



No. 33

October 2008

*“FEARFUL SYMMETRIES”:
RELIGION, CO-EXISTENCE AND THE SECULAR*



Conference Site: St. Mary's College

**COV&R-Conference July 8-12, 2009,
jointly hosted by
St Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill and
Heythrop College, University of London**

In the contemporary ‘return of religion’, and in the wake of anxieties around Islamist terrorism, the UK government has highlighted the importance of fostering religious cohesion and integration. These issues are especially acute in Britain. The bombers who attacked London in 2005 were ‘home-grown’, reinforcing nervous perceptions of ‘Londonistan’, and of a multicultural experiment that, for many people, has failed. Enormous public debate has been generated, as society confronts the limits of its own tolerance, and as attitudes towards religious diversity harden.

The 2009 conference of the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion* will explore these issues. It will be hosted by two institutions, St Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill, and Heythrop College (University of London). Each college has expertise in the area of interfaith dialogue: Heythrop runs a *Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue*, while St Mary's is home to the *Holy Land Research Project*.

The title of the conference, ‘**Fearful Symmetries**’, is a (mis-)quotation of William BLAKE, whose paintings and illustrations will provide a powerful visual commentary upon our discussions of mimetic indifferentiation and violence.

continued on p. 3

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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COV&R AT THE AAR IN CHICAGO, IL

Colloquium on Violence and Religion at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 1, 2008

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 be held in Clark 3 and 4 of the Palmer House Hilton and will include two papers.

From 9 a.m. until 10:10 a.m., Kathryn MCCLYMOND, Associate Professor in Religious Studies at Georgia State University, will speak about 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, MCCLYMOND will argue that sacrifice, which largely has 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. Distancing herself from popular and scholarly characterizations of sacrifice as dramatic, violent, and bloody, she will argue instead that sacrifice always involves multiple manipulations of offering substances and may not be dramatic or violent. 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.

From 10:20 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., Mark HEIM, Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School., will discuss 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 his presentation HEIM will discuss how he 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. Responding 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. Following the session, the COV&R Steering Committee for the AAR Annual Meeting invites others to join us for lunch to discuss plans for the 2009 COV&R session at the AAR.

COV&R's New Relationship to the AAR:

At its April 2008 meeting, the AAR Board of Directors responded affirmatively to COV&R's petition to become a related scholarly organization (RSO) of the AAR. Benefits associated with our new relationship include recognition as an RSO on the AAR website and a link from the AAR website to COV&R's website, a listing of COV&R's program within the AAR's program in the Program Book, rather than simply with other additional meetings, and an opportunity to offer one session on the main program in addition to our Saturday morning session.

As a related scholarly organization of the AAR, COV&R will enjoy enhanced visibility within the annual meeting structure. *The Steering Committee welcomes suggestions from you on how we may approach the 2009 meeting.* We are envisioning a high-visibility session on the main program to formally launch COV&R as an RSO of the AAR. Ideas you may have for invited speakers, theme, etc. are most welcome. What themes and speakers will enable us to draw new interest to COV&R among scholars who previously have been unfamiliar with our work? What themes and speakers exemplify the strengths and diversity of research on GIRARD's mimetic theory? If you are not able to attend the Steering Committee lunch meeting after the COV&R session on November 1 and have ideas that you would like to share, please e-mail me at martha.reineke@uni.edu.

Martha Reineke,

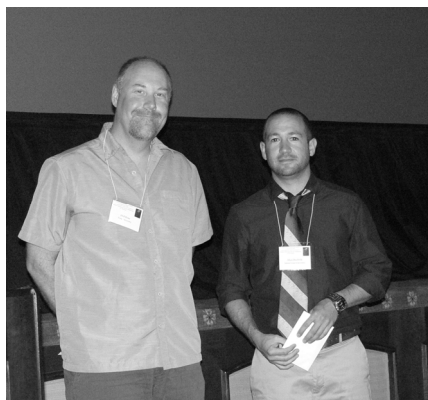
Coordinator COV&R at the AAR

Professor of Religion, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA

Raymund Schwager Memorial Award

To honor the memory of Raymund SCHWAGER, SJ († 2004), the Colloquium on Violence and Religion is offering an **award of \$ 1,500** shared by up to three persons for the three best papers given by graduate students at the COV&R 2009 meeting in London, England.

