



## 2003 MEETING: UNIVERSITY OF INNSBRUCK

### PASSIONS IN ECONOMY, POLITICS, AND THE MEDIA – IN DISCUSSION WITH CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

June 18 – June 21, 2003



Giotto: L'Invidia  
(Envy), 1305-06

Gucci: Advertisement for  
Envy perfume, 2002

Passions play an important role in economy, politics and the media. Recent discussions of the economy, no longer hesitate to stress the importance of a passion like envy functioning as a driving force in this field. The Swiss economist Ernst Fehr has given empirical proof of how envy significantly influences economic behavior. The world of advertising illustrates the importance of passions in the economy. Modern forms of politics, on the contrary, seem to be detached from passions, relying solely on rationality. However, developments since the end of the cold war have clearly challenged this self-understanding of modern politics. Politics, too, cannot escape the world of passions. Debates on nationalism, identity,

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*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."*

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The *Bulletin* is also available on the web, [theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/x1.html](http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/bulletin/x1.html). Due to space limitations, footnotes for the Bartlett and Johnson articles are omitted from this Bulletin, but footnoted versions may be found on the website.

## Innsbruck conference (continued)

Fundamentalism, or terrorism are all ultimately dealing with passions. Nobody would doubt, for instance, that terrorism is fueled by passion. But political or military actions to counter terrorism also need to mobilize passions in order to prevail. In our days, both the economy and politics depend on the media, another example of a highly passionate realm. According to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, it is the media who build a political body by creating an emotional unity. He refers, for instance, to Marshall McLuhan's insight into the role of the press as a builder of nationalism. Today we can closely observe how terrorism and the fight against it are first of all media events.

Passions also have an important religious dimension. At the center of all great religions we can find a special way to deal with passions. Whereas the great Eastern religions tend to overcome passions by recommending a life without any desire, the Biblical religions have a more complex view of passions addressing their good and bad sides. On the one hand, even the Biblical God becomes involved in passions (e.g. God's incarnation in Christianity). On the other hand, the Biblical religions focus on the distinction between the desires for eternal Good that unifies human beings and those desires for worldly goods which easily leads towards rivalry and war.

We can observe this distinction in the Ten Commandments. Whereas the first commandment recommends the love of the only true God, the ninth and tenth commandments prohibit the coveting of all those things that belong to our neighbors. It was Augustine who systematized this biblical view into a core concept of Western Christianity that distinguishes between the eternal Goods that people should "enjoy" (*frui*) and all temporal goods which should be "used" (*uti*) only. With the help of this distinction Thomas Aquinas was able to separate a good emulation from bad envy. Linked to a passionate longing for eternal Goods, emulation was seen by traditional Christianity as a necessary and benevolent part of human life. Is the modern breakdown of the distinction between eternal Goods and temporal goods contributing to the problems of our contemporary world, in which an "envious competitive vanity" and an "insatiable desire for possessing" (Kant) fuels the engine of economic life?

René Girard's mimetic theory should help to enable this interdisciplinary dialogue between social and economic scientists, philosophers, literary critics and theologians. Mimetic theory seems to be a suitable tool for this task. With its focus on mimetic desire—human desire imitating the desire of the other—it contributes to

a better understanding of passions in economy, politics and the media. It explains the important role mimetic behavior plays in these fields and also helps to understand the dangers which come with a world relying ever more on competition. Mimetic theory systematizes the relationship between passions and religion. According to Girard, human desire always longs for God or for those temporal goods that have turned into idols after the belief in God has died. This side of mimetic theory explains religious dimensions of capitalism, the contemporary return of religion in politics, and of religion within the modern mass media.

The preliminary conference program, call for papers (due November 30, 2002), and travel and lodging information can all be found at the conference website:

<http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/events/innsbruck2003.html>

## A letter from the President of COV&R

In a letter directed to Sister Ann Astell in reference to the 2002 COV&R meeting at Purdue University, Walter Cardinal Kasper, president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews wrote:

"With particular reference to Judaism, our search over the last thirty years, and indeed the guidelines of our Commission, have tended to focus on the affirmation of memory, that is, the memory of the patrimony shared by Catholics and Jews, with whom Catholics 'share the riches of the olive tree'."

This resonant expression, "the riches of the olive tree," alludes to the image of the young, wild olive shoot grafted into Israel, in order to draw life from it and to grow (c.f. Romans 11:24). Without Israel, without the patterns of worship, of prayer, without the prophetic witness of Israel, without wisdom and law, Christianity would never have existed. The memory of this shared patrimony must draw these two children of Abraham into courageous and honest dialogue. This is not the dialogue of tolerance which so often disguises condescension, but is the dialogue that seeks deeper understanding and that fundamental acceptance of another which transforms human relationships.

The 2002 Conference under the general title "Judaism, Christianity, and the Ancient World: Mimesis, Sacrifice, and Culture" advanced in no small measure that kind of dialogue. The willingness to debate, to argue, to clarify, to re-examine, is part of the energy required for study, particularly ecumenical study. The effort of the Conference to link mimetic theory to inter-religious dialogue was stimulating in several ways, not

least of which were the several exchanges on the topic of “Sacrifice, Violence, and Substitution” in Judaism and Christianity.

Overhearing these exchanges between Rene Girard, Alan Segal, Bruce Chilton, and Gerard Rosse was a privilege most of us present will not easily forget. Other articles that follow in this Bulletin will affirm my memory of this Conference. We owe our thanks to Sandy Goodhart for a jam-packed program, and a level of intellectual discourse that few academic conferences can surpass. We are all in his debt.

In the next year, COV&R will be extending its electronic reach, by email, websites, and a dot-org home. We will keep you posted. In the meantime, we invite your contributions to this Bulletin: book reviews, book recommendations, letters, news announcements, reviews of other pertinent conferences and workshops. Especially, we invite you to prepare to attend the 20003 Conference in Innsbruck, the major academic home of mimetic theorists, and we look forward to seeing you there.

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### Sites and Scenes of Sacrifice: Notes on Three Talks at COV&R 2002

Apart from the presentations on my own work by Tony Bartlett and Hans Jensen, three talks at COV&R spoke particularly to me, given my background and ongoing interests. These were the presentations by Michael Fishbane, Bruce Chilton, and Eric Gans. I hope these notes will be of interest to those who were not present and a reminder of the discussions to those who were. I don’t intend my comments as a defense of Girard’s work or the mimetic theory. I wish rather to highlight points on which I think the COV&R community needs to reflect.

**Michael Fishbane** made an intriguing presentation on “Transformation of Sacrifice.” Fishbane emphasized change and diversification in rabbinic Judaism’s approach to sacrifice. The destruction of the second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. led to a series of questions and reflections on the time “in-between,” the time between the present and the reconstitution of the Temple in the messianic age.

On the physical and ethical plane, the individual person becomes the site of sacrifice in the absence of Temple sacrifices. This is accomplished through fasting and self-abnegation. The rabbis developed a doctrine of *ke’ilu*, “as if”: when the self is offered and abnegated through fasting, the subject desires to become the place of sacrifice, as it were, through the diminishment of ones

own blood and fat. It is “as if” one is offering sacrifice in the Temple through giving up one’s physical substance for God.

Study and recitation of Scripture serve also as substitutes for and transformations of sacrifice. The theme of *’osek ba-torah*, to be occupied with Torah, becomes a dominant theme in Judaism. It is *ke’ilu*, as if being occupied with Torah is giving offerings to God. To be occupied with the text about the sin offering, for example, is to make a sin offering.

