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## **MIMESIS, CREATIVITY AND RECONCILIATION**

### **COV&R-Conference Ottawa, May 31-June 4, 2006, Call for Papers**

Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV & R) Conference  
Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada  
May 31—June 4, 2006

#### **Mimesis, Creativity and Reconciliation**



#### **Deadline for abstracts: January 15, 2006**

René Girard has been understood primarily as a theorist of violence. Girard's concept of Mimetic Desire as the basis for envy and hatred describes how acquisitive and then ontological desire stirs up individual and collective passions, resulting in covert and overt forms of violence. Girard's theory of the scapegoat unmasks the manner in which widespread violence within a community is often dissipated through a hidden scapegoat mechanism, whereby violence is directed against a surrogate victim. With violent mimesis, reconciliation within a community is achieved through this violent mechanism. Girard's anthropology and reading of texts has focused on describing culture as founded on this type of violence and the scapegoat mechanism.

Girard has always maintained, however, that mimetic desire itself is neither good nor bad: "... it is the basis of heroism, and devotion to others ... mimetic desire is also the desire for God." The challenge of this conference is to further develop how mimetic theory can be interpreted as positive, constructive, or creative. We seek to explore mimetic theory as 1) a potentially foundational theory of life-affirming creativity and 2) the basis of a description and

*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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development of reconciliatory practices that do not use violence. Participants are invited to explore the possibility that the concept of creative mimesis can help develop a framework for constructive, mutually-empowering human relationships that can avert violence when it threatens, and develop life-affirming responses when it occurs. When mimetic desire becomes creative, reconciliation and active flourishing occur as individuals or communities consciously create alternatives to scapegoating. Such individuals or communities then become models for others, creating positive contagion. We will ask such questions as: How can creativity be described in terms of mimetic theory? And second, how does our understanding of mimetic theory itself change when viewed through the lens of theories of creativity? What are the intellectual, ethical and practical consequences of this revisioning? How does such a revisioning look in relation to specific literary texts and cultural practices, especially in relation to gender, religion, science, and minority or indigenous cultures?

The Colloquium on Violence and Religion welcomes proposals for papers for its 2006 meeting, to be held in Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. Featured speakers will develop the themes of Creative Mimesis and Imagination (philosophical, theological and scientific conceptual developments); Reconciliation at the Nexus of Art, Theory and Praxis; Creative Mimesis and Peacebuilding; The Challenge of Reconstructing the Self (philosophical, psychological and theological accounts); and Creative Mimesis in the Traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of North America. In addition to traditional papers and presentations, the conference format will include experiences of audience participation through generative, collaborative dialogues and creative experiences through music and ritual.

In addition to the above, possible topics for papers and sessions include (among others):

**gender**  
**culture**  
**religion**  
**art, literature and music**  
**governance and/or institutional structures**  
**conflict transformation and peacebuilding**  
**reconciliation without scapegoats in theory and practice**  
**genocide, forgiveness and reconciliation**

The conference will bring together the Girardian scholars associated with the Colloquium on Violence and Religion with scholars (and practitioners) in the areas of peacebuilding, creativity, conflict resolution and the arts. Furthermore it will highlight contributions drawn from a number of distinct cultural groups.

The conference is hosted by Saint Paul University in Ottawa. For updated information refer to:

**<http://web.ustpaul.uottawa.ca/covr2006>**

Submit abstracts for papers and proposals for sessions to:

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## ***COV&R AWARDS & GRANTS***

### **Raymund Schwager Memorial Awards Competition For Graduate Students**

To honor the memory of Raymund Schwager, SJ († 2004), the Colloquium on Violence and Religion is offering **awards of \$ 200** each for the three best papers given by graduate students at the COV&R 2006 meeting in Ottawa, Canada, May 31-June 4.

Students presenting papers at the conference are invited to apply for the **Raymund Schwager Memorial Awards** by sending a letter to that effect and the full text of their paper (in English, maximum length: 10 pages) in an e-mail attachment to Vern Neufeld Redekop ([covr2006@ustpaul.ca](mailto:covr2006@ustpaul.ca)), organizer of COV&R 2006 and chair of the three-person COV&R Awards Committee. **Due date for submission: January 15, 2006.** Winners will be announced at the COV&R Business Meeting at the conference. Prize-winning essays will be considered for publication in *Contagion*.

### **COV&R Graduate Students Sponsorship**

COV&R **members** are **invited to suggest** graduate students or other scholars to the COV&R Board for scholarships supporting their conference attendance. The board will set aside \$ 1,000 to be able to sponsor the attendance of two to three persons who otherwise could not attend. The officers of COV&R will base their decision above all on the need of the suggested persons.