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 Michael Kirwan, organizer of COV&R 2009 and chair of the three-person COV&R Awards Committee (m.kirwan@heythrop.ac.uk).



*Phil Rose and Allan Doolittle
after receiving their prize*

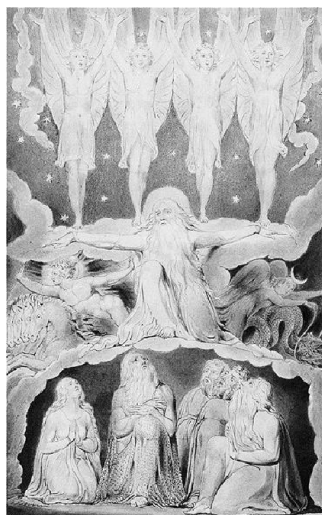
Due date for submission is the closing date of the conference registration, April 25, 2009. Winners will be announced in the conference program. Prize-winning essays should reflect an engagement with mimetic theory and will be considered for publication in *Contagion*.

The winners of the 2008 Raymund Schwager Award were: Allan Doolittle (first place) for his paper “Deceit, Desire and *The Dunciad*”, Eugene Galyona (second place) for “The Anthropological Breach of René Girard’s and Konrad Lorenz’s Ritualization and Its Consequences for the Literary Criticism”, and Phil Rose (also second place) for “Where Girard Meets McLuhan: On the Need to Communicate Violence”. We congratulate the winners.

COV&R Travel Grants

Travel grants to attend COV&R 09 are available for **graduate students** or **independent scholars** who are **first-time attendees** of the COV&R conference and **will normally be expected to present a paper** at the 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), until the **closing date of the conference registration**. The board will sponsor the attendance of up to ten persons with a maximum amount of \$ 500 each. The officers of COV&R will award the grant in the order of application.

A particular focus of the opening two days of the conference will be the encounter of Islam and western modernity, in the context of a multifaith Britain and Europe. Islamic scholars will be encouraged to explore with us the richness and the limitations of mimetic theory, as a reading of Islamic texts and traditions. More generally: is it possible for different faiths to encounter each other,



William Blake: ‘When the Morning Stars Sang Together’ from Illustrations to the Book of Job.

and to encounter secularity, without generating violence ‘in God’s name’? The second half of the conference will broaden out into wider cultural themes. One such theme will be an exploration of how mimetic theory might help us to understand the cultural and religious realities of central and Eastern Europe. 2009 sees the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, so papers from ‘Second World’ scholars and students will be especially welcome.

Just before the conference, St Mary’s will be hosting an important conference on Christian spirituality: ‘Sources of Transformation’, with Professor Bernard MCGINN as a keynote speaker. This runs from 30th June to 3rd July. Members of COV&R who wish to attend both the spirituality conference and the Colloquium’s are welcome to do so. For those who are interested, and depend-

ing on numbers, we intend to arrange a programme of interfaith encounters in Southall (to the west of London), over the weekend of 5th-6th July. Southall is known as the 'Holy City' and is the home of de Nobili House, a Jesuit centre of dialogue.

Full information about both conferences, with details of registration, will be available on the conference website, which will be operational from 15th October. There will be links from

- the COV&R website:
<http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/events>
- Heythrop College: <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk>
- St Mary's College: <http://www.smuc.ac.uk>
or contact Birute Briliute
b.briliute@heythrop.ac.uk or Michael Kirwan
m.kirwan@heythrop.ac.uk

Call for Papers

As always, papers working with any aspect of René Girard's mimetic theory are welcome, but some particular themes may be highlighted:

- Religious inspired violence, terrorism
- Fundamentalisms
- The limits of multiculturalism
- Interfaith dialogue: challenges and opportunities
- Religion and the secular
- Mimetic theory in film, music, art
- The Darwinian paradigm of mimetic theory
- Politics and Life after Communism: mimetic theory and the Second World.

