



2001 MEETING – UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

The mimetic theory and the history of philosophy May 31 – June 2, 2001

Each day's program will have keynote presentations in the morning, followed by breakout sessions in the afternoon.

Thursday MAY 31

THEME : RENÉ GIRARD AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

- Status Questionis: *Guido Vanheeswijck, University of Antwerp*
- Keynotes: *Charles Taylor, McGill University, Montreal (tentative), and Wolfgang Palaver, University of Innsbruck*

Friday JUNE 1

THEME : MIMETIC THEORY AND ECONOMICS

- Status Questionis: *Toon Van de Velde, University of Antwerp*
- Indifference and Envy: Girard and the anthropological analysis of modern economy. *Paul Dumouchel, University of Quebec, Montreal*

Saturday JUNE 2

THEME : RENÉ GIRARD AND THE RETURN OF RELIGION

- Keynote: *Gianni Vattimo, University of Torino*
- Discussion: *René Girard, Charles Taylor, and Gianni Vattimo*

This is a preliminary listing and scheduling of participants and events. Details may change substantially before the meeting. Please consult our website for more current information, <http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/cov&r.html>.

Additional conference activities are described on page 2, and registration information is on page 18-19 of this newsletter. *Please note: March 1 registration deadline.*

COV&R Object: "To explore, criticize, and develop the mimetic model of the relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture. The Colloquium will be concerned with questions of both research and application. Scholars from various fields and diverse theoretical orientations will be encouraged to participate both in the conferences and the publications sponsored by the Colloquium, but the focus of activity will be the relevance of the mimetic model for the study of religion."

The *Bulletin* is also available online at <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/x1.html>.

CONTENTS

2001 Antwerp meeting	1
COV&R Video History project	2
COV&R News	3
Report from Boston meeting	4
Samplings	
Marr: Girard & Benedictine Tradition	6
Girard: I Saw Satan Falling...	8
Lettini: Atonement & Victimization	9
Minutes of COV&R meetings	10
Redekop: Review of <i>Violence Renounced</i>	13
Goodhart: Response to René Girard	14
Antwerp registration information	18
Membership form	20

Antwerp – additional activities

Wednesday MAY 30

- 9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. Pre-Conference COV&R Advisory Board Meeting

Thursday MAY 31 – afternoon

RENÉ GIRARD AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

- Mimetic Anthropology and Political Theology: Reflection on the form of power in Carl Schmitt (session in French: Anthropologie mimétique et théologie politique: réflexions sur la forme du pouvoir dans la pensée de Carl Schmitt), *Maria Stella Barberi, Messina, Italy*
- Richard Rorty and René Girard: Pragmatism and/or Religion, *Andrew McKenna, Loyola University Chicago*
- Beauty by Any Other Name: Girard and the History of Aesthetics, *Tobin Siebers, University of Michigan*
- Comparing Girardian Mimesis with Platonic Mimesis, *Per Bjørnar Grande, University of Bergen, Norway*
- J.M. Synge's Playboy of the Western World and A Mimetic Hypothesis for Modern Comedy, *William A. Johnsen, Michigan State University*
- Patočka, Girard, and the Philosophy of History, *James Krapfl, City University, Trenín, Slovakia*

Friday JUNE 1

MIMETIC THEORY AND ECONOMICS

- Economics and the Mimetic Theory, *Britton W. Johnston, Santa Fe, New Mexico*
- The Swerve of Desire: Epicurus, Economics and Violence, *Anthony Bartlett, University of Syracuse*

MIMETIC THEORY AND LITERATURE

- Mimetic Rivalry in Laura Restrepo's work, *Sonja Bardelang, Offenbach am Main*
- Schiller's Johanna: Civilization, Art, and the Scapegoat, *Ann Astell, Purdue University*
- Lire Barbey d'Aureville à la lumière de la théorie de la victime émissaire, *Hélène Celdran*

Saturday JUNE 2

RENÉ GIRARD AND THE RETURN OF RELIGION

- Presentation by *Paul Pelckmans, University of Antwerp*
- New suggestions and developments in mimetic theory, *Giuseppe Fornari, Treviso, Italy*
- Girard in Latin America, *Michael Kirwan, SJ, Heythrop College, University of London*
- Presentation by *Stijn Latré, University of Antwerp*

- A Non-Political Coup: An Unusual Strategy, *Thomas A. Michael, PhD, The Dialogue Center for Counseling and Consulting, Church on the Mall, Plymouth Meeting Mall, Pennsylvania*
- Presentation by *Fred Smith, Emory University Atlanta*

4.30 p.m. Annual COV&R Business meeting

ANNUAL MEETINGS

Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA.
June 5-8, 2002.

University of Innsbruck, Austria. June 2003.

COV&R News

Video History Project. Naturally, COV&R believes that mimetic theory is a significant contribution. If history bears out our optimism, it will be of some future interest to record the early history of mimetic scholarship. Duncan Ragsdale, who has videotaped a number of sessions at the last several meetings, is collecting an oral history of people's involvement with René Girard, the Colloquium, and mimetic theory. He is especially interested in recollections of those involved at an early date, and in hearing stories about how people came to regard mimetic theory as vital. Duncan has recorded a number of interviews already, and plans to be at the Nashville and Antwerp meetings. It may also be possible to arrange other times and places. Duncan can be reached at his law office, [1] 901-523-2927.



A letter from the editor

Johan Elsen has retired as editor of the Bulletin and is now concentrating on organizing the 2001 COV&R conference in Antwerp. This issue marks my first in the position, and hopefully marks a change in the Bulletin as well. As a carefree graduate student, I hope to be able to devote the time and effort needed to enable the Bulletin to become a bit livelier – a source not only of news about the Colloquium, but just as much a source of ongoing debate, dialogue, and interesting writing about mimetic theory.

The thing most necessary to achieve this goal is your participation. As you well know, anything worth reading requires quality content, and I encourage you to think about the Bulletin as a place to share your ideas and work, completed or in-progress. I'm especially interested in seeing replies to work published here (or elsewhere), and I encourage letters, rebuttals, critique, opinion, and commentary. Let's face it – a little friendly rivalry can fuel all kinds of interesting fires.

There are poles within the Colloquium oriented on the one side towards academic and theoretical work, and on the other side towards religious and social application. So too there is a *difference* between Europe and North America. I very much want to value and present work from each of these perspectives. I would also like to especially encourage the contributions of women working with mimetic theory, work which uses feminist/gender studies in dialogue with Girard/mimetic theory, and the contributions of those working outside North America and Western Europe.

This issue should provide a good starting example of what might fit into the Bulletin. I am also seeking:

- Photos of COV&R events
- Cartoons or other visual illustrations of mimetic processes and concepts
- Brief items from news and other media with mimetic resonances

More details can be found on the Bulletin's web page, <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/x1.html>. The next issue will be published in April 2001, with contributions due March 1. So let me know your interest, and we can talk about the details.

Paul Bellan-Boyer
PBellanboy@aol.com
53 Duncan Avenue #46
Jersey City, NJ 07304 USA
[1] 201-432-5304

Upcoming Events

Nashville, Tennessee, USA. Saturday, November 18, 2000, 9:00-11:30AM. In association with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, the Mennonite Scholars and Friends and the Colloquium on Violence and Religion will host Additional Meeting AM2, "Peace Theology: A Celebration of *Violence Renounced*."

Please join us for a discussion of the recent publication of *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Studies in Peace and Scripture, edited by Willard M. Swartley (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000). Speakers will include Ted Grimsrud (Eastern Mennonite University), Sandor Goodhart (Purdue University), Willard Swartley (Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary), Vern Redekop (The Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution), and Rebecca Adams (Messiah College).

A Letter from the Treasurer

Dear COV&R-North America Members:

Thank you for your responses to my request for address, email and FAX updates for the COV&R-NA membership list. I am also trying to include Areas of Interest for as many COV&R-NA members as wish to include this information, but so far quite a few have not responded. If you have contact changes or would like to include your Areas of Interest on the membership list (to be distributed to COV&R-NA membership), please send this information to me via email at my address on the membership form, below. Please feel free to use the interest categories listed on the membership form or to add other categories.

Thank you, Julie Shinnick, Treasurer, COV&R-NA

New French language website. Jean Paul Kornobis has created a new website, *Violence et Sacré: Site consacré à l'oeuvre de René Girard*, located at <http://home.nordnet.fr/~jpkornobis>. He invites the submission of French language texts and links concerning the various practical applications of mimetic theory, with a special interest in recent psychoanalytic research on desire.

Report from COV&R's Boston meeting

COV&R's annual conference took place at Boston College, May 31 – June 3. Breaking new ground for COV&R, the conference's main theme was *Violence and Institution in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*. Prior to this meeting, there has been relatively little application of Girard's ideas to religious studies outside the Judeo-Christian area. It was clear that the keynote sessions only began to open these doors, but to the obvious delight and interest of many participants.