## ***LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT TO THE COV&R MEMBERSHIP***

René Girard has now entered the ranks of the “immortels” of the French Academy. The importance of his work on imitative desire, on the sacrificial (and violent) origins of culture, and on the fundamental insights that Jewish and Christian scripture make available to us on these structurative mechanisms (and in particular on the scapegoat mechanism and the surrogate victim) has begun to be felt on a world historical level. New organizations are forming to honor René in his home country of France. Centers for his work

continue to thrive in Innsbruck and in North America (in Chicago and West Lafayette, for example), and interest has come from Latin America, from the African continent, and from Asia. The conference in Koblenz, Germany, hosted by Ann Astell and the Schönstatt Sisters of Mary (which was by all accounts an astounding success), brought together close to 200 individuals from over 46 countries. And the upcoming conference in Ottawa hosted by Vern Redekop promises us a similar welcome.

Girardian thinking has “arrived.” A recent publication in France by Marie-Claude Siccard on mimetic desire in advertising – on brand names – makes the point. Girard has become a brand name. A few years ago we were having a discussion on the Advisory Board about the best way to honor René on his eightieth birthday and that discussion seems to me returns today with a new relevance. That discussion was eclipsed by the untimely passing of Father Schwager, but in the course of it Andrew McKenna noted that we honor him by our vita. I think Andrew is right. We honor René by our works and by our lives, by our productive work as a witness to our own lives and to his life, by continuing, in short, in his spirit. In place of sacrifice, the Rabbis said after the fall of the Second Temple, we pray and read. We do *tzadakkah*, the work of the just, of the *tzadikkim*.

If as a group we are not for ourselves, who will be for us? We need to continue to gather, on a yearly basis or even more often, to strengthen our bonds as an informed and compassionate community. That is a part of the positive mimesis. On the other hand, if we are only for ourselves, then what are we? That is also part of positive mimesis. Girardian thinking is not an ethics. René’s analyses of the mimetic, the sacrificial, the Biblical (and the literary), bring us to the door of the ethical. But it is we who must pass through that door in whatever way we know how.

And the time for that passage has arrived. Join the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. Encourage your students, your colleagues, your friends to learn more about Girardian theory, to make provision for the future. Come to the yearly conference on René Girard’s work. Read the COV&R *Bulletin*. Read the journal, *Contagion* (which has now passed from the brilliant editorship of Andrew McKenna to the dazzling potential promised by the accession of Bill Johnsen). Sponsor others to do the same. Continue to write books and essays by and about René’s work. Continue to honor René by your vita.

If not now, when?

Sandor Goodhart,  
Purdue University,  
President of COV&R

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Looking back on our conference at Schönstadt I think our most recent meeting was really outstanding regarding the quality of so many papers and the beautiful place where we met. Many thanks to *Ann Astell*, her many collaborators and the community of Schönstadt for all their efforts that made this meeting possible.

There is a second occasion to say a word of thanks to one of the important pillars of COV&R. *Andrew McKenna*, currently chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at Loyola University in Chicago, was editor of our journal *Contagion* since 1996. For nearly ten years he published a volume every year making mimetic theory by this enormous effort visible in the academic world. Whoever has undertaken such editorial work knows how much time and energy is needed to bring out a new volume every year. Many thanks Andrew for your great contribution to the work of COV&R. *William A. Johnsen* from Michigan State University has become the new editor. We wish him all the best to continue Andrew’s work in the coming years.

I also would like to refer you to two recent books. In France a very helpful introduction to mimetic theory was published by Charles Ramond with the title *Le vocabulaire de Girard* (Paris: ellipses, 2005). This book explains key terms of mimetic theory in alphabetical order. From *bouc émissaire* (scapegoat) to *violence* you will find all important terms used by Girard. Many references to Girard’s books make it a helpful index of the whole work. It would be a good thing to translate this book into English and other languages soon.

A Swiss anthropologist recently published an interesting book in German discussing some of the cultural reasons that help to explain Africa’s economic problems. David Signer’s book *Die Ökonomie der Hexerei oder Warum es in Afrika keine Wolkenkratzer gibt* [*The Economy of Witchcraft or Why there are no Skyscrapers in Africa*] (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2004) shows convincingly how patterns of collective envy closely connected to practices of witchcraft, sorcery and magic prevent economic entrepreneurship on the black continent. Whoever becomes too successful in many African societies risks that someone, or the whole group, casts an evil spell on him. Envy dominates many relations causing anxiety and discouragement. This cultural atmosphere prevents many initiatives. In the systematic chapters of his book the author clearly refers to mimetic theory to explain his observations. French readers may take a look at Signer’s book *L’économie de la sorcellerie*. Abidjan: Sempervira (Centre Suisse des Recherches Scientifiques).