A paper abstract (100-200 words) and short biography should be sent to Birute BRILIUTE at: b.briliute@heythrop.ac.uk The deadline for submission of paper proposals is **March 2nd 2009**.

Speakers

Professor Tariq RAMADAN (University of Oxford) will open the conference with the Raymund Schwager Memorial Lecture. Other confirmed speakers from outside COV&R, either as keynotes or for round-table sessions are: Professor Gwen GRIFFITH-DICKSON (Lokahi Foundation, London); Fr Michael BARNES SJ (Heythrop College); Dr Nur MASALHA (St Mary's College); Rev Dr Giles FRASER (University of Oxford), Dr Ivana NOBLE (Charles University, Prague), Dr Marcus POUND (University of Durham), Professor Christopher ROWLAND (U. of Oxford).

Conference Venue and Accommodation

The conference will take place at St. Mary's College, a historic university campus to the south-west of London. At the heart of the campus is the 18th century villa built by Horace WALPOLE, with 19th century additions by Lady WALDEGRAVE. The College stands in some 35 acres of lawns near the River Thames, close to attractions such as Kew Gardens and Richmond Park. The opening reception and the colloquium banquet will take place in the beautiful Waldegrave Rooms, and an excursion on the Saturday will consist of a river trip on the Thames to Hampton Court. Accommodation on the campus (**approximate figures: full tariff will be on the website**):

£ 75.00 per person per day (24 hr delegate rate: includes board, all meals, main room hire)

£ 35.00 per person per day (day delegate rate: includes lunch, coffee etc, main room hire)

Registration fee:

£ 70.00 full conference fee

£ 40.00 student conference fee

Optional excursion (boat and coach trip: Thames and Hampton Court) £ 20.00 per person.

Full accommodation and transport details, as well as a list of local hotels, will be specified on the Colloquium website from October 15th.

The deadline for registration for COV&R 2009 is **April 25th 2009**.

Michael Kirwan

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As usual my letter after our annual meeting always begins with some words of thanks. First we have to look back at our recent meeting in Riverside which brought many of us together to one of our biggest meetings we ever had, if we take the number of given lectures and papers into account. First of all I express my thanks to the organizers of this meeting in Southern California to Sabine and Robert DORAN. They really invested a lot of their time to make this meeting happen. Often-times I wondered how they were able to do all this work when we take into account that their twins were just born at the beginning of this year and that they had to rely more or less on themselves alone to organize the whole conference. The place they found – *The Mission Inn* – was marvellous and the many lectures and papers we could listen to and discuss helped us to come to a fuller understanding of how "catastrophe" and "conversion" are connected to each other. Thanks

to *Imitatio* and its founder Robert G. HAMERTON-KELLY we were able to have our first *Raymund Schwager Lecture* at this meeting. This year's speaker was W. J. T. MITCHELL from the University of Chicago who talked about the "State of the Union, or Jesus Comes to Abu Ghraib". It was a brilliant beginning of a hopefully long series of future Schwager Lectures. We were able to follow the work of one of the best iconologists realizing connections to mimetic theory and the influence of the Christian tradition on the way we look at images resulting from the dreadful aftermath of a failed war in Iraq.

A word of thanks must also be said to Julie SHINNICK who served for more than ten years as our American treasurer. Her continuous and reliable work enabled us to turn COV&R into a stable organization. We are really grateful how Julie took a lot of organizational work on her shoulders despite the fact that she still had to establish herself at her university at the same time. Fortunately we were able to find a person willing to take over from Julie. Since July Keith ROSS from the *Raven Foundation* has been our new American treasurer. His background in business will help us to strengthen the structure of COV&R and face all the new challenges that we will come across soon.

