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## **MIMETIC THEORY AND THE IMITATION OF THE DIVINE**

**An International Meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R)  
July 6-10, 2005  
Koblenz, Germany  
CALL FOR PAPERS**



*Koblenz – where Rhine and Mosel meet*

“God and Satan are the two supreme models, ‘arch models,’” writes René Girard. The Mimetic Theory of Girard has found rich testing grounds in a diversity of fields: literary and film criticism, anthropology, philosophy, theology, biblical exegesis, psychology, economics, conflict resolution, and political science. Often characterized as a theory of violence and its origins, Mimetic Theory has in fact a broader scope with enormous significance for pedagogy through models, spiritual formation, idealizing psychology, the sublimation of desire, the cultic and artistic representation of the divine and the demonic, idolatry and anti-idolatry, symbolic expression and ritual exchange, theological notions of divinization and of the *Imago Dei*, and the study of the religious “ways” of saintly discipleship traditionally known as the *Imitatio Dei* or the *Imitatio Christi*.

The Colloquium of Violence and Religion seeks to further its exploration of this multi-faceted theme by welcoming proposals for papers for its 2005 meeting, to be held in Germany’s beautiful Rhine Valley. Featured speakers will include distinguished professors Jean-Luc Marion (Divinity School, The University of Chicago) and Margaret R. Miles (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley), as well as two leading experts on the religious dimensions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Professors Eliezer Don-Yehiya (Hebrew University) and Mumtaz Ahmad (Hampton University).

Possible topics for papers and sessions include (among others): secular and religious art forms (including literature, film, icons, ritual) as images/imitations of the divine; asceticism; demonic cult; secular appropriations of the sacred in popular culture; the life and thought of individual saints and theologians; spiritual classics; topics in spiritual formation and counseling.

The meeting is hosted by the Schönstatt Sisters of Mary, in collaboration with the theological faculty at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

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

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

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Submit abstracts for papers and proposals for sessions to Ann W. Astell by e-mail ([Astell@purdue.edu](mailto:Astell@purdue.edu)), by FAX (765-494-3780) or by mail:

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**DUE DATE: DECEMBER 15, 2004**

## ***A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY***

2004 was a challenging year for our whole group. The sudden and unexpected death of our founding president Raymund Schwager SJ was a big loss. We lost a friend deeply committed to our work always bringing forward new ideas to strengthen our common task. His last contribution was the idea of regularly having an Israel-Palestine session during our annual meetings. We had our first session on that this year at Ghost Ranch and will continue this work next year in Koblenz. The best we can do after Raymund has left us is to continue the work he always was so eager to do. I think the Ghost Ranch conference helped us in many ways to move forward. Many thanks to Britt Johnston for all the work he has done. We were able to transform COV&R into a more professional organization. Thanks to the work of Duncan Ragsdale we decided at our business meeting to incorporate as a non-profit organization in the U.S. This will hopefully help us to improve the financial situation of COV&R, thus enabling us to expand our publications and have more meetings. We also found a new editor for the Bulletin. The last couple of years Paul Bellan-Boyer did all the work that enabled us to continue the publication of the Bulletin. We are very grateful for what he has done for us. Lacking, however, an institutional background for this editorial work he asked us to find a new editor, who is willing to continue this important work and also has the necessary institutional background. Nikolaus Wandinger—a colleague of mine in Innsbruck—accepted our invitation to become the new editor. We should give him all our support for his new duty. In the German-speaking world mimetic theory was for a very long time treated with suspicion, sometimes even with open rejection. This situation has really improved. There is a rising interest in our work. René Girard gave a major paper at the meeting of Catholic theologians in dogmatics and fundamental theology in September which was received very well. Major newspapers are longing for contributions of him. But also in general more and more people of different academic fields in Germany and Austria have become interested in our common work. It is good to know that we will meet next time in Koblenz (Germany) contributing to this new demand for mimetic theory.