Wolfgang Palaver

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

### **Report on the COV&R Conference Schönstatt-Koblenz, July 2005**

During four partly sunny and partly rainy days 180 participants from 26 nations encountered each other for the 15<sup>th</sup> COV&R Conference on Mount Schönstatt near the German city of Koblenz, where Rhine and Moselle merge. *Imitation of the divine* – the topic of the conference – is in a Christian perspective necessarily interconnected with discipleship of Jesus. Regarded from that angle, no better place could have been chosen for this meeting, because the spirit of discipleship penetrates it completely. The hospitality and kindness of the sisters can hardly be surpassed. Also the commodities and the organization were excellent. It seems unbelievable that our conference has been the first academic meeting at this place. Mount Schönstatt contains a really huge area shared by several convents, churches and guesthouses. Thus there were remarkable distances between the place where the sessions proceeded and some houses in which the participants were hosted. Anyway this fact allowed at least some of the participants to have nice walks out in the beautiful landscape in which the Schönstatt-center is embedded. I think it is allowed to make this slightly biting remark considering the lack of time for relaxation between the sessions, lectures and meals.



*A Schönstatt Chapel*

The abundance and variety of the papers given has to be called overwhelming. In the wrap-up session some speakers complained about a lack of time within the concurrent sessions, which in fact were competing sessions because of their general attractiveness. It is true that there was little room for serious discussion of the presentations. But everybody who has presented a paper once should be familiar with the greatest temptation speakers are exposed to: to say everything they know about a topic. Some potential solutions to this problem have been proposed; they have the demand for self-restraint in common. A first step

could be that the presenters within the same session exchange the main theses of their papers with each other in advance. This would at least allow the speakers of one and the same session to lock on to the ideas of each other.



*A Cultural Highlight:  
Sisters Ann Astell and M. Angela Macari*

The lack of real discussion and the fact of little exchange of arguments within the sessions could have caused the remark of a first-time-participant of the conference that there seems to be an unjustified longing for harmony in the assembly of people interested in the Girardian approach. I myself don't agree with him. Quite to the contrary I have experienced an enormous variety and richness of different ways to proceed with this approach. Yet, one does perceive a common focus of the manifold works presented, regardless of scientific discipline or religious affiliation. Such a common focus certainly is not at all a usual feature of academic conferences. From my point of view this common but interdisciplinary focus is one of the most outstanding advantages of COV&R meetings when compared to theme-focused conferences in which different specialists aspire to talk about the same topic without any common language, or to mono-disciplinary symposia in which each individual is longing for his or her personal playground to become a tiny niche of undisputed expertise for themselves.

But let us attend to the conference topic and some particular themes. The question of the imitation of the divine is one of the crucial issues of human and social life. Whether there is a right or a wrong, a proper or a perverted imitation of the divine is not only a subject of inner-theological interest. Thus we had the opportunity to enjoy keynote addresses dealing with the topic in very different ways.

Józef Niewiadomski elaborated on the very subtle theological differentiations to be made in order to distinguish between following the real God and pursuing mere human illusions. Following R. Schwager he described Christian discipleship as similar to the dramatic process that led Jesus from the realm of sponta-



neous expectations and actions to the surrender to the father. Listening to Margaret Miles' thoughts about how mimesis was rooted in Plato, Plotinus and Augustine was not only an intellectual benefit but also an aesthetic pleasure. Desire – she stated – is essen-



*Attentive Listener*

tially generated by physical vision. So the desire for the eternal and divine springs from the vision of the beauty of the created world. But the ability to see the physical world as beauty is the result of a strenuous spiritual discipline. An exciting approach but also an approach that includes the temptation of overestimating individual human merit and disregarding grace. Jean-Luc Marion invited us to a look of very precise and refined philosophical analyses behind the curtain which covers many everyday terms and concepts. His emphasis on the idea that man resembles nothing because he is the icon of the incomprehensible one was very impressive, but finally Marion depicted man in a very solipsistic way, so that the human person remained an absolute mystery. These were only a few highlights of the plenary-sessions of the conference.

From the several concurrent sessions I solely want to pick one which was particularly intriguing to me. In this session Travis Kroeker talked about the games of destructive power brought to light by political theory and their overcoming by Jesus even against the obstacles of his own disciples. Emmanuel Dubois de Prisque presented the ambiguity of Machiavelli's civic religion of the state at the outset of modernity. Giuseppe Fornari gave a very controversial paper about the pitfalls of political correctness. This session exemplarily displayed the vitality of the reception of mimetic theory in theology and the social sciences and also the differences in the conclusions drawn. A lot of other contributors should be mentioned like the young Simon De Keukelaere, whose presentation on Virginia Woolf was an inspiring dramatic firework, or Ibanga B. Ikpe, who posed some challenging, even though problematic, questions to mimetic theory from

an African point of view. But it is not possible to put on record everybody who would deserve recognition.

Finally, however, one part of the conference should be highlighted in particular: the session focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Raymund Schwager had initiated this series of discussions at the conference in Innsbruck. The disputation of the two excellent lecturers Mumtaz Ahmad and Israel Idalovich brought the importance of this issue to the fore. Even though Ahmad emphasized that the Palestine-conflict had no religious source at all and that it had merely been a political and social conflict up to now, his own emotional dedication and the dedication of the whole Islamic world cannot be understood without taking the religious dimension into account, I am sure. Of course, it has to be clarified what religion exactly means in this context. In other words: the entanglement of religious and political questions in this violent conflict underlines the importance of reflections about the adequate way of religious worship. This means dealing with the question of an appropriate imitation of the divine.