As usual also COV&R's board of directors changed. James ALISON, Sonja BARDELANG, Benoît CHANTRE, Paul NUECHTERLEIN and Rusty PALMER finished their terms. We are really grateful for their contributions to our common task and we hope this collaboration does not end but will continue in new ways. At the same time we welcome our new board members: Jeremiah ALBERG, Simon DE KEUKELAERE, Martha J. REINEKE, Susan SRIGLEY and Dorothy WHISTON. I am sure our new elected members will continue the work of their predecessors and will bring many new ideas into our organization.

Although our recent conference happened only three months ago and our memories are still fresh and alive there is always a next conference already around the corner. We are looking forward to our next meeting in London. Michael KIRWAN and his team have already met several times to organize this conference. The financial help provided by *Imitatio* and the *Raven Foundation* allows us to improve the work of COV&R. At our recent board meeting we decided that we will invest a large portion of the extra means into

young scholars. From now on we support ten young scholars to come for the first time to our annual meeting. Also the amount given to the future winners of the *Raymund Schwager Award* was increased. Most important for our future work are some ideas that were recently put together by Suzanne ROSS and Maura JUNIUS, both from the *Raven Foundation*. Suzanne and Maura sent me a letter that we already distributed among the board members. Their main concerns are the following: 1) Developing a new generation of leaders within the organization and 2) Mentoring a new generation of scholars of mimetic theory. I think these goals are important because the future of COV&R depends especially on our ability to attract young scholars. In order to achieve these goals our two colleagues made five concrete suggestions that I like to bring to your attention, too:

1. *Organize and conduct a plenary session with the Schwager award winners.* I especially like this proposal because it made me aware that the scarcest source at our annual meetings is our time and our attention. Financial support for our young scholars is important but it is even more important to listen to them. The other four recommendations are the following (I am just quoting part of the letter that I received from Suzanne):

"2. *Recruit all moderators for the parallel sessions and expand their role.* As it currently stands, moderators introduce speakers and serve as time keepers. They can do so much more than that. We propose that COV&R recruit all session moderators from respected experts in the application of mimetic theory in their fields. Moderators can be encouraged to begin the Q&A period with a constructive comment on the paper. To do that well they should receive the papers in advance. This will facilitate active mentoring within the parallel sessions and perhaps before the conference. This structure relieves the conference organizers of the burden of recruiting moderators and offers a standard practice that will help ensure the quality of the parallel session experience for the presenters. Moderators are now mentors.

3. *Create an online, searchable archive of research papers.* COV&R should expand the COV&R website to allow for the archiving of conference research papers in a searchable format. This will facilitate the research of the next generation of scholars and improve the quality of the parallel sessions. Rather than going over

ground that has already been covered, presenters can build upon past research.

4. *Be responsible for the taping of keynote and plenary sessions.* COV&R should be responsible for the taping of keynote and plenary sessions. This will involve coordination with the conference organizers, but it will ensure the standard practice of archiving the events. Audio and video recordings can then be posted on the COV&R website.

5. *Sponsor a poster session on next year's topic.* During a poster session, participants present the abstract for their research paper in the form of a poster. To be effective, they must distill their proposal down to its essence and find a compelling way to represent it visually. The posters would be focused on research ideas for the next year's conference. Posters are displayed in a large, open room so observers can go from one to another. Each participant stands by his/her poster and invites discussion from the observers."

Suzanne and Maura, of course, know that not all these suggestions can be implemented easily and quickly. But some can, and I am happy to tell you that Michael KIRWAN – the organizer of our next conference – told me already that he will try to implement as much of them as possible. Bringing Suzanne and Laura's letter to your attention should encourage all of us to think about new ideas to improve our collaboration.

Finally, there is one more concern that I would like to communicate. We are still looking for a European organizer willing and able to organize the annual meeting in 2011. Please tell me as soon as possible if you think you could host us at your place.