*Wolfgang Palaver*

## ***NATURE, 'HUMAN NATURE' AND MIMETIC THEORY***

### **Discussing mimetic theory in New Mexico's wonderful setting.**

*We are in the wonderful situation this time that we have two reports about this interesting conference: a newcomer's first impression – though this "newcomer" happens to be a co-organizer of the 2003 conference – and an experienced veteran's report.*

### **Key Impressions of the COV&R 2004 Conference in New Mexico**

**Location.** The COV&R 2004 Conference took place amidst the breathtakingly beautiful scenery of the desert of New Mexico. It was the perfect site for a conference on nature and human nature and also offered the opportunity to relax and to enjoy the beautiful and powerful landscape around Ghost Ranch. The red-glowing stone formations invited to go for a hike, e.g. to the close-by Chimney Rock. The Ranch itself contributed to these impressions: rooms and bathroom facilities were really basic, which perhaps was inconvenient for some participants but probably added to and intensified the experience of natural beauty and wilderness.



*Chimney Rock*

**Nature, 'Human Nature' and Mimetic Theory.** Apart from the perfect site we also enjoyed excellent lectures on nature and mimetic theory. Above all I want to mention the presentation of Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel. Defining nature in the context of mimetic theory as what is "neither subject nor object of mimetic rivalry", they argue that nature is disappearing. "All that is has now been engulfed, swallowed, absorbed within our economic and military rivalries." NBIC [= nano-bio-information-communication]-technology aims at complete control over 'nature' and makes the difference between nano-material and living material blur. Our environment and even our bodies and our minds become more and more artificial in the sense that they are influenced

and changed by scientific inventions. These inventions become more and more complex, and Dupuy argues that in the future engineers will be successful if they are surprised by their creations, if the automata which they create are free (i.e. if they escape our control). A thus reshaped 'nature' becomes a means to victory, an object of desire or mimetic appropriation in our global rivalries and conflicts and – according to Dupuy and Dumouchel – there is no way back to the past. Therefore we are living in a time of crisis, and further development will show whether we are going toward doomsday or something dramatically new. Unfortunately Dupuy and Dumouchel gave little concrete indication on how this development could be directed to positive ends.

**Key Note Address.** Michel Serres delivered a thought-provoking key note speech titled *Ego Credo*, arguing that St. Paul was the first to give rise to what we call the modern western subject. How does the apostle do this? He distinguishes between belonging and identity, saying that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female. With St. Paul all those categories become secondary or even irrelevant for one's identity, which is solely based on God's grace. Serres quotes 1 Cor 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am." Before St. Paul, belonging to one of these categories, groups or formats had defined who one was. And those groups are eventually founded on collective violence. For Paul the new identity is based on faith (and doubt), hope and charity. It is the identity of a son of the heavenly father, of a son who doesn't want to be a father himself and who therefore doesn't have to kill his (metaphorical) fathers to take their place.



*Michel Serres in conversation*

**Raymund Schwager Memorial Session.** At the very beginning of the conference a session was held in memory of Raymund Schwager SJ, the co-founder and first president of the COV&R, who had died in February. The session was very touching, especially the stories James G. Williams and René Girard told about their experiences and friendship with Raymund Schwager. Describing Schwager's personality, Girard said that Schwager was the only person who really made him doubt his theory, because he was (almost) free of mimetic rivalry. Also the video-interview with Schwager recorded some years ago was great. The whole session showed that the role Raymund Schwager played in the formation of the COV&R and in the

further development of mimetic theory can hardly be overestimated.

**Organization.** Overall the organization of the conference was very good, encouraging discussion and creating a family-like and uncomplicated atmosphere among the participants. Unfortunately the tight schedule gave very little time for changing rooms between the sessions. Probably the organizers thought that some physical exercise might be helpful for intellectual concentration but I think longer breaks would have been even more helpful for that task. A few times there were no moderators/facilitators in the sessions, which made discussions more difficult.

Altogether it was a great conference! Our congratulations and thanks go to Britt Johnston who – without having a big team to rely on – did a really great job organizing the conference! (As last year's co-organizer – knowing how many people helped to make the Innsbruck conference possible – I really wonder how he was able to do this...)

*Petra Steinmair-Pösel*

## **COV&R 2004 – The Fifteenth Annual Meeting**

The June 2–5, 2004 COV&R annual meeting in the incomparably beautiful setting of Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico was attended by about 120 people, some 65 of whom were active contributors to the conference program. This report will focus on the plenary presentations. The full program, along with the texts of many of the presentations, is accessible on the COV&R web site. The program began at 1 pm on June 2 with a three-hour memorial tribute to the recently deceased Raymund Schwager, S.J. One of the founders of COV&R and its first president, he was a long-time friend and dialogue partner of René Girard. The tribute began with a reading of Psalm 124 for which Raymund had a special love, especially for verse 7: "We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped." Petra Steinmair-Pösel then read a selection from Raymund's own comments on this verse.