In retrospect I think I dare say that Ann Astell and her team have planned and conducted a really enriching conference, which was on a very high scientific level in general. Yet this high level was still outshone by some scientific as well as cultural highlights.

*Wilhelm Guggenberger, University of Innsbruck*



*At the Israel-Palestine Session: Sandor Goodhart, Mumtaz Ahmad, Charles Selengut, Israel Idalovich*

### **A Second View: A Lonerganian at COV&R**

Greetings from Notre Dame, where I am spending the fall semester while on junior research leave from my home college, Regis College at the University of Toronto! Niki Wandinger approached me last July, looking for my reflections as a Lonerganian on the experience of attending COV&R for the first time. This I am very happy to do, as a sign of my gratitude to all of you for your generous hospitality during the conference.

For that is the first memory I have of COV&R, the warm and hospitable welcome received from all the Girardians we met. The gathering is informal and

friendly, and reminded me of the annual Lonergan workshop in Boston. All of us visiting Lonerganians felt at home. I enjoyed the wide-ranging conversations over meals and during breaks.



*Another cultural highlight:  
Manfred Faig with the Youth Chamber Choir and  
Girls' Cantors of the Liebfrauenkirche, Koblenz*

My second reflection concerns the broad scope of interests manifested at the conference. Yours is a truly multi-disciplinary movement: literature, natural sciences, psychology, cultural anthropology, philosophy, theology, economics and more. This multi-disciplinarity is something we continue to try to develop in the Lonergan movement, but you have achieved much more on this point than we have.

The Lonergan-Girard panel was a very positive experience, and I am grateful for the ongoing conversations that have begun as a result of it. The participants gave us a generous hearing, and the question period, while it brought no surprises, helped us articulate better for ourselves the parallels, contrasts and complementarities between Lonergan and Girard's thought.

I have one remark related to this point, as an observer of the week from a strictly Lonerganian perspective. I observed that there were two broad trends among presenters: one that tended to be mistrustful of issues in philosophical and theological anthropology and the other wanting to push an exploration of just these issues in order to settle whether, for example, it is possible to hold for a fundamental goodness of human beings. In the coming years, I see this as a basic challenge to be met by the Girard movement: not so much to take a common position on issues of philosophical and theological anthropology, but to begin a common exploration of them so that the various positions in the Girard movement can be made more articulate and explicit.

I look forward to a continuing association with COV&R, and I hope to see you in Ottawa next summer.

*Gilles Mongeau, S.J.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Wolfgang Palaver, Petra Steinmair-Pösel (eds.) *Passion in Economy, Politics and the Media in Discussion with Christian Theology*

Wien: LIT, 2005. 524pp.

ISBN: 3-8258-7822-8 € 34.90

This collection of essays is volume 17 of the series 'Contributions to Mimetic Theory' (BMT); the 'discussion' which is set out here, between theology and the social and cultural sciences, is exactly in line with the aims both of the series and of the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion*, whose conference at Innsbruck in 2003 gave rise to these papers.

The book has three sections, each with seven or eight essays on 'the passions' in the economy, politics and the media. These are preceded by an introduction from the editors, and a paper by René Girard, who returns once again to the drama of Shakespeare for his inspiration. His paper deals specifically with oxymoronic language in *Romeo and Juliet*, a play which is especially appropriate for this collection, given its interweaving of the themes of erotic and economic desire.

Each of the three sections contains high quality analysis. There are marked differences between them: for example, it is striking that the key essays on 'Passions in Economy' are penned by people who have been working with mimetic theory for many years: Eric Gans ('The Market and Resentment'), Paul Dumouchel ('A Mimetic Rereading of Helmut Schoek's Theory of Envy') and Wolfgang Palaver ('Envy or Emulation: A Christian Understanding of Economic Passions'). The programmatic essay of Petra Steinmair-Pösel, 'Economy and Mimetic Theory' sets out the key aim of this section, namely to challenge 'the myth of the Homo Oeconomicus' who is distinct from and makes rational choices independently of 'Homo Mimeticus'. Steinmair-Pösel sets out this argument very clearly, incidentally doing so with reference to the erotically-charged Gucci poster advertising a perfume called ENVY, which was perhaps the most memorable, if controversial, feature of the 2003 COV&R conference!

