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated as he rode in a motorcade through downtown Dallas, Texas. JFK was preparing for the next presidential election, for his second term, in the fall of 1964. In his presidential visit to Texas, JFK stopped in San Antonio, Houston, and finally, Fort Worth-Dallas.

After being greeted by the crowd at Love Field, in Dallas, President and Mrs. Kennedy walked to a waiting Lincoln limousine. The plastic bubble on top had been removed, making the limousine open, easier for the President to see the crowds and be seen by them. They were joined in the Lincoln by Texas Governor John Connelly and his wife—Vice President Lyndon Johnson and his wife, native Texans, occupied another car in the motorcade.

The procession left the airport and started on a ten-mile route through downtown Dallas on the way to the Trade Mart, where the

President was scheduled to speak at a luncheon. He never arrived.



*In a similar and yet not so similar scene many years before Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of praise—a triumphal entry on Palm Sunday as it has come to be called.*

*Jesus was a compassionate prophet and teacher. He gave new life, encouragement and justice—he was the champion of the poor, the oppressed and the sick and diseased. They loved Jesus. They saw and felt his love. They hoped he would overthrow the occupation armies of Rome and free them from all its tyranny, from their humiliation and poverty.*

*It seemed like this triumphal entry would lead to great things. The crowds did not realize that the triumphal entry was overshadowed by the cross, the instrument of torture and death.*



The crowds cheering President Kennedy and his entourage didn't realize it, but the President of the United States, elected in a democratic presidential election, seemingly welcomed by a festive crowd in Dallas, was about to be shot and killed.

This young President was seen as an advocate for the poor and oppressed, who challenged Americans to ask not what their country could do for them but what they could do for their country.

Everything looked fine on that beautiful day in November as the President's motorcade turned toward the book depository in which assassin Lee Harvey Oswald waited in a pre-meditated fatal ambush. Dallas was alive with excitement as the motorcade turned toward that infamous book depository, as a rifle slipped out of a window, and soon Lee Harvey Oswald had President John F. Kennedy in his sights.



*Jerusalem was alive with excitement when Jesus came into town. He wasn't necessarily the center of attention—it was Passover time and people from far and wide crowded the city. Jesus rode a donkey, not a luxurious Lincoln convertible, and he had no Secret Service protecting him. The crowds welcomed him, hoping he could be their champion. They wanted a winner, not a loser, which in a few days is exactly what Jesus turned out to be, in their eyes. In a few days, many who had enthusiastically welcomed Jesus realized he was not the champion they wanted, and they encouraged Pilate to "crucify him."*

*The crowds wanted physical deliverance, rescue and salvation. They wanted a powerful leader who would vanquish their oppressors. But Jesus was the Lamb of God coming to Jerusalem to do, once and for all, what no human or*

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*no religion or no government could ever do. Reconcile, forgive and give eternal life.*

*In his first few days of that week, in what many now call Passion Week, Jesus was outraged by the oppression and injustice, the rank materialism and greed that had overtaken faith, and his actions and teachings, in turn, outraged the religious authorities and pushed them to the brink.*

*During his last few days on earth in Jerusalem, Jesus boldly told the people that religious legalism, under any name, regardless of its constituent parts, was bondage. He compared the religious oppression of his day to being hypocritical, putting on a good show, like shining the outside of a coffee cup, only to leave the inside uncleansed.*

*The religious leaders realized Jesus had to be stopped, and they conspired with the Roman military leaders to arrest Jesus and charge him unjustly. Judas, the treasurer, with his belt stuffed with silver coins as his payment for betrayal, identified Jesus as the one the religious authorities wanted to have killed.*

*They mocked Jesus. They humiliated him. They tortured him. They made him carry the very instrument of his death to the place where they would drive spikes through his body and impale him on his cross. It was a prolonged, violent outpouring of rage on the part of humans—those who were present and those who were not—toward God, who is love.*



JFK's head jerked back as Lee Harvey Oswald's aim

found its mark. He slumped toward his wife Jackie, bleeding on her pink suit. The Lincoln sped away to Parkland Memorial Hospital, but little could be done—the President was pronounced dead only some 30 minutes after he was shot.