The conference proceedings will be published in a special issue of *Contagion*, edited by Bob Daly, S.J., with the exact date yet to be announced. In addition to the "keynote" papers, Bob will attempt to include some of the spirited floor discussions. A number of papers from the breakout sessions will also be included in the next regular issue. Since so much of the conference material will be available in that manner, I will attempt to offer only brief subjective and highly selective impressions, and I trust the journal and your letters to help remedy my omissions.



Robert Daly, S.J., presides at COV&R's 2000 conference at Boston College. All photos in this issue of the Bulletin appear courtesy of Mike Hearington.

On the main topic, only Robert Daly's paper on *Violence and Institution in Christianity* represented the work of someone from within the world of mimetic theory. One of its major contributions is to distinguish between "normative" and "descriptive" use of terms. So while Daly sees normative Christianity – hearkening to

the norm and ideal of Christian living – as "essentially nonviolent," any description of actual Christian history must acknowledge what Christian institutions and people have actually done. Treating the religion normatively or descriptively can produce different answers to questions about Christianity's relation to violence, and attention to this distinction may be useful in looking at the relations between word and deed in other traditions.

It is not surprising, but from the amount of discussion in this and other presentations which focused on the degree to which victims are either unveiled or hidden, it seems that the audience at a COV&R conference has a strong desire to hear the descriptive side of tradition-criticism, to know where the bodies are buried.

Reuven Kimelman, in addressing the restriction of warfare within Jewish tradition, offered a paper whose main focus was to outline the normative Judaic principles regarding the conduct of war. His argument is that the dominant tendency is to broaden and slow the process of making the decision to engage in war, providing greater checks on "unnecessary wars and their attendant abuses of power."

Sandor Goodhart's creative and combative response provided an opportunity for praxis learning in mimetic theory. Beginning by accusing Kimelman of a host of evils, including the supremely violent act of delivering a paper to COV&R without either addressing Girard or mimetic theory, Goodhart created a point of apparent rivalry. The atmosphere in the room palpably changed. I could practically see the thought clouds rising in the air as people tensed and shifted in their seats. "What's the purpose of this attack? Who's going to be the final victim?"

This process, which Sandor went on to affirm was intended in good heart and in the long Jewish tradition of seeking God through spirited engagement, was notable precisely for the fieldwork in social dynamics. When it works well, when the participants are committed to seeking the divine rather than victory, it might be just an argument, not a rivalry.

Following upon this discussion, Qamar-ul Huda attempted a traditionally rooted re-reading and reimagining of Islamic teaching on violence. Noting that the ethics of violence had historically been connected to legalists and theologians who worked for the imperial state, Huda addressed whether the tradition provided resources for other concerns, and then presented a sketch of hermeneutics for an Islamic liberation theology. One of the major themes in his presentation of Islamic tradition is the personalization and spiritualization of violent textual impulses – one wages an "inner *jihād*" or struggle to conform oneself to God.

In his response, Robert Hamerton-Kelly was able to spark some fireworks in calling attention to a key divide between the papers addressing violence in the various religious institutions. He was happy to hear papers like Daly's and Christopher Ives', which were explicitly critical of the violent practices in the religious traditions they examined, but was much less enamored of papers which seemed to take a more apologetic course. I don't know if Robert has ever been accused of political correctness, but he did maintain an orthodox Girardian position by insisting that no victim go unnoticed.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J., presented on religious traditions within the broad stream known as Hindu. Even in older texts, sacrifice seems to be both necessary, but its importance is downplayed, and ritual language generally reinterprets and covers the killing. Hindu religious tradition generally is characterized substitutions – from widespread animal killing, to ritual killing, and then to the cessation of killing. As sacrificial ritual becomes predictable and safe, the religiously significant world is internalized – for example when the essence of sacrifice is redefined as renunciation.

In her response, Julie Shinnick raised questions about the degree to which language covers-up sacred violence. When a horse is killed, yet the ritual pretends otherwise, this seems to allow a straightforward application of Girard's ideas of myth. Clooney's paper and Shinnick's comments also began to focus thoughts on the developmental move away from living sacrifices, a process seen in Judaism, but with parallels to the interiorization presented by Huda regarding Islam. I might phrase the question, "is this the work of the gospel by another name?", and Prof. Clooney raised the interesting question as to whether or not the Western categories fit. Does Girard's victim-consciousness map into the Indian concept of *ahimsa* (not-harming)?

Hindu tradition, like other religions, has the sacrificial impulse and, by stages, becomes increasingly uncomfortable with it. But a pair of questions from Lisa Bellan-Boyer helped probe that point of discomfort. As Vedic tradition was limiting sacrifice, it also enjoined the practitioner from eating red garlic or onions, the thought being that to eat a root vegetable one must kill the whole plant. But for all the concern about red garlic, the animal is still killed. And as animal sacrifice waned, the practice of *suttee* continued, and was often idealized.

Christopher Ives' fine presentation *Dharma and Destruction: Buddhist Institutions and Violence* was well-received. Not only was it sufficiently self-critical of Buddhist institutional violence, Dr. Ives was able to successfully build upon earlier sessions, and departing from his paper to talk freely about a Buddhist-Girard dialogue.



Charlie McCarthy, Noopy Dykes, and René Girard during a break, outside Boston College's Devlin Hall.

The conference's subsidiary theme, *A René Girard – Bernard Lonergan Conversation*, was not as obviously successful as the interreligious conversations, but I found this to itself be a matter of interest.

Those familiar with the work of both Girard and Lonergan saw some obvious points of contact. As our invited Lonergan expert Charles Hefling puts it:

Both Girard and Lonergan are "philosophers of consciousness," and from a Lonerganian point of view Girard's work can be seen as exemplifying what is meant by "insight" – "grasping many things in a single view." The result is a hypothesis (which, for Lonerganians, is a good thing) about what in Lonerganian terms would be called an interpersonal "scheme of recurrence." In the area of Christian religious teaching, Girard and Lonergan are at one in regarding as a distortion and perversion the theory of Atonement for which the scapegoating of Jesus was pleasing to or demanded by God. Thus they agree as well on the importance of the Cross as, instead, a disclosure and unmasking of precisely the mechanism it exemplifies.

But there was an obvious difficulty in putting these connections to work – at the conference there was in evidence no critical mass of people conversant with both thinkers. The oeuvre of both Lonergan and Girard seem to have a certain gravitas and density and esoteric character, not yielding their rewards easily. The cognoscenti have found each of these thinkers to provoke "insight." Yet I am reminded of the saying about Semitic languages – each one is easy once you've

learned them all. I have had the same feeling when it comes to reading Girard. There is a steep learning curve, and it is difficult to work effectively with powerful and subtle thinking without deep, broad, and persistent engagement.

One thing which keeps coming up at COV&R meetings, and which I hear voiced as a concern both outside and inside the group is the cult of personality. To what extent is COV&R the René Girard Appreciation Society, and how much is it able to be an open and vital locus of critical scholarship? Perhaps another way to ask the question – can evangelists listen?

These thoughts are on my mind as I am preparing a lecture on Girard for a seminar on atonement. How to cover, in any brief period, enough mimetic theory to be useful to the task at hand, and even to excite a little mimetic interest, while being faithful to the theory's complexity?

One thing the conference brought home to me in a quite visceral way. I have been an eclectic amateur student of religion for some time now, and consider myself rather knowledgeable about my own and a number of other religious traditions. But the variety of starting points, and the amount of ground to cover! It is clear to me that this conference only set a few ragged furrows in a vast field. The process of true engagement between complex systems – Girard's thought and that of Lonergan – and between religious faiths – these conversations should take very little for granted. As such, our opening attempts at listening and speaking to one another are profoundly educative. And they will take time.

There is very much more this report could address, some fine responses and Girard's own address on Heidegger, not to mention the many interesting breakout presentations. But those will have to wait for the planned Contagion issue.

Any report on the conference, though, would be sadly lacking if it did not mention the extraordinary planning and hospitality provided by Boston College. Bob Daly and his school deserve congratulations for the tremendous job they did to ensure a successful event. Their support for the Colloquium's meeting allowed us to give full attention to our business, a rare privilege.

And the business of COV&R, it seems, is the study of mimetic processes. Not only in our scholarship, but in the practice of self-reflection as we see the theory at work in our own affairs. And so may we continue to be generous in our criticism.

Paul Bellan-Boyer is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and editor of the COV&R Bulletin.

Samplings

This section of the Bulletin features excerpts and other short pieces. Because these are extracted from larger works, these may not do full justice to the authors' style. But they are offered here "as is," intended to provide a taste of the variety of work taking place with mimetic theory, to provide news about who's working on what, and to spark dialogue.