Wolfgang Palaver

MUSINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

This past year—marked from the 2007 COV&R meeting in Amsterdam and Soesterberg, The Netherlands, to the 2008 COV&R meeting at the Mission Inn and on the campus of UC-Riverside, California—has (once again but to an unusual degree) been an extraordinary year in the life of the Colloquium. The founding of Imitatio, Inc., by Robert HAMERTON-KELLY, Peter THIEL, and René GIRARD has galvanized new endeavors in mimetic research, education, and publication, benefitting the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, as well as a variety of other organizations

and foundations, each with its special relationship to mimetic theory. Thanks to Imitatio, the Colloquium was able to begin the Raymund Schwager Memorial Lecture series (with W. J. T. MITCHELL giving the inaugural lecture) and to increase the amount of travel support available to the many graduate students presenting papers at COV&R meetings.

This year, too, saw the publication of the prestigious *L'Herne* volume on Girard, edited by Mark R. ANSPACH, and the release of René GIRARD's collected essays (some of them translated into English for the first time) on literature and criticism, 1953-2005, in the volume *Mimesis and Theory*, edited by Robert DORAN, as well as important monographs by other members of COV&R. GIRARD's *Achever Clausewitz*, released in France this past year, will soon appear in English translation from Michigan State University Press, in a new scholarly series edited by William JOHNSEN.

Given the many and varied signs (so evident in recent meetings) of the vitality of the Colloquium—partly in recognition of the urgent importance of a mimetic understanding for phenomena in the current world scene (where religion and violence are frequently joined in the media reports of current events)—I will not attempt an overview in this little column, but rather zero in on two emotionally colored scenes from the Riverside conference that have lived in my memory (among the many wonderful memories) since last June with a special force, and which have prompted continued reflection.

No one present in the Mission Inn on the night of June 20 will forget the diatribe delivered by Richard COHEN in the physical presence of René GIRARD, now nearing his eighty-fifth birthday. Without wanting to attach too much importance to COHEN's remarks, which charged GIRARD unfairly and rudely with Gnosticism (of a Kantian, epistemological type) and with Christian heresy (of a Marcionite and dualistic stripe), I do wonder about the appropriate response to such charges.

Addressed personally by COHEN, GIRARD responded from his seat in the ballroom with simple dignity, saying, "I do not recognize my theory in your description of it." Seated at COHEN's side, Sandor GOODHART similarly responded with admirable restraint, as he proceeded (unlike COHEN) to fulfill his assignment by placing the

thought of GIRARD in serious conversation with that of LEVINAS (whom COHEN, an acknowledged expert on LEVINAS, failed even to mention). In the immediate circumstance, GOODHART's *indirect*, deliberately anti-mimetic, response succeeded in defending GIRARD's mimetic theory in a masterful way both practically (by refusing to answer COHEN in kind) and theoretically (by showing the theory's relevance to the thought of one of the twentieth century's greatest ethicists).

Direct and indirect responses, such as GIRARD and GOODHART gave, are certainly to be emulated. Is there a place, however, for some sort of positive defense against the too-familiar charges voiced by COHEN, charges that belong to the stereotypical (mis)representation of Girardian thought among GIRARD's critics? What can the Colloquium do, apart from what it is already doing and has already done, to secure and strengthen the place of mimetic theory in the discourse of the academy? This question continues to concern all of us. Striking to this observer was a discernible tendency on the part of many invited keynote and plenary session lecturers at the meeting in Riverside (I refer particularly to people who are not COV&R members) either to ignore the mimetic theory altogether, or to distance themselves explicitly from it (as did Gianni VATIMO), or to attack it (as did Richard COHEN).

If the attack by COHEN is memorable, so too, and even more so, is quite a different scene from the 2008 conference. No one present at the Mission Inn on Friday morning, June 20, will forget René GIRARD's lecture, "Scapegoating at Çatalhöyük," in which he discussed cave paintings that show the ritualized killing of animals, encircled by a group of attackers. The antlers of these slain animals were subsequently enshrined in homes, suggesting their possible deification. As he spoke with great animation, Girard commanded the attention of all present, who looked through his eyes at the cave paintings to discover in them an extraordinary record of antique human culture. "Could an animal scapegoating have preceded the human scapegoating that Girard has always placed at the origins of culture?" Wolfgang PALAVER asked. "Yes," replied Girard. "It makes no difference to the theory. An animal scapegoating could have come first."