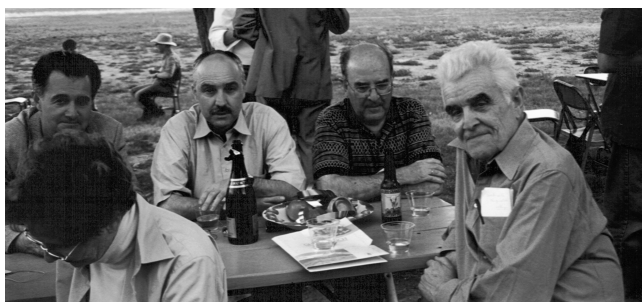
The tribute then developed in five "Acts." In Act I, Jozef Niewiadomski presented "Raymund Schwager, Biography of a Theologian," with special attention to the significance of Raymund's masterpiece, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*. Then Nikolaus Wandering developed further the theme of "Dramatic Theology" in Schwager's Writings." Act II, "Raymund Schwager Goes to America," was presented by James Williams, the translator of most of the major works of Schwager that have appeared in English. Act III, presented by Andrew Marr, O.S.B., developed the theme of "Raymund Schwager, Man of the Church and Jesuit." In Act IV, Julie Shinnick—also taking the occasion to point out that we need someone to write a history of

COV&R—presented “Raymund Schwager’s Contributions to Mimetic Theory and COV&R.” After that, Sandor Goodhart shared personal memories of Raymund, and Wolfgang Palaver developed, in a very personal way, the theme: “Raymund Schwager as a Teacher for Intellectual Life.” In Act V, René Girard presented “My Relationship with Raymund Schwager.”



*René and Martha Girard with Raymund Schwager*

Immediately following, at 4 pm, there took place a “Basic Mimetic Theory Discussion” that was introduced by Sandor Goodhart as “Mimetic Theory 101”. Goodhart explained how mimetic desire, if pursued uncontrolledly, leads to disaster, and how sacrificial violence inflicted on a surrogate victim has served as a way to escape the disaster, but that this process, which depends on deception to be effective, is now being progressively exposed. So the key question is: How can we expose all this—i.e., understand and identify with the victim’s innocence—and still survive? One answer, not necessarily the only possible solution, Goodhart noted, is to be found in the intersection of theology and anthropology in the Jewish-Christian religion. This session was designed, among other things, to be a basic introduction for the benefit of those new to mimetic theory. However, it did much more than that. Many “old hands” participated in the discussion and made it an interesting experience for the initiate as well as for the novice. There was a strong sense that sessions like this probably should have a place in our regular meetings.



*Relaxing*

In the evening, Michel Serres, having been introduced by Andrew McKenna, delivered the keynote address: “Ego Credo: About Faith, Hope and Char-

ity.” Serres began by observing how St. Paul came from, and therefore initially took his belonging and identity from three worlds: Hebrew monotheism, the Hellenistic rational world, and the world of Roman law. Being forged out of three powerful materials: ritual, logos, and order, he was able to see that these three ancient formats were founded on collective violence. The Good News breaks with these group-associated formats which were prone to the deadly mistake of confusing belonging and identity, of reducing a person to one of these groups. The main part of Serres’s paper was an attempt to read Paul’s epistles in the light of this insight. A lively discussion followed.

The morning of June 3 began with a plenary session on the theme of “Violence and Nature.” It began with Robert Daly summarizing his paper: “Biblical, Modern, and Post-Modern/Post-Christian Views of Nature, Human Nature and Mimetic Theory.” He pointed out how a contemporary biblical-critical and ecologically sensitive approach to biblical texts on creation and nature yields a far different reading than the traditional nature-exploiting readings characteristic of modernity. He then related this to recent specifically Christian understandings of mimetic theory. Following this, Paul Dumouchel and Jean-Pierre Dupuy gave a combined interactive (with each other) presentation: “Nature as the Excluded Third.” They began with the provocative question and answer: “What is the place of nature in mimetic theory?” Answer: “None!” They went on to assert that nature doesn’t exist any more. What we now have is artificial nature, with nanotechnology more and more taking over from what we used to call nature. Having begun this way, Dupuy and Dumouchel took turns developing this thesis and its implications, and then opened the floor for a lovely—and that’s an understatement—discussion.