Awakening divine and human memory is another function of *ke’ilu*. The Talmud tractate Rosh Ha-Shanah (the New Year) says that the blast of the shofar (ram’s horn) is intended to awaken not only the human celebrants but also divine mercy and attentiveness. If done properly, it is as if one binds oneself to the altar.

We see in these changing views of sacrifice a shift to the importance of the individual and the individual’s intention. My own comment is that we see something like this shift earlier than rabbinic Judaism, or at least coterminous with it. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ emphasizes the primacy of the purity, or wholeheartedness, of individual intention. The disciple’s intention is lived out by giving oneself to the just and loving God who is met through the other, the neighbor. When working on the Gospel of Matthew during the 1980s, I called this a kind of “ethical mysticism.”



*Michael Fishbane, Rene Girard, and Sandy Goodhart.  
Photo courtesy of Heather Wack.*

Two further questions come to my mind about Fishbane’s paper. One is the role of the model in this Jewish theology of “as if.” To practice self-denial it is clearly necessary to have human models whom one imitates. Is the disciple also imitating God’s creating and saving activity? If so, in what sense?

The second question is the relation of the Jewish transformation of sacrifice, as sketched by Fishbane, to Girard's claim that Christ and the early church transformed sacrifice to another sense, that of the willingness to give of oneself to others and to God, not for sadomasochistic purposes but out of love and faithfulness to the other. On the level of individual intentions and self-giving, they are obviously connected. The Christian claim, as interpreted by Girard and Girardians, goes further: the victimization that occurs in sacrifice is exposed and replaced in Christ with the revelation of the God of victims. Is there anything comparable in Jewish history, practice, and theology? Is the Girardian claim a *tour de force*? Will it hold for Christian history, practice, and theology?



*Jozef Niewiadomski speaks on "The Drama of Jesus: Raymund Schwager's Brief Creed." Photo courtesy of Stefan Huber.*

**Bruce Chilton** gave an interesting survey of sacrifice and the function of communal meals in the early church and he touched on some important points for advocates of the mimetic theory. He started with John 6. (See John 6:53-54a: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...") Here the believer does not participate in Christ. Rather, Christ participates in the believer. This concept was widespread in ancient religions but it contradicts what we find in ancient Judaism. The mystery of Christ being taken into the believer is intended for the elect; it sorts the elect from all others.

For Paul, by contrast, the Eucharist is participation (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10). The sorting out process is here imbedded in the Eucharist in

that anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body, condemns himself.

In the synoptic Gospels Jesus is a heroic sin-offering. His blood is a ransom (a "freeing," *lutron*) for many (Mark 10:45). He dies a martyr's death, and his resurrection is God's raising of a martyr. According to the Gospel of Luke Jesus says, "This is my body, which is given for you" (Luke 22:19), which makes explicit the solidarity of Jesus and his intimate disciples.

As for a historical reconstruction of what Jesus himself said and did, he apparently viewed eating with others, people of all sorts, as a parable of the coming kingdom of God. He circumvented many observances of the Torah and accepted all—including non-observant Galileans and Judeans, women, tax collectors—as table companions. God's provision through the meal is already forgiveness. Those who eat with Jesus must already be open to forgiveness. He could have got away with this visionary perspective in Galilee, but not in Judea. There he was too close to the centers of authority and power—the Temple and the Roman governor.

Jesus' "cleansing" of the Temple was in effect an occupation. It was rooted in his vision of his mission and was based on his interpretation of a text in Zechariah. The occupation of the Temple having failed, Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of the meal with followers: now in the absence of a pure place to sacrifice (the Temple), his body and blood was the true sacrifice of Israel. Jesus made meals with him a rival altar. This "cultic" interpretation enables us to explain the link between meal and sacrifice in the Christian tradition. I gather that Chilton proposes this also as an insight into the origin of sacrifice in the communal meal, for which he has argued, rather than vice-versa as in Girard's thinking and in most versions of the mimetic theory.

This argument with Chilton over which is originary, the meal or the scapegoating event leading eventually to sacrificial ritual, is probably well known and does not need to be rehearsed. Another problem he poses is this cultic interpretation of the origin of the Eucharist. In the Christian attitude toward Judaism there is already a certain rivalry between Christ's body as the new Temple, the new site of sacrifice offered once and for all for humanity, and the Temple as the site of God's special presence through sacrificial offerings. The cultic interpretation based on Jesus' disappointed expectation tends to make of this rivalry a petty historical one. The Christology stemming from the Gospels at least renders Christ's offering of himself as universally inclusive and moves beyond local religion and politics.

If we relate Michael Fishbane's presentation to Bruce Chilton's paper, is it possible that the new kind of self-offering in the Sermon on the Mount, the disciple of

Jesus as the site of giving oneself to God through the other, was a model both given and “given off” by Jesus himself? Was this his way of being with others throughout his ministry, so that no matter what his exact words at the last meal with his followers they could finally only see him and themselves in the light of this continual offering (“sacrifice”) that was with them and working in them all along? But as Luke 24 witnesses, it requires a resurrection to comprehend that.

**Eric Gans** is one of those critics whose work takes its point of departure from Girard, his former teacher, but who cannot accept the belief in a transcendent God self-revealing in history and moving it toward its end. (See my essay on Gans, Tobin Siebers, and Paisley Livingston in “René Girard without the Cross? Religion and the Mimetic Theory,” published in the first issue of *Anthropoetics* and available through the *Anthropoetics* website ([www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/home.html](http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/home.html)). His own version of the mimetic theory accepts Girard’s concept of mimetic desire and the problem of violence as the central issue for the human race. However, as Andrew McKenna put it in his introduction of his work, Gans proposes a formal theory of representation. This is a big theory, which is small at the same time. It is big in that it seeks to explain how human beings are able to get along in the world, but it is small in that it is “minimalist”: its basic argument is that human beings are able to cooperate and live creatively in the world because they have developed language, which originated in the deferral of violence and whose originary function is thus to defer violence.

Regarding its minimalist character, Gans has stated that the appropriate “mascot” for his theory is the “hedgehog,” as in the Greek proverb he uses for his Anthropoetics website: *poll’ oid’ alopex, all’ echinos hen mega* (“the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog one big thing”). Of course, René Girard is also a hedgehog, but one of a slightly different variety.

The originary scene as Gans conceives and imagines it is that of a group of hominids who have before them an object that will satisfy their appetites, an edible animal they have killed. They all start for it but—in one crucial moment, which is the beginning of “revelation” in Gans’ anthropoetic sense—they look at each other and pull back from a violent confrontation over the object. The object thus becomes the object of desire and language is born in ostensive gesture, in pointing to or showing what *that* is, what *it* is, what *not-us* is. The world of signs is born.

In his talk Gans applied this to various topics (society, religion, the Holocaust, and death). Here I would like to focus on his originary scene and its consequences.

One question is whether the hominids of the scene could fear violence if they had not already experienced it and intuited that it would lead to the elimination of one of their number. I asked Gans this question in private and he replied that they had of course some experience of violence at the animal level, but would we even call that “violence”? I don’t find that response satisfying. It seems to me that a complicated series of developments must have occurred for the hominids to be aware of the potential of violence. Either that, or the event was just “one of those things,” an accident (their hesitation before battling each other for the prey) that registered on a brain which must have already evolved to the point of great mimetic potential. But such speculations don’t offer satisfying support of a theory.

This minimalist theory that Gans names “generative anthropology” gives an account of the origin of language, but not only of language, for violence and the possibility of scapegoating, in their proper human sense, emerge at the same time. How then can we explain the powerful hold of scapegoating, in both spontaneous and ritual forms, as well as offering victims in sacrifice, if the original and originating event is the deferral of violence? Ritual is a universal phenomenon, and archaic and traditional societies almost always practice rites that move through the offering of a victim to the reestablishment of order.



