

The Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion

COV&R

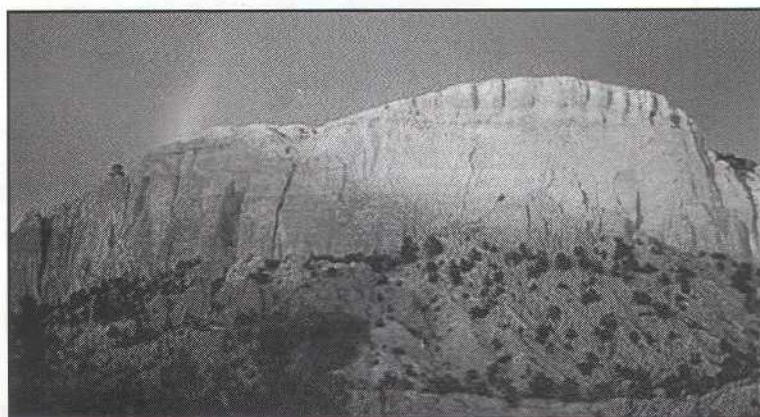


No. 23

November 2003

2004 MEETING – GHOST RANCH ABIQUIU, NEW MEXICO

Nature, Human Nature, and the Mimetic Theory June 2 – June 5, 2004



<http://www.covr2004.org>

Call for papers – January 15

The mimetic scapegoat theory offers groundbreaking insights toward understanding human violence and its origin in rivalrous desire. It presents a view of the human condition that implies a concept of human nature, but proponents of the mimetic theory have yet to clarify how this understanding of human nature might fit into a total economy of the natural world. Nor have they adequately explored those aspects of religion for which nature itself is a manifestation of the sacred.

The primary object of this conference is to address these two lacunae, both from the standpoint of the mimetic scapegoat theory and in relation to the theory. The theme of this conference suggests the following as possible lines of inquiry (among others):

- How should humans view their place within the totality of nature or, in biblical terms, within creation?
- What difference does it make to understand “nature” as “creation”?

<continued on page 2>

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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There’s more, including back issues of the Bulletin, on the COV&R website, <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/covr>.

Ghost Ranch Call for Papers (cont.)

- What are our human responsibilities, especially given the fact that in many respects we humans, for so long subject to the natural world, are now beginning to overwhelm the natural environment?
- Do literary depictions of nature (e.g. as either “sacred” or “monstrous”) reflect our destructiveness toward nature?
- Has the natural environment itself become the scapegoat for modern culture?
- How might mimetic theory illuminate more nature-centered religions (e.g. Native American, Japanese Shinto, etc.) or vice versa?
- Do Christian and Jewish theology, philosophy, and preconceptions need to be corrected or modified by other traditions of thought?
- How should Christian theology relate to evolutionary theory?

Also, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion has established a continuing project that will be addressed in this and future conferences: the challenge of peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians. There will be a special session during COV&R 2004 to work on this issue. Papers on how to apply the mimetic theory in that context are sought for this discussion.

Any and all interested individuals are invited to submit papers and/or paper proposals (250 - 500 words) by **January 15, 2004** via email attachments (in Microsoft Word format) to Britton Johnston of the program committee at papers@covr2004.org. For further information about René Girard or the mimetic theory, see theol.uibk.ac.at/covr.

The conference is seeking papers that apply or develop the mimetic theory of René Girard with respect to the relationship of human culture to matter, the body, and/or the natural world. Papers that present tightly argued theses are less important for the purposes of this conference than papers that open up opportunities for creative dialogue and exploration.

Papers to be presented in plenary meetings should be in a distributable draft form by April 1, 2004. Advance registrants will receive copies by May 1.

For further information about the conference, visit the conference web page, www.covr2004.org, or contact Britton Johnston, conference organizer, at:

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Report from Innsbruck Conference: Polarity

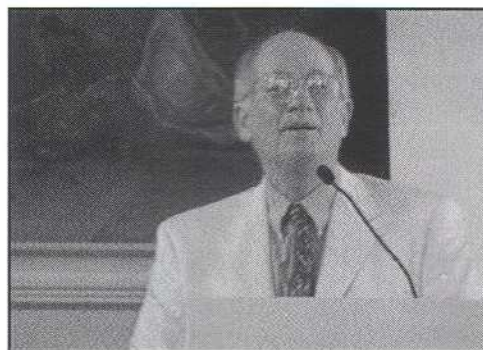
Jørgen Jørgensen
Hjørring Seminarium

One issue, which creates polarity among mimetic thinkers, is how to understand transformations of scapegoating.

The world of today was the starting point for both Jean-Pierre Dupuy's *Panic and Politic* and Eric Gans' *The Market and Resentment*, two inspiring lectures. For reasons to do with practical organization Dupuy's paper became the opening paper at the conference. These two papers offered utterly thought-provoking analyses of the modern individual in the light of mimetic theory, even if Gans' dense paper would have benefited from more time for discussion.

