The Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion

COV&R

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CATASTROPHE AND CONVERSION POLITICAL THINKING FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Conference Site: The Mission Inn

COV&R-Conference June 18-22, 2008, University of California, Riverside

Welcome to Riverside, California

The University of California, Riverside is very much looking forward to hosting the 2008 meeting of the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion*, June 18-21. The theme of this year's conference is "Catastrophe and Conversion: Political Thinking for the New Millennium," and we have been fortunate in being able to bring together an exceptional cast of keynote and plenary speakers to address the topic.

We are very happy to have Jean-Pierre DUPUY (Stanford / Ecole Polytechnique) who, in the last few years, has distinguished himself as one of the world's leading experts on catastrophe. His now classic *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé: Quand l'impossible est certain* (*Toward an Enlightened Doomsaying: When the Impossible is Certain,* Seuil 2001) will be translated into English along with selections from his recent work on catastrophe. Professor DUPUY was also among the many researchers working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) who shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice-President Al GORE.

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

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

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THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EUROPEAN IDEAS

28 July – 2 August 2008, Helsinki, Finland
Language and the Scientific Imagination

Workshop
Science, Literature, and the Anthropology of René Girard

Those interested in this workshop are invited to submit papers or presentations on any aspect of Girard's work. Topics may include (but are certainly not limited to) the origins of religion, culture, and language, philosophy of history, theory of modernity, Biblical interpretation, Eric Gans's critical revision of Girard in "generative anthropology," ancient or modern philosophy, politics, ethics, anthropology, or aesthetics, and so forth.

Please send proposals for papers or presentations (of ten pages or twenty minutes) to stephen-gardner@utulsa.edu.

Prof. Stephen L. Gardner
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The ground-breaking work of the French-American literary critic and anthropologist of religion René Girard aims to bridge the chasm dividing the sciences and the humanities since the origins of modernity. It brings an interpretative approach to bear on religious myths, literature, and culture partly inspired by the rise of modern science and more specifically by the "positivist" school of French sociology. Following in the steps of Durkheim, Mauss, and others (including Freud), Girard deconstructs myth and literature anthropologically, in terms of the social vicissitudes of human reciprocity and the origins of history and man. In his theories of imitative desire, scapegoating, and the sacrificial origins of religion, he elicits problems of rivalry and violence at the heart of human relations and the genesis of culture.

At the same time, though, this "scientific" deconstruction of the disguised and productive effects of violence in myth, religion, and literature works has a reverse impact. It also brings out the limits of—the mythologies of—the supposed "de-mythologizing" of the Enlightenment. The scientific culture of modernity generates its own myths; romanticism (broadly speaking) is the "natural religion," so to say, of "enlightened" democracy. The rivalry of science and the humanities thus belies a certain affinity, a family kinship, like fraternal enemies. Girard's theories suggest that it is precisely in a purportedly de-mythologized culture that "life as literature" or "existence as an aesthetic phenomenon" (in Nietzsche's phrase) supplants religion—without necessarily being able to accomplish for social life what religion did in the pre-modern world, namely generate social order.

Girard's ideas open up an original strain of cultural studies deeply critical of (though not unsympathetic to) democratic modernity. It is also deeply critical of the reigning fashions of Continental hermeneutics in the post-modern genealogy of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. Even so, this strain picks up on the sacrificial and anti-sacrificial, mimetic and anti-mimetic themes that begin to appear in the radical thinkers of the last two centuries. Girard returns to Biblical sources as both the target of their sacrificial thrust, and the natural conclusion of their anti-sacrificial elements. The only real escape from the mythology of the social imagination in the "enlightened" world of science and technical rationality, he scandalously argues, is the revelation of the Cross. This return is partly facilitated, paradoxically, by the greatest works of modern literature; literature is the real "science" of mythology. Its greatest works deconstruct illusions bred by literature itself, which with printing becomes the original form of popular culture, and so expose the myths in modern individualism. It is not philosophy that deconstructs literature so much as literature that deconstructs the myths of modern philosophy.

COV&R AWARDS AND GRANTS

Raymund Schwager Memorial Award

To honor the memory of Raymund SCHWAGER, SJ († 2004), the Colloquium on Violence and Religion is offering an **award of $ 1,000** shared by up to three persons for the three best papers given by graduate students at the COV&R 2008 meeting in Riverside, CA.

Students presenting papers at the conference are invited to apply for the **Raymund Schwager Memorial Award** 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 Robert Doran, organizer of COV&R 2008 and chair of the three-person COV&R Awards Committee (covr08@ucr.edu).

Duedate for submission: April 18, 2008. Winners will be announced in the conference program. Prize-winning essays will be considered for publication in *Contagion*.

COV&R Travel Grants

Travel grants to attend COV&R 08 are available for **graduate students** or **independent scholars** who are **first-time attendees** of the COV&R conference. Write a **letter of application** accompanied by a **letter of recommendation by a COV&R member** to that effect to the **Executive Secretary**, Ann Astell (aastell@nd.edu). The board will sponsor the attendance of up to three persons with normally an amount of $ 200, maximum $ 300 each. The officers of COV&R will base their decision above all on the need of the suggested persons.

COV&R AT THE AAR IN CHICAGO, IL

First Announcement: Colloquium on Violence and Religion at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting

The Colloquium on Violence and Religion will meet from 9-11:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 1, at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL. Our session will include two papers.

The first paper will be offered by Kathryn MCCLYMOND, Associate Professor in Religious Studies at Georgia State University. Her paper will draw on her book, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). Through a comparative study of Vedic and Jewish sacrificial systems, *Beyond Sacred Violence* argues that sacrifice, which has largely been understood as the violent and dramatic death of animal victims, is in reality a dynamic cluster of multiple activities applied to animal, vegetal, and liquid offering substances. Building on the work of Jonathan Z. SMITH, MCCLYMOND argues against well-known popular and scholarly characterizations of sacrifice as dramatic, violent, and bloody, arguing instead that sacrifice always involves multiple manipulations of offering substances. In doing all of these things, the book draws attention to the fact that sacrifice has largely been imagined through a Christian lens within the field of religious studies. MCCLYMOND's critical engagement with GIRARD should be of strong interest to the *Colloquium* and promises to result in a stimulating discussion. Responding to MCCLYMOND's presentation will be Thomas WILSON, Professor of East Asian History at Hamilton College.

Our second paper will be offered by Mark HEIM, Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. His presentation will draw on his book, *Saved From Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 2006). For HEIM, the cross has long been not only a scandal but also a profound paradox: filled with saving significance and power. In *Saved from Sacrifice*, HEIM takes on this paradox, asserting that the cross must be understood against the whole history of human scapegoating violence. In order to highlight the dimensions of his argument, HEIM carefully and critically draws on GIRARD yet goes beyond GIRARD to develop a comprehensive theology of the atonement and the cross. Through fresh readings of well-known biblical passages and his exploration of the place of the victim, HEIM makes a significant contribution to and reworking of atonement theology. Re-

sponding to HEIM's presentation will be Józef NIEWIADOMSKI, Professor at the Institute of Systematic Theology at the University of Innsbruck.

As has become our custom, significant time will be reserved after each presentation for discussion among all of those gathered for the *Colloquium*. Questions may be directed to the Coordinator of COV&R at the AAR, Martha Reineke (martha.reineke@uni.edu), Professor of Religion at the University of Northern Iowa.

Martha Reineke

Thanks to the generosity of the Raven Foundation we will also have Jack MILES (UC Irvine), winner of the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for *God: A Biography*, and a MacArthur fellow. His second book, *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*, was named a New York Times Notable Book of 2002. His talk, "The Missionary Moment: Christian America and the World War of Ideas," will discuss the notion of conversion in terms of the relations between the US and the Muslim world.

The renowned Italian philosopher and former European Parliament member Gianni VATTIMO will be addressing the conference. His most recent work has dealt with the relation between philosophy and religion, and includes: *Religion* (Stanford, 1998); *Belief* (Polity, 1999); *After Christianity* (Columbia, 2002); and *The Future of Religion* (Columbia, 2005, with Richard Rorty).

The first Lecture in Honor of Raymund SCHWAGER will be given by W. J. T. MITCHELL, Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago, and, since 1978, editor-in-chief of the leading interdisciplinary journal in the humanities, *Critical Inquiry*. His *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago, 1998) was nominated for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. In 2006, Professor MITCHELL was awarded the Modern Language Association's James Russell Lowell Prize for *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago, 2005). He is currently working on a book entitled *Totemism, Fetishism, Idolatry: Images and Others*.

There will be a special session devoted to René GIRARD's latest book, *Achever Clausewitz* (2007). Professor GIRARD's talk, "Clausewitz and the Apocalypse," will introduce the major theses of his book, and will be followed by a round table discussion with current COV&R President Wolfgang PALAVER, Robert HAMERTON-KELLY (Stanford / Imitatio), and Jean-Pierre DUPUY, all of whom have developed the theme of the apocalypse in their recent work.

Highlights of the plenary sessions include a special panel devoted to exploring the nexus between GIRARD and LEVINAS with former COV&R President Sandor GOODHART and Richard COHEN, Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Professor COHEN is one of the world's leading specialists in the philosophy of Emmanuel LEVINAS. He has published *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge, 2001), and *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago, 1994); and has translated and edited numerous books by and on LEVINAS.

There will be a panel on politics and religion with James GELVIN (Professor of History, UCLA) and John SMITH (Professor of German, UC Irvine). Professor GELVIN's talk is entitled "Political Islam: Beyond Religion and Terror" and Professor SMITH will be speaking on Pope BENEDIKT XVI. Ivan STRENSKI (Professor of Religious Studies, UC Riverside) and Paul DUMOUCHEL (Professor of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, Japan) will be addressing issues concerning violence and anthropology. Professor STRENSKI will speak on "How to Think about Suicide Bombers."