Girard and the Benedictine Tradition

Andrew Marr is Abbot of St. Gregory's Abbey of Three Rivers, Michigan, a Benedictine abbey in the Episcopal Church. A number of his articles are available from his home page, <http://andrewmarr.homestead.com>. This is excerpted from "The Divine Office."

The Divine Office is hardly an escape from mimetic activity. Far from it. In performing the Office, a group of people are doing, saying and singing the same thing. Movement in common, such as the community rising and bowing in honor of the Trinity, and chanting together makes the Office a *corporate* activity. In his historical survey of hymns, Erik Routley pointed out the plain chant was developed primarily in monastic communities because its fluidity of musical line made it most suitable for a small group of people who were used to singing together over a long period of time. In the absence of the beat that drives later Western music, plain chant requires that all singers listen carefully to each other if they are going to stay together. This listening must extend to an instinctive feel for what the whole choir is doing. This means that everybody has to both lead and follow the choir at the same time.

William McNeill has analyzed the mimetic phenomenon of what he calls "muscular bonding" in his book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press; 1995). Curiously, nobody seems previously to taken a systematic look at the power of human mimetic behavior in military parades, dances and football crowds. The Prussians discovered that military drills are a practical way of making an army act as a unit so as to make it effective in battle. But even more important, "the emotional resonance of daily and prolonged close-order drill created such a lively *esprit de corps* among the poverty-stricken peasant recruits and urban outcasts...that other social ties faded to insignificance among them" (McNeill, p.3). The "drill" of a Divine Office involves much less physical activity, but the physical gestures in common along with the chanting build up a strong cohesiveness among the community in

quite a different direction than conflictual mimesis does in social relationships.

In his chapter “Religious Ceremonies,” McNeill makes much of the polarity between religious enthusiasm and corporate restraint. Saul came across a group of prophets engaged in a group ecstasy and he joined in to their mimetic activity. At approximately the same time, Dionysiac celebrations were sweeping across the Hellenistic world. Both ecstatic groups evolved into literary traditions where their verbal embodiment came to dominate and so come down to posterity in the form of the Greek plays and the Hebrew books of the prophets. However, “both descend from religious inspiration generated by keeping together in time. In both instances, moreover, it is worth pointing out that the supersession of muscular by literary inspiration recapitulated the way I believe that muscularly generated emotional bonding had been superseded by linguistic communication in the evolution of humanity” (McNeill p. 73).

McNeill notes some tantalizing hints in early Christian literature to the effect that dancing may have been a widespread activity in early Christian worship before fear of public excitement overcame the holy dancing which, in the words of Ambrose of Milan, carried aloft the “one who dances in the spirit with a burning faith and uplifted [that person] to the stars” (Quoted in McNeill, p. 75). McNeill then suggests that the communal monasticism of Benedict was a means of controlling the individual enthusiasm of the early monks. “Eventually, duly constituted authorities constrained nearly all Christian monks to live together in monasteries and conform to rules, thus ending public outbreaks of the sort that had occasionally turned Egyptian hermits into leaders of riotous crowds” (McNeill, p.76). In contrast to frenetic group activity such as that of the ecstatic prophets and dancing congregations, the Emperor Theodosius decreed that church leaders “standardize their chant and song, together with processions and other ritual gestures” (McNeill, p.77).

There is no question that the liturgical style enjoined in Benedict's rule and followed by later generations of Benedictines is on the restrained side. However, this restraint does not necessarily stifle the Holy Spirit. When monastic communities spend two to four hours a day in worship, it becomes clear that the tendency to decorum in worship has more to do with the internal needs of monastics than the agendas of emperors and bishops. It is liturgical restraint that keeps the flame of the Spirit alive in a community and in each member over a long period of time. Given the power that mimetic behavior can take on, as René Girard has shown, it is

quite important that the large doses of mimetic behavior involved in monastic liturgical prayer be maintained at a calm level.

This low emotional level in worship, however, is not incompatible with spontaneity in prayer. On the contrary, it fosters the gentle but heartfelt prayer of “purity of heart and tearful compunction.” Benedict says that the monk who goes into the church to pray alone should “pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and full attention of heart” (52:4). In this same chapter, Benedict has stressed the importance of leaving the church in “deepest silence” so that a person wishing to pray will not be disturbed. Ostentatious prayer that makes a commotion will certainly disturb the prayer of anybody else within hearing distance! When we bear in mind the steps of humility that eschew loud and boisterous laughter, we realize that making a loud display of ourselves in prayer could be a sign of pride rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.

The “literary inspiration” that McNeill noted as taking priority over “muscular bonding” is very much at the forefront in the Divine Office as envisioned by Benedict. To begin with, the psalms are literary documents that encapsulate spontaneous responses to God. More important, the monastic tradition tended to stress a pedagogic and formational model of worship in contrast to what liturgists now call “the cathedral office” which was more proclamatory in character. Benedict intended the office to guide us in our understanding of our relationship with God and of how we should live our lives. By quoting from Psalm 34 in the Prolog: “which of you desires life and longs to see good days?” (Pr. 15). Benedict is telling us that this verse poses a fundamental question that we should meditate on often. Psalm 95 is given special emphasis as a call to conversion: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Pro. 10). This psalm, that refers to the people's grumbling in the desert, is particularly important as it is used every morning at Matins. This daily call to turn away from grumbling is made all the more urgent when one remembers that the people's grumbling was followed up by their ganging up on Moses and threatening him with collective violence.

Call for Papers

CONTAGION, the journal of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, is looking for a few good papers. To propose an article, or talk over an idea, contact the editor, Andrew McKenna.

amckenn@orion.it.luc.edu

[1] 773-508-2850

Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair

James Williams is nearing completion of the English translation of René Girard's latest book, to be titled I Saw Satan Falling Like Lightning, scheduled for March 2001 publication by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY. Jim has kindly provided an hors de oeuvre, reprinted here with the permission of René Girard and Orbis Books.

From chapter 3, "Satan..."

The mimetic concept of Satan enables the New Testament to give evil its due without granting it any reality or ontological substance in its own right that would make of Satan a kind of god of evil.

Satan does not "create" by his own means. Rather he sustains himself as a parasite on what God creates and by imitating him in a manner that is jealous, grotesque, perverse, and as contrary as possible to the upright and obedient imitation of Jesus. To repeat, Satan is an imitator in the rivalistic sense of the word. His kingdom is a caricature of the kingdom of God. Satan is the ape of God.

To affirm that Satan has no actual being, as Christian theology has done, means that Christianity does not oblige us to see him as someone who really exists. The interpretation that assimilates Satan to rivalistic contagion and its consequences enables us for the first time to acknowledge the importance of the prince of this world without also endowing him with personal *being*. Traditional theology has rightly refused to do the latter.

In the Gospels, mimetic and victimary phenomena can be organized around two different concepts. The first is an impersonal principle, scandal. The second is this mysterious figure that the Gospels call Satan or the devil.

As we have seen, the synoptic Gospels contain a discourse of Jesus on scandal, but no discourse on Satan. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, includes no discourse on scandal, but it includes one on the devil, which I have just examined.

Scandals and Satan are fundamentally the same thing. However, we can observe two important differences between them. The primary emphasis in the two concepts shifts significantly. The accent in scandal is on the early stages of the mimetic process, consequently on relations between individuals rather than on collective phenomena—although the latter are not absent, as already noted. The mimetic cycle is foreshadowed, but it does not take such clear form as in the case of the figure of Satan or the devil. The single victim mechanism is suggested but not clearly set forth.

With scandals as our single starting point it would be difficult, I think, to arrive at a complete explanation of the single victim mechanism and the anthropological meaning of the Cross. Yet this is what Paul does when he defines the Cross as the supreme scandal. If we could not turn to the pattern of the mimetic cycle to interpret it, Paul's message would rest partially unintelligible. Most readers do not really understand what Paul means.

But with the satanic expulsion of Satan the mimetic cycle is really closed, the knot is really tied, for the single mechanism becomes explicitly defined.

But why doesn't Satan present himself as an impersonal principle in the same way as the scandals? Because he designates the principal consequence of the single victim mechanism, the emergence of a false transcendence and the numerous deities that represent it, Satan is always *someone*. This is what the following chapters will enable us to understand.

And from chapter 11, "The Triumph of the Cross..."

Medieval and modern theories of redemption all look in the direction of God for the causes of the crucifixion: his honor, his justice, even his anger must be satisfied. They don't succeed because they don't seriously look in the direction where the answer must lie, sinful humanity, human relations, mimetic contagion, which is the same thing as Satan. They speak much of original sin but they fail to make the idea concrete. That is why they give an impression of being arbitrary and unjust to human beings, even if they are theologically sound.