This first section concludes with a theological perspective from Montreal, offered by Michel Beaudin and Jean-Marc Gauthier. From classical times to the present, they assert, both the economic and the political orders are structured according to a 'sacrificial soteriology'; even the proponents of neo-liberal economics recognise that there will necessarily be victims as a result of its operation. This is set out by analogy with the sacrificial understanding of Christianity which has been attributed, however mistakenly, to St Anselm, while the alternative rereading of Christian soteriology as 'sacramental' corresponds to the

insights of René Girard and mimetic theory. For the latter, salvation is not a *homeopathic* remedy, redeeming violence by violence, but *heteropathic*, 'where only love can save from violence, only the gift of life can save from ... death ... and only the resurrection of the beloved Son can save from the cross.' (194)

This essay reinforces a sense of consolidation in this first section: of scholars converging upon the insight that our standard account of how economies operate is flawed, and that mimetic theory helps us to see why. The section on 'Passions in Politics' is more exploratory and diffuse, with theologians such as Jean Bethke Elshtain and Graham Ward offering important contributions (Augustinian scholarship, Radical Orthodox ecclesiology) from outside the mainstream of Girardian thinking. In the same section, a paper from the late Raymund Schwager sets out the reasons for adoption by the Innsbruck Research Project of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a special area of concern. Contributions by Jean-Pierre Dupuy (on panic), Stephano Tomelleri (on resentment), Bruce Ward (Rousseau and envy), and Stephen Gardner (*The Great Gatsby*) are included here. Stimulating as each of these are, the essays as a whole do not convey the same sense of converging significance as the section on the Economy, and perhaps an explicit theological summary, such as we find at the end of each of the other two sections, could have been included. Specifically, a Girardian theological engagement with Graham Ward's challenging paper on 'The Body of the Church and its Erotic Politics' would have been welcome.

A similar richness, and diffusion also, can be found in Section III, 'Passions in the Media'. The media here include internet and alternative universes, drama (Arthur Miller), film (Hitchcock, Pasolini etc) and advertising (in contemporary Japan). The concluding essays from Thomas H. Böhm and Józef Niewiadomski offer a theological perspective and a theological synthesis, respectively. Böhm employs the theology of Paul Tillich to construct an incarnational-missionary account of Christianity, one which is in counterpoint to the false religiosity of 'media religion'. Niewiadomski offers a 'beatific vision' of the religious resolution of the problem of desire. He cites Rublev's portrayal of the Trinity in *Philoxenia*, and specifies the self-emptying of God who descends voluntarily into the world of deadly passionate appetites, precisely to redeem us from them. In this way the Rublev icon becomes a contra-picture to the notorious Gucci advertisement.

*Passions in Economy, Politics and the Media* has the strengths and the drawbacks of a volume originating as an academic conference. The strengths are considerable: writers from numerous disciplines, and allied to varying degrees with mimetic theory, have come up with a stimulating collection of essays. The

weakness, as with conference *acta*, is that these can often seem to be simply juxtaposed, rather than genuinely placed in dialogue with one another. As implied in the theological contributions of Böhm and Niewiadomski, the discussion between economy, politics and media on the one hand, and a (Girardian-inspired) theology on the other, usually begins as a citation of opposition and differences. In the terms used by Beaudin and Gauthier, we are speaking of rival 'soteriologies', sacrificial and sacramental. The challenge then, as with any genuine dialogue, is to go deeper, to refine understanding both of the dialogue partner's position and one's own; to look for affinities as well as points of divergence.

This volume moves the conversation forward. The cover description of the book claims that its interdisciplinary approach 'promotes a deeper understanding of the religious dimensions of capitalism, the contemporary return of religion to politics and the religious implications of modern mass media'. To judge by the papers collected here, this analysis seems to be more developed and more focussed in the first of these than the other two. This is not surprising, as this first theme is as old as capitalism itself, while the contemporary challenges – the 'return of religion to politics' and the religiousness of the mass media – will take longer to come into focus, and there is more of a feel of 'work in progress.' But on the whole the ambition of the editors, in bringing together these different perspectives, appears to be justified, with this fine addition to the BMT collection. One final comment concerns the cover illustration, by Wolfgang Friedl, entitled *Jealousy*. The illustration shows two figures kissing very tenderly (in contrast to the frenzied eroticism of the Gucci advert), while a third figure looks on in despair – and I think it is wonderful!

Dr Michael Kirwan SJ, Heythrop College, University of London

**Peter Walter (ed.),**

***Das Gewaltpotential des Monotheismus und der dreieine Gott* [*Monotheism's Potential for Violence and the Triune God*] (Quaestiones Disputatae 216), Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder 2005, 231pp, ISBN 3-451-02216-8 € 24.90**

In the last number of the *COV&R Bulletin* Roman Siebenrock reported on the meeting of the German-speaking dogmatic and fundamental theologians in September 2004. The theme of the conference was "Monotheism – Trinity – Violence", and René Girard was invited to give one of the keynote lectures. Now the conference proceedings have been published by Peter Walter in the renowned theological series *Quaestiones Disputatae*, thus opening the discussion of the working group of German theologians to a wider public.