Other speakers include Peter THIEL, co-founder and former CEO of PayPal, and now president of Clarium Capital, a global macro hedge fund with nearly 3 billion under management. His interest in mimetic theory stems from his undergraduate days at Stanford University, where he came into contact with GIRARD's thought. The Thiel Foundation supports research into mimetic theory through Imitatio.

Isabel Capeloa GIL (Professor of German and Cultural Theory and Dean of the School of Human Sciences at the Catholic University of Portugal) will be speaking about her work on catastrophe in the German modernist writer Ernst JÜNGER. June O'CONNOR (Professor of Religious Studies, UC Riverside), an expert on the thought of Dorothy DAY, will speak on a panel on the ethics of catastrophe with Cheyney RYAN (Professor of Philosophy, University of Oregon / Oxford), named by the *Washington Post* as one of the twenty leading scholars in the US on the frontier of peace and conflict studies.

Rounding out the program will be the last installment (for now) in the series of panels on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, set in motion by Raymund SCHWAGER in 2003. Instead of inviting outside experts, as in the past, this year's session will focus on assessing lessons learned from the series. Speakers include Byron BLAND, Sandor GOODHART, Wilhelm GUGGENBERGER, Sheelah HIDDEN, Charles SELENGUT, Simon SIMONSE, and the session will be chaired by Wolfgang PALAVER.

We have received and accepted over 140 paper presentations for the parallel sessions, covering a wide range of topics and approaches. The high quality and diversity of the proposals promise to make for very strong sessions.

The conference venue, the Mission Inn Hotel and Spa, is a historical landmark and tourist destination, offering luxurious accommodations at a very reasonable conference rate. It is located in downtown Riverside, in easy walking distance to shops and museums. Across the street, the Marriott Riverside also offers excellent accommodations at a special conference rate. We urge everyone to book their room as soon as possible, since these hotels are filling up quickly. Since the US Dollar is very weak this year, participants coming from abroad will experience significant savings.

Tourist attractions in Riverside include the Museum of Photography and the Mission Inn Museum. For those who wish to venture outside Riverside, Southern California offers a wide variety of places to see and experience: 60 miles to the west of Riverside lies the city of Los Angeles, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world; 60 miles to the east one can hike in Joshua Tree National Park or shop in Palm Springs. To the south, there is San Diego with its famous zoo; and for families there is of course Disneyland (in Anaheim). Renting a car would be the best way to explore Southern California, since the public transportation system is mostly designed for commuters and is not very well developed.

We have organized an excursion to the Getty Center in Los Angeles for Saturday, June 21, after the business meeting. In addition to its many important collections of paintings and sculptures, the Getty Museum (which opened in 1997) is an architectural marvel in itself. Perched atop a hill overlooking Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean, the Getty will offer us the final event of COV&R 2008: watching the sun set over the Pacific on the longest day of the year…

Robert and Sabine Doran

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Many of us are already looking forward to our next meeting at the University of Riverside in Southern California. Robert DORAN—supported by his wife Sabine—has worked very hard to organize another successful annual meeting. Looking at the program of what will take place at Riverside we can expect an exciting and stimulating meeting. I hope I will meet many of you there. I am grateful that Sabine and Robert DORAN invited us to their place.

Imitatio. Supporting Raymund Schwager Lectures

Fortunately there is also some other good news to tell. Robert HAMERTON-KELLY, a New Testament scholar and one of the founding fathers of COV&R, was able to establish *Imitatio Inc.*, a research fund of the Peter Thiel Foundation devoted to promoting research in mimetic theory and disseminating awareness of it. COV&R is one of the groups supported by this new fund. We therefore will be able to have a special lecture at every annual meeting helping us to invite outstanding key note lecturers to our future conferences. In memory of Raymund SCHWAGER—René GIRARD referred to his dedication to knowledge and to his frugality at the first meeting of *Imitatio* last October—this new lecture is called the "Raymund Schwager Lecture". Our first lecturer will be W. J. T. MITCHELL as you can see in the DORANs' preview of our upcoming meeting. I am grateful to Robert HAMERTON-KELLY for supporting us generously in our dedication to mimetic theory.

Focusing on Religion and Violence as a Progressive Research Program

Recently, a friend of mine referred me to a famous lecture by Imre LAKATOS on "Science and Pseudoscience" that this philosopher gave in the early 1970s demonstrating clearly what he understood as a research program. LAKATOS distinguished between scientific or progressive and pseudoscientific or degenerating programs. Listening to LAKATOS' lecture on the internet I thought that mimetic theory should always aim at being a progressive research program. According to LAKATOS this means to be able to develop a theory leading to the discovery of hitherto unknown, novel facts. "What really count are dramatic, unexpected, stunning predictions: a few of them are enough to tilt the balance; where theory lags behind the facts, we are dealing with miserable degenerating research programmes." Scott GARRELS' article "Imitation, Mirror Neurons, and Mimetic Desire" in *Contagion* 2006 shows how basic insights of GIRARD into the importance of mimesis in social life are receiving more and more substantiation from empirical research. I am sure we will soon see more evidence in this direction. An important question will also be if our focus on religion will develop as a progressive research program, in the way LAKATOS understood it. Can we predict that religion will play a more important role to overcome human violence in the future? I have some confidence in this regard as well. The more we understand anthropologically, for instance, that human beings are mimetic and religious beings at the same time—we imitate what we adore—and the more we realize how deeply our mimetic and religious dimensions are interwoven with each other the better we will grasp the deep wisdom that characterizes the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible. I am especially thinking of the 10th commandment (Exo 20:17: "You shall not covet … anything that belongs to your neighbor") with its warning against mimetic rivalry and how the 1st commandment—or even better the Shema Yisrael (Deu 6:4-9: "You shall love the LORD

your God with all your heart …")—expresses the religious precondition enabling us to avoid the deadlocks of mimetic violence. Such religious insights are, of course, not restricted to the Judaeo-Christian World. In one way or another we can find similar insights in all world religions. In the *Qur'an* we can read, for instance the following commandment: "Covet not the thing in which Allah hath made some of you excel others." (Sura 4:32) Also the first *mantra* of the *Isha Upanishad* in which Mahatma GANDHI recognized a summary of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and also the very truth of other religions expresses the prohibition of mimetic rivalry: "All this, whatsoever moves on earth, is to be hidden in the Lord (the Self). When thou hast surrendered all this, then thou mayest enjoy. Do not covet the wealth of any man!"

Mahatma Gandhi on Mimetic Coveting

GANDHI again and again came back to this *mantra* recognizing in it a deep truth that is essential for creating peace in the world. In a speech in 1937 he underlined how much this *mantra* contributes to a peaceful life:

> "If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then, since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough, the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: Do not covet anybody's possession. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives."

What GANDHI summarized in this speech comes very close to the deeper meaning of the Decalogue or the commandment of love in the New Testament and goes very well together with GIRARD's understanding of "creative renunciation"—a concept influenced by the writings of Simone WEIL—in the last chapter of his first book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel.* Exploring the important relationship between religion, imitation, and desire with the help of mimetic theory contributes definitely to a progressive research program. Mimetic theory powerfully explains why so many religious traditions have focused exactly on this problem. Its ability to see how all these insights come together proves its ability of being a progressive research program that helps to explain in what way religion can foster peace. But working in this direction is even more than a research program. It has become a necessary contribution to peacemaking in our challenged world of today.

Wolfgang Palaver

MUSINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

As members of the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion* know full well, references to lynchings recur in the writings of René GIRARD, who sees them as operations of the victimage mechanism. I write these secretarial musings from the state of Indiana, where the Ku Klux Klan flourished in the 1920s, until David C. STEPHENSON, the leader of the Klan, was convicted of second-degree murder in a case that led to the political downfall of the governor of Indiana and the mayor of Indianapolis, exposing both of them as Klan members. In 1930, Marion, Indiana, was the site of a KKK lynching of two young black men, about which journalist Cynthia CARR has written in her 2007 book, *Our Town: A Heartland Lynching, a Haunted House, and the Hidden History of White America*. Since René studied at Indiana University and met his future wife Martha there, his allusions to lynchings inevitably resonate (at least to the ears of this Hoosier) with a certain local history, which adds to their general significance.

An unlikely subject for poetry, the lynching of a black man inspired the following lyric by the American poet and pacifist Kenneth PATCHEN (1911-1972). I offer a close reading of it in this issue of the *Bulletin* as a Girardian reflection on collective violence, its victims, and its perpetrators.

"Nice Day for a Lynching"

The bloodhounds look like sad old judges
In a strange court. They point their noses
At the Negro jerking in the tight noose;
His feet spread crow-like above these
Honorable men who laugh as he chokes.

I don't know this black man.
I don't know these white men.

But I know that one of my hands
Is black, and one white. I know that
One part of me is being strangled,
While another part horribly laughs.

Until it changes,
I shall be forever killing; and be killed.

PATCHEN's "Nice Day for a Lynching" is a poem about bitter division, societal and ethical. The title itself yokes together a wrenching pair of opposites. The formulaic expression "nice day for …" is usually completed with something equally "nice"—a picnic, a

ball-game, a fishing expedition—but the poem sketches for us instead a horrific scene of violence that is anything but sporting: the murder of a man, a public lynching. The word "lynching" itself suggests a joining of counterforces, a hanging together that includes a pulling apart, as becomes apparent when one considers the etymologically related word "linchpin." Indeed, the poem not only takes as its topic a lynching; it *is* a lynching, a complex work of art that pulls apart what it holds together, a lynching that not only mirrors but opposes real-life lynching, making art a protest of life.

In order to make the reader face a terrible reality, the poet proceeds by indirection. The reader sees, first of all, not the mob or the murdered man, but the "bloodhounds" who "look like sad old judges / In a strange court" (lines1-2). The verb "look" quickly assumes a double meaning. The hounds passively "look" (that is, "appear") like judges, but they also "look" in an active sense: "They point their noses" (line 2). The phrase "point their noses" (line 2) is appropriate to bloodhounds, animals known for their ability to detect the scent of blood, but it recalls the action of accusers who formulaically "point their fingers" at the accused. Only when the reader identifies enough with the dogs to gaze with them in the same direction does s/he see what they see: "the Negro jerking in the tight noose" (line 3).