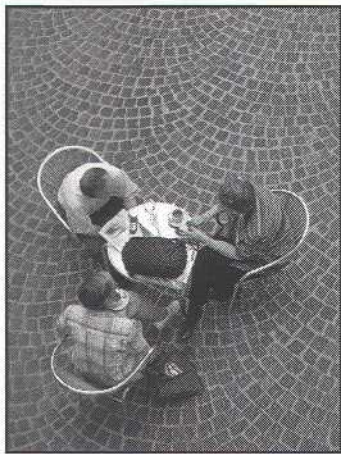
Both papers introduced a range of new social analytical aspects relevant to the field of analysis of mimetic theory. Evidently, the speakers shared an interest in elaborating on mimetic conflict, scapegoating and the institutionalized platforms for exchange and symbolic action generated by fundamental violence. Both papers emphasized the formation of the modern market mechanism and reflection to understand the modern world, a project which certainly may give rise to panic—as a marker of significant differences between being together in the past and in the present.

According to Dupuy, there is a modified relationship between the I and the victim in the modern world. Humans as agents in the modern world have the opportunity to operate only from their own needs without their opponents getting physically involved in the action. This contrasts with former societies in which the agency was embedded in relations of a more concrete and physical nature. If one compares before and now, a certain suspension as regards the victim is evident.



Eric Gans at the Innsbruck podium.

Whereas previously an actual victim was involved, physically present in the exclusive violence, victimizing in the modern world has become more indirect. Thus Gans claimed that scapegoating has undergone transformations and innovations through the ages. The modern individual possesses a knowledge of the victim without necessarily being a scapegoater in its raw and religious forms.



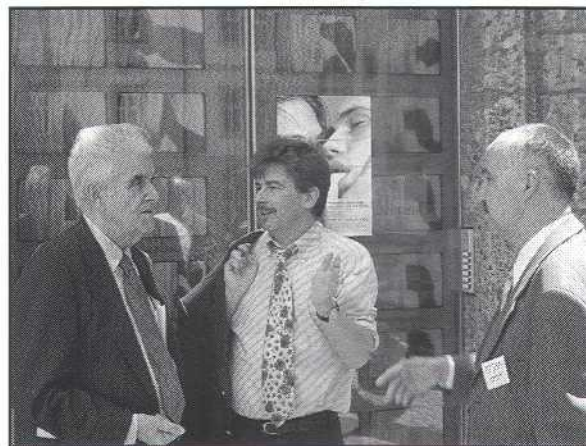
Trinitarian relations during one of the conference breaks.

We are not faced with one-to-one correspondences between archaic societies and the modern society, but in the course of history there is a succession of transformations, innovations, including changes related to what Gans calls *abortative gestures* as regards mimetic reciprocity and the ensuing formation of new possibilities for being together—in panic or as agents in the market. Taken to their logical conclusion, significant differences such as these will also raise crucial questions concerning the scope of mimetic theory. Different positions on this matter may result in a polarity within the work on mimetic theory.

If we are constantly faced with the emergence of new social forms that cannot be equated with those of former societies, does it follow that we have entered a new “realm”? Certainly the modern individual seems to be conscious of the victim regardless of the physical presence of the victim—whereas the furious mob of scapegoaters had to do with an actual victim without the modern knowledge that this was so. Does this then question victimization as a fundamental fact? Is not the victim present regardless of whether or not we see them? The process of scapegoating as dependent on spontaneous actions—or...?

Surprisingly little was said on the theme of sacrificial substitution which René Girard describes when discussing double transference—the critical moment of both the cause of violence and the cause of peace—from the mob to the victim and the step from the victim to the social system via the transformation of the surrogate victim into the Sacred. There seems to be no getting away from the generative link due to the logic of substitution, the play within the play. Without this link what was said earlier might give the impression that the relationship between the past and the new world is a relationship between two worlds that run parallel, each on its own course. It is even more intriguing how little the modern world has actually departed from *la route antique des homes pervers*. Isn't the modern world still based on the fundamental mechanisms of substitution despite the changing forms of culture and society?

Whereas both Gans and Dupuy seemed to question the direct, unchangeable link back to scapegoating, Girard claimed that sometimes a cigar is a cigar, indicating a tighter connection between modern and archaic victimizing. This, however, does not mean that the modern world does not hold new possibilities as compared to earlier. The crucial point here is the difference as regards our knowledge of the victim. It should be noted that both Depuy and Gans were aware of the danger of confining mimetic theory to a dual ‘two-space thinking’.



René Girard, Józef Niewiadomski, and Wolfgang Palaver in conversation at the end of the Friday afternoon program.