The book is divided into four sections reflecting the succession of papers given at the conference, preceded by the editor's introduction. Each section starts with a key essay followed by two critical replies. Thereby each of the four sections contains reflections on the topic of "Monotheism – Trinity – Violence" from the perspectives of different academic disciplines (religious studies, philosophy, systematic theology, biblical theology and cultural anthropology). However, not all essays take up all aspects of the common topic. All the contributions to the conference volume, with the exception of René Girard's, are in German. For better reading I will give the English translations of the titles in this review.

The first section is headed by an essay by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, who became well known among theologians especially because of his provocative thesis that the Mosaic distinction of the true God and the false idols, of true and false religion, enhances violence. In his essay, entitled "Monotheism and the language of violence", Assmann puts forward a somewhat moderated thesis. Being not so much interested in violence as such but primarily in the biblical language of violence, Assmann poses the question why the biblical tradition records the formation and establishment of monotheism in such violent scenes, why violence plays such a crucial role in the texts of the Old Testament. For his argument Assmann distinguishes between two types of monotheism: inclusive and exclusive monotheism. According to Assmann inclusive monotheism is the mature state of polytheism and can be summarized in the sentence: "All Gods are one". In contrast, exclusive monotheism doesn't evolve from polytheism, but forms a revolution against it and is characterized by the sentence: "No other gods but God". Assmann is only concerned with the latter form of monotheism, because only this type speaks the language of violence: It is the latter type of monotheism which can be found in the biblical texts of the Old as well as the New Testament. At the heart of this type of monotheism Assmann locates the motif of the fervid and jealous God and the permanent need for the believer (i.e. the convert), to make and then stick to the right decision (i.e. the decision for the true God). Against this background Assmann interprets the biblical language of violence as a warning against assimilation to other, polytheistic cultures, as a warning against the backslide into the earlier form of existence. He asserts that today the violent motifs are (ab)used by fundamentalists. Hence Assmann concludes his paper by arguing that the biblical language of violence has to be historicized in order to restrict its validity.

In his reply to Assmann the German Old Testament scholar Erich Zenger asserts that it was exactly biblical monotheism that overcame the violent aspects of other creation myths. Moreover he argues that the

biblical language of violence was just one phase in the development of monotheism, a phase which, after the Babylonian exile, was followed by a reflected monotheism that included the ideal of non-violence. This reflected monotheism forms – according to Zenger – the hermeneutic horizon for the interpretation of the biblical language of violence.

The second reply to Assmann is given by the philosopher Klaus Müller, who emphasizes the question of truth which he sees neglected in the thesis of the Egyptologist. According to Müller, it is the suspension of this question and the consequent disconnection of reason and belief that leads to intolerance and violence.

The second section starts with an essay by the Austrian philosopher Peter Strasser, who challenges the modern appreciation of polytheism. According to Strasser, violence is a phenomenon deeply linked to all archaic religions – polytheistic as well as monotheistic. Therefore the question of monotheism and violence shouldn't be dealt with against the background of polytheism. Rather, Strasser asserts, it is characteristic for biblical monotheism that God is more and more understood as a God of all people. Trinitarian monotheism also cannot be used in terms of a political theology (Carl Schmitt), as the "separation of powers" within God defies any political exploitation. For Strasser the main problem lies in an understanding of the Christian God, prevalent in the wake of Kant, as a weak God, the God of deism and ethics. This notion of the weak God, which is also familiar to polytheism, makes people feel that they have to do everything by themselves and gives rise to human megalomania.

The German dogmatic theologian Karlheinz Ruhstorfer shares and deepens Strasser's critique of the modern appreciation of polytheism. However, he differs from Strasser's view by interpreting the megalomania of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the associated violence as a result of a monomaniacal anthropology rather than of a Kantian understanding of monotheism.

The second response to Strasser, delivered by the German philosopher Saskia Wendel, focuses on the trinity. Wendel argues that Trinitarian unity intrinsically includes diversity and mutual love and therefore rules out any form of totalitarian violence.

The essay that commences the third section zooms in on the theme of the Trinity. The German theologian Magnus Striet shows that the notion of the Trinitarian God deeply corresponds to the human need for freedom. Unfortunately the thorough examination of the Trinitarian topic is done at the expense of the question of violence, which is only marginally touched on in this article. As a consequence, the replies to Striet's essay given by the German theologians Karl-Heinz Menke and Helmut Hoping also remain – more or less

– confined to the subject of the Trinity and pay little attention to the question of violence. Nevertheless Menke asserts – against Assmann and in the wake of Striet’s remarks – that Judeo-Christian Monotheism doesn’t have to be overcome for the sake of non-violence but provides its basis.

