

Identification and Division: Pushing Back Against Scapegoating

(Slides)

Three Principles from GoM

- An original state of merger, in that the iniquities are shared by both the iniquitous and their chosen vessel
- A principle of division, in that the elements shared in common are being ritualistically alienated
- A new principle of merger, this time in the unification of those whose purified identity is defined in dialectical opposition to the sacrificial offering (GoM, 406).

My Take

1. Construct an ideal "We" (in our case, Americans)
2. Identify problems that keep the "We" from being ideal
3. Identify a group of members who can be blamed for those problems (a scapegoat)
4. Divide the "We" into "Us" and "Them" by loudly and vociferously identifying those problems with that group (though in fact the problems may originate within the vocal group making the accusations.)
5. Purify the "We" by expunging the scapegoated group
6. Repeat the process with another group because the problems don't go away.

Examples from Frazer

In one part of New Zealand an expiation for sin was felt to be necessary; a service was performed over an individual, by which all the sins of the tribe were supposed to be transferred to him, a fern stalk was previously tied to his person, with which he jumped into the river, and there unbinding, allowed it to float away to the sea, bearing their sins with it (563).

More from Frazer

In great emergencies the sins of the Rajah of Manipur used to be transferred to somebody else, usually to a criminal, who earned his pardon by his vicarious sufferings. To effect the transference the Rajah and his wife, clad in fine robes, bathed on a scaffold erected in the bazaar, while the criminal crouched beneath it. With the water which dripped from them on him their sins also were washed away and fell on the human scapegoat. To complete the transference the Rajah and his wife made over their fine robes to their substitute, while they themselves, clad in new raiment, mixed with the people till evening. (563)

Quote from Burke

Projection device. The "curative" process that comes with the ability to hand over one's ills to a scapegoat, thereby getting purification by dissociation. This was especially medicinal, since the sense of frustration leads to a self-questioning. Hence if one can hand over his infirmities to a vessel, or "cause," outside the self, one can battle an external enemy instead of battling an enemy within. And the

greater one's internal inadequacies, the greater the amount of evils one can load upon the back of "the enemy." This device is furthermore given a semblance of reason because the individual properly realizes that he is not alone responsible for his condition. There are inimical factors in the scene itself. And he wants to have them "placed," preferably in a way that would require a minimum change in the ways of thinking to which he had been accustomed. (173-74)

Conclusions

Scapegoating does not solve actual problems. It is a process used by powerful people to redirect blame for problems onto an individual or unfortunate other group. It singles out a particular individual or group to take the blame for problems shared by the whole. It operates rhetorically and ritualistically and is essentially a kind of magical thinking.