*Nikolaus Wandinger addresses “Raymund Schwager’s New Look at the Biblical Basis for the Doctrine of Original Sin.” Photo courtesy of Stefan Huber.*

On the other hand, traditional myths and legends of paradise and human beginnings typically describe a state of peace and harmony before a “fall” and loss of this blissful state. Girard’s mimetic hermeneutics demythologizes and deconstructs these accounts, implying that Eden is a mythical metaphor pointing to

God's intention for humankind. Girard fends off gnosticism by holding that mimetic desire is always inherently good, so that living authentically in a nonviolent manner is always a human potential. His position may be akin to Reinhold Niebuhr's dictum concerning sin: it is not necessary, but inevitable. So we could say that violence and scapegoating are not necessary, but inevitable. Yet Gans' anthropology would give a plausible explanation of how humans have been able in all cultures to conceive of a state, a "being" that is "before" and "beyond" all rivalry, conflict, and violence. Perhaps this is related to Hans Jensen's contention that a theology of blessing should take precedence over a theology of salvation-history, which emphasizes crisis and God's acts in history. Is the true "primordial" state of the human family one of harmony, peace, and blessing issuing from the deferral of violence?

And to return to Fishbane's remarks on the rabbinic *ke'ilu* theology, do the Jewish and Christian concepts of renunciation, of the sacrifice of self, somehow have their origin in the very creation of Adam as the creature who can defer violence and give himself over to a being that will be fulfilled in another place, in another time, in another self, in an other...?

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## The work of James Williams

*The following article is a fuller treatment of the talk given by Tony Bartlett at the Purdue conference.*

It is good to celebrate the work of another; celebration always takes the other as its pretext. And in this case the work or text is that of Jim Williams, to whom I owe a crucial debt in my own academic and professional career. Jim encouraged me to come across the water to study in Syracuse, a place noted for the longest winters south of the Arctic Circle and the biggest gosh-darn shopping mall in the USA. Even given my prior interest in the thought of René Girard, which made the initial connection between us, it was going to take some pretty fertile intellectual chemistry to overcome the double barrier, climatic and mass-consumerist, that Syracuse first suggested to my sensitive soul. Jim did not disappoint. The mentoring, inspiration and support he gave have been absolutely invaluable for me in my personal and intellectual development since 1993 when I first came to the USA.

My remarks here are fairly condensed and refer to two main areas of Jim's influence on my work. These

are, first, his use of mimetic anthropology in biblical criticism, and, second, a strong reading of Heidegger that was particularly formative for me. Both these areas fall under the title of hermeneutics, though in very different veins, biblical and ontological; they are deeply opposed as such, and were so in Jim's thought. I will take the liberty of expanding this mark of tension with reference to the thought of Michel Foucault which can be termed post-hermeneutic, and which addresses an ever-elusive, ever-inconclusive, ever-absent "Word of God." This will allow me to accentuate the contrast to the point of recognizing the essentially apocalyptic, or infinitely radical, nature of the hermeneutic in which Jim Williams and other Girardians are engaged.

Near the beginning of his last major work, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred*, Jim makes some startling assertions. He says, "In the Hebrew Bible there remains a certain ambiguity in the relation of the God of Israel to violence. The Gospels, however, disclose both the secret of the mythic camouflage of violence and the way of liberation through a love that refuses violence. The Gospels' story of Jesus as the Innocent Victim reveal the fate of the God beyond differences whose presence in the world so threatens and subverts structures of violence that it cannot be tolerated." The final point of this passage is the exceptionally important anti-figure or anti-symbol of a God who can only be revealed in the process of expulsion. This indeed is not a mythologized expulsion, in the form of strange flights from high rocks, or a princess snatched as a paramour by a monster from the deep, but is a real, brutal, unrelenting event of judicial, collective killing. This is a God present in the abyss of human disintegration, violence and abandonment, a concept that I have developed considerably in my own work. At the moment, however, I want to highlight the other aspect of Jim's statement, that the Gospels represent a non-ambiguous disclosure of non-violent love while the Hebrew scriptures are still engaged in a critical struggle between the old transcendence of violence and an emerging transcendence of love.

Here, at once is the core interpretative horizon, the deep hermeneutics or mainspring of the Girardian universe, and its significance is not to be located in a pseudo-hierarchy between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, but in the crucial perspective of an organic, historical, self-radicalizing tradition, finding its radical anthropological term in the figure of Jesus. By means of an entirely exceptional cultural process inscribed in Hebrew and Christian scriptures alike, there is a progressive disclosure and subversion of the very fabric of human culture itself, human culture's fabric of violence. The scriptural form of this disclosure has a

temporal arc of around fifteen hundred years, including oral and covenant traditions from before the Davidic monarchy, stretching to the last writings of the crucified-and-risen Jesus traditions at the beginning of the second century. The scriptural form of this disclosure is then recapitulated by a gathering upheaval or seismology of the contemporary world in which the effect of the scriptural cultural process provokes cultural crisis and at every level, from the local to the political to the philosophical. This last aspect is not fore-grounded by Williams but is certainly affirmed (for example, “[T]he texts will have their way; they will work in history,” and the evocative discussion of socio-political crisis in the last chapter.) Ultimately what is being claimed is a kind of real genealogy, one that is culturally inevitable or constant, in as much as culture is understood as self-creating through violence but by means of a singular cultural exception this violent self-construction is both displayed and radically transformed.

It is Jim’s vital contribution as a biblical scholar to affirm uncompromisingly this hermeneutic and across a thorough range of biblical texts. There are any number of striking instances of the process of radicalization of the tradition, the ones Jim adduces, and many others that have become apparent to me since. He describes in telling detail the transition from the sacred violence surrounding the figure of the Levites at the earliest levels of the covenant experience, including the possibility of child sacrifice, to the growing and sustained prophetic critique of the sacrificial cultus itself. In these early stories there is already a previous level of transition or discontinuity from complete mythical camouflage of the victim to a “theology of divine anger” in which the people themselves share responsibility for evil with the god. This militant theology of God’s wrath against human evil continues to inform and accompany the Hebrew experience down to the time of Jesus; and its traces or dissemination clearly appear in the text of the New Testament. Moreover this theology has re-coalesced and redeployed since then to become a standard—though I would say untenable—feature of culturally-received Christianity. A qualification like this introduces a note of complexity into a too simple picture of transformations from an historical transcendence of violence of the Hebrew variety to an historical transcendence of non-violence of the Christian variety. The process still continues to understand and articulate itself in both scriptural traditions. Jim also underlines this when he says “sacrificial language still has a strong hold” in the New Testament.

Ultimately, however, another, much more profoundly radical transformation or discontinuity is at work in the text, signaled above all by the figure of the

Suffering Servant in second Isaiah, and the way this is merged with the Son of Man in the Jesus tradition. In commenting on Mark’s Gospel Jim says the Servant prophecy of second Isaiah is “the heart of the secret meaning of (Jesus’) vocation.” In *Gospel Against Parable*, before Jim became acquainted with Girardian anthropology, he had already reached a remarkable conclusion about the key hermeneutic power of this figure. He is discussing in what sense God is acting historically in and through the Gospel narratives and seems unable to resolve the particular manner in which this may be so. He even appears to surrender the problem entirely when he proposes that “another ‘dimension’ than the ordinary or historical is the object of faith.” But then he adds: “(T)he mystery of the kingdom of God in the form of the suffering Son of Man should give us pause to reflect on what we can know from history *in any conventional sense*. . . . Is it not the case that in the prophetic faith to sing of the servant of Yahweh is to speak more truly of history.”