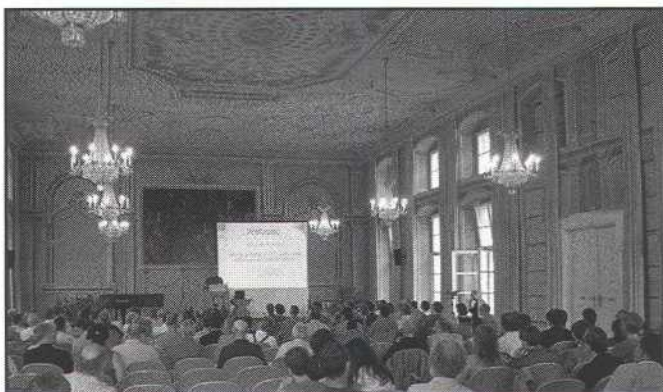
The last paper at the conference, also given with great gusto, was Józef Niewiadomski's *Extra media nulla salus?*, which dealt with ecclesiastic issues in the light of, for example, internet-double-binds between

repetition and the temptation and the unbearable lightness of the brave new world. In the discussion following this paper, the polarity mentioned above was touched upon, with reference to a crucial tension in Girard's *Things Hidden*.

That book begins with anthropological considerations inspired by mimetic theory, whose classifications are ultimately inspired by the Bible and the Gospels, and the book concludes with the speech on God's kingdom. The modern world we inhabit is a world which is simultaneously sacrificially founded and influenced by an increasing uncovering of the business of scapegoating, i.e. a world torn between already and not-yet. And it is the fundamental anthropology of this world which is at the core of mimetic theory.

The entire conference was indeed characterized by the urge to reconsider fundamental aspects of anthropology. For example internal mediation and rivalry have often been presented in somewhat negative terms, as something that degenerates and thus tends to become superficial (c.f. Plato's judgement on the poets), but in various ways the conference focussed on the mimetic desire as fundamental conditions of life, as an "neutral", starting point for the analysis.

This is actually what Girard's first book proposes that we should do. An analysis of mimetic desire must have a spectral approach, understanding mimesis in extremes rather than in positions based on preconceived notions of good and evil. Competition is not bad in itself, but it may become so and develop into deadly rivalry. On the other hand, blind admiration is a kind of living death. Such attempts to rethink the interplay between internal and external mediation characterized not only the papers given by Dupuy and Gans, but also Tobin Sieber's "Selfish Cripples," Andre Lascari's "Shame, Guilt and Forgiveness," and Per Bjørnar Grande's "Love in the Western World."



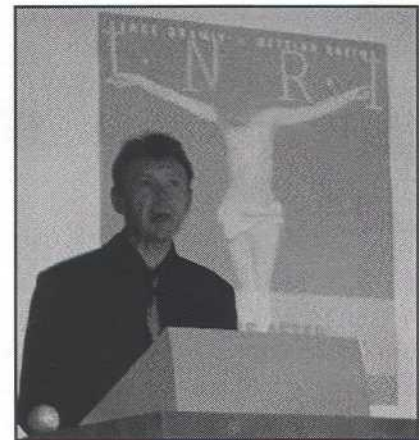
The setting, if not the program, was baroque.

Key Impressions of the Innsbruck Conference

Per Bjørnar Grande

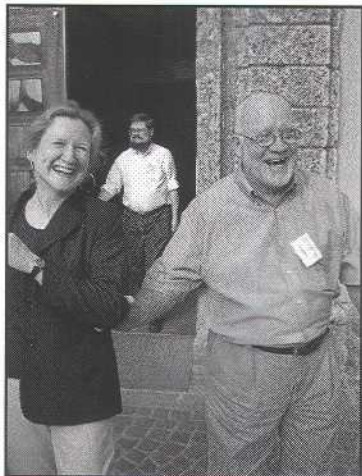
Location. Innsbruck town was beautiful. I knew that it was picturesque, but that it had such old world charm and dramatic beauty (the latter even surpassing Norway) was a pleasant surprise. The Theologische Fakultät was huge and imposing, with the finest baroque ceilings in all the theologische world.

Passions. Few passions were aroused before Graham Ward gave his provoking lecture on *The Church as a Body of Politics*. The highly eroticized interpretation of John 6 provoked some and even alarmed others. Girardians tend to hesitate to interpret the Gospel message in erotic terms as Eros in mimetic theory is never dislocated from jealousy and rivalry. The way in which Ward's lecture was presented, however, was admirably clear, even dispassionate. And with hindsight, perhaps mimetic theory has been too one-sided in its interpretation of the destructive tendencies of Eros?



Graham Ward with a commercialized and eroticized Jesus.