The word "noose" stands at the end of the third line, precisely in the middle of the first stanza, to tie together opposites. The "crow-like" spreading of the man's feet in his dying agony evokes not only the persecutory stereotypes of Jim Crow, but also the shape of a scissors, cutting across the lines of societal division that separate "above" (line 4) from "below." The man's feet, like the metered feet of the poet's line, spread, leading the reader, step by step, into discovery. At first only the bloodhounds, who "look like sad old judges," seem to be watching the execution. In the last line of the stanza, the place of the dogs becomes occupied by "Honorable men" (line 5). Unlike the "sad judges" of the first line, however, the human judges "laugh." The phrase "Honorable men" ironically recalls, of course, the phrase "Your Honor," which is customarily used in court, even a "strange court" like this one, which violates the law. The senses of sight, smell, and touch are all evoked in the vivid physicality of the opening lines, which closes with an auditory image. The brutal laughter of the onlookers contrasts with the choking of the victim, who cannot speak to proclaim his innocence.

The speaker of the poem, its "I," suddenly utters a word to fill the gap between the laughter and the choking. His word, her word, is a word of denial that echoes Peter's denial of Jesus during the Passion: "I do not know the man" (Luke 22:57)—a passage to which Girard returns again and again. Twice the speaker makes his denial: "I don't know this black man. / I don't know these white men" (lines 6-7). The words express a sense of complete alienation from the scene and the players within it, a distance from the victim, but also an estranging revulsion from the murderers. The speaker wishes to declare his innocence by disavowing any responsibility for what is taking place before his/her eyes. The deictic adjectives "this" and "these" attempt to limit and contain the evil being perpetrated, limiting it to one particular man, one particular set of lynchers, from which the speaker can maintain his own finitude. But where, then, does the speaker stand, but in a no-man's land? The societal division between "black" and "white" becomes for the speaker a crisis, in which a judgment must be rendered, a judgment about good and evil, a judgment ultimately against the speaker's self.

The speaker realizes that he possesses knowledge and therefore responsibility. After the repeated words of denial ("I don't know"), comes the declaration: "But I know" (line 8). In the second half of the poem—its midway point marked structurally by the couplet—the external division between the murdered and the murderers becomes internalized: "I know that one of my hands / Is black, and one white" (lines 8-9). Unlike Pilate in the Gospel, who would wash his hands of blood, the speaker's hands are stained with color. Black and white are both colors, the hues of a single humanity. The human blood that flows in the dying man's body, to which the bloodhounds "point their noses" (line 2), flows also in the veins of the speaker. Their "noses" sense what the speaker comes to "know." Whereas in the first half of the poem the speaker is distracted, concentrated on external happenings, in the second half he turns inward in self-recognition: "One part of me is being strangled, / While another part horribly laughs" (lines 10-11).

The striking adverb "horribly" recalls the adjective "honorable" in the first stanza, revealing the demonic character of the judges, who are nothing more than a mob, and thus incapable of just judgment, of true discretion. The speaker's double declaration "I know" (lines 8-9) counters the previous double denial "I don't know" (lines 6-7), even as Peter's threefold affirmation of love for the resurrected Jesus atones for his previous triple denial of him (John 21:15-19). Indeed, as Emmanuel LEVINAS would be quick to point out, the speaker's subjectivity, his "I," his humanity, emerges as he stands under the weight of what is happening "above," assuming responsibility for the victim, but also for the victimizers, for the innocent and the guilty alike. His individual voice acquires the strength of a personal character precisely when he acknowledges his relatedness to Others, his inseparability from them.

Whereas the first stanza is five lines long, to represent the victim (in line 3) encircled by the dogs (lines

1-2) and the human lynchers (lines 4-5), the third stanza is four lines long. Its structure emphasizes the pairing of binaries, of "black" with "white," of the "strangled" with the mockers, of the living with the dying. The suffering of the speaker involves enduring within himself this yoking of opposites, which in turn enchains him, binding him to responsibility.

The final couplet visually recalls the couplet in the middle of the poem. There is a chiastic reversal, however. Whereas throughout the poem the speaker has been talking about "black" and "white" in that order (lines 6-7, line 9), in the final line of the poem the speaker declares: "I shall be forever killing; and be killed" (line 13), an ordering that suggests "white" and "black." The speaker thereby identifies himself, first and foremost, with the killers, the white lynchers, the guilty crowd, and only secondly with the solitary victim, the Negro. The repetition of the verb "be" adds emphasis to the final "be killed," making it not just an eternal opposition of "killing" and "killed," but rather a diachronic consequence of "forever killing." That is to say, the one who is "forever killing" will ultimately "be killed," dying by the same sword he wields against Others (Cf. Matthew 26:52).

The final stanza begins with a strange clause: "Until it changes" (line 12). The pronoun "it" has no clear antecedent. What is the "it" that must change if the speaker is to avoid being someone who kills and is killed? That is the question of the poem, the question that remains to haunt us. The impersonal pronoun hints (René GIRARD would tell us) at the victimage mechanism that remains always veiled in human societies, at the murderous things, the real-life lynchings, that have been hidden since the foundation of the world (Matthew 13:35).

Notice, though, that the clause reads: "Until it changes," not "Unless it changes." The emphasis is on time, not on conditionality. Time includes a dimension of hope. Even as the poem has led us diachronically through a process of change, from being lost in the mob (in stanza 1) to individuation (in stanza 3), from disavowal and denial (in stanza 2) to the admission of relationship and responsibility (in stanzas 3 and 4), so too, the reader, appropriating the speaker's "I" as her own, can anticipate a future, an "until" when lynching will be a thing of the past.

Is this not the future for which the Colloquium on Violence and Religion hopes?

Ann W. Astell

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

COV&R at the AAR/SBL in San Diego 2007

Slightly after 9:00 o'clock on the morning of November 17, 2007, Dr. Nikolaus WANDINGER of Innsbruck's Institut für Systematische Theologie, with his characteristic cheerful earnestness, began a reading of his paper entitled, "'Sacrifice' in *Harry Potter* from a Girardian perspective." This was taking place in the swank environs of the Connaught Room of San Diego's Grand Hyatt Hotel. The *Colloquium on Violence and Religion* was holding a concurrent meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

Martha REINEKE of COV&R had coordinated the meeting (thanks, Marty!). As participants entered, she encouraged us to drink as much coffee as we could, since she had to pay the hotel $70 per gallon for it! Over the course of the 2 hour meeting, about 15 people attended. In addition to the presenters for the morning, participants included Charles BELLINGER, Willard SWARTLEY, and your humble servant.

Niki's presentation (a revised version of which will be published in *Contagion*) was a reflection on a serious topic in a somewhat whimsical form. Within the series of novels known for their attraction for children, WANDINGER explored the difference between archaic sacrifice and Christian self-sacrifice. Which of the two, he asked, do we find predominant in the Harry Potter series? His analysis offered us several challengingly ambiguous examples: the death of Harry's mother, the offering of Pettigrew's hand to enable Voldemort's incarnation, the death of Dumbledore at Snape's hand, and the near death of Harry to defeat Voldemort. Not being a *Harry Potter* fan myself, I had a little trouble taking seriously a theological discussion that involved characters with names like Dumbledore, Voldemort, and Snape. I must admit, however, that this novelistic treatment of these themes as WANDINGER presented it made for an engaging reflection.

Matthew CONDON of Georgia State University offered a response. He expressed appreciation for the fact that Niki's treatment helped to liberate the Christian discussion of *Harry Potter* from the wearisome evangelical scandalization over "witchcraft and magic." But he questioned whether a reading of a literary work ought to depend on an application of a "grand theory" like GIRARD's. CONDON expressed an attraction to the character of Snape, who seemed heroic to him, and romantic in his abiding love for Lilly Potter, Harry's mother. The conversation concluded with questions to ponder: is self-sacrifice anti-sacrificial? If so, under what conditions? Is heroism the same as self-sacrifice? Does J. K. ROWLING manage to transcend primitive sacrifice and achieve something genuinely transcendent, or does Harry's fate in the final volume fall short of such redemption?

After Niki's presentation, the meeting was far from over. Michael HARDIN and Brad JERSAK had organized a presentation on their newly published volume, *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (see review on p. 16). Edited by

JERSAK and HARDIN, and with a forward by Willard SWARTLEY, this book is a collection of essays on atonement theory. (Support Paul NEUCHTERLEIN's website by buying it through the link on his bibliography page: http://www.girardianlectionary.net/girard-a_bib.htm) Seven of the contributors to the volume came for the presentation. Since there was nobody in the room who felt that the Father demanded Jesus' blood, there was not much back-and-forth in the discussion of the book's theme. A few aphoristic comments from the conversation should convey a taste of it:

Mark HEIM: At last, theologians are integrating mimetic theory and atonement theory.

Marit TRELSTAD, feminist process philosopher, on the practical impact of ANSELM's theory of atonement: "In the cross of Christ I worry." She worries especially about domestic violence against women.

Anthony BARTLETT: "I've had a beef with ANSELM for years."

Willard SWARTLEY: "Hebrew as a language does not distinguish clearly between *result* and *purpose*. The cross is a result, not a purpose."

Brad JERSAK: "People feel good about Jesus, but they don't like the Father." A certain meth addict believed that the Father viewed the addict with disgust.

Fully a third of the book's contributors are lawyers or work in the criminal justice system.

Quoting Kharalambos ANSTALL, the Greek Orthodox theologian whose essay appears posthumously in the volume, on the subject of the Father's supposed demand for the sacrifice of the son: "That's Moloch, not Jehovah."

Michael HARDIN let us know that we'll be hearing more about this book: "We're taking this show on the road." Watch for upcoming events related to this book and to the preaching of peace at www.preachingpeace.org .