“To sing of the servant of Yahweh is to speak more truly of history,” perhaps the best line Jim ever wrote! Is this not the author on the threshold of a theme, of an intellectual leap waiting to happen, of Jim’s intuited sense of the victim of violence as the key simultaneously to historical and theological truth, something that needed the Girardian method to bring it to full articulation? In *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred* Jim put flesh on the bone of this thought, demonstrating again and again how the crucial mechanism of human culture and history is brought to light in the Hebrew scriptures and their Christian epilogue. What this means is that it is no longer a question of taking history as supposed empiricism, as crude facticity, and seeking then somehow to relate a separate system of religious meaning to it, but understanding that history itself arises *as meaning* in the revelation of the victim. That history does not truly begin until the complete disruption of sacred eternity—of time as “the same”—occurs with the revelation of both difference and the radically new in and through the cross. As Jim says, “The revelation, the disclosure, the unmasking of the mimetic world occurs in (Jesus’) death on the cross.” And “With the God revealed in the Son of Man...there is no violence.”

Therefore, human history, truly human history, and divine history, truly divine history, begin simultaneously and indissolubly with the cross. In this perspective empiricism itself, in its severe, anti-mythic realism, is derivative from the gospels, not gospel criticism from empiricism. By the same token, therefore, the critical quest for the historical Jesus is a product of the inner dynamic of the gospels themselves and must always circle back to the crucial event at their core for its own

meaning and inspiration. This suggests, to me at least, that in the last analysis there is an identity of the historical Jesus and what the gospels actually say about him; in particular about the intentionality toward his own death, about the manner in which he took it on, endured it and gave it an absolute critical meaning. Ultimately the abiding fascination of the gospels is the sense that this is not simply a layering of texts, an editorial suturing of themes that somehow achieves an historical breakthrough. At root there is an individual intelligence, praxis, project and will that, out of the abyssal resources of the Jewish spiritual and scriptural tradition, shook and changed the world because they personally and without remainder went beyond violence.

The progressive cultural shifts and transformations that Jim describes and that reach a category of depth in the person of Jesus are spread in an arc across the Hebrew canon, the deuterocanonical/apocryphal material, and the New Testament. This material can be presented in both a synchronic and diachronic way. From the synchronic perspective the bible offers us varying and discontinuous forms of cultural response. This is to say that in the final form of the Hebrew scriptures priestly, historical, J and E material all appear side by side, all these are paralleled by prophetic writings, and Wisdom writings provide another separate corpus oblique to all the former. Subsequently the Christian New Testament adds its own layer of response that despite greater compression may also be read as potentially various and discontinuous. There is no inner finality. But the whole of this material can be understood very differently, in terms of transformations that are successive and progressive through time. This, of course, is the reading that Jim gives, that I echo, and which in fact echoes the classical reading given by readers of the New Testament to the Hebrew scriptures or "Old Testament."

In the Greek Christian world, beginning in the third century, this reading became known as the typical or typological reading of the bible. The term refers to the root word *tupos* which means a slap, blow or strike, and hence the mark, impression made, and then pattern or figure. Old Testament events, themes and individuals were types of Christ or the Christian community, in the sense of a preliminary mark or impression which received its full depth or meaning in the events and meaning surrounding Jesus.

It's obvious how the typological approach could become overdetermined, emptying every facet of the Hebrew text of its own authenticity of meaning. The metaphysical development of Christianity would also strengthen its aridifying character. In fact its excessive use could end up freezing the very sense of temporality

that in principle it conveyed. The divinity of Christ, dimly foreshadowed in so many types of the Old Testament, could be understood as absolute metaphysical truth synchronic with the meaning of everything. In vital contrast the typology advanced by Girard and Williams sees the *tupos* or blow of human violence revealed again and again in the Hebrew scriptures, in all its temporal particularity, but receiving its deepest, most brutal impression in the person of Jesus. The mark in every sense of the suffering Son of Man releases the profound dynamic of the scripture, and can claim to be *the* transformative constitution of human history, the one that gives life and meaning to all genealogy. (One could say perhaps that in Jesus violence struck too deep, punching out its own foundations.) So in fact what Jim has presented is a new method of biblical hermeneutics, or a very new take on an old one. It is a biblical and anthropological typology of subverted violence and its abyssal transformation into new humanity.

This is what I began to understand with Jim, and I believe the range and consistency with which he applied it testifies to a deep personal grasp of a revolutionary hermeneutic. For it is not simply in the area of biblical scholarship that he recognized the hermeneutic; he saw its significance also in relation to contemporary philosophy. Jim manifested a biblical suspicion of ontological hermeneutics as first philosophy, of the Heideggerean worldview; because the lighting of being (*lichtung*) was subverted for him by a more profound and revelatory horizon of meaning, the one opened or created by the Crucified. This was evident in his delight in class over a passage of Dostoevsky's *Demons*, in which the central character, Stepan Trofimovich, makes his deathbed confession that "love is higher than being." The only mistake Stepan makes is to use the metaphysics of height and visibility rather than language of depth and transformation: "love is lower, more profound than being."

Jim's suspicion of ontology becomes precise in his remarks on Heidegger's 1935 lecture "Introduction to Metaphysics." Jim points to the shadowing of violence and ritual in Heidegger's language concerning the creators of the polis; the poets, priests, rulers are engaged in a battle, a *polemos* that is the same as *logos*, original gathering and order, in which "they cast the project up against overwhelming power to rule and exorcise (*bannen*) thereby the world opened up." Jim, of course, is not the first to recognize the undertow of violence in Heideggerean ontology. Levinas says it in *Totality and Infinity*: ontology mobilizes itself or displays its true content as violence, as war. But Jim also points up in this context Heidegger's hostility to the



Christian logos conceived as a disfigurement of the authentic Heraclitean logos. What is also worth underlining is the extent to which Heidegger is deeply influenced by the Christian logos even as he struggles to announce a philosophical space totally uncontaminated by it. Derrida himself comments on this unambiguously : “Heideggerian thought was not simply a constant attempt to separate itself from Christianity (a gesture that always needs to be related...to the incredible unleashing of anti-Christian violence represented by Nazism’s most official and explicit ideology, something that one tends to forget these days.) The same Heideggerian thinking often consists, notably in *Sein und Zeit*, in repeating on an ontological level Christian themes and texts that have been ‘de-Christianized.’”

This seems a most apposite remark, for it at once recognizes the impact of Christian themes on Heidegger and the way ontology is an attempt at an overall “de-Christianization.” This might suggest that the very structure of the interpretation of Being is at once indebted to the disclosing power of the logos or kerygma of the cross and a last furious attempt to keep it at bay. Or, to put it more provocatively still, the cross reveals the Being of beings more clearly than Heraclitus ever did because it adds no element of mythology to violence; it comes to us as no portentous fragment of original truth of being. Rather the Christian *logos*—exactly as Heidegger gives us to understand—it is intolerably particular. It displays the absolute historical particularity of human violence, and because of this it introduces judgment into the particularity of all violence. It is this judgment that Heidegger strives might and main to get rid even as he repeats continually the motifs of Christian revelation—fallenness, guilt, care, world, death, temporality. And so, as Jim states, “Heidegger’s concept of Being is a concept of the sacred... And like the sacred social order, it must achieve itself through violence.” In this revolutionary reading ontology is a cultural expression under profound pressure of the sign of the cross; it repeats the disclosure of violence but seeks to re-enclose this in the disclosure itself, and so justify itself, expelling the radical depth and challenge, the otherness of revelation which is the eruption of forgiving love.