Ward's main message, however, was that the Church must not hide or deny humanity's sexual nature. Well, nobody can disagree on that. In my view, Ward is, from the background of contemporary Western thought, flogging a dead horse. Repressed sexuality was sometimes an acute problem until about 20 years ago. Today the problem is perhaps the opposite; namely sexual fixation, and this fixation is not absent from today's churches.



COV&R meetings are fun!
Sonja Bardelang & Rusty Palmer enjoy the event.

Lectures. The organizers had very wisely given lots of time for concurrent sessions. The success of this choice was not due to the democracy of letting many give a lecture, but, in my view, the 30 minute lectures followed by discussions afterwards represented some of the most interesting opportunities for engagement.

Christina Biava's attempt to see Girardian thought in relation to linguistic theory was surprisingly relevant and interesting. More work need to be done here. Fornari's Freudian & Girardian introduction to Leonardo da Vinci's work and life was excellent. Stephen L. Gardner made a highly successful attempt to interpret the social scheme in *The Great Gatsby*. According to Gardner, *The Great Gatsby* reflects Fitzgerald's intense insights into social desire. Gardner's desire to reveal Jay Gatsby's romanticism, however, was, in my view a little one-sided and not seen in a context of a double desire in relation to the violence of the establishment (represented in Tom Buchanan).

One suggestion for next year's concurrent sessions: don't leave the discussion to the end, until all four lectures are finished. Nobody has any desire to discuss the first and second lecture when passions have run dry. Politically correct questions which attempt to combine all four lectures, also tend to water down the discussion.

More critique: The two first lectures on Freud were practically impossible to follow. When lecturers read their papers with enormous velocity, not looking up and communicating, can one not just as well sit at home and read the printed version? I will, however, recommend anybody interested in Freud and Girard to read Werner

Ernst's and Eberhard Th. Haas' papers on the internet (theol.uibk.ac.at/cov&r). Ernst's discussion on mimetic desire and instincts marks one of the first thorough comparisons of Freudian and Girardian thought. And one can, after reading the paper, wonder if the baby's craving for the mother's breast is not instinctual rather than mimetic? If one thinks that Freud is wholly negative to Christianity, Haas can tell us that Freud actually saw the Gospel's commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself as the strongest defence against aggressions.

Girard's fine lecture on *Romeo and Juliet* punctured our superficial understanding of the drama as pure and innocent love. It even makes it difficult to place it as tragedy in the classical sense. Girard's analysis of the lovers' contradictory language revealed the strong dualism of feelings which the lovers have towards each other. The argument of the lecture was actually very subtle, so subtle that some of us felt an acute need to reread the drama.

Panel discussion. This was, in my view, the most disappointing part of the conference. People in the panel must understand that they are not about to give another lecture. Humour, thought provoking statements, dialogue and daring disagreements seems essential in a panel discussion. A dynamic relationship between the panel and the listeners was somewhat lacking.

Food. This was really a highlight of the conference. As a restaurant chronicler I would rate the food at the canteen and the quality of the snacks and drinks in between the lectures at exceptional. Food in town restaurants was also good, but extremely traditional.



Girard eats apples
(photo by Ludwig Ecker).

Organization. From the first e-mail reply from Petra Pösel to the checking out of House Marillac, the organization was perfect. Everything was smoothened with Jesuitical ease. Not even an impractical person such as me could get entangled by any kind of practical chaos. Rating: 10/10.

Future. COV&R is on the right track. The group is extremely successful in getting together people from different intellectual and spiritual backgrounds. Although this success partly lies in non-exclusion and interdisciplinary openness, it is important to keep up the scholarly profile. The worst thing that can happen is if COV&R develops into a semi-religious-academic sect. But with such a high degree of sensibility among the leaders of the COV&R group and such cultural openness displayed on the conferences, this fear does not seem acute.

In my view future conferences should focus more on Anthropology. Girardian theory has become an integrated part of Literary Theory and Religious Science. The Conference in Antwerp, I am sure, enhanced Girardian theory in relation to Philosophy. Now is the time to make mimetic theory a part of the anthropological canon.

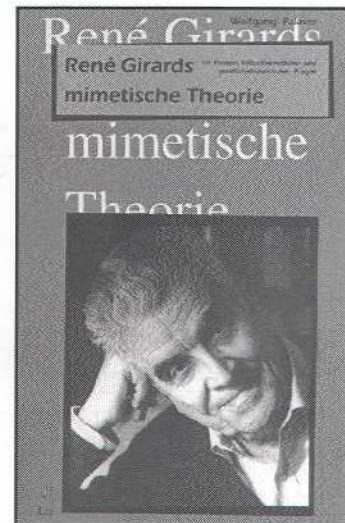
Review of Palaver's *René Girards mimetische theorie*

Wolfgang Palaver. *René Girards mimetische theorie*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003.