This word from GIRARD made me think of a scene from the film *Dead Man Walking*. Writing

to a prisoner on death row (played by Sean PENN), in whose life she becomes increasingly involved, Sister Helen PREJEAN (played by Susan SARANDON) remembers a scene from her childhood, in which she had joined a circle of children who tortured and killed an opossum, whom they had surrounded. The memory helps her to identify (as guilty) with the criminal, who is a murderer; to have the courage to distance herself from a society that supports and practices capital punishment (the "all-against-one" ring of torturers); and to make a theoretical connection between the animal-slaying of her childhood and the human scapegoating of adult society. In the memoir on which the film is based, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* (1993), PREJEAN recalls the incident as follows:

When I was eight I had had some nightmares after I helped torture an opossum some neighborhood boys had cornered. *I had wanted to be tough like the guys*, and I had taken my turn hitting the animal with the stick until the opossum began to bleed from the mouth. I dreamed that night of the bloody head. Perhaps there were baby opossums waiting for their mother to return with their food (stress added, p. 11)

Students of mimetic theory will not miss the explicit reference to mimetic desire and behavior. The girl's remembered dream of the bloody head suggests the trauma sustained by the perpetrators after their act of ritualized killing. Her troubled conscience thinks of the slain animal in notably human terms, as a mother of children, even as the maternity of the victim expresses symbolically the violence she has committed against her feminine self, against her own maternal instincts, when she acted out of a desire "to be tough like the guys." The dream suggests that the dead one continues to live, perhaps (as primitive people might have imagined it) as a god in need of placation.

PREJEAN's book argues that the way to placate the dead, the victims of violence, is not to pile up more victims through a violent (albeit legal and ritual) repetition of the previous killing, but to practice an empathy with the victims (and their families) and the convicted killers (some of them, in fact, innocent) alike, acknowledging one's own share in guilt and working hard and at multiple levels to create a culture respectful of human life, from conception to natural death.

René GIRARD would surely agree. He has written eloquently against capital punishment—the very cause to which Sister PREJEAN has de-

voted herself. How moving it is that her remembered childhood experience, no less than the slaying depicted in the cave paintings at Çatalhöyük, confirms GIRARD's word that an animal scapegoating may have preceded a human scapegoating at the dawning of human civilization, one substituting for the other.

What ensures the vitality of mimetic theory is precisely its ability to explain phenomena in a credible way, to ring true to human experience and to illumine its cultural forms. In the end, this is and remains the best defense and the proper test of GIRARD's thought, also in response to criticisms like COHEN's. May the Colloquium continue its work of sifting and winnowing, its quest for truth.

Ann W. Astell

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

COV&R Metting June 18-24 in Riverside, CA 2008

The 2008 COV&R Conference in Riverside was one of the best COV&R conferences ever according to many long-time participants. The auspices for this year's meeting on catastrophe and conversion were more than favorable. During their excellent preparation work our highly likable and competent organizers, Robert and Sabine DORAN, had twins! Girardians know that in quite a few archaic cultures the birth of twins forebodes catastrophe. The physical resemblance is associated with the imminent danger of mimetic catastrophe, the terrifying resemblance of mimetic antagonists. Since, in many respects, COV&R is not an archaic society this must have been the augur of a so-called "eu-catastrophe", a neologism coined by TOLKIEN that reappeared quite a few times during the colloquium. The word refers to the good ("eu") conclusion of a drama's plot. After Gianni VATTIMO's entertaining and interesting keynote lecture someone asked if he could not apply the term "eu-catastrophe" to what he had been saying. VATTIMO looked at the audience and asked for some explanation: "You-catastrophe?" and continued, pointing at himself, "me-catastrophe?"