The next plenary session, on the afternoon of June 4, was on the subject of Israel and Palestine. This was the first of the sessions on this theme to which, last year, COV&R committed itself to give space in each annual program. The session was introduced by Sandor Goodhart. Charles Selengut then spoke under the title “Israel and Palestine,” emphasizing the psychological and mimetic nature of the conflict, and why the traditions of theological compromise common to both sides have not been an effective factor. Eric Gans then spoke under the title “Postmodern Anti-Semitism” or “Anti-Semitism from a Judaecentric Perspective,” building, among other things, on the chronological phenomenon of Judaism being the religion of a nation, Christianity being the religion of a world of nation states, and Islam being neither medieval nor modern, but a-historical. Not surprisingly, the discussion was animated. Toward the end, the question was raised: Why were there no Muslim voices

here? This was generally recognized as a challenge for future COV&R sessions on this theme.

The next plenary session, in the early afternoon of June 5, under the heading of "Anthropology II" featured three presentations: Lucien Scubla, "The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion"; Simon Simonse, "Kings and Gods as Ecological Agents: Reciprocity and Unilateralism in the Management of the Natural Order"; and Mark Anspach, "Levitical Codes as Anti-Sacrificial: Reflections with the Work of Mary Douglas". These presentations and discussions focused largely on some of the more technical aspects of sacrificial mimetic theory and its interpretations.

The final plenary meeting at 4 pm on June 5 was an evaluation panel with René Girard, Anthony Bartlett, Sandor Goodhart, and Sheelah Hidden. Expressed was a general sense of the success of the conference, much of this being due to its primary local chairperson and program organizer, Britt Johnston. The meeting had a great deal of vitality, and, especially from the remarks of Dumouchel and Dupuy, also something of a sense of crisis. Several mentioned a sense of being part of a family, a sense was strengthened by noticing the numerous new (including young) faces. There was also some discussion (but not full consensus) about a need for greater theological process, at least in the broad, scientific and non-denominational sense. The lively Israel-Palestine session—thanks to Raymund Schwager for being the one to suggest it—was acknowledged to be just a beginning.

The major item presented and acted upon in the Business Meeting was the proposal to move ahead without delay to incorporate COV&R as a not-for-profit organization in the U.S.A. A committee composed of Robert Daly, Wolfgang Palaver, Duncan Ragsdale (whose law firm will take care of the legal details of incorporation in the State of Tennessee) and James Williams worked out the major technical details of the proposal which Robert Daly presented to the general membership. The proposal was unanimously approved.

Much enjoyed and also an important source of the growing sense of family were the social gatherings and conversations with which we ended each day, especially the Ghost Ranch director's reception on June 4 at the home of Rob and Sharon Craig, and the barbecue and social on the final evening, June 5. About forty people were still around to participate in a June 6 Sunday morning eucharist on the "office porch" service led by Robert Daly.

*Robert J. Daly, S.J.  
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**RAYMUND SCHWAGER SJ**  
**NOVEMBER 11, 1935 – FEBRUARY 27, 2004**



*Raymund Schwager as we knew him*

When the news of Fr. Raymund Schwager's death spread through Innsbruck University on February 27<sup>th</sup>, it was received with disbelief, which soon gave way to shock and bewilderment. Professor Schwager had not been ill and was supposed to spend just one night in hospital for a fairly routine medical examination. While there, he suffered a heart attack and all attempts to save his life were unsuccessful. What remains for us is to keep the memory of this great scholar, theologian, Jesuit, priest, and – above all – this great believer and human spirit.