We have been waiting for Wolfgang Palaver's book, announced in successive issues of the *Beiträge zur mimetische theologie* catalogue as 200 pages, then 250 pages. At over 400 pages, *René Girards mimetische Theorie* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003) is the most comprehensive book we now have on Girard's work. Seven major sections focus on "Life and Work," "Religion and the Modern," "Mimetic Desire," "The Scapegoat Mechanism as the Origin of Culture," "Biblical Revelation and Christianity," "Political Implications of the Mimetic Theory," and the "The Relation ("das Verhältnis") of Man and Woman."

There is news in the short biographical sketch of Girard. No one to my knowledge has ever before extracted in any interview the relation of the Girard

family to the resistance movement in France during the second world war.



There are new subjects and new reflection on current subjects of the mimetic hypothesis in every section. No one has discussed so many writers in relation to Girard. Palaver employs small essays on important writers to establish the hypothesis as well as capture the loyal readers of these writers. The reader may best regard these short discussions as at once necessary footholds on the rockface as well as remarkable insights to take back to one's reading of Goethe, Kleist, Storm, St Augustine, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Vattimo, (to name only *some* of those authors whom Palaver discusses in relation to mimetic theory).

In fact, monographs have no doubt disappeared into this book. Those who know Palaver's earlier publications will recognize his work on Hobbes and Carl Schmidt, but there are discussions here of Augustine and Sartre in particular that could have expanded into a life of their own, beyond the immediate task of cultivating the ground of Girard's hypothesis.

Section 2, "Religion and the Modern" plots Girard's development of his hypothesis from his early work on the early modern novel. Palaver insists on Girard's distinctiveness, distinguishing Girard's observation of the de-divinising of models and gods in the modern period from secularization theory. Then he puts him neatly back into this context by identifying Girard's hypothesis as the best answer to the greatest research problem that the modern social sciences have posed to themselves, the definition of a universal theory of religion.

Section 3, "Mimetic Desire," is the most wide-ranging of the entire book. Of particular interest is his discussion of "small differences" (Freud's term) where he mimeticizes the observations of political commentators who see the recent civil conflict in Bosnia and Rwanda as caused by similarities, not differences.

Section 6, "Political Implications of the Mimetic Hypothesis," although shorter than some of the earlier sections, cleanly plots out divine kingship as well as the judicial system from ritual sacrifice. We are more familiar with Girard's way of explaining divine kingship from the advance credit the sacrificial victim gets for bringing peace. Less often emphasized is an explanation of the judicial system as derived from capital punishment: the result of letting the emphasis fall on the persecution of the victim rather than the benefits which accrue from punishment. This exciting prospect can perhaps be extended to that increasingly turbulent body of legislators in the modern democracies, to be seen as a weak ritualization of the crowd itself, where mobilization against leaders is increasingly contentious. And journalism itself might be seen mimicking the dynamics of the greater masses, so solicitous of the opinion of the crowd that a 'vote' of support or antipathy to any public figure can be voiced at any moment.

One would identify the last half of the book, devoted to the relation of the mimetic hypothesis to Christian tradition and worldly affairs, as the special subjects of the research group closely associated with Raymund Schwager and the faculty at Innsbruck, but the concluding section is devoted to a subject whose interlocutors include Toril Moi and Luce Irigaray, not the usual contributors to the *Beiträge der mimetischen theorie*. Thus the most remarkable discussion comes last: "das Verhältnis von Man und Frau" is a wonderful title but difficult to translate, as it might indicate at once the loving relation, the responsibility, the duty, and the limits man and woman each set to the other.

Although this section is only 12 pages long, Palaver's beginning is properly comprehensive. "Girard's theory is more wide-ranging, because he considers all sacrificial victims, not just women. But a feminist theory could build on Girard's beginning and disclose the structural violence of patriarchal society" (373). Palaver discusses these relations under two questions: the sexual relation seen from the concept of

mimetic desire (is mimetic desire typically masculine?), and the role of women looked at from the scapegoat hypothesis (are women typical scapegoats?). Palaver draws attention to the early work of Susan Novak and Martha Reineke, but he also does not neglect the early responses of Raymund Schwager and Robert Hamerton-Kelly. This work is everyone's business.

This last section gives another push to a vital research area. Robert Bly probably speaks for all concerned when he advises that if a man at a party tells a woman that 'you are my anima' she should run away screaming. But such now neglected work as Erich Neumann's remarkable inventory of the images of the feminine deposited in human culture perhaps patriarchal, in such books as *Amor and Psyche*, *The Origin and Development of Consciousness*, and *The Great Mother* can, like Frazer's *Golden Bough*, be mimeticized away from their essentialist limits. Sequence-dating, which Neumann borrows from Flinders Petrie, (the relative sorting of objects in a developmental series when you have no true dates for them) perhaps gives us a genealogy of the earliest (polyvalent) representations of the Great Mother as sacred, and then the deconstructing or rationalising of that figure into (alternately) holy and profane in patriarchal culture. One would here find a role for Girard's canny observation of the weakening of the father which antedates the modern (and modern feminism).