As we concluded the meeting, Dr. REINEKE expressed hope that COV&R would be able to strengthen its relationship with the American Academy of Religion by becoming an officially recognized "affiliated society." That would give us the opportunity to hold meetings, not merely concurrently with AAR meetings, but as a regular part of the agenda.

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Mimetic Theory and Neuroscience, UCLA, January 2008

Sometime in December, 2007, an announcement landed in my email inbox, reading in part: On Tuesday-Wednesday, January 15-16, 2008, The Center For The Study Of Religion At UCLA—In Its "Future Of Religion" Series—Invites you to a two-day conference on the theme: "Mimetic Theory and Neuroscience".

This immediately caught my attention, because ever since Scott GARRELS gave a paper on this at COV&R in 2004 (http://girardianlectionary.net/covr2004/garrelspaper.pdf), I had been interested in this. In fact, I entered the theology program at Fuller Theological Seminary, (right in the neighborhood of UCLA) in part because Scott's work has been based there. The announcement went on to give program details (see: http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/religion/Announcement.htm). So I went—sort of. I couldn't attend the Tuesday lectures, so I cannot report on them. Doubtless, they will come available soon in some form, online or otherwise.

After introductory comments by BATCHY, HAMERTON-KELLY, and HURLBUT, Scott GARRELS gave a summary of the convergences between mimetic theory, imitation science and neuroscience. With GARRELS' presentation, the structure for the ensuing conversation emerged. It hinged on two oppositions:

- between the neuroscientists' ignorance of the social implications of imitation, and the mimetic theorist's ignorance of neuropsychology; and
- between the neuroscientists' desire to embrace mimetic theory as an empirical science, and GIRARD's impulse to use the discoveries in neuroscience as rhetorical support for his theory.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

As GARRELS hinted at these tensions in the discourse, he outlined six points of convergence between mimetic theory and the new Mirror Neurology ("MN"):

1. Motivational Properties: Mimesis, or self–other imitative reciprocity, is an immensely compelling and motivating quality of human interaction. For example, the developmental psychologist Colwyn TREVARTHEN stated in 1999 that, "We use imitations interactively to motivate one another reciprocally from the start," and that, "these earliest imitations offer the greatest challenge to psychological theory". This formulation sounds very similar to GIRARD's emphasis on the significance of mimetic desire formulated in 1961.

2. Early, primordial nature: Social force, or dynamic, that operates powerfully at both conscious and unconscious levels of human experience prior to formal cognition and representation in both human development and evolution (in contrast to FREUD & PIAGET)(MN—IACOBONI, DAMASIO).

3. Non-static, emergent nature: Mimesis is highly generative and facilitates the emergence of representation, and is intertwined with it, in all forms of human interaction, language, and culture (again,

both from a developmental and evolutionary perspective).

4. Non-representational Nature: Humans not only imitate the surface gestures, figures of speech, and behaviors of others, but more fundamentally human behavior is organized around the imitation of goals, intentions, and desires of others—that is we most often imitate each other without specific behaviors appearing alike, since it is the goal or desire we are imitating (MELTZOFF, for example).

5. Mimesis is not just important in child development, but remains pervasive and foundational to adult cognition, motivation, and behavior (again at conscious and unconscious levels of experience) (MN, DAMASIO).

6. Imitation is a default human behavior, or 'social glue', that facilitates those uniquely human forms of group coordination and cooperation—at the highest levels of collective action in society.

GIRARD responded immediately by saying that he doesn't understand anything about mirror neurons, but he's glad they exist. He alluded to his critics over the years who have accused him of lacking empirical support for his theory. The discovery of mirror neurons seems to support his case.

Antonio DAMASIO followed GARRELS with a series of examples of how mirror neurons seem to work. He began with a disclaimer that he knows nothing about mimetic theory: "I'm only a plain neuroscientist," he said, with only a trace of irony. He described two or three recent findings in neuroscience:

- By placing electrodes on a subject's face, the action potentials of the facial muscles can be measured. When subjects are shown photographs of faces with various emotional expressions, the action potentials of the subject's facial muscles imitate the emotional expression of the face in the photograph; furthermore, subjects whose faces have been numbed so that they cannot control their facial muscles are less able to identify the emotions they see in photographs.
- Brain lesion studies: persons with lesions in the motor and somatomotor parts of their brains are unable to identify emotions in photographs of faces, even though their vision is completely unimpaired. Apparently, we need to imitate emotional states of others in order to recognize them.
- The brain has recently been discovered to contain "convergence zones," regions where the input from the various senses are correlated to a given moment or event. A memory or re-experiencing of any one of the sensory dimensions of a past experience will bring the other sensory lines from that same experience into consciousness. DAMASIO sees this as part of the necessary neurological "architecture" for mimesis.

DAMASIO believes that this sort of memory structure is responsible for mimesis. GARRELS asked him, "but what about the fact that imitative behavior has been observed in infants only a few hours old?" DAMASIO suggested that this might be an example of "genetic, or racial memory."

Marco IACOBONI followed, expressing a keen interest in the social implications of mimesis. He cited behavioral experiments showing that we humans tend to feel more trusting and affectionate toward those who imitate us most closely. He cited a second study where test subjects were asked to think about either college professors or soccer hooligans before taking an intelligence test. The results of the tests showed clearly that just to think about smart people makes one smarter, and conversely, just thinking about stupid people makes one less intelligent.

IACOBONI concluded with a concern that mimesis should make us more empathetic and therefore less violent. He seemed puzzled that violence could develop from empathy.

GIRARD stepped in to clear up this point, that paradoxically, empathy generates rivalry by first creating mimetic desire.

Jean-Pierre DUPUY finished off the panel presentations by arguing that mimetic theory must not try to rely on neuroscience for its scientific *bona fides*. Mimetic theory is scientific regardless of the "empirical support" of a "hard science" field like neuropsychology. He supported his argument with principles from the philosophy of science (from WITTGENSTEIN & GÖDEL), and with examples from sociology that show the empirical power of mimetic theory—this was like his argument in his book *La Panique*.

The fact that this conversation was taking place at all was exciting, but neither did the content, which was stimulating—even thrilling—disappoint. The evening also showed the amount of work that needs to be done to educate these scholars about each others' fields. The "hard scientists" on the panel tried to encourage GIRARD by admonishing him to be more strictly scientific in his discourse about the relation to mirror neurons with mimetic theory. Neurology cannot be said to "prove" mimetic theory, they said; mimetic theory is scientific enough all on its own. I felt sympathy for GIRARD, who bears many bruises from critics who have used their insistence on "empiricism" to bludgeon him. DUPUY and DAMASIO were right that we must be careful not to give up the term "empirical" to the more strictly physical and experimental sciences. But I empathized with GIRARD; the *rhetorical* challenge of promoting the truth in an academic culture inclined to deny it is a serious challenge. Besides, as other philosophers of science have noted (KUHN, FEYERABEND) progress in science does not take place without effective rhetoric. Mirror neurology? We'll use it!

Britt Johnston

BOOK REVIEWS

Gans, Eric: *The Scenic Imagination:* Originary Thinking from Hobbes to the Present Day
Stanford U P, 2007, 232 pp.
ISBN- 10: 0804757003, $ 55.00

This publication does not break a silence of ten years, as anyone familiar with *Anthropoetics* or the *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* knows, but it is Eric GANS' first major book in generative anthropology to appear since 1997. After having proposed the originary hypothesis (1981), having situated it amid major anthropological studies of early man and explored its ramifications for the fusion of Greek and Jewish cultures at the origin of the West (1985), having examined its implications for the category of revelation in Judaism and Christianity (1990), having established its relevance to the history of Western esthetics (1993), and underscored its fearless dexterity amid many paradoxes of literary theory and philosophical reflection (1997), here, making it new, Eric GANS situates the originary hypothesis in the realm of modern reflection on the question of human origins. It just might be that *The Scenic Imagination* is the most direct and to-the-point exposition of generative anthropology available. It might be so partly because the range of the twenty-plus thinkers with whom GANS engages in explicit dialogue offers case after case in which to compare the originary hypothesis to its predecessors, anticipations, forebears, deniers, and competitors; the book is an act of deep respect for the efforts of the human mind to figure out the origins of the human mind. If it proves nothing else, it proves that Eric GANS has *not* been alone in the enterprise of originary thinking (regardless of how unfashionable such thinking has become in the last hundred years). Its seeming directness may also be an effect of the book's topic being never anything other than the question of the interplay between human origins and human ontology; the originary hypothesis is, after all, an hypothesis about just that—the interplay between thinking about human origin (especially conceived as coeval with the origin of human language) and human ontology.

The Scenic Imagination declares itself to be the study of "the intellectual context within Western thought, beginning with the Enlightenment" in which a certain "error has been both accepted and challenged, although never before described" (4). What is the error sometimes challenged, sometimes accepted? One of rejection: "It is a common mistake to reject the scenic imagination out of hand as 'unscientific,' as though the scene could be reduced to a set of simpler neurological or genetic phenomena more amenable to scientific study" (4). Girardians should share at least this much ground with GANS: the human mind, soul, spirit, realm of transcendence (let us not fight over names but agree on the need to name it) is worthy of our attention and ought not to be expelled—rejected out of hand—in secular servility to a materialist ontology.

So the scenic imagination should be respected—but what is "the scenic imagination"? Humans differ from animals because they represent sacred objects to each other in ritual, myth, narrative, art; these acts of representation give us a history that animals do not have: "human experience, as opposed to that of other animals, is uniquely characterized by *scenic events* recalled both collectively and individually through *representations*, the most fundamental of which are the signs of language" (1). The recalling of scenic events gives humans their unique history. Animals have memories; they remember events; they just don't remember *historical* events. When we imagine sacred objects, we imagine them on scenes where we are (peripheral) actors and the objects are centers of attention, collective and individual; these objects and memories belong to and make up human history, a meaningful series of singular scenes of representation. One such object that can be represented *on* the scene of representation *is* the scene of representation itself: "The point of the term *generative anthropology* is that the scene of representation generates the meaning and structure that characterize the human. Among the representations that can appear on the scene of representation is that of the generative scene itself. I shall call the faculty that carries out this self-representation of the scene the *scenic imagination*" (4). So the scenic imagination is the human mind's activity of moving to imagine its own origin—to propose models of the scene on which the human mind, as creating symbols and created by the use of symbols, originated, as a unique event in the cosmos.