Orbis Books – <http://www.maryknoll.org/MALL/ORBIS>

The language of scapegoating

In the discussion following René Girard's address to the Boston conference, he mentioned that unmasking the sacrificial system requires language which is conscious of the process. This posed a problem translating *The Scapegoat* into Japanese, which was apparently lacking a word or phrase which was a good analogue to "scapegoat." English, by contrast, has been developing under the influence of mimetic insights, and has words and phrases which unmask victimization: *scapegoat*, *black sheep*, *fall guy*, *thrown to the wolves*, *witchhunt*, *show trial*. The editor is collecting similar examples of language (not limited to English) that is conscious of mimetic revelation, and would appreciate your contributions.

Email: PBellanboy@aol.com

Atonement & Victimization

Gabriella Lettini is a graduate of the Waldensian Theological Seminary in Rome, and an ordained Waldensian pastor. She is writing her doctoral thesis at Union Theological Seminary in New York. on the relation between the otherness of God and the holiness of the other in contemporary theology. This is excerpted from one of her doctoral exams on the history of atonement doctrines. Ms. Lettini invites comments to GLettini@aol.com.

One of the main points René Girard makes in *The Scapegoat* is that the Gospels finally reveal to humanity that the victims of society have no guilt and never had, in the sense that they do not deserve to die.... In fact, at the crucifixion Jesus is placed between two thieves: maybe we should interpret this not in the sense that it was a dishonor for him, or that injustice was done just to him because he was innocent. I think the point is that injustice is done to the innocent and to the thieves, because violence, death, execution are never “right,” fair, justifiable.

If Jesus’ death was supposed to unmask the evil nature of scapegoating, Christianity very soon covered this up, and embraced scapegoating wholeheartedly, saying once again it is salvific. Do Anselm’s and Luther’s atonement theories unmask the evil mechanism of scapegoating so clearly at work within Christianity? No, they both embrace scapegoating and surrogacy as the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death (saying it was once and for all did not make all that difference in reality, because it still reinforced the paradigm). Neither Luther nor Anselm were concerned for the oppressed/scapegoats/surrogates within their own societies. Therefore, their atonement theories cannot be truly liberating.

Delores Williams, in *Sisters in the Wilderness*, pointed out how Jesus, who is supposed to have died for humanity’s sin, is being punished “in place” of humanity, and is the figure of the perfect surrogate. She points out how this model cannot possibly be liberating to Black women who have traditionally been forced in surrogacy roles by white slavocracy. I think that Girard’s and Williams’ works could really complement and enrich each other, and I have tried to put them in dialogue. Jesus went to the cross because it was better that “a man die than a whole nation.” Jesus is therefore a surrogate that is offered to the Roman colonialist power in place of the whole people of Israel. Jesus is also exchanged for Barabbas, and dies “in place” of him, thus being a surrogate for him (an innocent is punished to relieve the guilty, as it often happens).

Girard’s work can also be very thought provoking for all feminist and Womanist theologians that are trying to understand the dynamics of abuse perpetrated by Christianity. For instance, Girard points out how victims often get caught in the logic of scapegoats and start believing the ideology of their victimizers. In some cases, the victim ends believing s/he is really guilty of something or deserves punishment. For instance, many witches believed their accusers, and many abused children believe they caused adults’ attacks and therefore deserved it. In other cases, the victim helps the victimizer because s/he thinks that suffering will give her a higher moral or social or religious status. Women and oppressed communities have most always been encouraged to accept abuse and to suffer “as Jesus did,” accepting a mystique of sacrifice.

Another pattern designated victims often follow is to try to make themselves less attractive to the victimizers by self-inflicting violence. For instance, Girard shows how the man possessed by demons in Gerasa was trying to escape lynching by the people of the town by stoning himself. I thought of the accounts of sexually abused children that mutilated themselves or tried to get extremely obese or thin in order to be less attractive to the victimizer. However, I think that this paradigm does not really work for the victim: most often it does not stop the abuse, and it leads to self-destructive behaviors that can lead to real addictions. Women and oppressed communities are plagued by self-destructive behaviors that make their survival and liberation even more difficult to achieve. Many victims accept abuse because they are taught to believe that their suffering will eventually redeem the victimizer, thus thinking they have to be responsible for the abuser’s salvation (Christianity often taught this, a very convenient ideology for the ones in power). Sacralizing the victim is a very good political tool: you don’t even have to force the victim too much, if you convince her/him that their victimization is good and worthy (e.g. myth of the perfect woman or perfect slave), or that the victimizer has to be obeyed (abusive/white father as God).

What Girard did not take into consideration is that the victim might accept some limited and repeated suffering because the other “choice” was death. Delores Williams showed how slave women focused on survival rather than liberation, because they tried to preserve themselves also for their children and the survival of the community at large. I think that the cross should not be sacralized because it is a condemnation of all crosses. In this sense, it should be once and for all. But in the history of Christianity the perspective and the voices of the victims were soon switched with the ones of the victimizers as soon as Christians got political power.

Can the cross be sacralized in a way that will empower you for survival?

The cross has been empowering to oppressed communities that understand that it is a witness to the fact that God is on their side, that God knows and suffered violence and oppression, and yet was able to walk away from the cross. Because of the belief in resurrection, the cross can be a powerful symbol that the cross is not the last word, that there is still hope and a future in the midst of pain. The cross can be truly empowering and liberating when it makes hope possible in situation that seem unbearable, when suffering is not an option by a reality. Yet I still think that sacralizing a symbol of violence and abuse is always very dangerous. It might have served the first persecuted Christian community to make sense of their loss and to construct hope in the face of despair, but then the same symbol used by other hands in other times became extremely abusive.

Advisory Board Meeting: Minutes

St. Mary's Hall, Boston College, May 31, 2000

Present: Diana Culbertson (President), Robert Daly, René Girard (Honorary Lifetime Chair), Sandor Goodhart (Executive Secretary), Gerhard Larcher, Andrew McKenna (editor, *Contagion*), Jozef Niewiadomski, Wolfgang Palaver, Raymund Schwager (Lifetime member), Julie Shinnick (Treasurer)

Non-Attending: Gil Bailie, Cesáreo Bandera, Johan Elsen (*Bulletin*), Giuseppe Fornari, Eric Gans, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Hans Jensen, Marie-Louise Martinez (Conference Organizer, 1998), Dietmar Regensburger (Treasurer), Tobin Siebers, Thee Smith (Conference Organizer, 1999), Jim Williams (Lifetime)

Presiding: Diana Culbertson, President

The meeting was called to order by President Culbertson at 9:20am. There were three hand-outs: (1) a copy of the COV&R masterlist as of May 2000 from Bob Daly; (2) the agenda for today's meeting from Sandor Goodhart; and (3) a note from Johan Elsen. It was noted that Andrew McKenna would be arriving late to the Board meeting.

1. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting in Atlanta in 1999 were distributed by Diana Culbertson who was the Executive Secretary. They were reviewed and discussed. It was noted that Jozef Niewiadomski's name was not on the list of Advisory Board Members. His name was added.

The minutes as amended were approved unanimously by acclamation.

2. The treasurer's report

a. The American treasurer, Julie Shinnick, reported that there is \$9,702.72 in the American account.

b. Since the European treasurer, Dietmar Regensburger, was not able to attend, Wolfgang Palaver read the European report in his place. It was reported that there is \$6,130.27 in the European account.

c. Bob Daly, organizer of the conference at Boston College and our host, reported that the \$5,000 given normally to *Contagion* (for 2 issues) from these conferences was donated this year by the Society of Jesuits and that he received \$9,500 from the Academic Vice President of Boston College. The advisory Board expressed its gratitude.

3. Expiration of terms and nomination of new members

The COV&R constitution provides for eleven members plus officers. The terms of Hans Jensen, Tobin Siebers, and Giuseppe Fornari were expired in 2000 and up for renewal. Hans Jensen and Tobin Siebers expressed their preferences in writing to Wolfgang Palaver that their terms not be renewed. Their withdrawals from the Advisory Board were accepted. Sandor Goodhart motioned for the renewal of Giuseppe Fornari. The motion was seconded by Julie Shinnick. Giuseppe Fornari's term was renewed for three years. It will expire in 2003. A letter would be sent to Giuseppe Fornari notifying him of his renewal of membership on the Board.

That left two places on the Advisory Board to be filled. The nominating Committee, consisting of the President (Diana Culbertson), the Executive Secretary (Sandor Goodhart), and one other Advisory Board member (Wolfgang Palaver) had discussed the matter and came up with two names. Diana Culbertson nominated William Mischler. Julie Shinnick seconded. Sandor Goodhart nominated William Johnsen. René Girard seconded. Both William Mischler and William Johnsen were approved unanimously by acclamation. Diana Culbertson said she would notify William Mischler of his election (pending its approval by the COV&R membership at the Business meeting). Sandor Goodhart said that he would notify William Johnsen of his election (pending its approval by the COV&R membership at the Business meeting).