Raymund Schwager was born November 11, 1935 in Balzerswil into a Swiss farming family as the second of seven children. In his childhood he experienced the effort of manual labor. After primary and secondary school he joined the Society of Jesus in 1955. Following Jesuit custom he studied philosophy (1957-1960 near Munich, Germany), and theology (1963-1967 in Lyon-Fourvière, France), interspersed with educational work as a prefect in a Jesuit boarding school (1960-1963: „Stella Matutina“ in Feldkirch, Austria). He was ordained a priest on July 31, 1966 and completed his formal education with the doctorate in theology (1967-1969 in Fribourg, Switzerland). During those years he also spent some time in Spain, the home country of the Jesuits' founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola, on whom he wrote his thesis. For seven years (1970-1977) Fr. Schwager was one of the editors of the journal *Orientierung* in Zurich and traveled, giving speeches and presentations. In 1977 he became Professor of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Innsbruck. From 1985-1987, and again from 1999-2004 he was dean of that faculty. Raymund Schwager was a co-founder of the *Colloquium on Violence & Religion* (1991), its first president (1991-1995) and, since 1999, a lifetime honorary member of its advisory

board. He eagerly awaited being relieved of his duties as dean, which he saw as his great new gift of freedom. At the end of the spring semester 2004 he was scheduled to retire, an event he had long anticipated in order to be able to return to full-time research for his planned book “Dogma and Drama”.

Raymund Schwager’s thinking was above all inspired by three sources: First, his deep Christian faith and spirituality in the tradition of St. Ignatius and nourished by the biblical writings; second: a mode of arguing he called “dramatic”, a term he took from H. U. v. Balthasar but to which he gave new meaning in his theology; third: mimetic theory and the friendship he sustained with its author, René Girard.

Early on in his biblical studies Schwager became convinced that the problem of human rivalry and violence and the theological question of how God relates to it is central to biblical revelation and therefore also to the faiths of Jewish and Christian believers and to their respective theologies. When he read René Girard’s ideas on the matter, he realized that he had found a like-minded spirit and went to see Girard for the first time in Avignon in 1973. From then on a close scholarly co-operation and ever closer personal friendship developed between the two. However, Schwager did not merely apply mimetic theory to theological questions, he aspired to refine and advance that theory by applying theological answers to it. That way Schwager’s theology and Girard’s theory nourished each other to greater explanatory power.

In theology Schwager took up questions that had been relegated to oblivion by liberal theologians, like sacrifice and substitution, and relentlessly worked to clarify how we are to conceive of God: If God is all goodness and grace, what are we to do with scriptural passages that talk of God’s wrath? Is there a consistent message about God in the Bible or even in Jesus of Nazareth’s teaching, and what is it? By taking up questions that others tried to avoid, Schwager advanced theological thinking. By tackling what seemed to be insoluble riddles, he facilitated solutions that previously had not been thought of. He reached these goals via his hallmark “Dramatic Theology”: The history of revelation, as it has been recorded in the biblical writings, is not linear. Divine revelation therefore is not like a theoretical treatise. History is made up of a web of different interdependent actions – initiatives and responses – by different agents – human and divine. Thus we have to read the Bible like a drama that captures this dramatic back and forth, and each act in the drama of salvation gives new meaning to every cue-line and to the whole play. Only retrospectively can we infer what it is all about and come to a theory, yet a theory that remains always dependent on the whole drama and its acts; separated from it, it petrifies and loses validity.

Raymund Schwager did theology not for himself or for the sake of the argument, he did it in the service of the church. But this for him meant neither that he would be uncritical towards the church, nor that he would enclose himself within her boundaries. Bashing the church and her leaders never was his way of action – against this kind of scapegoating he would always defend her –, yet when he felt that something important was wrong, he would voice his criticism respectfully but clearly. Being politically active, trying to influence the world for the better was not something Raymund Schwager superadded to his being a dogmatic theologian; it was the very way in which he was that theologian. Theology for him was not some other-worldly endeavor, it was to provide guidance for our world, in private and in public life. Thus he actively sought the dialog between theology and the sciences in order to join together evolutionary thinking and belief in divine creation. During the Cold War in the 1980s Schwager worked for de-escalation, during the 1990s and in recent years the Israeli-Palestinian question and the danger arising to world peace from Western arrogance and fundamentalist Islamic terrorism occupied him very much.

Therefore inter-religious dialog and symbolic actions for peace by world religious leaders ranked high on his list of important events. He especially valued the current Pope’s activities in this respect: his travels and encounters with other religious leaders, his prayer meetings in Assisi and his confession of guilt for the church on the First Sunday of Lent in 2000. Acknowledging the shortcomings of oneself and one’s own community without scapegoating others or the past of one’s own community is a prerequisite for true and lasting peace, Raymund Schwager was convinced.