It seems that the scenic imagination is mostly (not entirely) a secular thing: "Originary thinking is scenic: to think of human origin is to propose a hypothetical originary scene. Throughout human history, this has been done through sacred texts. In the period from HOBBES to FREUD, it was often done through the exercise of the thinker's own scenic imagination" (169). Before the Enlightenment, it was not thought needful to represent the scene of human origin to ourselves inasmuch as religious texts and metaphysical presuppositions satisfied: "No more than the Bible did ancient metaphysics conceive the scene of representation as requiring a separate hypothesis of origin from that of the object-world to which its representations refer" (8). Cosmology and anthropology were (more or less) one; the gods had not failed us, or at least not with failures sufficiently spectacular to embolden us to imagining the scenic self-generation of human being. The English Revolution and the collective murder of CHARLES I sufficed as a spectacular failure for

Thomas HOBBES, who takes the first position in the study.

The scenic imagination is the origin of modern, secular anthropology. The scenic imagination is, GANS notes in the context of describing the discovery that even the politically conservative HOBBES made, an imagination "inherently liberal. If it is the human actors on the periphery who establish the center, then they have the power, and the right, to replace or even abolish it" (11). The scenic imagination comes into its own alongside the flourishing of thought about "imaginary social contracts" (8); it is no coincidence that such thinking was "incompatible" with the human ontology sustained by the "imperfect reciprocity of slave societies, what we might call those societies' 'implicit violence'" (8). A social structure accepting of slave inequality is not one conducive to having its participants imagine the originary equality of all human beings as users of language, as "free" makers of the social world. Without the radically egalitarian moral theology of Christianity, we would never have gotten ourselves into the place where the scenic imagination was possible. We began to think about the human origin of human institutions when the fragility, instability, and vulnerability to desacralization of such institutions was welded to a sense of the power of linguistic reciprocity as a model of political reciprocity (HOBBES, GANS mentions, is rightly considered by some to be the first modern philosopher of language). The "thinker's own scenic imagination" (169) – from HOBBES to FREUD – must to some degree struggle against the potentially mind-numbing effect of the power of "sacred texts" (169) alone, conceived as centers before which one subsists in mute awe rather than centers which one might usurp (in fear and trembling).

Part One is titled "Scenes of Enlightenment." HOBBES, LOCKE, and CONDILLAC are treated together; ROUSSEAU and KANT each get their own chapter; between them, passages in VICO and HERDER are analyzed as foundational of "alternative anthropologies." The chapters on ROUSSEAU and on the aesthetic anthropology of KANT are the most detailed, dense, and difficult in the book; they are also the most brilliant. GANS has selected these seven figures as representative of the Enlightenment. He affirms that HOBBES and ROUSSEAU agree "the central human problem is the violence caused by mimetic desire" (24); "Both understood that neither scarcity nor even inequality but *the contagion of desire* poses the most serious problem to human society; and both made the ability to hold this desire in check the sine qua non of a viable polity" (25). LOCKE is praised as "the primary theorizer of history's most successful model of large-scale human interaction" (35), the liberal-democratic free market. CONDILLAC, whom GANS credits with a "groundbreaking contribution," is celebrated for "situating [the origin of human language] specifically in the passage from the natural-indexical sign of need to its 'arbitrary' linguistic counterpart" and thereby focusing "our attention on the possible motivations for this passage" (43-44). ROUSSEAU, unlike the vast majority of social scientists even in our time, "is aware that language cannot be explained as a simple prolongation of pre-human systems of communication" (49). ROUSSEAU grasped the paradox of originary representation: "if men need language in order to think, they must have needed thought in order to speak" (50). GANS is enthusiastic about the scenic intuitions of VICO: "We make ourselves human by discovering/inventing a transcendent world of signs that is inaccessible to human control. Vico comes closer to anticipating this radically anthropological conception of sacred significance than any other thinker before the postmodern era" (72).

Meanwhile, GANS is not now, as he has never been, a purely "secular" thinker; his unwavering respect for the religious dimension of human mindfulness and his unashamed owning of the mystery of human being coincide with the anthropological theology he proposes, according to which the human originated only by naming God as its sacred Other. The Enlightenment, a project in anti-religious desacralization, was bound to exhaust itself in a certain set of failures, with the exhaustion exhibited most spectacularly in the embarrassing (to "Reason") devastations of the French revolution.

While the "Scenic imagination of the Enlightenment" merits praise in that it "constructs an anthropological genesis for the ancients' timeless conceptions of the social order" (14), the models of the originary scene proposed by these thinkers remain "on the political level, that of the public interaction of represented desires" (14). GANS observes the effect of the social contract thinkers' preoccupation with the origin of political institutions this way: "It is no accident that the model of the genesis of the center from the periphery that flourished in the Enlightenment was epitomized in the social contract, generative of state-level political institutions *rather than of the human itself*" (13) [emphasis added]. The problem is that, over and over again, scenes of the origin of human society presuppose the already-existing language-using humans themselves. Humans somehow got to be there without the eventfulness that God's originary creation-act had always guaranteed. Thus the major figures of the Enlightenment "could conceive the deferral of human violence as the source of human institutions, but not of the human itself" (95). The function of the originary ostensive sign both designating the sacred center and deferring intraspecific communal violence by naming the transcendent Other could never quite be grasped.

The set of approaches-without-success derives also from Enlightenment epistemology's reliance on the model of a collection of atomistic individuals coming together: "the Enlightenment's scenic imagination […] conceives the individual as a consumer whose desires are fixed before he enters the marketplace rather than emerging dynamically from within the activity of exchange" (95). In failing to conceive the "common and interdependent origin" (61) of the collective and the individual in an event where the human is born in significant difference from its one sacred Other—an event the envisioning of which religion had always preserved—Enlightenment thinking suffers from a "characteristic failure to consider that the minimal human group must first solve the problem of deferring *internal* mimetic conflict before it can enter into an external 'state of war' with other groups or individuals such as would necessitate the establishment of state sovereignty over the means of violence" (26). This "characteristic failure" is no minor glitch. It goes to the limit of Enlightenment wisdom, the vanity of proposing models of social authority independent of respect for the originary *sacred* that permitted linguistic transcendence itself: "Whether for Hobbes or for Rousseau, the center is a focal point of human desire, not a locus of transcendence; the central authority is not, as it would be for Durkheim, equated with the sacred" (13). The merely political center of the social contract cannot be the sacred center of the originary event (the originary hypothesis). GANS is not a "social contract" thinker.

Thus in "Ending the Enlightenment," which opens Part Two of the book, "The Scene Embodied," Joseph DE MAISTRE is credited for maintaining "his focus on what the Enlightenment had ignored: the sacred generative center of all human society, to which we characteristically relate through *sacrifice*" (107). The center must be intuited not merely as a locus on which all the desires of atomistic individuals might converge in unanimous chaos, but also as a locus conceived as the space on which the being of the sacred Other of the human subsists: "his [DE MAISTRE's] focus on blood sacrifice as apotropaic violence provides a better-articulated model of how the sacred functions in human society than Durkheim's vague notion of ritual as reinforcing communal solidarity" (109). Similarly, in the same chapter, Edmund BURKE with his foundational critique of revolutionary violence is praised for having rejected the scenic imagination of the Enlightenment "because that scene itself is presented as simply renewable (as a 'social contract') without reference to its origin, as though the propositions of philosophy were not themselves dependent on a prior founding of the scene of representation at a moment previous to the existence of the 'context-free' declarative—that is, at a moment whose nature as *event* could not be abstracted from it" (104). In other words, religious as opposed to the metaphysical thought that permits the enthronement of a supposedly paradox-free "Reason," however "naïve" seeming its figurations of an anthropomorphic Creator, situated the origin of human history in relation to a transcendent Other; BURKE was therefore quite right to champion the intuition that we must have one unique human origin if we are to speak of history as a series of events with a transcendent dimension. The Burke-defended originary "moment whose nature as *event* could not be abstracted from [the moment]" is, in this sense, a deeply theistic moment; it is the moment of the originary naming-of-God with the first ostensive sign. To this day, revolutionary atheism (that of the prophets of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, neurological self-fashioning and the like) dreams of re-making humans into beings who owe no reference and trace no history to that humbling minimal event—humbling because we cannot be without our transcendent Other.

Part Two, "The Scene Embodied," moves a little more quickly through a longer list of figures. After BURKE and DE MAISTRE, the chapter "Scenes of Philosophy" is devoted to HEGEL, MARX, and NIETZSCHE; "Scenes of Human Science" considers Wilhelm VON HUMBOLDT, Max MULLER, J. F. MCLENNAN and Lewis MORGAN; DURKHEIM, FREUD and GIRARD; and the unfortunately all-influential Franz BOAS. The same painstaking and respectful probing that touches on high points of alternating credit for sound intuition and notification of failure to pursue originary intuition continues. HEGEL in his master-and-slave dialectic gets beyond the political scene of the social contract: "For the first time, the human self, and not merely a human polity, is conceived as generated through scenic interaction, the outcome of which is *economic*" (116). DURKHEIM is recognized as "the first thinker to conceive of the sacred as a mode of interaction among human beings rather than as the expression of either their awe before the spectacle of nature or their communion with gods or 'spirits'" (16). FREUD is "the first thinker to construct a genuine collective scene of human origin" (163).