The search for answers continues to this day. Conspiracy theories abound, and those who support a particular hypothesis usually choose one that implicates adversaries they despise. Seldom does anyone support a theory that places blame on someone they cannot detest and loathe. Those of us who were alive then remember exactly where we were when we first heard of JFK being shot in Dallas.



*Of course, none of us are old enough to remember the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem. It was so long ago it is relatively easy to avoid and sidestep any personal culpability for the gruesome circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus and the hate that motivated his torture and execution.*

The old gospel song "Were You There" (1899) dares to ask each one of us, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?... Where you there when they nailed him to the cross?... Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?"

**Were YOU there when they crucified our Lord?**



Those of us who are old enough to remember television coverage and still photos published in



magazines of the riderless horse drawing the coffin of JFK, the world leaders attending, and the heartrending photo of three-year-old JFK Jr. (“John-John”) saluting his father’s coffin.

Any similarities between Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and JFK’s visit to Dallas end with their burial and what happened next.

Jesus’ body was also taken to his burial in a tomb, but without the pageantry, acclaim and worldwide media focus accorded JFK.

You can visit the John F. Kennedy Eternal Flame at his gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. His grave reminds us, as all graves do, of our own mortality. We’re reminded that death has the last word. JFK’s grave reminds us that graves are occupied—filled with the dead bones of those who once lived.

The burial of Jesus was not the end of his story—his tomb is empty.

He entered Jerusalem giving himself over, in self-sacrifice, to receive the hatred of humanity. Irony of all ironies, he is and was Creator of all who hate, reject and crucify him. He willingly accepted hatred and absorbed it so that he might love all of us, the whole world, and in so doing, forgive all of us.

Jesus delivered us all from death—on his Cross, he gave us forgiveness and gave us the hope of our own resurrection, which will happen because our risen Lord lives! ☐

*Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries.*

# THE LAST SCAPEGOAT

BRAD JERSAK



**Definition:** “*Scapegoat*” (noun): *a person blamed for something bad that someone else has done or for some failure that occurs.*

## THE DAY OF ATONEMENT & THE SCAPEGOAT RITUAL

The *Day of Atonement* (Yom Kippur), described in Leviticus, is considered the holiest day of the year for the Jewish faith.

Today, post-temple Jews (with no temple, priest, or sacrifices) observe the day as the culmination of a ten-day period of fasting and repentance (which begins on Rosh Hashanah). Jewish tradition says on that day each year, God opens the Book of Life to examine the words, actions, and thoughts of those whose names are written there. If the good deeds outweigh their sins, their name remains in the divine ledger for another year. A unique element of *Yom Kippur* today is that the book of Jonah is always read in remembrance of God’s forgiveness and mercy.

In ancient Israel, the Day of Atonement was much different. It focused on the High Priest’s annual entry into the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifices for the sins of the nation. It featured offerings of a bull and a ram, followed by an intriguing ritual involving kid goats, one of which our English translations call “*the scapegoat*.”

*Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the*



## SCAPEGOATING TODAY

Fast-forward to the present, when ‘scapegoating,’ used as a verb, became common for blaming a third party (an individual or a group) for some person’s own faults or some group’s errors and their consequences. For example, when *Hurricane Katrina* hit New Orleans, the levy broke, and the flood waters destroyed property and people, there was a rush to lay the blame on someone. Some of the wackier religious voices were quick to *scapegoat* the gay people in New Orleans—as if *Katrina* were God’s destroying angel, punishing a whole city because of a small sliver of the population—which the delusional preachers compared to the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.

While I still hear the term used in some circles, a popular expression has overtaken it for now: “*throwing someone under the bus.*” One dictionary explains, “To *throw someone under the bus* is to criticize, blame, or punish them, especially in order to avoid blame or gain an advantage. People so thrown are typically in a vulnerable position.” That’s an excellent way to describe *scapegoating*.

## GIRARD’S ‘MIMETIC THEORY’

It was my great privilege to have a brief but rich acquaintance with the great French literary critic and social scientist René Girard. He became famous for a breakthrough he called “*mimetic theory*” (“we mimic each other’s desires”) and the “*scapegoating mechanism.*” It’s complex, but here is my elevator pitch:

Girard first noticed how often in literature (especially in Shakespeare) close friends or siblings become rivals who

compete for the same property or duel for the same lover. They want what the other wants simply because the other wants it. That is, their desires came, not from within, but from each other.