Among his numerous writings in books and articles Schwager’s most important works in English translation are: *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*. (German: Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?) Transl. by M. L. Assad. Crossroad, New York, N. Y., 2000. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation. Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. Trans. J. G. Williams & P. Haddon (Ger.: Jesus im Heilsdrama. Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre). New York: Crossroad 1999. *Jesus of Nazareth. How does Jesus understand his life?* New York: Crossroad 1998. His German book on *original sin* has been in the process of translation and will be published posthumously as *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation* by Gracewing in Leominster, Herefordshire, GB.

I want to conclude with two personal remarks on the humility and mental presence of Fr. Raymund Schwager. In the scientific community scholars on the one hand tend to take pride in their accomplishments, on the other hand many still want to be seen as hum-

ble persons. Some try to fulfill both desires by exhibiting their humility – which, of course, is a contradiction in the act. Raymund Schwager's humility was way beyond that. The reverence and admiration many of his students awarded him did not inflate his sense of ego at all, neither did he have to fend it off in order to feign humility; rather he put up with it in an attitude of Ignatian indifference and ironic calmness. Fr. Schwager also had the great gift of granting his full mental alertness to the person he was talking to and their current request. In all the numerous duties he had, being almost overwhelmed by his workload, he would finish the sentence he was reading or writing, turn around from his screen and be all yours.

In his lecture on eschatology Fr. Schwager felt it was necessary to address the problem that for the human imagination "heaven" was so opaque a concept that it could only be perceived as dull and boring, while the modern person seeks something adventurous and enticing. He felt that our most sublime experiences in this life were but mere shadows of what "heaven", of what eternal life, must be. Now he has embarked on this last enquiry and he will find his long-awaited freedom there.

Nikolaus Wandinger

JOAN OF ARC AND  
SACRIFICIAL AUTHORSHIP  
BY ANN W. ASTELL

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) Pp. xvi+283, ISBN: 0-268-03260-2

In *Joan of Arc and Sacrificial Authorship* Ann W. Astell has written a fascinating study about the story of Joan of Arc. Astell explores the various renditions of Joan's life and personage by an exhaustive list of artists: Southey, Coleridge, de Quincey, Schiller, Twain, Shaw, Brecht, Hellman, Sackville-West, Woolf, Tournier, Péguy, Claudel, Bernanos, Werfel, Cohen and Ehn. Astell's focus on these figures stems from her interest in their representations of Joan of Arc in prose, poetry, biography, films, plays and songs. The study of these artists is thematically based, carefully written and as revealing about them as it is about Joan. They are wonderfully perceptive and compelling to read. But this is not the genius of the work. What Astell achieves in this fine interpretive collection of the differing representations of Joan of Arc is her own presentation of Joan of Arc as a revelation of René Girard's anti-sacrificial theory.

The introduction begins with several quotations, including this one from Girard: "Dying in the same way as Jesus did, for the same reasons as he did, the martyrs multiply the revelation of the founding violence." What slowly emerges as one reads through Astell's detailed analysis is precisely how Joan of Arc

fits into this Girardian model. Her conclusion makes this brilliantly clear.

The book begins with a simple account of the life of Joan of Arc. The story, perhaps for its lack of embellishment, is immediately compelling. One understands why Joan of Arc's life has been so often revisited by modern literary artists. The features most striking in this "chronological sketch" are Joan's intense spirituality, the Voices that guide her, as well as her courage and concern for others. Yet what Astell reveals in her analysis is how Joan's interpreters are themselves existentially involved in their portrayals of her life, whether stemming from their own artistic rivalries, their Marxist ideas, or their gender issues. What these varied and personal interpretations of Joan do—from Southey's epic poem *Joan of Arc* to Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, or Sackville-West's *Saint Joan of Arc*—is illustrate the truth of the statement by Roger B. Salomon, who says that the story of Joan of Arc "calls forth endless interpreters, each of whom reveals as much about himself as about Joan" (15).

And yet, as one reads the various accounts, one senses that something central to Joan's story has been ignored, perhaps the meaning of her actions and life in religious terms. Joan becomes mythologized. According to Astell, the authors ultimately "imitate Joan as an artistic model" and by doing this "they identify Joan with all the artists who have gone before them as precursors... In Joan's death they imagine their own" (186-7). What she uncovers is that these interpreters are "at once sacrificial victims with Joan and her murderers, they accept as true the myth of her guilt and the necessity of her death as a purchase price for literary canonization" (187). For these modern authors, where art has supplanted religion, Joan provides the mythic aura of the saint.