Heidegger’s philosophical hermeneutics repeated the terrible disclosure or unfolding of violence but without the alternative provided by the cross. This gesture cannot be divorced from the horrors of actual National Socialism. I want to conclude my homage to Jim Williams by bringing his analysis up to date, sketching very lightly the same thoughts and concerns in respect of a leading postmodern thinker, Michel Foucault. Foucault’s concept of genealogy dispenses with any

fundamental ontology, and so represents a step beyond a disclosure and re-enclosure of Being. The task of the genealogist is rather to destroy the primacy of origins, of truths, along with doctrines of development and progress. Instead everything is the play of conflict as such. “Subjection, dominations, and combat are found everywhere (the genealogist) looks.” But neither is such combat the result of subjective consciousness, of intentionality, but rather of strategies or force relations that occur across the surface of actual history without causal reference to entities. It is the emergence of a battle itself which defines a space, and with that comes the emergence of subjects. “No one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in, since it always occurs in the interstice.”

Such an uncompromising principle of conflict as determination of meaning in actual history clearly cannot be far removed from Girardian anthropology of generative violence, and also as philosophical construction of terminal sacrificial crisis. For it is apparent that once again we are dealing with an ultimate ritual category, without critical depth or hope for an alternative, in essence not far removed from Heidegger. Foucault has dispensed with the mystique of being which historically was related to the outrage of Nazism, but in its place he asserts a poststructuralist play of forces that may be seen to be just as effectively related to endless consumerism, the infinity of commodity capitalism. What there is in common is the thematic release of rivalry and violence, of violence as an anti-theme, without reference to the biblical subversion from which the contemporary disclosure comes and its absolutely coincident offer of transformation out of present history.

As Foucault puts it, “Whereas the interpreter is obliged to go to the depth of things, like an excavator, the moment of interpretation [in genealogy] is like an overview, from higher and higher up, which allows the depth to be laid out in front of him in a more and more profound visibility; depth is resituated as an absolutely superficial secret.” Even so the Western philosophical tradition, so profoundly conditioned by biblical depth and revelation, continues to claim its privilege of absolute vision and avoid the abyssal anti-hermeneutics of faith in the cross. Thus a continual apocalypse occurs, an ever deepening revelation of violence as an anti-theme, and the consequent ever-heightening urgency of the biblical hermeneutic that at once provokes the revelation and proposes the abyssal alternative of love. This for me is the final gift, provocation and wonder of the intellectual and literary legacy of James Williams.

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## Introduction and Review of *Das Opfer-aktuelle Kontroversen*

Das Opfer-aktuelle Kontroversen: Religions-politischer Diskurs im Kontext der mimetischen Theorie. ed. Bernhard Dieckmann (Münster–Hamburg–London: Lit verlag, 2001) 308 pp.

The papers resulting from the conference: “The Transformational Power of Sacrifice: Religio-Political Discourse in the Context of Mimetic Theory,” that was held at the Villa Vigoni on Lake Como from Oct. 18–22, 1999, are published here in German. The contents, translated into English, and numbered for convenience of reference, are:

- Part I: Cosmos and Sacrifice. (I-1) Raymund Schwager, “Creation and Sacrifice: Roberto Calasso and René Girard”; (I-2) Giuseppi Fornari, “Dionysius, Nature, and the Evangelical Difference. Understanding of Nature and Sacrifice: Calasso, Anaximander, and Nietzsche”; (I-3) Hans Dieter Zimmerman, “Human Sacrifice – God Sacrifice: Wodan, Iphigeneia, Isaac, Dionysius, Christ”; (I-4) Susanne Nordhofen, “Christa Wolf’s Medea. Myth and Tragedy in the Light of Mimetic Theory;” (I-5) Wieland Schmied, “Blasphemy or Theodicy? The Orgy Mystery Theater of Hermann Nitsch.”
- Part II: Political Philosophy and Mimetic Theory. (II-1) Maria Stella Barberi, “To what Purpose Enmity? Thinking through Mimetic Theory by Way of Carl Schmitt”; (II-2) Michele Nicoletti, “The Political Theology of Carl Schmitt and the Mimetic Theory of René Girard”; (II-3) Ruth Groh, “On the Problem of Decision in Carl Schmitt and René Girard”; (II-4) Wolfgang Palaver, “Globalization and Sacrifice: Carl Schmitt’s Teaching on Law”; (II-5) Klaus Reichert, “Shakespeare’s Mimetic Rivals”; (II-6) Sergio Manghi, “No One Excluded: The Care of One’s Neighbor: Social Services and Democracy.”
- Part III: Deconstruction, Religion, Christianity. (III-1) Gianni Vattimo, “Heidegger and Girard—Beginnings of a Dialogue”; (III-2) René Girard, “Facts, Not Just Interpretations”; (III-3) Stefano Tomelleri, “Ressentiment and Deconstruction”; (III-4) Józef Niewiadomski, “Transcendence and Incarnation: The Transforming Power of Sacrifice as Seen in the Light of Easter.”

From the background of the claim that the exercise of violence is not a perversion of, but rather, an inherently constitutive moment of modern competition,

the question arises: are victims (or sacrifices) unavoidable? [Note that the German word Opfer means in English both “victim” and “sacrifice.”] That was the central question behind this German-Italian conference. Especially fascinating was the fact that the German participants were mostly literary scholars and theologians, while the Italian scholars were mostly social scientists.

It is quite impossible, in a brief review, to do justice to such a rich collection of articles. However, for German readers, Bernhard Dieckmann’s “Introduction” (9–16) outlines very helpfully the content and significance of the collection, both as a whole and in its individual parts. The substance of my review can do no better than to translate freely from this introduction.

“All the conference papers are published here. Some additional ones were written by participants after taking part in the discussions. Schmied’s paper (I-5) was added to the collection because of its relationship to the conference theme. Vattimo’s paper is the one he would have read had he been able to attend the conference.

“The focus of the conference was the mimetic theory of René Girard who became known as an interpreter of archaic religion and its sacrificial practices by his 1972 *La violence et le sacré*. But Girard’s purpose was much more ambitious. For him, the working out of an anthropology that analyzes the fundamental meaning of violence for human beings and society is just the first step. Beyond that, he tries to show that the biblical message both exposes and overcomes violence. Thus, Girard is concerned not just with the connection between the religious sacrificial practices and the societal structures of archaic societies on which his research was, for a time, especially concentrated; he is also just as concerned with the problem of victimage/sacrifice in modern societies. Even the—at first glance peaceful—competition of liberal social arrangements with its market economy, even that must be understood as a violent sacrificial system. How helpful mimetic theory can be in this endeavor has been shown, for example, by Paul Dumouchel and Jean Pierre Dupuy in their recent (2001) *Die Hölle der Dinge. René Girard und die Logik der Ökonomie*. It is true, then, even for the modern world, that sacrifice remains an “actual” problem, a central social and political challenge. Even the modern world cannot get along without the transforming power of sacrifice, its ability to reduce social tensions, and to bring peace to society by distinguishing between good and bad violence.

“Along with R. Girard, three authors are especially important for the articles in this collection. Two of them, Roberto Calasso and Gianni Vattimo, have taken an especially emphatic position in the debate on René

Girard's understanding of sacrifice. The political thought of the third, Carl Schmitt, has become very important in the recent discussion about the significance of globalization. The three parts of this volume are arranged primarily in relationship to these authors.