The setting the Doran's had chosen for the conference was quite amazing. Apparently the current bar of the Mission Inn stands where President Theodore ROOSEVELT once slept during his visit to the hotel and the actual Presidential

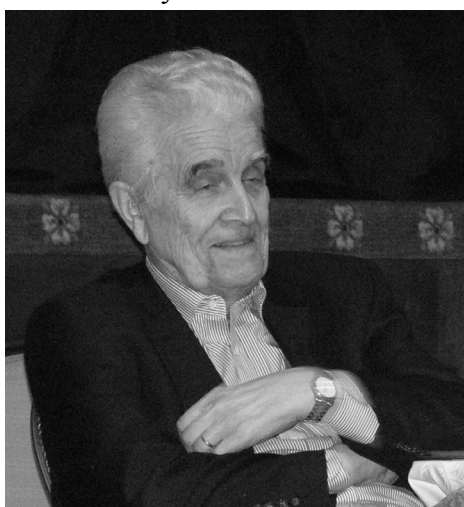
Lounge (which pays homage to the ten U.S. Presidents that have passed through the doors of the Mission Inn) was the site of Richard Nixon's wedding to his wife Patricia. The Inn has something of a Spanish mission, a museum, a boardinghouse, an art gallery, an aviator's shrine, a monastery and even a hotel. In one word: a perfect setting for a COV&R conference!

The cast of speakers this year (with DUPUY, GIRARD, VATTIMO, Jack MILES and W. J. T. MITCHELL as key-note speakers) was not less impressive. No doubt some of the many plenary speakers (and maybe even some others in the concurrent sessions) would have made excellent key notes too. It is impossible to do justice to everyone in this brief report. One should begin by writing about Jean-Pierre DUPUY's key note lecture since he has been thinking a lot on the conference's subject in recent years. In his *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé* (Seuil 2004) DUPUY opts for an enlightened form of doomsaying. It is this position he defended in Riverside. According to DUPUY we need to rehabilitate the doomsayer since the only possible chance we have to avoid an impending catastrophe is to believe it will certainly happen. If we believe it will not happen, we will never change our behavior and the calamity is upon us. The biblical prophet Jonah, as DUPUY convincingly showed, is so persuasive about the imminent catastrophe that eventually it is averted. Thanks to his prophecy the people of Niniveh change their ways, which at the same time falsifies the poor prophet's prophecy! This is the doomsayer's paradox.

Ever since (and probably even before) his excellent article *Mimésis et morphogénèse* DUPUY has been an accomplished master of paradoxes. Yet one could wonder (as some theologians told me afterwards) if DUPUY's stress on the (no doubt fascinating) philosophical and mathematical intricacies of doomsaying's loops and paradoxes is not an elegant way to elude the very Christian consequences of GIRARD's apocalyptic thinking (be it to clearly refute them). One should not forget that GIRARD's most apocalyptic book, *Achever Clausewitz*, is also his most apologetic one. Since there was no time left for questions after DUPUY's lecture and since he continued his exposition during the session on *Clausewitz* the next day there was no real discussion of his ideas with theologians. At some future occasion one should organize a debate on the topic between

DUPUY and Wolfgang PALAVER, for instance, the theologian who has most stressed the apocalyptic elements in mimetic theory.

During his lecture René GIRARD chose to take us back from the future to the distant past, to the prehistory. He invited us to have a look



at some archaeological findings at Çatalhöyük, a large Neolithic settlement in southern Anatolia (Turkey) dating from around 7500 BC. The people who lived there apparently had no temples, yet every house was a shrine with a sacred north-wall and buried ancestors within the house. The vivid murals portraying animals and humans in semi-circular patterns around the animals are indeed intriguing. Going against a brand of ethnology that mainly remains blind to violence in prehistoric art, GIRARD stressed the traces of violence to which the drawings on the murals seem to refer. Even though it is always difficult to pin down the reference of prehistoric art GIRARD's hypothesis that the murals refer to ritualized animal scapegoating is rather convincing. The very short knives, the highly ritualized technique of killing the animal (with the cutting of the ankles), the apparent sexual teasing of the animal etc. all seem to point in that direction. The drawings contain many very realistic details and yet the animals are represented as being much more dangerous (and sometimes literally much bigger) than they are in reality. That would, of course, be a tell-tale sign of scapegoating. Some of the drawings can be read as part of a prehistoric "comic strip" on ritual scapegoating, even though they do not have to refer to the same event. According to GIRARD that is the case because different drawings seem to depict different ritualized stages in the killing. With his research in the meaning of this prehistoric art GIRARD also referred to a discussion he had with Walter BURKERT who believes that animal killing is older than human sacrifice (see *Violent Origins*,