This is why famous, beautiful people model items in advertisements. I didn’t even know I desired a particular brand until I saw that Brad Pitt was wearing it. *He must want it, so now I need it!*

This is why two toddlers in a room full of 50 toys begin to fixate on and even fight over a single toy. I didn’t know I wanted the red ball until little Sarah wanted it. *She wants it, so now I need it!*

This is why roommates in college end up fighting for the very same girl or guy, even though there are 1000s of potential mates on campus. *He has the hots for her; somehow now I do too!* Our desires mimic those of others—hence, *mimetic desire*.

Now, we can already see how *mimetic desire* grows into *mimetic rivalry*, which then grows into ‘mimetic violence.’ And mimetic violence has a way of escalating between brothers to families to tribes, to nations until they reach a state of mutually assured destruction (as in the cold war).

Girard realized that if his mimetic theory were correct, it would only appear in literature because it’s already a human phenomenon. He began to study how mimetic rivalry and mimetic violence are portrayed in the mythologies and holy books across cultures and religions. And sure enough... all the way back to Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Saul and David,... it was everywhere! He could see how

*scapegoat.* Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the *scapegoat* shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a *scapegoat* (Leviticus 16:6-10).

When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the *live goat*. He is to lay both hands on the head of the *live goat* and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. **The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness** (Leviticus 16:20-22).

these brothers became clans and tribes that became warring nations (Judea and Israel, the Jews and the Edomites, and so on).

## THE 'SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM'

But something else happened—so random that it almost seemed like a miracle. As mimetic violence rose to a fevered pitch and all-out violence, sometimes the mimetic rivals would stumble upon a third party—whether an individual or a group—that they

Girard believed that eventually, many communities chose to veer away from randomly lynching oddballs and developed a regular ritual that replaced the human *scapegoat* with a representative animal. And behold, the sacrificial system was born! A way to diffuse the sin of mimetic violence every year by laying the sins of the community on an animal that could be slaughtered, burned, or exiled... and hopefully peace would return for a season.

became *the last scapegoat* and exposed the *scapegoating mechanism* as a fraud! How so? First, note that bitter rivals, Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate, conspired to *scapegoat* and crucify Jesus to temporarily diffuse a potentially violent situation (peace for decades... then utter destruction). Second, note that the *scapegoat mechanism* only works if the *scapegoat* stays dead! But in light of the resurrection, the whole process is exposed as evil. From that point on, the jig is up—*scapegoating* is universally recognized as a lie and a crime against humanity (even as we continue). And third, without the *scapegoating mechanism*, we don't have a magical path to pseudo-peace. The only way to avert mutually assured destruction is to follow Jesus' Way of peace.

Through Girard's epic discovery, we might now see how and why Jesus is *the last scapegoat*. ***Jesus' sacrificial death is not an appeasement offering to an angry god or demon, but an act of the one who, by love, takes away the sins of the world and saves us from sacrifice. Once and for all.***

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ... But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10:1,12-14). □*

Brad Jersak serves as the pastoral scholar for Plain Truth Ministries.

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CAUSE OF THE  
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—RENEÉ GIRARD



could mutually agree was the 'real problem.' They were frequently different and vulnerable in some way—perhaps they had albino skin or had Down's Syndrome or were unusual in their appearance or behavior.

When the mimetic rivals got rid of that person—perhaps they exiled them or threw them off a cliff—it was as if the *scapegoat* removed the sins from the camp and now everyone could be at peace. Granted, it was a pseudo-peace, a wicked fraud... but because the *scapegoating mechanism* diffused the violence and the *scapegoat's* sacrifice brought reconciliation, ironically, the *scapegoat* (now dead) seemed sacred and somewhat godlike.

## CHRIST: THE LAST SCAPEGOAT

Are you ready for a plot twist? Although Girard recognized this pattern across the literature, the mythology, and the religious texts of the world, he was in for a shock when he read the story of Jesus. So surprised that he became a life-long follower of Jesus!

As he read the Gospels, he saw how the Cross exposed the injustice of *scapegoating* and the failure of every sacrificial system to bring true peace. He saw Jesus challenging the rivalries between Jewish sects, their enemies, and their oppressors. He preached a gospel of mercy, of forgiveness, of the end of sacrifice.