**Wolfgang Palaver chairs a panel
at Innsbruck conference.**

Palaver's book is readable and admirably useful—the backcover copy promise of a "leicht lesbare Text" is

fulfilled with headings and subheadings introducing each subject, and one is grateful for an appendix directing the reader back to the book's discussion of 26 central concepts of the mimetic hypothesis to guide revisits, rereadings.

When discussing the above subjects, Palaver carefully cites chapter and verse in Girard's writing, as well as the secondary literature. This book is a map of the Girard archive. Palaver usually but not always includes page references to the original French or English text (an American reader will probably not have immediate access to *Wenn all das beginnt*), but he is right to cite first the volumes of Girard's work translated into German. One of Palaver's tasks [like Giuseppe Fornari's remarkable sequence *Fra Dioniso e cristo* (2001), *L'apprendimento della vittima* {with Claudio Tugnoli} (2003), and in particular *Il caso Nietzsche* (2002)], is to wage a cultural campaign to win Girard's place within the contours of a specific language family, with its own favored texts and interpretative traditions.

Palaver is required reading for anyone interested in any aspect of Girard's theory. Let's get to work.

Bill Johnson

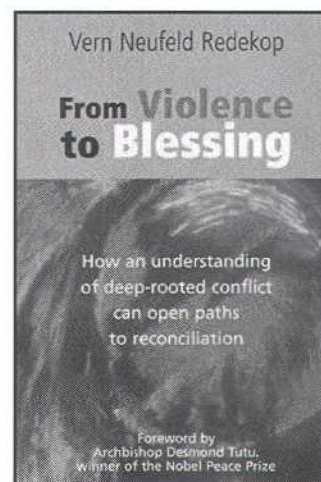
Review of Redekop's *From Violence to Blessing*

Vern Neufeld Redekop. *From Violence to Blessing: How an understanding of deep-rooted conflict can open paths to reconciliation*. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2002.

A leading Canadian scholar-practitioner of conflict resolution, Vern Neufeld Redekop offers in this book the rich fruit of years of experience in working with people directly affected by ethno-national conflicts (Oka, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Belfast, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Palestine, Israel). This extensive experience, expressed in the moving form of examples, testimonies, and anecdotes, serves to verify Redekop's theoretical understanding of the mimetic causes and cures of violence, personal and communal.

Speaking in two voices—that of the academician, who studies books and conducts seminars, and that of a simple human being, who continually strives and struggles in his own life to learn what peace-making

really means in practice—Redekop models for his readers the dialogic engagement he hopes to inspire in them and, through them, in others. Through his by-line, he puts himself “on the line” in bearing witness not only to “past and present realities” of violence, but also to what Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls, in his Foreword to Redekop's book, “the quest for a healing path” (10).



From Violence to Blessing has a three-part division. In the eight chapters of Part One, entitled “Violence,” Redekop probes the “dark night” of violent human conflict. His theoretical analysis of the causes of violence focuses on the phenomenon of “deep-rooted conflict,” which is based on “the distinctive identities of the antagonistic groups” as defined by “kinship, language, race, religion, aboriginality, nationality, political affiliation, or class” (19, emphasis added). Accepting John W. Burton's thesis concerning “human identity needs,” Redekop maintains that “deep-rooted conflict is about identity,” and that fighting occurs whenever “human identity needs are threatened” (23).

Synthesizing and developing the work of previous theorists of identity needs, Redekop names and describes five basic abilities upon which one's sense of self (“selfness”) depends: 1) the ability to discover meaning in the “world” one inhabits (that is, to have a semi-coherent world-view); 2) the ability to belong to a family, community, or group in order to experience connectedness, membership, relationality; 3) the ability to be secure, safe, sheltered; 4) the ability to act, to fulfill one's sense of calling and responsibility; and 5) the ability to be recognized by others for who one is and what one does or suffers. When a person or group is

disabled or deprived in any one of these five areas, a human identity need goes unfulfilled. Passions of anger, sadness, depression, shame, and fear signal dissatisfaction at the lack in one's world of meaning, connectedness, action, recognition, and security, respectively.

The excessive fulfillment of one need—a defensive need for security, for example, enacted either as withdrawal and stubborn entrenchment or as a parasitic dependence upon (and compliance with) powerful rulers—might temporarily compensate for deficiencies in other areas of need. If basic human identity needs are not satisfied, however, conflict necessarily results as a *psychological* reflex of the instinct for survival and self-defense. The urge toward the psychological survival of “selfness” is, in fact, so strong that it can lead individuals and groups to risk their own physical annihilation and to kill others for the sake of achieving it.