On the other hand, some Enlightenment tendencies persist even to this day, especially the slippage which permits the smuggling in as pre-existent of that language the very origin of which is supposedly being explained. For example, in the case of HEGEL, GANS writes: "The operative concept of dialectic depends on the transcendental from the very start; which is to say that, like Plato's Ideas, it [the concept of dialectic] is implicitly dependent on human language" (119). Similarly, NIETZSCHE's subtle cancellation of the center-periphery tension permits him to aestheticize the scene of representation at the expense of its ethical functionality: "Thus the central figure who emerges

from within the chorus of satyrs is *already* transcendent; the single actor playing the role of the god is not opposed agonistically to the others, but merely incarnates their 'vision.' Nietzsche's scene eliminates the constitutive tension between sacred center and human periphery" (134). When NIETZSCHE went so far as to present "the scenic [itself] as the transcendence of the ethical, 'beyond good and evil,'" (139), he opened the way to an estheticization of politics that had, as we know, terrible consequences. It is perhaps to be expected that Karl MARX, the most dogmatically materialist of the three "philosophers" discussed in chapter 7, produced the anthropology most readily exposed as one of "fundamental incoherence" (131). A materialist ontology that reduces human signs to "just" another form of "matter" will always be one of the least compatible with the human ontology proposed by GANS' thinking.

The influence in America of Franz BOAS is decisive in establishing the suspicion of originary thinking as "incompatible with human diversity" (169). Nonetheless, GANS does not shy away from describing the undeniable philosophical poverty of BOAS' obstinate empiricism: "Boas has no theory of the human scene; he not only does not but cannot propose a theory of human origin because he will not and cannot tell us what the human *is*. Boas' discussions of religion, language, and art simply take these institutions as empirically given" (171). Here, the "slippage" noted above extends from the origin of language to the human itself. For Boas, *everything* human is already given, not just human language. Boas is as far away from philosophical anthropology as one can get. Let us just fill up the academic sack with files of ethnographic data; and so gently to hell with the question of a tenable hypothesis about what the human is and by what event it came to be in cosmological history.

Ironically, hopeful indications of some possibility for originary thinking about the human have recently come neither from the humanities nor the human sciences (evidence of a sorry dereliction of duty) but, instead, from the field of evolutionary biology as it intersects with the anthropology of human origins. In the "Conclusion," GANS engages first in discussion of important work by Roy RAPPAPORT, Merlin DONALD, Manfred BIERSWICH and Derek BICKERTON. In the context of his critique of RAPPAPORT, GANS returns again to the essential function which he noted BURKE and DE MAISTRE appreciating of the sacred in creating human difference: "Human ritual, mediated by language, is not simply more 'complex' than animal ritual; unlike the partial networks of animal relations, it is structured around a sacred center. All the unique characteristics of the human are attributable to this one difference, yet one seeks in vain throughout Rappaport's long book a clear formulation of it" (188). Merlyn DONALD seems sadly oblivious to the most basic insights of the work of René GIRARD and deprived of the intuitions of HOBBES and ROUSSEAU, demonstrating a "profound failure to recognize the inherently conflictive structure of mimesis" (191). The slippage we noted above reappears in the work of BICKERTON, and what GANS says of BICKERTON could be said of dozens of evolutionary anthropologists' scenarios of language origin obsessed with adaptive advantage and fitness and the like, but failing to grasp the transcendental effect of the human sign: "the main difficulty of deriving human language from its practical application [is …] that is can have no practical application until it already exists" (195). One can only wonder at the attractiveness-despite-futility of the many, many "attempts to find in the obvious usefulness of language the explanation of its emergence" (195). Ultimately, however, GANS finds encouraging convergences between the originary hypothesis and the research of David Sloan WILSON's *Darwin's Cathedral* (2002) and Terence DEACON's *The Symbolic Species* (1997). DEACON in particular is credited with the "rare distinction of understanding that the original function of language is ethical, that the crucial ethical problem is 'to mediate […] peace,' and that the meanings of language are social realities not reducible to any individual's brain state" (207).

This is a wonderful book. Anybody interested in getting to know the important work of this powerful disciple of René GIRARD might do well to start with *The Scenic Imagination*. It may be especially interesting to those interested in the history of political theory as it intersects with philosophical anthropology. If you feel comfortable with the ideas of René GIRARD, you will find yourself well on the way to understanding something of the thought of Eric GANS as well. The similarities between the radical new thinking of GANS and GIRARD, as this book's thematization of the centrality of the sacred in human ontology makes quite clear, continue to outweigh the differences. Keeping these thinkers in proximity should be the business of everybody who wishes to promote mimetic theory.

Andrew Bartlett

Hamerton-Kelly, Robert (ed.):
Politics & Apocalypse
Paperback, East Lansing:
Michigan State University Press, 2007, 266 pp,
ISBN-10: 0870138111, $ 19.95.

This first volume in what is projected to be a series called "Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture" has some very important work on Mimetic Theory. In a short review, I can only hint at the careful and rich thought available in this collection.

The opening essay by René GIRARD, "The Evangelical Subversion of Myth" deals in a powerful way with the notion that we are all called to be repentant,

recovering abusers. This is a particularly pointed statement of something GIRARD has said many times: the Pharisees convicted themselves of being murderers of the prophets in the very act of insisting that *they* would not have killed the prophets whose tombs they honor. Likewise, if *we* say that we would never have killed the prophets if we had lived in their time, then we convict ourselves of continuing the job of murdering the prophets. A strong statement, this, but it comes from dealing with some strong statements in the Gospels that GIRARD thinks we are tempted to slide over.

This theme is stated with both power and clarity in an essay, "Denial of the Apocalypse versus Fascination with the Final Day" by Józef NIEWIADOMSKI. He contrasts the frenzied apocalyptic expectations that come across as oriented toward revenge and a tendency to project violence on God with the denial of apocalypse among many "liberal" Christians who project all violence on the crazies who go for this apocalyptic fervor. As an alternative to both of these scenarios, NIEWIADOMSKI outlines an apocalyptic scenario from the viewpoint of mimetic theory where everyone is confronted with those who abused and persecuted them and have the opportunity to accuse them of their wrongs. But *then* we are confronted with all those whom *we* have abused and persecuted, excluded, etc. *they* will accuse us. The result is a free-for-all of everybody against everybody, a flood of accusation, which is satanic, since Satan is the accuser. NIEWIADOMSKI says this would truly be a "*dies irae*." Then he goes on to add the confrontation of all with the Cross. "In him, God's unconditional forgiveness and integration were embodied in a human life and death; in the Last Judgment Jesus will have to say something important also in his humanity. And it would be very surprising if he himself now did anything else but what he asked the Father to do, when he hung on the cross; forgive them." (65) This confrontation will be painful, as if "through fire," but it is the way to transforming the *dies irae* into a day of Grace. This seemingly simple teaching turns into something like a zen koan when we try to live it. When we see what is wrong with the world, we are tempted to act as accusers, which trips us into the mimetic frenzy of accusation and counter-accusation. Yet, it won't do to say nothing and do nothing. I see here, then, a challenge to be open to the guidance of Paraclete in the place where we each find ourselves in the current world situation. As with everything in the spiritual life, there is no infallible formula for application, but I think NIEWIADOMSKI has presented with the fundamental challenge of mimetic theory in a particularly clear and powerful way.

The other essays put philosophers Carl SCHMITT, Leo STRAUSS and Eric VOEGELIN in dialogue with René GIRARD. Fred LAWRENCE gives us a telling comparison between the views of history in the philosophies of Leo STRAUSS and Eric VOEGELIN with GIRARD's mimetic theory. LAWRENCE shows how both STRAUSS and VOEGELIN fail to overcome the problems posed to modernity by HOBBES, LOCKE, and ROUSSEAU, but that Girard leads us to the much deeper diagnosis of the human condition in the Gospels and, more important, the remedy of "unconditional forgiveness of one's enemies and persecutor, commitment to helping the world's victims [and] loving despite unrequited love" (129).

In his essay on Carl SCHMITT, Wolfgang PALAVER demonstrates that SCHMITT insisted that the way to preserve peace (of a sort) is for each nation to define clearly their enemies, both internal and external. There will be violence, even wars, but the alternative is that the nations fall apart and there is nothing but Hobbesian chaos. SCHMITT follows HOBBES by insisting that "the chaotic and warlike condition has to be transferred from the inside of the state to its outside, to its relationship with other states" (74). PALAVER suggests that SCHMITT's "concept of the political can be interpreted as an offspring of rituals rooted in the scapegoat mechanism overcoming a mimetic crisis" (76-7). He points out that in AESCHYLUS' play *Eumenides*, the violent Erinyes are pacified by being transformed into a police force that will channel their violence against enemies of the city both internal and external. SCHMITT sees great danger in the developing world culture of our times as it threatens to make every war a civil war. Only individual states poised at enmity with each other can hold back this catastrophe. SCHMITT uses the term *katechon* (restrainer) from the New Testament to demonstrate what he is about. For SCHMITT, only restrainers, such as the Erinyes can save us. PALAVER reminds us that the Gospel says that *katechon* are, at best provisional, and that it is the Kingdom of God that can save us.