"Part I, *Cosmos and Sacrifice*, first looks at the position that Roberto Calasso, the Italian publisher of Girard, developed in his 1994 novel *The Ruin of Kasch*. Calasso begins by fairly extensively appropriating Girard's analysis of sacrifice. But then he criticizes Girard for making too much of the connection of human beings to nature. He also accuses him of sharing in the illusions of the Western Enlightenment. Ever since the Greeks, it has been part of the hubris of Western thought to want to overcome or get beyond the need for sacrifice. But since that is impossible, the will to do so is then taken for the actual reality. The fact that life was not possible without sacrifice was repressed—with disastrous consequences. This meant that the violence-limiting function of sacrifice was lost; in other words, there was no longer any social protection against violence; sacrificing and victimizing got out of control. This attitude reached its high point in the modern belief that human beings could take their fate into their own hands and shape it. Calasso's sharpest polemic is directed against Marxism. It is hardly necessary to add that these efforts to get beyond the need for sacrifice have reached a new high point in the most recent projects to direct and correct evolution by means of gene and computer technology. Calasso pleads for a turning to the original wisdom of Asia, especially as witnessed in the Indian Vedas. Culture and history are to have their place under and in nature. Human beings must be modest and accept that sacrifice is the central anthropological given and, beyond that, also a cosmological given. It mirrors the eternal circulation of the cosmos. Life arises only out of struggle.

"In the first article, Schwager (I-1) takes issue with Calasso. He stresses that the grounding of human life in nature is admittedly only slightly thematized in Girard, but by no means passed over. One can see this in the great importance of evolutionary categories in Girard's theory. It is Schwager's concern to connect Christian belief in creation and the theory of evolution with each other. In doing this he places great importance on the doctrine of original sin as a model for understanding both the human inclination to violence and the interpenetration of violence with nature. Giuseppi Fornari (I-2) points out that the categories with which nature is interpreted are, in the thought of early antiquity, anthropomorphic or sociomorphic; they understand nature in analogy with society. Hence Calasso's grounding of sacrifice in the circulation of

nature presupposes, actually against his own intentions, a capitulation to or resignation to societal violence. Hans Dieter Zimmerman (I-3) looks back into the past of sacrifice in the History of Religions, especially among the Germans, the Greeks, and in Christianity. How great the need is for sacrifice, even in the present, is demonstrated, finally, by the contribution of W. Schmied (I-5) on the Orgies Mystery Theater of the Viennese action-artist Herman Nitsch. One must understand this as a gigantic attempt to renew the tradition of religious-ritual sacrifice.

"Part Two, *Politics and Sacrifice*, begins with the political thought of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, one of the most significant international political jurists of the 20th century—as skeptical as Calasso vis-à-vis Enlightenment optimism—held the friend-enemy relationship as constitutive of the dimension of the political. Politics is possible only by the identification and the exclusion of enemies; it therefore cannot dispense with violence and sacrifice. It is especially interesting that Schmitt relates political theory and theology to each other; he emphasizes the grounding of all political concepts in theology. He thus intentionally locates himself decisively within the Catholic tradition. Scholars who stand close to mimetic theory have, in recent years, become very interested in this connection between political theory and theology. For there exist unmistakable parallels between Schmitt's understanding of the political and that of Girard—with, of course, one fundamental difference: Schmitt holds violence in politics to be totally unavoidable; and he also places religion under the same necessity. Girard, on the contrary, strives, even in the realm of politics, to suppress violence, and he understands the Christian faith in the tradition of Augustine's *De civitate dei* as a reality that transcends the sphere of politics and violence. This is discussed in the first articles of this part by Maria Stella Barberi (II-1), Michele Nicoletti (II-2), Ruth Groh (II-3), and Wolfgang Palaver (II-4). From the view of mimetic theory, Schmitt is an exemplary representative of a sacrificial Christendom or Catholicism. He is only marginally interested in the victims (*Opfer*) of political processes. At the decisive moment, at least as far as his political thought is concerned, he places the heritage of ancient Rome over the message of Jesus. But the controversy with Schmitt is not just historically significant; for in the current debates about globalization, we are dealing, as W. Palaver shows, with questions that Schmitt has already taken up. S. P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1997) repeats many of the arguments of Schmitt.

"The relationship between politics, violence, and sacrifice is constantly being thematized anew in various

literary works. Klaus Reicher (II-5) describes how rivalries, as the driving force of the political, determine the action both of Shakespeare's royal dramas as well as of his *Macbeth*. In doing so he develops further Girard's analyses of Shakespeare. Susanne Nordhofen (II-6) analyses the reception of Girard in the *Medea* of Christa Wolf. Both foundational murder and sacrifice play a central role in this novel. But this particular insight into the founding significance of violence for society ends in a confident assurance that one of these (sacrifice) is better than the other alternatives, hence in a return to myth.

"At the end of Part II, Sergio Manghi (II-7) considers the consequences of the obligation to universal solidarity for the modern social and legal state. It is a consequence of the proclamation of Jesus, especially of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Differently than Calasso and Schmitt, he considers the proclamation of Jesus as the foundation of modern democratic politics. The open-endedness and imperfection of societal life, that to many is so objectionable and that abrades them to desperation, is a positive challenge. What we repeatedly think to be deficiency is, in reality, our great opportunity: life not as a realization of preordained ethical, social, and political programs, but as living encounter and struggle with free persons of equal rights.

"Already in Part II, *Cosmos and Sacrifice*, the thought of Nietzsche stood in the background, but it was understood both by Calasso and Nietzsche as anti-Christian and sacrifice-friendly. In Part III, *Deconstruction and Christianity*, we now turn to the way Gianni Vattimo has been philosophically drawing near to Christianity—and precisely with the help of Nietzsche and Heidegger. For Vattimo, both of these philosophers are key figures in the overcoming of Western metaphysics which, with its objectivism, laid the foundation for the hubris of the modern "mastery" of the world. In this connection, he develops the concept of weak thinking, for which the rejection of all violence is essential. Thus the thinking of Girard becomes for him a bridge that leads to Christianity. But, in all this, Vattimo's position in relation to Christianity's truth-claim remains unclear: for him, ultimate validity and absolute claims belong to the disastrous heritage of an objective metaphysics.

"The reactions of the authors who argue with him are correspondingly ambiguous. R. Girard highlights the proximity of Vattimo to Catholic Christianity. However, against the Heideggerian antireferential concept of truth, he pleads for facts and not just interpretations, because otherwise, the difference between the perpetrator and the victim is eliminated. Stefano Tomelleri then comes to Vattimo's defense against this objection, seeing

deconstruction only as an aspect of Nietzsche's *ressentiment*. But he does point out that dispensing with all firm structures could easily lead to a crisis of a lack of differentiation in which mutual aggression, no longer subject to limitation, could thus be satisfied. Józef Niewiadomski, as a theologian, revisits the question of the transformative power of sacrifice. He asks about the nature of the "Easter eyes" that saw The Crucified as Risen, and determines it to be the ability to recognize Jesus' unconditional giving of his life and love, for which eyes death becomes the door to life.

"Before getting into a number of these contributions, let me emphasize the need to have a positive concept of sacrifice—this is not just in consideration of the theological and liturgical tradition of Christianity in which talking about sacrifice is firmly anchored, but also for ethical and philosophical reasons. It has to be emphasized that authentic human life, without selfless dedication to another, is not possible. This can elevate even to the point of giving one's own life for another; for help is often possible only at the risk of one's life. We have here, in fact, an enormous difference between sacrifice as the expulsion, persecution, or even killing of another, and sacrifice as voluntary dedication to another. But there is still an inner, factual connection between the two meanings. The best means to avoid self-dedication is to project it onto another, to drive him/her (instead of oneself) to self-sacrifice. Here is where ethical imperatives can take on a dangerous double meaning. You don't avoid the problem by means of mere verbal differentiations, between, e.g., self-sacrifice and self-dedication, but only by means of a systematic clarification not just of the fundamental dangers of the concept of sacrifice, but also of its unavoidability.