Gerhard Larcher motioned that the name of Per Grande be considered for future membership or as an alternate if either William Mischler or William Johnsen does not wish to serve. Raymund Schwager seconded. The motion was approved. Gerhard Larcher said he

would notify Per Grande of his election as an alternate (pending its approval by the COV&R membership at the Business meeting).

The idea of a “waiting list” for membership to the COV&R Advisory Board was discussed. In addition to the name of Per Grande, other names were raised. It was decided that the Nominating Committee should consider the matter and report to the Advisory Board about it next year. Diana Culbertson motioned that Wolfgang Palaver be reappointed to the Nominating Committee. Julie Shinnick seconded the motion. The nominated was approved.

4. Forthcoming meeting in Boston

Bob Daly reported on the forthcoming meeting and distributed the Program. Bob gave some logistical details about accommodations, telephones, computers and the like, and asked for help from the Advisory Board introducing the speakers and moderating the sessions.

5. Upcoming Girard-related meetings

Sandor Goodhart complimented Bob Daly on his organization of what promised to be a fine conference.

a. Sandor Goodhart announced that a group led by Nil Nellis and his family would be traveling Saturday evening to Claremont, New Hampshire to attend Eastern Orthodox services there with René and Martha Girard. Transportation would be provided, housing would be available, and all are welcome to attend.

b. Diana Culbertson announced that there will be a meeting in Agen, France on the penitentiary / penal system on November 10. The conference will be organized by Pierre Gardeil. Michel Serres is scheduled to attend.

c. Sandor Goodhart reported that there has traditionally been a session devoted to René Girard’s work at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion / Society of Biblical Literature, that the meeting this year was on November 18 in Nashville, TN, and that he was organizing a meeting around Willard Swartley’s new book, *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Pandora Press, 2000). More information would be forthcoming in the next COV&R *Bulletin*.

6. Plans for future COV&R Meetings

a. The COV&R meeting in 2001 will be organized by Johan Elsen and will take place at the University of Antwerp in Antwerp, Belgium on May 30 to June 2. The theme will be “Philosophy, Religion, Economics and the Work of René Girard.” Gianni Vattimo is scheduled to attend. More information and a call for papers will be forthcoming from Julie Shinnick.

b. The COV&R meeting in 2002 will be organized by Sandor Goodhart and take place on June 5-8 at

Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. The theme will be “Mimesis, Sacrifice, and Scripture: Judaism, Christianity, and the Ancient World.”

c. The COV&R meeting in 2003 will be organized by Raymund Schwager and others at the University of Innsbruck in Innsbruck, Austria. The theme is likely to be “Globalization in Economics, Politics, and Religion.”

The Board broke for lunch at 11:30am and reassembled at 1:30pm, minus René Girard who was being interviewed.

7. The COV&R Bulletin

In a note to members of the Advisory Board, Johan Elsen requested that he be relieved of responsibility for editing the COV&R *Bulletin* after June 2001. The Advisory Board decided that an announcement to the general membership would be made at this meeting. If no one was forthcoming as an editor, a notice would be placed in the next *Bulletin*.

The possibility of producing an on-line version of the *Bulletin* was discussed. Some members felt that although an on-line version was attractive as a way to save on printing and mailing costs, and although such a conversion was probably inevitable in the future, this print oriented generation was not ready for an exclusively on-line journal and a printed version should continue to be prepared.

8. Contagion

Andrew McKenna reported that the current issue of the journal would go to press in two weeks. He said that we are not getting enough publishable manuscripts. Some that are submitted are not of high enough quality. Others are not especially Girardian – and those issuing from the Emory conference were cited. For example, only six essays were to appear in the coming issue of the journal and only three of those six were from the Emory conference. He said that we need people to be sending in appropriate submissions.

A discussion of the possibility of an on-line version of the journal along parameters similar to the discussion of the COV&R *Bulletin* ensued.

McKenna said he is getting virtually no institutional support for the journal (he is no longer the chair of French at Loyola) and must rely on subscriptions and money from the COV&R conference. It costs about \$2,500 to produce each issue (\$2,000 to print, \$500 to mail) or \$5,000 for two issues.

9. COV&R on the internet

Wolfgang Palaver reported that Dietmar Regensburger has just completed a web-site for COV&R that includes links to *Contagion*, the *Bulletin*, the COV&R listserv, the Girard Bibliography, a page on membership information, a photo gallery, and a page

with information about past and future conferences. The web-site was commissioned by Raymund Schwager who is the current Dean at the University of Innsbruck. The Advisory Board concluded (after viewing the colorful sample pages that Wolfgang brought) that the web-site was especially impressive and that Dietmar and Raymund were to be highly commended for their efforts. The address of the homepage of the web-site is:

<http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/index.html>

Sandor Goodhart reminded the Advisory Board that Eric Gans has generously continued to moderate the COV&R listserv. Goodhart also pointed out that a second listserv moderated by Paul Neuchterlein addresses homiletics from a Girardian perspective specifically. The address for both listservs is available on the above COV&R web-site.

A discussion followed about the positive value of a web-site in connection with COV&R. Calls for papers, subscription information, and links to pages of interest to Girardians would all be more easily accessed.

10. Other old Business

Sandor Goodhart called attention to the video testimony project of Duncan Ragsdale in chronicling the history of COV&R. Ragsdale, who is a lawyer and a member of COV&R, began the project at the Paris conference. He has interviewed René Girard, Sandor Goodhart, Sonia Pas, and Jim Williams, among others, and he hopes to videotape as many members of COV&R as are willing to sit before his camera for an hour or so. His goal is to produce for posterity a permanent record of the group.

Goodhart also moved that to the extent that funds are available (and with a cap of \$1,000), the COV&R group should subsidize interested graduate students and others who have not attended COV&R before for travel and registration expenses to the COV&R conferences as a way of encouraging their participation. The Board approved this motion.

11. New Business

A motion was made that the Advisory Board limit the invitation of former conference directors to attend Advisory Board meetings as consultants to three years rather than the five years currently provided. The motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sandor Goodhart
Executive Secretary

Annual Business Meeting: Minutes

Vanderslice Hall, Boston College, June 3, 2000

Present: Membership of COV&R 2000

Presiding: Diana Culbertson, President

The meeting was called to order at 1:30pm by President Culbertson who expressed her appreciation to Robert Daly for the high quality of the Boston conference.

1. Nominations

Culbertson announced that the terms of Hans Jensen, Tobin Siebers, and Giuseppe Fornari had expired in 2000, that Jensen and Siebers had expressed preferences that their terms not be renewed, and that the Board had accepted their preferences with thanks. Culbertson put into nomination for renewal the name of Giuseppe Fornari which was accepted. Culbertson then nominated William Mischler and William Johnsen to replace Siebers and Jensen, with Per Grande as a alternate should either Mischler or Johnsen decline. All three nominations were approved.

2. Forthcoming meetings of interest to Girardians

Culbertson announced the forthcoming meeting in Agen, France on the penitentiary / penal system on November 10. Sandor Goodhart announced the forthcoming trip to Claremont, New Hampshire immediately following the banquet to attend Easter Orthodox services, and the session on René Girard at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature in Nashville on November 18. The session this year would be devoted to Willard Swartley's new book, *Violence Renounced. René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Pandora Press, 2000). More information would come in the next COV&R *Bulletin*.

3. Plans for future COVAR Meetings

Culbertson announced that the COV&R meeting in 2001 will be organized by Johan Elsen and take place at the University of Antwerp in Antwerp, Belgium on May 30 to June 2. The theme will be "Philosophy, Religion, Economics and René Girard." Goodhart announced that he will organize the COV&R meeting in 2002 which will take place on June 5-8 at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. The theme will be "Mimesis, Sacrifice, and Scripture: Judaism, Christianity, and the Ancient World."

4. The COVAR Bulletin

Culbertson announced that Paul Bellan-Boyer had agreed to take over the editorship of the COV&R *Bulletin* to replace Johan Elsen who has resigned. She put his name into nomination and it was approved.

5. COVAR on the internet

Culbertson announced the homepage of the new web-site: <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/index.html>.

6. Other business

Goodhart called attention to the video testimony project of Duncan Ragsdale, who is interested in chronicling the history of COV&R. He has interviewed René Girard, Sandor Goodhart, Sonia Pas, and Jim Williams, and hopes to videotape as many members of COV&R as possible. Goodhart urged the membership to speak with Ragsdale before leaving to set up a taping session. Culbertson announced that some funds are available to subsidize students and others who have not attended COV&R before for travel and registration expenses to the conference as a way of encouraging their participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sandor Goodhart
Executive Secretary

Violence Renounced, Peace Announced

A review of [Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking](#), edited by Willard Swartley with a response by René Girard and a foreword by Diana Culbertson. By Vern Neufeld Redekop, Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada.