The thought of Leo STRAUSS receives extensive treatment in essays by John RANIERI and Peter THIEL. RANIERI's essay is focused on how STRAUSS dealt with the "Jewish Question." This is quite a problem for an atheistic Jew. Interestingly, STRAUSS gains much of his sense of direction from Friedrich NIETZSCHE. What STRAUSS affirms about Jewish culture is the early warrior tradition. It is the prophetic tradition and its sympathy for victims that has undermined Jewish culture. Judaism is most itself when it struggles against other cultures. The continued existence of Judaism requires perpetual struggle between Jerusalem and Athens. It is the heroic embrace "eternal return" as understood by NIETZSCHE that Jews embrace their suffering without hope of redemption. One could encapsulate his attitude to Judaism with the phrase: "the kings were right; the prophets were wrong." When he brings in a comparison with GIRARD, RANIERI says that "the very aspects of the

Bible held up by Nietzsche and Strauss as the inspiring and life-affirming message of the text are the very tendencies from which, in Girard's view, the Bible is freeing itself" (167). In commenting on the obscurity of STRAUSS' writing, Peter THIEL suggests that the lack of clarity may be a necessity for a philosopher who does not want to be persecuted. STRAUSS tries to return to the city-state of PLATO's "The Laws," a state that is based on the primitive sacred that also reinstitutes the denial of this foundational violence. STRAUSS takes NIETZSCHE to task for playing the prophet who denounces prophetic religion (prophetic Judaism which led to Christianity). By explicitly enjoining the primitive sacred, NIETZSCHE exposes its reality. It is this reality that the philosopher-king must cover up again. At the end of his essay, THIEL contrasts Straussian secrecy with GIRARD's blowing the cover (i.e., pointing out that the New Testament has blown the cover). He notes that the Straussian Pierre MANENT has accused GIRARD of bringing on the destruction of humanity under the guise of non-violence. But if GIRARD is right, then the Straussian project of re-covering up the primitive sacred simply cannot possibly work.

In the concluding essay, Stephan ROSSBACH examines the loose ends of Eric VOEGELIN's thought that were never resolved. ROSSBACH suggests that VOEGELIN cultivated the humility of the *vita negativa* as a self-assertive resistance to untruth, a resistance that amounted to a protection against being wrong. In analyzing VOEGELIN's late essay "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," a meditation in the Anselmian method, ROSSBACH charges VOEGELIN with seeking a conclusion through his meditation whereas ANSELM meditated *from* his conclusion. At the end, ROSSBACH suggests that if the word "sin" were substituted for "untruth," the moral dimension of truth seeking would have become clear. "While we may be able to define ourselves in opposition to untruth the peculiar nature of the category 'sin' makes it very difficult for us to resist sin without having to meditate our own sinful afflictions." (253) Which brings us back to the essays by GIRARD and NIEWIADOMSKI.

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Jersak, Brad / Hardin, Michael (eds.):
***Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. (527 pp.)**
ISBN: 978-0-8028-6287, $ 32.00

The editors of this volume have compiled a variety of essays centered around an interpretation of salvation and atonement that sees God and violence at opposite ends of the story. After the foreword by Willard SWARTLY and a preface by Michael HARDIN, 20 chapters explore the main theme, divided up into seven parts or sub-themes: 1) Setting the Table; 2) The Cross and the Historical Jesus; 3) The Atonement and Sacrifice; 4) Atonement and Forgiveness; 5) The Atonement and Justice; 6) Atonement and Nonviolent Victory; 7) Atonement, Rebirth and Deification.

Brad JERSAK explains in the first chapter that the authors "are representatives of Anglican, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anabaptist and Evangelical traditions" (19). They do have their different angles on the matter, "even disagreeing sharply on a number of points" (19). Yet they also agree on very important questions. Their most fundamental common ground is that they reject "the dominant theory of the atonement known as penal substitution. Most do not believe that the Cross saves us through the satisfaction of God's wrath by the punishment of Jesus Christ." (19) "Three common themes serve as an umbrella" for the contributions to the volume: "1. God's *nonviolence* in Christ at the cross. […] 2. Christ's total *identification* with humanity in his incarnation and his call for us to identify with him in his life, death, resurrection and glorification. […] 3. The *victory* of Christ over Satan, sin and death as he confronts and defeats them through his resistance, obedience, and resurrection." (19)

With this common ground to tread, the chapters of the book are not only diverse in content but also in several other ways: some come from names well-known among the COV&R membership and explicitly employ the mimetic theory; others are not from the COV&R crowd. Some chapters (3-5, 8, 11, 13, 19) are reprints, resp. excerpts from other publications, most are, however, first-time publications; some are very academic, devoting great skill to minute details, others are existential in outlook and ponder deep questions about what all that means for our understanding of ourselves and our daily conduct of life.

It is not possible to give an adequate overview over all the contributions here. So let me just relate some things that caught my eye and leave the rest to your own discovery of this book. Editor Michael HARDIN sorts the different contributions along different theological paradigms in chapter 2, and this provides important lines of theological reasoning.

N. T. Wright, New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop of Durham explores "The Reasons for Jesus' Crucifixion". These reasons are different for each of the parties concerned: the Romans, the Jewish authorities, and Jesus himself. Especially the intention of Jesus is focused on in four sub-chapters (pp. 91-149). Wright unfolds a sophisticated argument for Jesus' knowingly walking to his death in Jerusalem, and attributing a salvific significance to this death. He even prepared for that with the two symbolic actions of the Last Supper and the Cleansing of the Temple.

Exploring motifs from the prophetic writings and Jewish thinking, Wright argues "that we can credibly reconstruct a mindset in which a first-century Jew could come to believe that YHWH would act through the suffering of a particular individual in whom Israel's sufferings were focused; that this suffering would carry redemptive significance; *and that this individual would be himself*. And I propose that we can plausibly suggest that this was the mindset of Jesus himself." (131) "Jesus therefore took up his own cross. […] Unlike his actions in the temple and in the upper room, the cross was a symbol not of praxis but of passivity, not of action but of passion. It was to become the symbol of victory, […] because it would be the means, of the victory of God." (148)

Marcus BORG's "Executed by Rome, Vindicated by God" contains a biblical theological argument about divine providence: does the NT interpretations of Christ's death as foreordained by God force us to believe that God positively wanted Christ's death and made it necessary by divine predetermination? BORG argues that the Bible repeatedly uses the motif of divine providence without claiming divine predetermination in that sense. His example is the book of Genesis' account of Joseph being sold into slavery. "The storyteller of Genesis affirms a providential purpose in Joseph's being sold into slavery [… cf. Gen 45:5-8]." (160) Still, this does not mean that Joseph's brothers fulfilled God's will in selling their brother (on the contrary they sinned in doing so), nor does it say that their action was unavoidable. "Rather the story affirms that God can use even the evil deed of selling a brother into slavery for a providential purpose." (160) The same applies to the crucifixion.

Robert EKBLAD has contributed a minute analysis of two text-versions of Isaiah 53:4-6 and 10, the fourth song of the Suffering Servant. He explains that the differences between the Masoretic Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint version amount to different theological emphases and interpretations of God's part in the suffering of the servant. The gravest difference certainly being in verse 10, where EKBLAD translates the Masoretic text as "But the Lord delighted to crush him, making him sick, if his soul would make a guilt offering" (196), while the Greek versions means "And the Lord desires to purify him of the plague: If you would give a sin offering […]" (196). (An aside: the so called German "Einheitsübersetzung" of the Bible, the official translation used by German-speaking Catholics in liturgy, renders the verse as: "But the Lord delighted in his crushed servant and saved the one who gave his life as a sin offering", although this is warranted by neither version of the text; but, of course, it happens to conform to Girardian ideas about the development of God's image in the Hebrew Bible.) EKBLAD concludes by saying "that the LXX translators' many differences with the [… Masoretic text] can be interpreted as theologically motivated. They seek to dissociate God from the servant's (Israel's) suffering in verses where the MT could be (wrongly, I believe), and often has been, interpreted to support a notion of atonement through penal substitution." (204).

Sharon BAKER explores "The Repetition of Reconciliation: Satisfying Justice, Mercy, and Forgiveness". She emphasizes that our view of God is not just a matter for inner-theological debate because it "has a profound effect on the way we behave and on the decisions we make, especially when those decisions include whether or not to go to war" (222). So our theory of how God deals with sin and how he administers justice or mercy has consequences in our own behavior towards those who really or purportedly have wronged us. Since Scripture uses metaphorical language and has been interpreted throughout history applying different lenses from the mental horizon of the time, BAKER feels justified and obliged to seek an interpretation for our day that interprets Scripture "through the lens of a peace-loving, anti-violent God" (227). She begins by trying to explain the relationship between divine justice and forgiveness. Drawing on SHAKESPEARE's *Merchant of Venice* and the Bible she comes to the conclusion that "in order for justice to be most like God's, it must be infected with mercy and not stand as mercy's opposite. As a result mercy and justice do not live in tension, […]. Antagonism between the two actions results from a human construction of justice [… that is] retributive, quantitative, and destructive of relationships, God's justice is restorative, qualitative, and builds relationships." (229) She cites Raymund SCHWAGER affirmatively that atonement on the cross is done by answering "'the conspiracy of hatred […] with an outpouring of love'" (238). She therefore explains that "God's sacrificial and redemptive justice enacted through forgiveness reveals the nature of atonement as 'at-one-ment'." (239) While I concur with her argument in general, I would like to raise a question. BAKER's reasoning for a God-like justice is akin to that of ANSELM of Canterbury's, whose atonement theory is the great antagonist of the whole book. But ANSELM thought that his satisfaction theory fulfilled just these demands: reconciling God's justice with His mercy. Therefore to refute his theory of atonement we need more than this idea of the conflux of divine justice and mercy.

Brita MIKO's "Die With Me. Jesus, Pickton, and Me" is the most existentially gripping piece of the compilation for me. The author relates the problems that her faith in divine forgiveness creates for her when she takes seriously that this also applies to serial killer Robert Pickton. Pickton has been convicted of killing six women after sexually assaulting them, he is on trial for 20 more killings of women, however has

not yet been convicted of these. Altogether 60 women disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, so that many think Pickton might be involved in even more crimes. MIKO only alludes to these details, I had to check *Wikipedia* to get an idea of what she was talking about. But she earnestly relates what it does to her to think that the heavenly Father "'opened wide the doors of heaven to Pickton' […] to see it in the concrete kills me. I feel damned both ways. If it is true, what are the implications for the families of the women? […] How can I let the Father open wide the doors of heaven to Pickton without betraying them? […] This is not what I wanted being a Christian to mean." (245) She goes on to realize that "we sometimes assume a call to love is wishy-washy. But a call to love is terrible and terrifying and relentless and in every moment unattainable. A call to love is the worst thing ever." (247) Then she reminds herself and the readers that Christ talked about the new covenant *in his blood* and that the slain women's blood is his as well. Following Jesus on his way means following him even in forgiveness where it feels shameful. "[…] in a Robert Pickton world, loving and forgiving is shameful. Forgiving the terrorist is shameful. I feel like I will deserve the world's anger if I forgive him. You will want to kill me. You will be right." (248) "The life of Christ must be the way through this world. Can we walk in it at all?" (249) Not withstanding the seriousness of MIKO's concern and question, and accepting the different genre of her contribution, I am still tempted to ask whether there is any place for justice in her idea of divine mercy; or stated differently: does Pickton have to respond somehow to the open door of heaven in order to enter? MIKO does not tell us.