"The double meaning discussed here is also of fundamental importance for the current most successful bestseller. The plot of the Harry Potter story develops in relation to this double meaning. This is true at least in the first volume, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. On one side, the hero, Harry Potter, is protected by sacrifice (the self-giving love of his mother who died to save him). On the other side, the evil one "about whom one does not speak" and his followers rely on sacrifice (as the killing of another). They need the blood of the unicorn. This is accompanied by the statement: 'Always the innocent are the first victims'."

Thus the material I have taken from Dieckmann's introduction. To conclude, let me begin with some 'obligatory' comment about the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of a collection. In this case the advantages clearly dominate. For those who have some, but not necessarily extensive, familiarity with mimetic theory, or are at least open to its basic insights, this

collection gives marvelous witness and some entrée to the often bewildering range of disciplines that contribute to and are affected by mimetic theory. Let me stress the importance of this. Most Girardian scholars or followers of mimetic theory are literary theorists, or theologians, or philosophers, or anthropologists, or psychologists, or legal theorists, or pastors, or social scientists of this or that orientation, etc., etc., etc. But few are more than one or two of these things. It would be a mistake, indeed one I made myself when I first read this book, to focus just on those articles that resonate with one's own interests. That would be to miss the richness of this collection, to evade the challenge of trying to enter into other approaches to mimetic theory, and to miss experiencing for oneself how broadly and deeply developed are the various discourses that have been blossoming around Girardian mimetic theory.

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## Sacrificial Anti-Abortionism

Bernadette Waterman Ward recently argued in an excellent article in *Contagion* that abortion is a sacrificial practice. She seems to have general approval among participants in the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, where the majority opinion appears to be that abortion ought to be illegal. I do not wish to contest Ward's thesis; yet I believe a case can and should be made that much of the discourse in the anti-abortion ("pro-life") movement is also sacrificial. This is particularly true among conservative Protestant groups. This sacrificial quality of pro-life discourse ought to be a consideration in the debate on public policy regarding abortion.

Here I consider two major dimensions of pro-life discourse that betray its sacrificial nature: 1) the collective dimension, where the anti-abortion crowd manifests the stereotypes of persecution of a sacrificial lynch mob; and 2) the particular sign of the fetus itself, attention to which resembles the fascination of the primitive sacred for a fetish or holy relic.

### The Collective Dimension: The Gathering Rage

René Girard has shown that the primary function of sacrifice is to reconcile the culture so that it can exist as a collective. The sacrificial victim becomes the reconciling center of the culture. The body of the victim of the collective violence (i.e., the sacrifice) becomes a mythological sign or symbol around which the culture gathers. But the corpse need not always be the product of communal violence; the deified victim of a natural death can also serve this purpose; or a fetish object representing the sacred victim can function in this way.

A secondary characteristic of this sacred system is that this violence requires unanimous agreement that the victim should be killed; commonly, some moral law to which everyone agrees serves as the means to establish this. Any clear transgressor of that law becomes a ready victim.

These two stereotypes of persecution appear in much of the rhetoric of the "pro-life" political camp. We find a community gathering around a sacred object to justify persecution; and we find an effort to draw upon moral laws to generate agreement about the guilt of the scapegoat—the scapegoat in this case being the abortionist and/or the pregnant woman.

It is common in pro-life rhetoric for the moral law to be invoked with the declamation of the murder of an innocent—the fetus. The structure of persecution proceeds from there, as culprits are identified. The pregnant woman is doubly guilty of transgression, first because she has a crisis pregnancy, something which throws doubt on her moral integrity ("she's had her fun and now she doesn't want to take responsibility"); and second because she now wants to kill the "innocent being" inside her. She is a ready-made sacrificial victim. We can mete out her punishment through denial of the abortion she seeks; she must bear her child "in travail." She must bear the cost of raising the child. The abortionist and the woman seeking the abortion occupy the position of the guilty victims in the center of the righteously indignant crowd. The scenario is structurally homologous with a lynching. This is especially evident when a self-appointed sacred executioner such as Paul Hill actually carries out a killing on behalf of the crowd.

Anti-abortion discourse usually employs the device of concern for fetuses as "innocent victims." Even conceding that the fetus is indeed a victim, we might well ask whether the fetus is a collective victim. Dr. Ward argues that the fetus is a collective victim because of the cultural environment which values convenience, career, etc., above the life of the fetus. But these arguments tend to ignore the obvious fact that the immediate "victimizers" are the abortionist and the mother. If abortion is murder, it is not in the first instance a collective murder. Neither does abortion gather the culture in the direct way that a lynching does.

On the other hand, the anti-abortion movement does gather around the call to punish the abortionist and the woman seeking abortion services. Much of "pro-life" discourse is a call to restore a sacred moral law, punishing those who transgress it.

In *The Scapegoat*, René Girard's second stereotype of persecution is the one in which the culture begins to accuse certain transgressors as responsible for pervasive social breakdown. This stereotype serves in similar

situations as a means of justifying the collective desire for violence against the accused. In the old south, a black man would be lynched because an accusation was made that he raped a white girl. The crowd carrying out the lynching convinced itself that it was doing so in order to end a “plague” of black depredations against the virtue of white womanhood. This expressed concern only served as an excuse to carry out the lynching.

The case of the woman taken in adultery in John 8 is exactly this sort of scene, with Jesus revealing that the moral concern of the crowd was only an excuse to carry out a sacrifice.

The pro-life movement, in its call for the punishment of abortion providers, focuses on the innocent fetus as the victim. Anti-abortion rhetoric often repeats the cry that millions of innocents are being killed by abortion, proof of the moral degradation of our society. As in the example of lynching in the old South, here we have the precise elements of Girard’s second stereotype of persecution: claims of a cultural breakdown and a moral plague; and a call for the community to punish the one identified as the cause of the problem.

### **The Dimension of the Particular**

#### **Sacred Sign: Fetus as Fetish**

Another indicator that anti-abortion discourse is sacrificial is the tendency of such discourse to make a sacred fetish of the fetus. Gil Bailie’s lecture on the Gospel of John 11 is helpful in this regard. He points out that a natural death can serve a sacrificial purpose through rituals that sacralize the body of the deceased. The type of ritual wailing of Mary, Martha, and the Jews at the tomb of Lazarus is a phenomenon common to many cultures, a technique to adapt the natural death of Lazarus to serve a sacrificial purpose. Dead bodies, tombs, relics, and other sacred objects are made sacred on account of their association with death, to serve the purpose of reconciling people in the culture. It is often claimed that such objects contain the sacred spirit of the dead saint or ancestor. Being sacred, such objects are treated with great reverence. Violation of the sacredness of these objects is often the occasion for collective violence against the transgressor.

One example of this again comes to us from Gil Bailie. He pointed out that the sacred object which produced the solidarity necessary for the crusades in the 10th century was the holy sepulcher in Jerusalem. The people of Europe rallied around the call to kill the infidel in the holy land for the sake of the holy sepulcher of Jesus. Such death-related sacred objects have tremendous power to bind people together in solidarity, but they also bind people together to lynch anyone who violates the sacredness of these sites/objects.