Astell's final chapter, "A Contrapuntal Conclusion: The Catholic and the Jewish Joan", provides a religious reading of Joan's story by artists (Péguy, Claudel, Bernanos, Werfel, Cohen and Ehn) who see their art as serving religion rather than displacing it. Here Joan of Arc's religious intentions are meaningfully explored, and her innocence and charity are emphasized. Astell's powerful conclusion suggests that what one finds in the religious interpretations of Joan of Arc—Jewish and Catholic—is a rejection of the myth of her guilt using antisacrificial means to tell her story. This, argues Astell, is in line with Girard's analysis of Christ's Passion as antimythic. The religious interpretations that Astell highlights "focus attention less on Joan's victimhood than on her charity, on her free choice to offer her life to God for her fellow human beings in an act of heroic love and forgiveness. The life of a victim, a scapegoat, is always cruelly taken away from him or her by others,



whereas saints give their lives, even in the midst of torture, come what may" (187).

Ann Astell's book *Joan of Arc and Sacrificial Authorship* is remarkable and a pleasure to read for many reasons. It draws one into the intriguing life of Joan of Arc, it introduces the reader to the modern literary artists who have interpreted her life in relation to their own, albeit in sacrificial ways; but finally, it offers a compelling Girardian perspective on the artistic representations of Joan's religious interpreters. This antisacrificial reading reveals what makes her most obviously *Saint* Joan of Arc.

Susan Srigley

Nipissing University, Ontario, Canada

**POLITICS AND APOCALYPSE:  
LEO STRAUSS, CARL SCHMITT AND ERIC  
VOEGELIN IN MIMETIC PERSPECTIVE**

This is the title of a workshop held by the Stanford Girard Circle from July 12 through 17, 2004 at the university. Peter Thiel, managing partner of Clarium Capital Management of San Francisco and a member of the Circle sponsored it, and with adequate resources we were able to make it a very pleasant experience for all. Furthermore the participants turned out to be entirely compatible and since we had allotted sufficient time for each presentation (three hours) we enjoyed what some said was the most pleasant and profitable intellectual exchanges of their careers. Participation was by invitation only because we wanted a leisurely and focused discussion rather than the hurried exchanges of bigger meetings. There were 13 participants and 9 prepared papers. René Girard had perpetual right of first comment and response and led the mimetic critique and correction of the positions we were examining.

The participants and their papers in order of presentation were: Robert Hamerton-Kelly, "To Reveal the Revealer: The Fourth Gospel as Apocalypse"; Wolfgang Palaver, "Carl Schmitt's Katechontic Resistance Against Global Civil War"; John Ranieri, "Modernity and the Jewish Question: What Leo Strauss Learned from Nietzsche"; Fred Lawrence, "Philosophy, History, and Apocalypse in Girard, Voegelin and Strauss"; Peter Thiel, "The Straussian Moment"; Stefan Rossbach, "Agnostos Theos: Eric Voegelin on the Mystery of History"; Paul Caringella, "Eric Voegelin on The Political Religions, (with Biographical details)"; Jozef Niewiadomski, "'Denial of Apocalypse' versus 'Fascination with the Final Days'. Remarks on the current theological discussion of apocalyptic thinking."

Non-presenting participants were Sue Lawrence, Gil Bailie, Randy Coleman-Riese (both the latter from the Cornerstone Forum) and Tim McFadden, a circle member. The workshop culminated with a four-hour

session led by Rene Girard, in which he summed up his reaction to the workshop as a whole and to the issues at stake. That session, along with all the others was recorded and there will be transcriptions available in the volume we plan to publish next year.

The agenda shows the plan of the discussion: the first and last presentations are theological and intended to bracket the philosophical and political papers. At the center of the agenda is Lawrence's summary of the thought of Girard, Voegelin and Strauss, and on either side of the summary special considerations of the thinkers in question.