Within an ethos that is preoccupied with violence, along comes Willard Swartley who is interested in the potential of mimetic theory in the service of peace, resulting in first a conference and then *Violence Renounced*. The book includes papers presented at the conference along with other manuscripts sought out by Swartley. In time this volume will be seen as pivotal in launching a body of Girardian literature on the life affirming dimensions of mimetic phenomena.

Let me spell out where I am coming from in reviewing this book. Recently I put on a seminar of deep-rooted conflict, complete with mimetic theory, to a group of Canadian First Nations people. For them, theory and praxis must inform the Personal. In other words, what they learn must apply to their lives and those of their people. They are up-front about what philosopher Michael Polanyi describes as the intellectual passions driving scientists and academics.

My own framework for approaching this book is elaborated on in my article, "The Centrality to the Exodus of Torah as Ethical Projection" ([Contagion 2](#),

Spring 1995, 119-144). In it I begin with the question, how can those who were oppressed avoid imitating their oppressors when they get into positions of power? The answer coming out of a close look at the structure of Exodus is through Teachings (a proper rendition of the Hebrew word *torah*). The question for us becomes, What teachings about the nature and role of mimetic phenomena can guide people desiring shalom-like relationships with their Others? Several distinct contributions emerge from the book.

A key piece within the book is the first published version of Rebecca Adams' ground-breaking mimetic approach to the concept of love. She posits that if the desire of the mimetic Model is the well-being, the fullness of subjectivity for a capacity for agency, then if the Proto-Subject (who is not experiencing this fullness of being) imitates the desire of the Model, they will desire their own well-being. This may start a path of creative regeneration. It also resolves the mimetic double bind, imitate me but don't imitate me too much. For as Adams points out, "...if proto-subjects fulfill the first half of the command and desire their own subjectivity, they also by definition fulfill the second: They will not merely imitate the mediator's subjectivity." (294) Though this article is at the end of the book, it should be read first and then re-read at the end. The rest of the book can then be approached for clues as to what does it really involve to desire the subjectivity of the Other. In other words how can one love mimetically.

In this context, Sandor Goodhart's contribution works at several levels. First, it elaborates the theme of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah as a scapegoat who exposes through this text, all the key elements of Girard's scapegoat theory. At another level, he shows how this realization can contribute to a profound mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Jews. Methodologically and content wise, he contributes to a Torah of peace.

Willard Swartley's own contribution on "Discipleship and Imitation of Jesus" uses the mimesis teachings of the New Testament to start to identify teachings which start to flesh out what it means to "love mimetically." Through an analysis of the Greek prefix *sun*, (translated "co-") he shows how the co-participation and discipleship (following) language function as a cognate field within mimetic theory such that with Christ as Model, "we learn a new pattern of mimetic desire, one that leads not to rivalry and violence, but to building others up, . . . in order that as members of the community of the new creation we break the spiral of violence. . . ." In effect, Swartley develops a creative mimetic ontology.

This sense of transformation of being or subjectivity is developed further by Robin Collins in his article on

Girard and atonement. He advocates an incarnational approach to atonement in which Christ's death "represents his subjectivity completely oriented toward giving his life to God and others in faith, hope, love, and self-sharing" (146). Identification with Christ involves sharing in Christ's subjectivity during his death in a way which "overcomes our alienation towards ourselves, others and God" (146). Collins gives a tantalizing overview of how the need for a new source of positive desire is developed in Theravada Buddhism, philosophical Taoism, and Neo-Confucianism.

Girardian scholar James Williams focuses on the transformation of the role of king to that of servant. He begins by showing the links between kingship, scapegoating and sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. The emergence of the monarchy is for Williams a sacrificial event in which monarchs as the ones different become polarizers who establish order, failing that they become scapegoats. With Jesus introduction of leader as servant, there is a transformation of the differentiating function from war and ritual sacrifice to servanthood in which life is the object. Mark 10:35-45, the servant leader pericope, becomes a witness, in Tony Bartlett's words, to an "interruptive praxis because it interrupts violent reciprocity" (196).

Other articles in the book make a real contribution to our understanding of violence within both the biblical tradition and Ancient Near Eastern texts. Contributors vary from being core Girardian scholars, fully grounded in his thought, to those with a more cursory introductory knowledge of mimetic theory complemented by significant theological insight. Whether reading it to search for teachings to empower a positive, life-oriented approach to mimetic theory as I have outlined above or to engage Girardian thought in a dynamic new way, *Violence Renounced* makes for a good read.

"We will cling fast to your torah..."

A response to René Girard's contribution to *Violence Unveiled*, from Sandor Goodhart, Purdue University, goodhart@purdue.edu.

When we were graduate students in René's classes at the University of Buffalo in the late sixties and early seventies, we used to say that René had the Midas touch. Everything he laid his hands on turned to gold. No matter how difficult or familiar the text or problem, we would bring it to him, and in a flash, it would look new and clear in a way that felt genuine and authentic and his gesture never ceased to dazzle us.

Did we idealize him and his effect upon us? Probably. But we were content to bathe in the luminous clarity of his extraordinary perspective and we were never the same afterwards. We gained a knowledge and confidence in our own capacities that in my case at least has stayed with me to this day.

I was reminded of these moments as I reread René's pages responding to my essay on him in Willard Swartley's wonderful book, and I oddly enough felt a little of the same initial charm. Who is this fellow named "Sandor," I wondered? Why doesn't he just give up his silly view and admit that René has clarified matters once again for all of us? I had to catch myself, of course, to remind myself that it was me he was talking about, and that, oddly enough, I had now in fact gotten my wish. Although still René's student, I had now achieved the credentials and the skills to publish on my own and one of the consequences of that status and that capacity was that I could now find myself at odds with René even in the course of defending his ideas. Like King Midas, I had found the gold I had for so long desired ironically inedible. Facing the difficult choice between rejecting the gift (as King Midas did) or honoring the gift by reflecting it and reflecting upon it, I could (and would of course) choose the latter. Having appropriated René's teachings, I could now choose the good mimesis over the bad, and deflect any possible competition or rivalry between us. But the oddness of the situation stayed with me.

There is a Jewish story, a midrash, an agadic moment in Talmud (*Baba Metzia* 53), that may help us to think about this dilemma. Two Rabbis are arguing over the cleaning of an oven. Rabbi Eliezer says you do it this way, Rabbi Gamliel says you do it that. If I am not right, Rabbi Eliezer says, let the carob trees show it. All of a sudden, all the carob trees in the region fly up out of the ground! What can you tell from carob trees, one of the supporters of Rabbi Gamliel proclaims. If I am not right, then, Rabbi Eliezer says, let the rivers show it. All of a sudden, all the rivers in the region start flowing in the opposite direction! What can you tell from waters, another of the supporters of Rabbi Gamliel shouts. Finally, in frustration, Rabbi Eliezer says, if I am not right, let the Holy one, blessed be He, show it. All of a sudden, there is a whirlwind, and out of the heart of the storm, a heavenly voice speaks. "Why do you argue with Rabbi Eliezer," the voice says, "since in all regards, he is right!" "We don't listen to heavenly voices," Rabbi Gamliel replies. "The truth is not in heaven. We have your Torah, and we will cling fast to your Torah, even if you Yourself show up to tell us to do otherwise."

If I proceed to argue my position, then, to differ from René here or there, I take shelter in the fact that I

do so in the light of the teaching he has offered us, and that I summon René back to his own instruction and honor that instruction by proclaiming it, even if I do so in his presence, and even if René himself shows up to oppose it.

* * * * *

My case in the essay is straightforward.¹ I argue that Isaiah 52-53 displays all of the elements crucial to René's theory of the innocent victim and the exposure of the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism that René finds central to (and in fact the distinctive feature of) the Christian Gospel six centuries later. As a result, I suggest, we need to wonder whether the Christian Gospel is singular on this particular basis. Is it possible, for example, that the Gospel is *not* unique (although René and others say it is) and just a repetition and development of the Hebrew Bible within a given time and place? Or, is it possible that the Gospel *is* unique but that René and others are wrong to think that its singularity derives from this particular demonstration, and that perhaps it comes from some other quality?

Or, finally, is it possible the Gospel *is* unique and that its uniqueness *does* derive from its revelation of the sacrificial mechanism but that the correspondence between the two, between Isaiah 52-53 and the Christian Gospel, is incomplete and some critical element of the Gospel (not contained in Isaiah 52-53) remains to be elucidated – although it is difficult to imagine just what that element could be? Without such further elucidation, I argue, we are left with the sense that what René discovers within the Christian Gospel is its Jewish filigree and that it is this compelling and powerful analytic of the sacrificial that he would identify – quite apart from any matters of personal faith – with its singularity.