The fetus occupies exactly this position in the collective dynamics of anti-abortion discourse. Much of the debate about the fetus has been about whether or not the fetus has a spirit. This imputation of a soul or spirit to the fetus differs only slightly from the pagan imputation of a sacred spirit to a sacred burial site or fetish. The question of the fetus’s humanity is necessarily metaphysical—measurements of heartbeat and movement notwithstanding. Such metaphysical arguments must always exist in the sacred rather than in the prophetic realm.

Girard’s analysis of the founding of philosophy suggests that metaphysical discourse is fundamentally sacrificial. His reading of the presocratic philosopher Heraclitus indicates that Heraclitus’ *logos* is founded on violence—something which Heraclitus acknowledged but retreated from. Thus the traditions that follow upon Greek philosophy must fail to discover the truth because their premises require the obscuring of the sacrifice upon which they are founded. Metaphysical notions like “Being” and “innocence” can have little relationship with the truth because they are essentially double negatives. The idea of “being” as a metaphysical concept derives essentially from the negation of a negation: “being” = “not dead.” Likewise, for innocence: “innocence” = “not guilty.”

The humanity of a fetus must inevitably exist in our minds only as an abstraction. We cannot really have a relationship with an unborn fetus; if personhood is “interdividual,” i.e., known and experienced only through relationship, then a fetus cannot be experienced as a person. Therefore if a fetus is to be considered a person it can only be so in a metaphysical sense of personhood—questions of “quickenings” and “when life begins” dominating the discussion. Inevitably, then, the fetus serves as a sacred object—a metaphysical person, an object invested with “spirit”—a fetish.

In the collective dynamics of the anti-abortion movement, this is precisely what we see—a community gathering around a sacred object, upholding it as more worthy—because of its innocence—than the mother who carries it, and weeping over its desecration by the sinful abortionist and the woman who gets the abortion. Bloody descriptions of the death of the fetus serve to inflame the passions of those who demand punishment of the infidels—just as the followers of Slobodan Milosevic once wept over the death of a national hero (who died in 1389) before they rose up to slaughter the Muslims. The structure of the collective dynamics is the same.

Spokespersons for the pro-life movement argue that they seek only to end slaughter, not to perpetrate it (notwithstanding the crazy minority who assassinate

abortion doctors or put wanted lists on the internet). But the impulse of sacrificial violence isn't necessarily only for lynching or slaughter. Girard's definition of collective violence includes not only lynching, but exiling or punishing. The anti-abortion movement puts a clear emphasis on punishing abortionists (i.e. "outlawing abortion").

It is revealing in this regard that a significant proportion of the activists who struggle to outlaw abortion also tend to favor capital punishment (the Roman Catholic Church, to its credit, being a notable exception to this trend). If anti-abortion is purely anti-sacrificial, one would expect that an anti-abortion population would also consistently oppose the sacrificial practice of capital punishment. Surveys suggest that people who are pro-life generally tend to oppose capital punishment, but the tendency is not universal. Among certain anti-abortion activists, particularly conservative Protestants, there is a strong tendency to favor capital punishment. This would seem to suggest that, within a significant segment of the pro-life movement, "pro-life" actually means pro-sacrifice.

#### **A Cross-Bearing, Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Abortion Policy**

Ward and other Girardian pro-life advocates are right to consider pro-choice discourse about "privacy rights" and "power over one's own body" to be sacrificial. Yet anti-abortion discourse that focuses on the "right to life" of the fetus and its "quickening," is also sacrificial. I suggest that the only non-sacrificial, non-violent position in this debate would be to regard the pregnant woman, along with the fetus she is carrying, as a single whole: a special category of human life, requiring a special kind of care and support. This would constitute a call to society toward a costly discipleship of support for life—and the only authentically "pro-life" position.

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### **Annual Business Meeting: Minutes**

Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana  
Saturday, June 8, 2002

**Present:** Membership of COV&R 2002

The meeting was called to order by D. Culbertson, President, at 6:00 p.m.

1. D. Culbertson reminded the membership that nominations from the advisory board for board membership do not preclude nominations from the floor.
2. Paul Bellan-Boyer moved and Sandor Goodhart seconded that James Alison, nominated by the board for

election to the advisory board (replacing Marie-Louise Martinez), be approved for this position, term to expire in 2005. The motion was unanimously approved by the membership.

3. D. Culbertson announced that Eric Gans had been appointed to honorary membership on the advisory board because of his permanent contribution to the work of COV&R.

4. Gil Bailie moved and James Williams seconded that Paul Nuechterlein, nominated by the board as first alternate, replace Eric Gans as an elected member of the board, term to expire in 2005. The motion was unanimously approved by the COV&R membership.

5. Wolfgang Palaver announced the 2003 meeting in Innsbruck, June 18-21 and called the membership's attention to the fact that the call for papers is posted on the COV&R website at <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/events/innsbruck2003.html>. Wolfgang stressed the need for scholars outside of COV&R to dialogue with COV&R scholars. He pointed out that, to this end, a number so Swiss researchers who have been engaged in empirical studies on envy, resentment, and reciprocity have been scheduled to speak at the Innsbruck 2003 meeting. Wolfgang called the membership's attention to the list of accommodations posted with the call for papers.

6. Eric Gans accepted his appointment as an honorary member of the Advisory board.

7. Diana Culbertson announced that the COV&R session at the AAR/SBL meeting in Toronto will take place the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and the topic of the session is to be Raymund Schwager's book on original sin.

8. Diana Culbertson apprised the membership of the 2004 COV&R meeting scheduled for June 2-5 at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. The theme of the conference has not been decided, and the program committee appointed by the board (Bob Daly, Britt Johnston, Andrew McKenna, and Gil Bailie) will report on their decisions at the 2003 meeting. Accommodations are plentiful at Ghost Ranch, and suitable for academics.

9. Diana Culbertson announced the advisory board's addition to the bylaws of COV&R: "The executive secretary in consultation with the president and treasurer may offer travel assistance to any speaker or graduate students to any conference sponsored by COV&R." Sandor Goodhart explained to the membership that the disbursements involved are not huge amounts, and that they come from the dues and convention contributions of COV&R members.

10. The membership was apprised of the problems in publishing the bulletin this year (September 11 as disruptive for Paul, and lack of content submitted for

publication). Cheryl McGuire volunteered to help Paul Bellan Boyer to solicit ongoing news, book reviews, abstracts of dissertations, etc., important to COV&R and its purpose.

11. Andrew McKenna announced that Volume 8 of the journal has been distributed, and that back issues of the journal are to be put online. Eric Gans volunteered to scan Volume 4 into a pdf file so that it can be accessed online.

12. Paul Bellan-Boyer moved and Andrew McKenna seconded that the reappointments of C. Bandera, G. Bailie, S. Goodhart (Executive secretary), J. Niewiadomski, D. Regensburger (Treasurer, Europe), and J. Shinnick (Treasurer, NA) be approved by the membership. The reappointments were unanimously approved.

13. Paul Nuechterlein announced an upcoming conference on atonement theory, featuring James Alison

as speaker, and taking place in Racine, Wisconsin next week.

14. Paul Nuechterlein reminded the membership that whoever wanted to be included on his email reminder notices for his Girardian reflections on the lectionary should email him to be placed on the list. Paul also offered to sign members up for the ecunet Girard list.

15. Cheryl McGuire reminded the membership that Andrew Marr's personal website (linked to the COV&R web page) contains Girardian reflections on the Benedictine Rule.

16. Paul Bellan-Boyer moved that the meeting be adjourned. R. Daly seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Julie Shinnick, Treasurer-NA  
(for Sandor Goodhart, Executive Secretary)

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