In the last section the question of violence is addressed most directly. In his clear and programmatic essay René Girard sheds light on the complex relationship between religion and violence. He gives a short and straightforward introduction to the main insights of mimetic theory, touching on the mimetic nature of the human person, on the victimage mechanism and the function of archaic religions, as well as on the crucial difference between myths and the biblical tradition. One of his main arguments is that far from being the cause of violence, archaic religions are a consequence of violence and always essentially concerned with protecting people against violence. For this purpose they resort to a substitute violence – a fact that is revealed by the Judeo-Christian revelation. Since sacrificial violence “contains” (J.P. Dupuy) violence, Girard describes the elimination of sacrificial violence in the wake of the biblical tradition as an ambivalent process which also weakens the peaceful effects of this violence. According to Girard the attempt to abstain from sacrificial violence therefore turns out to be very difficult, and even impossible without Christianity: “Nothing can be done, in my opinion, without the help of Christianity, which knows more about us and our violence than all the forms of philosophy, and science of which we are so proud.” (190)

The first reply to Girard’s essay is given by the German theologian Johann Ev. Hafner, who criticizes that the Girardian notion of violence is merely adequate for archaic groups but not for modern differentiated societies. Moreover Hafner disagrees with Girard’s interpretation of the passion of Jesus as an incident of lynching. The second response by Knut Wenzel, another German theologian, focuses on Girard’s understanding of desire and mimesis. Wenzel argues that desire must not only be understood as acquisitive desire that leads to violence. Rather he emphasizes the positive aspect of desire which constitutes the basis for cultural activity and mystic desire (*desiderium naturale*).

To sum up it can be said that *The Violent Potential of Monotheism and the Triune God* is a good introduction into the complex field of “Monotheism – Trinity – Violence”, even though it exhibits some drawbacks. Perhaps the most striking of them is the omission of the work of Raymund Schwager. Although the discussion was initiated by Schwager, whose works focus on the issues of violence and religion, the Swiss theologian as well as his writings are not mentioned by the German theologians – a fact

which to me seems astonishing as well as disappointing. Apart from that the volume reflects the strengths and drawbacks of the discussion at the conference: It provides a first examination of the issue from different points of view and different academic contexts. Thus it shows how important the discussion on the topic is, as well as how much work still has to be done in this field.

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**Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Key Contemporary Thinkers)**

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, 211 pages,  
ISBN 0-7456-2948-2 (paperback), \$ 26.95,  
0-7456-2947-4 (hardcover), \$ 62.95

Even before entering into the successive chapters of Chris Fleming’s remarkable *René Girard*, it is important to note two principles that guide it throughout. The first is set prominently in the introduction, and should be enforced as the primary consideration for publishing or rejecting manuscripts which offer introductions to individual theorists. Fleming respectfully offers his book as an invitation to his own readers to read Girard (or more of him) with greater appreciation and understanding, firmly rejecting the all-too-common practice of deconstructing the subject, of implying that reading more of this theorist has now been made unnecessary by this book. Amen.

One of the pleasures of following Girard’s work over the years has been to watch him create something profitable out of both silly and subtle misreadings of his work. I would have said that there was only one way (Girard’s way) to learn this, but Fleming handily punctuates his survey throughout with asides which perspicaciously foresee an objection that could well be answered but only with more space than an introduction can take. Being less charitable than Girard and Fleming, I call this technique ‘foolproofing’ the argument (Fleming remainder to footnote 28, pp. 186-187 a gallery of spectacular and infamous misreadings).

The book follows what now seems the most likely and efficient way to trace Girard’s elaboration of the mimetic hypothesis: to follow his path from *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (DDN) through *Violence and the Sacred* (VS), up to *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Fleming’s first chapter is devoted to “Mimetic Desire.” He accurately follows DDN’s formal analysis of mimesis and its complications as read in the modern European novel, noting as well Girard’s crediting of literature as epistemology in its ability to plot desire’s metaphysical, rivalrous complications and entanglements. Fleming verifies the epistemological or scientific value of the mimetic model by tracing its engagement with psychoanalysis. More recently in *Des origines de la culture*, Girard

has pointed us to further verification and support in Professors Andrew Meltzoff's and Wolfgang Prinz's work on mirror neurons and what they call 'the imitative mind.'

While describing its early development, Fleming never loses sight of the whole picture, the most up-to-date understanding of the mimetic mechanism, its current commitments and promise. He deftly concludes this first chapter by noting the historical grounding of *DDN* (Girard's concept of Stendhalian modernity), nicely negotiating between representing a mechanism which conditions human behavior since it became human and its specific historical form. Fleming later quotes Fredric Jameson's reminder that history hurts. Girard's essay on anorexia, given in Chicago in 1995 and published in volume III of *Contagion* shows that even seeing the beginning of anorexia's short history and living in hope of its end, even being able to explain the mechanism itself, does not mitigate the pain of watching those ensnared in the historical entanglements of mimetic behavior.

There are felicities of phrasing throughout, verbal economies which help Fleming to keep pace with the book's ambitions and limits. I have marked some thirty examples which sound so good that Girard must have coined them, but I haven't yet found them in the English Girard himself has written. "In the masochistic relation, desirability is a property constituted by the informal taboo interposed between the desiring subject and the object by the presence of the rival." (25) "Informal taboo" wonderfully keeps in mind the anthropological context looming ahead of *DDN* in *VS*, the long de-development of prohibition from the primitive to the modern, but also the offhand way moderns manage an always potentially dangerous reciprocity.