Blending the theory of human identity needs with René Girard's mimetic theory, Redekop equates these needs (for meaning, belonging, security, action, and recognition) with the desires we appropriate from our models and rivals. When these needs/desires go unsatisfied, the strong passions that are symptomatic of an absence or loss of personal and communal identity (a loss manifested in the appearance of doubles and in increased undifferentiation within the group) typically find an outlet in violence against a scapegoat—an “all against one” action that restores, however temporarily, a sense of self and connectedness, albeit at the cost of excluding and destroying someone else. The Other is dehumanized and demonized that the idolatrous Self might be saved.

In Part Two Redekop provides a case study illustrative of deep-rooted conflict prompted by a threat to ethno-national identity, and thus a threat to the personal identity of individual members “nested” within the opposed groups. Focusing in Chapters 9–11 on the Oka/Kanehsatà:ke Crisis of 1990, Redekop first presents a chronological narrative of the events leading up to, and taking place during, the crisis. He then “enframes” the history through a series of close-ups that reveal mimetic relational systems within the whole. What he calls “secondary enframing” captures the “subplots to the story,” which began as an acquisitive rivalry between a small group of Mohawks and the townspeople of Oka, Quebec, over

the ownership of a plot of land, the Pines, into which the city was determined to extend a golf course. The rivalry resulted in a death, bloodshed, and beatings. It rapidly escalated through contagion into an affair of serious national and international concern, putting Canada on the brink of mass uprisings.



Vern Redekop poses a question at the Innsbruck conference.

Using an “abductive” method, Redekop combines deduction (from a well-developed theoretical framework) and induction (reasoning from the actual facts of the case, corroborated by interviews with participants in the conflict) to conclude that “something bigger than any of the individuals involved . . . pressured them to act in a violent way” (185). He calls that “something bigger” a “mimetic structure of violence” (185), being careful to define “structure” as a diachronic series or kaleidoscopic pattern of actions taken in sequence—that is to say, a dynamic emplotment—the whole of which is more than the sum of its parts.

In the face of a destructive force that was “something bigger” than any and all of the players in the Oka/Kanehsatà:ke Crisis, Redekop “searched for a word to express a correspondingly positive impulse” (255) with the power to create a new world governed by different principles, namely, those of the Torah. Part Three of *From Violence to Blessing* explores the mimetic potential of blessing (which inspires “blessing in return for blessing”) to function as an antidote (both preventive and curative) to the curse of mimetic strife.

Since identity is determined, in part, by the choice of one's models and the appropriation of their desire, the orientation toward saintly models and ultimately to God Who is Love (1 John 4:8) provides an alternative, satisfying means to meet not only one's true identity needs, but also those of others.

In Part Three, Redekop again highlights the work of Girard, who has pointed to God and the devil (*diabolos*, Satan) as the two arch-models of positive and negative mimesis, respectively. He acknowledges gratefully his debt to the work on "loving mimesis" by Rebecca Adams, whom he calls "the primary contributor to an understanding of love in mimetic terms" (313). Within this theoretical framework, Redekop turns to explicitly theological topics and biblical interpretation, in order to explain the mimetic power of mutual blessing to overcome the threat posed by deep-rooted conflict.

A great part of the value of this book lies, as I suggested earlier, in the wealth of Redekop's personal experience and in the stories he tells to explain and verify his theoretical understandings. His theoretical insights are extremely valuable, however, in their own right. The link between human identity needs and Girardian "desire" provides a powerful key with the potential to spur research not only in social conflict resolution, but also in adolescent and group psychology, the philosophy and psychology of education, and spiritual (identity) formation. The exploration of blessing (in its many different forms) as a gracious way not only of affirming the goodness of the Other's being but also of self-affirmation (by being a blessing for God and others) helps to elaborate the positive capacity of mimesis and of mimetic desire and thus to complement and extend Girard's compelling analysis of mimetic violence.

Redekop's synthesis of many different theoretical approaches is both a strength and a weakness. His appeal to a range of authorities shows his wide and appreciative reading of scholarship in the field, and it affirms his expertise, but it also burdens him with the difficulty of coping with different technical vocabularies and schemata that do not easily or always match. His description of mimetic theory stands too much side-by-side that of human needs theory, instead of fusing seamlessly and deeply with it. The concept of "selfness" seems vague. Redekop does not distinguish sharply enough between the demonic/Satanic mimesis

that produces an illusory "self" that is never satisfied by what it seeks to fulfill its idolatrous identity needs, on the one hand, and the holy, loving mimesis that alone can satisfy the person's need for a unique, genuine identity or (Levinasian) subjectivity, on the other hand.