René's response is succinct and characteristically generous.² Sandor recognizes the power of the texts of the Christian Gospel in revealing the critique of the sacrificial mechanism, but he denies that the Christian text is singular in this fashion. He privileges the critique of anti-idolatry which he finds – and rightly so, in my view – at the heart of the Hebrew Bible, a critique not capable of doing what Sandor would have it do.

Even thematically, René argues, the Gospel is more explicitly concerned with scapegoating, more reflective about it, and more conscious of that self-reflexivity, whereas the Hebrew Bible, as Sandor admits, “marginalizes” the reflection on sacrifice for a reflection on anti-idolatry. But it is only in terms of sacrificial dynamics, René argues, that idolatry is understandable, and not the reverse. The Hebrew Bible goes part of the way in separating divinity from the victimage, “de-victimizing the divinity” and “de-divinizing the victim,”

but not as far as the Christian Gospel in understanding God to be on the side of the victim. The Christian Gospel completes the reflection the Hebrew Bible opens. The Hebrew Bible must be commended for beginning the task, but the task cannot be regarded as completed without the Christian Gospel.

The issue would appear to be joined. At root of the difference between René and myself, it would seem, is the status of the critique of idolatry as given in the Hebrew Bible. For me the Torah, understood as the law of anti-idolatry, is enormously powerful, powerful enough in fact to include everything that René talks about as the mimetic and the sacrificial. Therefore I am able to find in René's discovery of the sacrificial mechanism the discovery of the Jewish filigree within Christianity. Christianity from this perspective is like a large midrash, one in which many individuals live from day to day no doubt, but nonetheless a midrashic story for all that, a way of making the Hebrew scripture applicable in a particular time and place. Christianity extends and elaborates this Jewish understanding, brings that insight to bear upon a situation with which it may or may not in the past have had to deal – the invasions and abandonments of family life, for example, for a Aramaic-speaking Jewish community immersed within a Greek-speaking community that is part of the Roman empire. And it does so even if at times in its history that Christian offspring denies its own origination or filiation within the Jewish community, and even if that denial can sometimes assume the form of bloodshed.

From René's point of view, on the other hand, the critique of idolatry is considerably less powerful as an explanatory tool – and in fact innately dependent upon the sacrificial mechanism for its own understanding. The critique of sacrifice comes for him not only (and perhaps not even primarily) from Jewish sources but from an independent revelatory experience, the trace of which is the Passion and the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. And so while the Jewish Bible and its critique of idolatry gets us some of the way out of the confusions of mythical thinking, that critique needs in turn to be fundamentally completed by the unveiling of the sacrificial mechanism which occurs exclusively for him within the Gospel text.

Moreover, each of us remains a witness to the faith community from which we come. No amount of explaining, no amount of rhetorical persuasion (however subtle or thorough), is likely to convince either of us of the primacy of the other's point of view. I come to René's work on the mimetic and the sacrificial from a Jewish perspective and I discover in it a vocabulary for reading more fully my own Jewish tradition. After reading René, I understand much more completely than

before what it means for me to be Jewish and I account for the appearance of Christianity – and of René’s work within the history of Christianity – as an extension of that primary Jewish insight. René comes to read the Jewish tradition and the law of anti-idolatry from within the Christian experience from which vantage point it seems to him – however powerful – still lacking and incomplete. And that reading gives more strength to his belief in the primacy of the Christian text.

Indeed, the very idea of persuasion, of a rhetorical engagement that advances arguments, relies upon the criterion of logical reason, and lays claim to making some real analytic progress, is in some way anathema to each of us. Greek is certainly the language we all speak. Each of us translates our native tongue, so to speak, into Greek. I translate Hebrew into the Greek of the university, and René translates the mysterious Greek of the Gospel into the philosophical Greek of Plato and Aristotle. And we undertake these translation projects even if we only come to them through the other, even if I come to understand Judaism more fully only *after* reading René, even if René comes to understand one or another aspect of Christianity only *after* reading my writing (or the writings of others like Emmanuel Levinas or André Neher) on Judaism. No doubt I have learned infinitely more from René than he has from me, owing both to René’s personal magnanimity and the dynamics of teacher-student relations (and one hopes there have been others with whom René has experienced the same fund of generosity as those of us who are his students and friends have experienced with him). But for each it is our native tongue that remains foremost.

Is there no way our two perspectives may be reconciled? René’s theory of the mimetic nature of desire and of the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism as the root of all social structure, is unabashedly brilliant, in my view the major advance of our time in the fields of cultural anthropology and psychology, the one perspective that gives the other major theories of our culture in the last hundred years – those of Freud, Nietzsche, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan, to mention only a few – the context in which their work finds its most powerful place. But his theory of the Christian as a deconstruction of sacrifice and scapegoating is an elaboration of Jewish ideas, however revelatory such Christian access has been for René personally, and however powerful René’s thought has been for me personally. Jesus in my understanding is a Jewish prophetic thinker throughout, and not in spite of his promotion of anti-idolatry (or even in addition to that promotion) but because of it. It is on the basis of the deconstruction of the sacrificial as an extension and prophetic concretization of the anti-idolatrous that in my

view the power of the Christian text resides. And it is as testimony to his own Jewish origins that Jesus develops this insight as such and that the Gospel in turn commemorates it.

To say as much, however, is not to say – and I want to be very clear about this point – that the Christian text is not unique. Nor is it to say that René’s discovery of the Jewish filigree within the Christian text is not related to its uniqueness, only that it cannot be the whole story. What then *could* be the basis for the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel, we may legitimately ask, a basis that is not contained in Isaiah 52-53? Here I summon René back to his own ideas. The uniqueness of the Christian Gospel and the power of the discovery of the sacrificial mechanism may be founded on the resurrection, and my primary support for that claim comes from the writing of René Girard.

The texts of the resurrection of Jesus after the crucifixion, I suggest, are at the root of the singularity of the Christian Gospel, both as the Christian Church has long argued, but more importantly in the present context, as René Girard has argued. The resurrection alone in the Gospel goes to the end of the process of sacrificial scapegoating by allowing us to see things through – perhaps for the first time in the history of Judaism – to their fullest conclusion. The resurrection alone reveals the sacrificial mechanism and even historical reality itself as a ruse. In context of the resurrection, Jesus both died and did not die. He literally passed “through death” to show us the scapegoat mechanism to the end, something that did not happen in Isaiah 52-53. In light of the resurrection, all social structure, the entire scapegoating machinery, is revealed as delusional, a delusional quality we cannot see unless we see the victim “after death” so to speak.

Christians have of course long argued that the resurrection is what makes Jesus’ experience unique. Perhaps in René’s thought we have a way of validating that claim without resorting to a literalist account – which is how the resurrection has been read to this point. The resurrection allows us to see the process to the end, and end which was not in Isaiah 52-53. A Girardian reading of the resurrection allows us to see the event and all events leading up to it as textual, as textual as the rest of the sacrificial process. It shows that even death may be treated as a myth. It includes the death of the victim in the picture and not just the events leading up to the death. If the entire process is a myth, a collective delusion, then we really can’t rely upon any sacrificially based “reality” at all and we require an ethical approach to life rather than a scapegoat centered approach.

Is this the further elucidation” about which I spoke earlier? René Girard’s thinking about the sacrificial

mechanism makes it clear why it is so important to retain this text. Moreover, it seems so to René Girard as well.

Here is what René has written about the resurrection in his latest book.

Le plus étonnant, c'est que la Résurrection et la divinization de Jésus par les chrétiens correspondent très exactement sur le plan structural aux divinizations mythiques dont elles révelles la fausseté. Loin de susciter une transfiguration, une défiguration, une falsification, une occultation des processus mimétiques, la Résurrection du Christ fait entrer tout ce qui restait depuis toujours dissimulé aux hommes dans la lumière de la vérité. Elle seule révèle jusqu'au bout les choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde, qui ne font qu'un avec le secret de Satan jamais dévoilé depuis l'origine de la culture humaine, le meurtre fondateur et la genèse de la culture humaine.