And then he did something that changed everything: he

# PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

RICHARD ROHR

*Richard Rohr names how fear diminishes our ability to love and forgive:*

Jesus came to resolve the central and essential problem of hate. We've produced so much utopian talk about Jesus and love, we've forgotten Jesus had a very hard time getting to the issue of love. First, he had to expose and destroy the phenomenon of hatred. Once he exposed the lie and illusion of hate, love could show itself clearly—and it did.

The pattern, unfortunately, remains the same. Hate, it seems, is the ordinary, daily agenda. Love is the way out of this ordinary programming. The Gospels present the dilemma in a personal narrative that grounds the whole issue in history and in one man's enlightened response to the human situation. Jesus accepts the religious and social judgment of hate and publicly bears the consequences, but in an utterly new and transforming way that reveals new patterns and possibilities. For two thousand years, he has remained the most striking icon of a possible new agenda. His death exposed the lie and the problem. His risen life tells people their lives could have a different story line. He didn't just give us textbook answers from a distance; he personally walked through the process and said, "Follow me."

I believe fear is almost always behind hate. Sometimes it looks like control, but even then, people are usually just afraid of losing something they think they have. It is almost always unrecognized or unaddressed fear that justifies hatred. The best and most convincing disguise for fear is seeming virtue, or godliness. Then it never looks like fear. It looks like reason, prudence, common sense, intelligence, the need for social order, morality, religion, obedience, justice, or even spirituality. It always works. *"Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14, NRSV). What better way to veil vengeance than to call it justice?

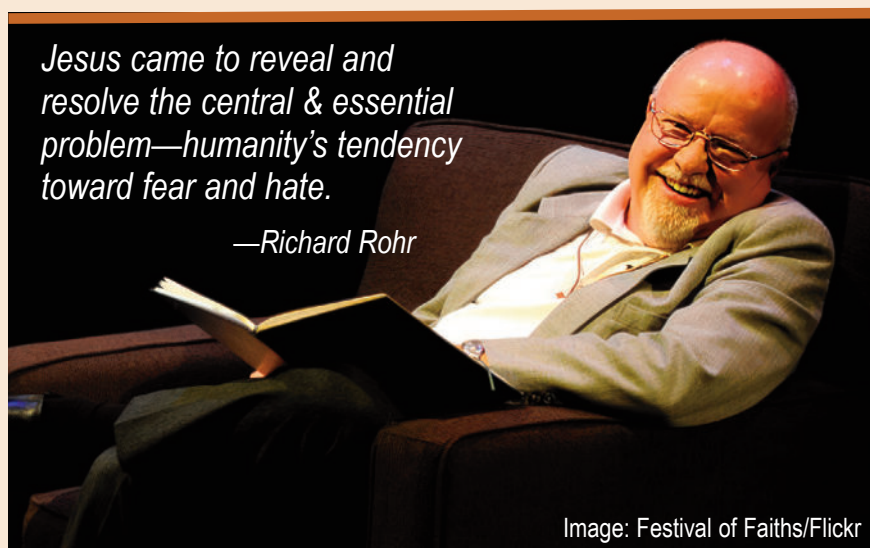
Only people who have moved beyond their wounded ego and the need to control all outcomes, only those practiced at letting go, can see fear for the impostor that it is. To be trapped inside of our small ego is always to be afraid. Great religion tries its best to free individuals from the tyranny of their small and fragile selves. It always points toward a larger identity that we call the Godself, the True Self, the self "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3), the trustworthy Lover. Healthy and true religion, like Jesus himself modeled, tells us there is Someone we can trust.

Jesus came to reveal and resolve the central and essential problem—humanity's tendency toward fear and hate.

Love is the totally enlightened, entirely nonsensical way out of this pattern. Love has to be worked toward, received, and enjoyed; the first move is to recognize our deep capacity for fear and hate. But remember, we gather around the negative space quickly, while we "fall into" love rather slowly, and only with lots of practice at falling.

□

*Adapted from Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations. ©Center for Action and Contemplation. UBP.*



*Jesus came to reveal and resolve the central & essential problem—humanity's tendency toward fear and hate.*

*—Richard Rohr*

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**Ruth A. Tucker**

Foreword by Greg Albrecht

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from the mud without  
blemish, is a universal  
symbol of rebirth.  
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transcends religions to  
proclaim the tender mercies  
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