But Miroslav VOLF in his "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice" makes a strong case for the interrelatedness of justice and reconciliation. He rejects the two extreme theories: the one granting what he calls "cheap reconciliation" (274), but also the other one that demands as a precondition for reconciliation that justice will be served first. Instead he argues that the Christian faith opts for a "primacy of the will to embrace" (280), yet distinguishes the will from the act of doing so. The bridge, so to speak, from the will to embrace to the actual embrace is "attending to justice" (281), if we realize that justice can never be perfect. Then forgiveness and justice can be understood as interdependent.

In "The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship and God" Denny WEAVER elaborates on what he calls his New *Christus Victor* paradigm of atonement, explaining its similarities and dissimilarities with earlier ones, and the points of agreement and disagreement with theologians explicitly employing the mimetic theory, namely Mark S. HEIM and Anthony BARTLETT.

Being also the editor of this *Bulletin*, I realize that I am running out of space to relate more about this rich and diverse book. Let me finish by at least naming those chapters I have not yet mentioned: James ALISON writes about "God's Self-Substitution and Sacrificial Inversion" and well-known spiritual author Richard ROHR adds "The Franciscan Opinion", namely DUNS SCOTUS's soteriology, which was considered a legitimate minority position in his days. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan WILLIAMS, with the aid of a commentary by Mark D. BAKER offers a short reflection on "The Forgiveness of Sins: Hosea 11:1-9; Matthew 18:23-35". C. F. D. MOULE delimits the scope of punishment and retribution in the New Testament, introduced by Pierre ALLARD. Mark D. BAKER explains "The Saving Significance of the Cross in a Honduran Barrio" and Wayne NORTHEY sees the cross as "God's Peace Work towards a Restorative Peacemaking Understanding of the Atonement". Nathan RIEGER proclaims the "Good News for Postmodern Man: Christus Victor in the Lucan Kerygma", Anthony BARTLETT explains the atonement as the "Birth of a New Humanity". Andrew P. KLAGER offers an extensive reading of "the Recapitualtion of Peace in St. Irenaeus of Lyon's Atonement Narrative" and Kharalambos ANSTALL juxtaposes "Juridical Justification Theology and a Statement of the Orthodox Teaching". Ronald S. DART concludes the volume with "Divinization, the Church and Prophetic Politics in Our Post 9-11 World".

Nikolaus Wandinger

Ross, Suzanne: *The Wicked Truth: When Good People Do Bad Things*.
Glenview, IL: The Raven Foundation, 2007.
(215 pp.) ISBN: 978-1-60402-982-6, $ 21.95

Among the many hundreds the books and articles devoted to the exploration of mimetic theory, there exists a class of "How to" or User manuals whose interest is to bring René GIRARD's ideas outside the classroom and back down to street and living room level, to where humans interact with one another in utterly commonplace circumstances that mostly comprise our daily lives. This remains the theory's richest terrain, being, after all, where the novelists and playwrights who have informed GIRARD's thinking from the outset forged their genial intuitions. One of the reasons that these ideas have survived the culture wars of the 80s and 90s is that they provide concrete answers to questions about how theory plays out on the streets. In no particular order of preference, I would name Gil BAILIE's prize winning *Violence Unveiled*, Jim GROTE's and John MCGEENEY's *Clever as Serpents: Business Ethics and Office Politics*, Roel KAPTEIN's *On the Way of Freedom*, and James ALISON's more recent books. Suzanne ROSS's *The Wicked Truth* is a fertile addition to this stock for the way it elucidates and embellishes the in-

sights to be drawn from the immensely popular musical *Wicked*. This is the first publication to come from the Raven Foundation, which counts me, by way of disclosure, on its board of directors, and whose aim of "addressing conflict by advancing the awareness of René Girard's mimetic theory among the general public" (ravenfoundation.org) is handsomely served here.

Based on the still best-selling novel by Gregory MCGUIRE, Stephen SCHWARTZ's musical stages a prequel to MGM's well-beloved *Wizard of Oz* of 1939, where the wicked witch is a burlesque foil to Dorothy's beguiling innocence. We flash back to an imaginary reconstruction of family and social conflicts that could issue in this resounding triumph of good over evil, which even the film caricatures brilliantly enough.

I do not wish to go into plot details because the musical's unfolding is so much fun, and it is not necessary, since the vivacity and acuity of ROSS's argument is not dependant on any one plot line in particular; it extends to all our psychodramatic dysfunctions. Her purport is that *Wicked* is host to truths we all know—and deny—about ourselves. This book is not an intrusive interpretation of a pop culture artifact, but a highlighting, underlining, and further explicitation of the logic of mimetic reciprocity, good and bad, benign and malignant, that the musical makes fully available. It is a harmonizing of voices, GIRARD's and SCHWARTZ's, that, unbeknownst to each other, are attuned to the same understanding of the intertwining pathologies of identity and belonging whose yield is scapegoating practices that we all know and love to hate.

So, frequent readers of the *Bulletin* might ask, what's new? How does this book enhance our grasp of mimetic theory? Many of us are attracted to this theory by a sense of its manifold implications for ordinary behavior, for everyday interactions that result in unwonted resentments, rivalries, and misprisions. *The Wicked Truth* excels here, showing how a seemingly outlandish witch-hunting lynch mob that can polarize an entire community is heir to prosaic dramas of the classroom and the dance floor, where commonplace manipulations and cruelties propagate inclusions and exclusions by which we fashion our very fragile and altogether residual identity.

Mimesis is the parent, socially as well as etymologically, of self-image, whose construction is too often adversarial, in litigious dependence on its outcasts and pariahs. This generates the Sacrificial System, as ROSS identifies it, which "corrupts all human relationships through blindness and confusion" (85). In short, it "destroys our ability to love" (143), contaminating the moral imagination of persecutors and victims alike, as she goes on to analyze the trap of victimary identity that "mirrors the very thing it is opposing" (104). Genuine difference and diversity fall prey to complementary and reinforcing symmetries of good and evil; opponents identified as either "not the Wicked Witch" or "other than the Wizard" replicate each other's recriminations. As if recalling Oedipus and Teresias and many another tragic duo, ROSS observes how "they sing almost the same words and the anger in their voices is indistinguishable" (120).

This is a case, among others, where art functions as theory, highlighting the pattern over the personal. Good and evil line up against each other in this structure like the utterly vacuous signifiers of Saussurean linguistics: oppositive, relative, negative. Far too often, ROSS remarks, it "is not really about identifying evil—it is about feeling good about ourselves. ... It only matters that we believe we have located evil somewhere out there, outside of ourselves" (52). As she shows us in a telling metaphorical riff, we grasp at snapshots, photographic stills dispensing moral security, but reality is more like a motion picture, with all the variety, complexity, and "ever present possibility of change" (162) that film can envision. We know the lethal consequences that the enforcement of stereotyping can lead to, and ROSS cogently remarks about the covert and overt violence we exercise and seek to moralize: "There is not Good Violence or Bad Violence; there is only violence" (167).

Readers in mimetic theory are familiar with these dynamics, but probably not on the intimate, interpersonal scale that ROSS brings home to us. Yet when she states that "the search for evil begins inside us" (160), I want to quibble, though only in favor of her overall line of argument. Evil is, as she often reminds us, what we do (18, 156), not what we are; it is not in us but, like violence itself, a relationship, and most often a misconstrued, mystified one, in which we are blind to our own role in its proliferation. It radiates from the Sacrificial System to which we do not subscribe overtly but that we underwrite in fact by myriad antagonisms, from slights, intended or not, to onslaughts, verbal or other, by which we are indictable, in E. M. FOSTER's phrasing, as "criminally muddled." Whence the universal, anthropologically grounded need for forgiveness that, citing ALISON adroitly, ROSS argues for at the end of her book (197-98). And the need is no less great when we cast stones at the system, at the mob, the persecuting crowd in which we rarely see ourselves, and in which GIRARD's notorious reading of Peter's denial confirms our membership.

ROSS crowns her analysis of our "creed of self-worship," which reduces others to means to our ends, with a "creed of compassion" that argues for caution and uncertainty, for openness to risk and "accepting limits to our behavior," "limits to our desires" (195)—and why not, since they are not, *stricte sensu*, ours to begin with? But, since she references ALISON again on this topic, I would enjoin yet another quibble, or perhaps just a coda: in ALISON's view, the "joy of being wrong" about our Manichaean certainties, about being

blameless, non-complicit in scapegoating violence, is a cognitive experience that opens up limitless horizons for human flourishing. Otherwise stated, by KAPTEIN this time, "We always know only the six wrong solutions of our problem. There are certainly thousands of right solutions, but we don't see any of them because ... we are closed of from the world with its endless possibilities." Just as, conversely, the possibilities of destruction afforded by the stifling embrace of mythical thinking are in turn limitless, world-consuming. This is GIRARD's alarming reasoning in *Achever Clausewitz*, where he writes "mimetic history" on a grand scale. His latest book makes a hefty pendant to ROSS's close-ups on our self-inflicted miseries, and we read them with equal profit, so much do they mutually substantiate PROUST's contention that interpersonal and international dysorders mirror each other.

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