It is difficult to summarize the discussions but here are some general statements that might give a sense of them. The impulse for holding them came from a desire to understand better the current religious temper of international politics. My motivation came from the discovery that American Neoconservatives, who are influential in US foreign policy circles today, are influenced by the thought of Leo Strauss. "What is this thought and how does it appear to mimetic theory?" I asked. Palaver pointed out that the three thinkers other than Girard we circle members have some knowledge of, namely, Strauss, Schmitt and Voegelin, all developed their thought in important relation to the Bible. In the Bible the idea that God acts in history to vindicate the just and punish the wicked is called 'apocalyptic', and so we chose the title, "Politics and Apocalypse" to describe an intellectual situation where political thought proceeds more or less in a dialectic relation to the Bible in particular and Jewish and Christian theology in general. Strauss, for instance, speaks often of the tension between Athens and Jerusalem, and some commentators say of Schmitt in comparison with Strauss, that he is a political theologian while Strauss is a political philosopher, that is, the former gives an answer to the question, "What is the ultimate source of sovereignty?" while the latter leaves it a question and thus an opening to the transcendent realm of further questioning. So the alternative political questions are, "How should we live in the question?" or "How shall we obey the answer?" Our discussions proved, to my satisfaction at least, that this is a false dichotomy in the case of Schmitt and Strauss, and that Schmitt's religious answer is pagan, not Christian.

The final written presentation treated the term "apocalypse" in its narrower meaning. Not only does the word describe God's work in history generally, but more precisely God's ultimate work as judge of the world. In this sense apocalypse is an ideology of vengeance, what Niewiadomski elegantly calls, "the vicious circle of being right and demanding retribution." We saw at this point the immense contribution of Raymund Schwager applied to our present plight of vengeful and self-righteous politics. The judge does not actively inflict anguish but allows those who will



not repent to suffer the consequences of their own choice.

In the final session Girard summed up the mimetic dissent from our three thinkers as a dissent from philosophy as such. More precisely, philosophy is self-deceiving because it claims to stand back and apart from the situation it observes and to report and adjudicate objectively. Thus the philosopher denies his own participation with the mimetic mechanism and so instead of disclosing it covers it up most thoroughly with the dense fog of reasonableness and apparent de-

tachment. Detached, word-centered discourse obscures the suffering victim.

These are only fleeting impressions of a weeklong conversation that went on for six hours a day for six days. When I have finished editing the audiotapes I will have a better sense of what really went on. In the meantime this impressionistic report will have to do, until the volume of essays and dialogue appears next year.

Robert Hamerton-Kelly

### A NOTE FROM THE NEW EDITOR

As you might have read in the executive secretary's note at the beginning of this Bulletin, the editorship of the Bulletin has passed on. I want to thank Paul Bellan-Boyer for the work he has done in the past years, and I want to thank the advisory board for the trust they have placed in me. I hope that I will be able to justify it.

At the Ghost Ranch conference, when we discussed the future of the Bulletin, many people suggested it might be a good idea to take up some traditional permanent features of the Bulletin, namely regular letters from the executive secretary and the president of COV&R, and the ongoing bibliography. Our President, Sandor Goodhart, could not provide a letter for this issue of the Bulletin for personal reasons. We wish him all the best and hope that we will hear from him next time.

We also agreed on having a regular contribution from Simon Simonse, so that the making of the Bulletin would not lie in theological hands alone. Yet, Simon neither could provide his contribution for this issue, but we expect it for the next one. As you can see from these remarks, editing the Bulletin can only work with your help and your contributions. So, if there is anything related to the mimetic theory and the work of COV&R which you would like to report, discuss or review, please let me know. I am looking forward to your suggestions to continue the Bulletin as a means of furthering our communication and contributing to COV&R's being a forum for the discussion and exchange of ideas.

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The last bibliography was published in the Bulletin in 2000. In taking up this feature again it turned out that so much material has accumulated that it is impossible to put it all into this issue of the Bulletin. Therefore, if you have submitted bibliographical material not listed here, please be patient: It will be in the next spring issue of the Bulletin.

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We invite you to send us copies of your articles, as well as references to any kind of literature dealing with mimetic theory to : [Dietmar.Regensburger@uibk.ac.at](mailto:Dietmar.Regensburger@uibk.ac.at) or Girard-Documentation Fax: (43 512) 507-2761 or by mail to: Institut fuer Systematische Theologie, Karl-Rahner-Platz 1 A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria.



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