Given the emphasis on identity needs, it is surprising that Redekop's biblical readings do not include commentary on humanity's creation in God's image and likeness (the divine standard for a truly human, mimetic "selfness"), nor on those Gospel passages concerning the death to one's self as a precondition for the finding of one's life in its fullness. To what extent does Jesus call for a renunciation of (apparent) identity need satisfactions? How does a person or community detach itself from an addictive dependence on illusory satisfiers of identity needs? How exactly does blessing work to satisfy the five human identity needs, grace building on nature? How are the individual's identity needs related to, and reconciled with, those of the community? Redekop's book prompts these questions, but it does not go far enough in answering them. This is a fertile area for further development.

Following Paul Ricoeur, who resists a dismissive attitude toward utopias as something unrealistic and unattainable, Redekop dares to imagine a future characterized by mutual forgiveness, reconciliation, and overflowing, reciprocal blessing: "Perhaps imagining reconciliation might stimulate a new path of action.... Among human beings, change and creativity start with imagination" (350). Redekop's illustrative stories, personal witness, and theoretical insights in *From Violence to Blessing* wonderfully fuel that imagination and hope.

Ann W. Astell



Ann Astell during a break at the Innsbruck conference.

Purdue Panel Discusses Contagion Article "Abortion as a Sacrament"

As faculty advisor for Students for Life and a co-founder of the University Faculty for Life group at Purdue University, I feel called to keep the complex issues surrounding abortion in the public awareness. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, my alma mater, the motto is: "Sift and Winnow...The Truth Shall Set You Free."

Something is very wrong, it seems to me, when a matter of grave moral import in the personal and public sphere is a taboo topic, something significantly absent from the scholarly conversation and research agendas in the Humanities at the universities. On-going medical and genetic research, pharmaceutical developments, court decisions, and legislation are continually at work to redefine the very meaning and practice of abortion, and yet it is one of those serious things about which people seldom talk—something about which they are indeed afraid to think or speak.

On Friday, April 4, 2003, a faculty panel wonderfully broke through that barrier of silence on Purdue's campus. Acting on an inspiration, I approached Ruth Salvaggio, Director of Women's Studies, and Jacqueline Mariña, Director of Religious Studies (both newly appointed administrators). They agreed to have their programs co-sponsor a public faculty panel discussion of an article by COV&R member, Bernadette Waterman Ward (University of Dallas), which appeared in Contagion (Vol. 7, 2000, 18-35), entitled "Abortion as a Sacrament: Mimetic Desire and Sacrifice in Sexual Politics." In that article, Professor Waterman Ward boldly presents a feminist case against abortion, using mimetic theory to explain why and how patriarchal societies have tended to scapegoat women and children. The phenomenon of contemporary, legalized abortion must be seen within that framework, according to Waterman Ward.

Ruth Salvaggio agreed to serve as a panelist, as did Patrocinio ("Patsy") Schweickart (English and Women's Studies), James McClure (Mathematics), Thomas Ryba (Philosophy), and Sandor Goodhart (English). I xeroxed copies of article for all the panelists and distributed copies to everyone who

attended the noon-hour discussion. Prior to the panel, I also composed a set of questions that I asked the panelists to address in their remarks.

Sixty-five people attended the panel discussion. Angelica Duran, a young colleague in the Department of English, had assigned an essay by René Girard to her undergraduate students, and so she brought her entire class to hear the panel. I welcomed everyone and explained the ground rules, which called for mutual respect and insisted "that everyone—the panelists themselves and the members of the audience—base their questions and comments on the published text," which then became the object of close and critical reading.

All of the panelists came well prepared with their comments and addressed different aspects of Waterman Ward's essay, in keeping with their own expertise and interests. The result was a disciplined, intelligent conversation of great intellectual and spiritual richness. Although the panelists clearly held opposed views about whether or not abortion should be legalized, they all agreed that the ethical questions should take priority over political and legal concerns. Important common ground was established *de facto* by the use of a common text as the basis for discussion. As a result, all the panelists found themselves in agreement about one thing or another, even when they disagreed about others. They were all somewhat critical of the essay, but they also expressed their gratitude to Waterman Ward for articulating a thoughtful argument that challenged them to think in new ways about abortion and which enabled the discussion. What made the panel work, they agreed, was that it was text-based and thus clearly focused.

The audience response was extremely positive and encouraging, and the panelists told me that they would be happy to continue the dialogue we had begun. It is our hope to use this text-based approach in future panels to discuss not only abortion, but also other controversial life issues, such as capital punishment. Women's Studies and Religious Studies are especially open to such dialogues. Whenever possible, we hope to use articles published in Contagion as a basis for discussion and thus to promote interest on campus in mimetic theory.

Ann W. Astell

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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.

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