The next two chapters are the most impressive in the book. "Sacrificial crisis and surrogate victimage," is primarily devoted to the vertiginous expansion of the mimetic hypothesis in *VS*. Fleming efficiently names the stage when break-away conflict among innumerable doubles begins to polarise on a single common enemy as "accusatory mimesis" (48). Here (56) is his summary of effective sacrifice: "...the victim must either: come from outside the community and be capable of being integrated into it; come from inside the community and be set aside in order that some distance is instituted between that victim and others; or come, already, from the margins of the community – neither 'inside' nor 'outside' it. If the (surrogate or sacrificial) victim comes from outside the community and no attempt is made to integrate it, then its death will not possess the requisite cathartic power to halt the sacrificial crisis; and if the victim comes from *within* the community and no attempt is made to distance them from it, then its death risks provoking reprisals and is thus likely to *precipitate*,

rather than *resolve*, the crisis (*VS* 272/405-6; 269/401)." He gives as well a fine terse definition of the function of taboo as establishing "protocols for the correct proximity of potential rivals." (65) Throughout Fleming helpfully gives page numbers for English and French editions, as well as page numbers to locate an extended elaboration of an argument.

Chapter Three ("Myth, Tragedy, History") in particular answers at length the curious charge that Girard doesn't take the real world seriously. On pages 105-106, Fleming recognizes the complexity of Girard's treatment of the reality behind myth. "Girard attempts to theorize how biomedical and social phenomena *interact* – how, for instance, actual physical plagues have precipitated various kinds of social and cultural collapses and so spread their 'undifferentiating effects' via non-biological means. Further, he argues that the reciprocal affinity between the biological/medical aspects and the social aspects of a plague are invariably collapsed in myth; indeed, this lack of differentiation between social and material causation – of, for instance, attributing the origin of a physical plague to moral decrepitude – is itself a constitutive factor of mythical narratives and part of the way in which they obscure their own violent origins (*DB [To Double Business Bound]*, 138)." Such handy formulations as this send us back to some of the earliest proofs. Whether the question posed of 'one or many murderers' makes *Oedipus Tyrannos* antimythical, it is certainly true that the play *does* sever the reciprocity of the biological and social by unlinking the accusing and expelling of Oedipus (social aspects) from the lifting of the plague (biological).

In effect, Fleming is following closely and carefully Girard's insistence on truth as the goal of his research: "...dans leur essence, la religion et la science ont *toutes deux* pour but de *comprendre*. En fait, la religion *est* une science de l'homme." (*Les origines*, 225) Fleming artfully reconstructs and summarises Girard's insistence on the relation of real facts, real history to myth (inversely) and then religion (directly): "...the referentiality of the texts that he examines is not, therefore, the result of some *a priori* philosophical commitment to realism; it is merely that he sees referentiality as more adequate to the range of evidence that he examines – it is part of the hypothesis, therefore, not an assumption that precedes it: the representation of violence in myth requires the inference of its referential nature.... (108)" Thus, in Chapter Four, "Non-Sacrificial Violence. The Judeo-Christian Scriptures," Fleming explains that Girard does not *begin* with an affirmation of the historical reality of the Biblical narratives: "he doesn't affirm their historical reality in order to demonstrate their non-mythological basis, but rather the other way around: it is their non-mythological features which point towards their historicity." (121)

Fleming's last chapter or conclusion is the shortest chapter of the book, but is very suggestive for indicating relations to collateral work and reciprocal influence in, for example, Jean Pierre Dupuy and CREA, the work of Eric Gans and the group surrounding *Anthropoetics*, the relation of the mimetic hypothesis to research in the biological and physical sciences. He is especially good on Girard's influence on Michel Serres. I wish I had written that "....Girard's presence permeates rather than punctuates Serres work." (156)

The conclusion eloquently reissues the challenge Girard poses: "What is the likelihood that the convergence of mythical patterns across a broad range of cultures would share the same patterns to a very high degree of consistency without there being a common mechanism that would bring these into effect? And, secondly, what is the chance – allowing for a moment the reality of genuine violence behind texts of persecution – that the analogies to mythical texts do not

suggest a similar violence?" (162-163) We see clearly from Fleming's book that Girard (like Serres) is more interested in proposing a hypothesis which combines "the maximum of actual uncertainty with the maximum of potential certainty" (*The Scapegoat*, p. 98) than grinding additional proofs for what is already known. "He is not interested in deductive certainties, that is, but in inferences drawn that seem to fit best the available evidence." (162)

This is a wonderful book. Does it supercede Palaver, Kirwan, or even Jensen? Of course not. Keep reading them. And there is more work to do. None of these books engage the important work of Giuseppe Fornari. The linguistic competence of many COV&R members in French, German, and English means that Italian, Danish, and Dutch are not beyond the pale.

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Nikolaus Wandinger

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