[The thing that's most astonishing is that the Resurrection and the divinization of Jesus by Christians corresponds very precisely on the structural level to the mythic divinizations whose falsity they reveal. Far from sustaining a transfiguration, a disfiguring, a falsifying, or an occultation of mimetic processes, the Resurrection of Christ brings into the open everything that remained hidden to human beings in the light of the truth. The Resurrection alone goes to the end in revealing things hidden since the foundation of the world, things that are one and the same with the secret of Satan never before exposed since the origin of human culture, namely, the founding murder and the genesis of human culture.]³

The resurrection goes completely beyond Isaiah 52-53, even beyond the Talmud in which a resurrection is mentioned and from which in the Jewish canon the theme of resurrection comes. Whether or not it is a matter of faith, and whether or not it is considered an "objective fact" (as René calls it in a recent interview with Jim Williams), it is indispensable methodological step to the presentation of René's thought, as René himself acknowledges.⁴

Perhaps René is right after all. Although René had spoken about the resurrection as early as *Des choses cachees*, I failed to understand its importance for René's thought when I wrote my essay.⁵ What I learned from both his essay here, and his newest book, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, is the power of the resurrection to Christian thought in precisely the sacrificial and anti-sacrificial terms in which René has defined that thought. As I learned Judaism through René, so now it seems fitting that I should learn Christianity through René as

well. Perhaps then here is one more instance of the learning that continues for me in the engagement of René's work, even if that learning causes me to revise René's work. Perhaps it is one more way in which I can at last affirm along with him, in his final essay of Willard Swartley's book, that here is something that Sandor didn't see and that René's writing has once more turned to gold.

* * * * *

The story from *Baba Metzia* to which I referred earlier does not end where I left it. It seems that some time after the arguments between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Gamliel on the cleaning of an oven, Elijah spoke with the Holy One, Blessed be He, about these matters. And what did the Holy One say, an inquiring mind wanted to know, when He heard Rabbi Gamliel's assertion that the Torah is not in heaven, that it passes through human mediation? He is reported to have replied, "My sons have defeated me! My sons have defeated me!", laughing.⁶

-
1. See Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Violence Renounced. René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Telford, PA.: Pandora Press, 2000), 200-17.
 2. Swartley 2000, 308-20.
 3. See *Je Vois Satan Tomber Comme l'Éclair* (Paris: Grasset, 2000), 197.
 4. See James G. Williams, ed. *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 280.
 5. See *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1977). Translated as *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
 6. For a compendium of such agaddic materials, see Bialik, Hayim Nahman and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds. *The Book of Legends*. Translated by William G. Braude (New York: Schocken, 1992).

The cover of *Civilization Magazine* Aug/Sep 2000 teases "**When Dying Cultures Shouldn't Be Saved.**" While not mentioning mimesis, Michael Blake's article "Rights for People, Not for Cultures" covers a subject that has been discussed with interest at COV&R's most recent annual meetings.

ANTWERP CONFERENCE REGISTRATION INFORMATION

IMPORTANT: Registration deadline **March 1, 2001.**

Registration Fee: € 60.00 EURO with all subsequent costs also assessed in EURO.

Lodgings: As the University of Antwerp has no Campus Housing, we suggest the following Hotels for lodging during the conference. All hotels are within walking distance (approx. 5-10 minutes) from the conference site.

1. We can provide simple hotel accomodation (Zeemanshuis) at the rate of €30.00 a day (single rooms, breakfast incl., min. 3 nights, 40 beds available) for early subscribers (registration deadline: January 15, 2001).

2. Alternative hotel accomodations are listed below. **IMPORTANT:** participants should make their own reservations at these hotels. Central reservation is only made for those wishing to lodge in the Zeemanshuis, subscribing before January 15, and as space is available (see below). All prices below are for one night, breakfast included.

CONGRESCENTRUM ELZENVELD, Lange Gasthuisstraat 45, B-2000 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 202 77 70, fax +32 3 202 77 75, e-mail greta.dekock@ocmw.antwerpen.be. Rates : approx. € 45.00 (single)

IBIS, Meirstraat 30, B-2000 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 231 88 30, fax +32 3 234 29 21, web www.ibis.tm.fr. Conference rate (ask for UFSIA-rate): € 64.50 (single or double)

PRINSE HOTEL, Keizerstraat 63, B-2000 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 226 40 50, fax +32 3 225 11 48, e-mail hotel-prinse@skynet.be, web www.hotels-belgium.com/hb-antwerp-prinse.html. Rates : appr. € 80.00 (single), € 100.00 (double)

COLOMBUS HOTEL, Frankrijklei 4, B-2000 Antwerp, +32 3 233 03 90, fax +321 3 226 09 46, e-mail colombushotel@skynet.be, web www.colombushotel.com. Conference rate (ask for UFSIA-rate): € 75.00 (single), € 87.00 (double)

RESIDENCE HOTEL, Molenbergstraat 5, B-2000 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 227 38 29, fax +32 3 231 67 07, e-mail residence@dema-worldwide.net, web www.dema-worldwide.net. Rates : appr. € 75.00 (single), € 87.00 (double)

ATLANTA HOTEL, Koninging Astridplein 14, B-2018 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 203 09 19, fax +32 3 226 37 37, e-mail atlanta@dema-worldwide.net, web : www.dema-worldwide.net. Rates: Appr. € 62.00 (single standard room), € 74.50 (double)

ANTWERP TOWER HOTEL, Van Ertbornstraat 10, B-2018 Antwerp, tel. +32 3 213 62 00, fax +32 3 213 62 49, e-mail tower.hotel@skynet.be. Rates: Appr. € 64.50 (single), € 76.00 (double room)

ALFA THEATER HOTEL, Arenbergstraat 30, B-2000 Antwerpen, tel. +32 3 231 17 20, fax +32 3 233 88 85, e-mail reservations@alfahotels.com, web www.alfahotels.com. Conference rate (ask for UFSIA-rate): single € 109.00, double € 134.00

Meal Program: Dinners and evening meals are provided in the campus restaurant at a day rate of € 20.00. Food services begin with dinner on Wednesday May 30 and conclude with evening meal on Saturday June 2.

COV&R ANTWERP CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

Name: _____

Institutional Affiliation: _____

Complete Address: _____

Phone number, including country code: _____

Fax : _____ Email: _____

Summary of Costs & Fees

Hotel Accomodation (Zeemanshuis - € 30.00 a day, 40 beds available, single rooms, registration deadline January 15)

Arrival date: _____

Departure date: _____

Number of nights _____ x € 30.00 / night = € _____

Food: Number of days: _____ x € 20.00 / day = € _____

Conference Registration: € 60.00

TOTAL = € _____

Credit Card Information (Mastercard or Visa only): _____ (Mastercard) _____ (Visa)

Print name on card: _____

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please send this form with the required information and mail with your check (EURO) or credit card information to:

COV&R – Mimesis
Lindenlaan 19
B – 8700 Tielt
Belgium

Special needs: Please indicate below if you have any special needs such as dietary restrictions or any kind of disability for which you may require assistance.

Travel information: all travel information will be sent to all participants after receipt of registration. Additional information will also be available on our website: <http://www.ufsia.ac.be/flw/nieuws/cov&r.html>.

Membership

We invite you to become a member of COV&R. Annual dues are \$40 U.S. per household, or \$20 U.S. for matriculated students. Those in soft currency areas who find it difficult to pay this amount in U.S. currency are invited to apply to the executive secretary for a special rate. Member includes voting rights, research collaboration and discussion, and opportunity to support the aims of the Colloquium, and also subscription to this *Bulletin*, and to *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*. Please do not delay to join COV&R if you are committed to our *raison d'être*.

Bibliography

The Documentation of Literature on the Mimetic Theory is searchable online, <http://starwww.uibk.ac.at>. For further information, see Bulletin no. 9 (1995), p.6 (online at <http://info.uibk.ac.at/c/c2/c204/drama/bulletin/>).

We invite you to send us copies of your articles, as well as references to any kind of literature dealing with mimetic theory.

Dietmar Regensburger
Dietmar.Regensburger@uibk.ac.at
Girard-Documentation Fax: (43 512) 507-2761
University of Innsbruck, Universitätsstr. 4 A-6020
Innsbruck / Austria

COLLOQUIUM ON VIOLENCE AND RELIGION MEMBERSHIP

Please enroll me as a member of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. My membership fee is enclosed (\$40 U.S., \$20 U.S. for matriculated students).

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

My special interests are in the following fields:

<input type="checkbox"/> Literary Criticism, Aesthetics	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychology and Psychiatry
<input type="checkbox"/> Political Science, Economics, Social Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/> Education, Practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Biblical Theology	<input type="checkbox"/> Anthropology, Religious Studies
<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Theology, Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender Concerns	

Send check or money order to:

COV&R c/o Julie Shinnick
10616 Mellow Meadows #27A
Austin, TX 78750 USA
[1] 512-257-1878
[1] 512-219-1009 fax
jshinnic@io.com

European colleagues should send a eurocheque in Austrian schillings (AS 440 or 220) or use an International Deposit Money Order/Mandat de Versement Internationale to:

COV&R c/o Institut für Dogmatik,
Universitätsstr. 4
A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria
account 93.012.689 Österreichische Postsparkasse BLZ 60.000

You may subscribe to the *Bulletin* without joining COV&R, at the annual rate of \$15 U.S. (AS 165).