1988). GIRARD said that BURKERT could eventually be right, but this difference does not matter a lot for mimetic theory. The point of ritual killing is to turn human violence away from the own group (be it towards animals or other humans).

The plenary session that caused the greatest stir was that of the eminent LEVINAS specialist Richard A. COHEN and Sandor GOODHART. GOODHART delivered a thoughtful lecture on GIRARD and LEVINAS, but COHEN only mentioned his pet thinker once during his diatribe, if I am not mistaken. I chose the word diatribe on purpose. The whole lecture was a fierce criticism of GIRARD's ideas. According to COHEN, GIRARD's hypothesis is too simple and explains too much, a criticism to which DUPUY responded very well referring to modern science. The non-Christian COHEN furthermore branded GIRARD a heretic (a gnostic and a Marcionist). One of the purposes of COV&R is to criticize mimetic theory, so his contribution would have been very welcome, if it were not a restatement of criticisms to which GIRARD has responded long ago. Since I was sitting next to a young LEVINAS and COHEN fan during the lecture I had the honor of being seated next to the master after the lecture. COHEN told me he really knew very little about GIRARD before being invited to speak at the colloquium. Not long before the meeting he started reading the beginning of the second part of *Things Hidden* on the plane and got rather agitated by what he read. He then decided to write an article against GIRARD. After I told him about the later developments in GIRARD's thinking and his clear stance against Marcionism and his stress on the goodness of mimetic desire (even though it is constantly perverted, deviated from its real goal), a stress which contradicts the accusation of gnosticism and after this was confirmed by GOODHART, COHEN decided not to write his planned article against GIRARD.

If there was a real near-gnostic thinker at the conference it would have been Robert HAMMERTON-KELLY, even though he would probably not agree with this reading. Violence is the father of all things and mimetic violence is the holy grail! Robert HAMMERTON-KELLY delivered a splendid lecture on the fragments of HERACLITUS. He also staunchly criticized the proponents of "positive mimesis", since in his view violence is really behind *everything*, except what comes from above. HAMMERTON-KELLY's contribution is an impor-

tant one since a certain facile stress on positive mimesis among quite a few Girardian scholars has, in my view, indeed often eluded the tragic and highly problematic aspects of mimetic theory. Mimetic theory is, among other things, a rehabilitation of the idea of original sin, which according to G. K. CHESTERTON is “the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved”. A combination of cheap, easy positive mimesis and a scapegoat theory boiled down to fashionable victimary thinking (instead of a generative mechanism) has certainly at times reduced GIRARD’s subversive thinking to a very politically correct theory especially popular among so-called “liberal theologians”. Often a mistaken and politically correct stress on the scapegoat theory has even been made at the expense of mimetic desire (as GRANDE argued in his lecture). Yet, GIRARD has also stressed the goodness of mimetic desire (see for instance *I See Satan*). This is probably a profoundly Catholic idea: the good things are indeed very often perverted, but they are not bad in themselves. God is our Savior, but also our Creator and creation was good at first. Instead of a Manichaean view of the world mimetic theory confronts us with a series of paradoxes. It is interesting to note that the research in mirror neurons and the experimental research in imitation suggests to Girardians that the source of empathy is also the source of envy and mimetic rivalry.

Among the other lectures one should mention Peter THIEL’s speech on the global world and the economy. GIRARD thanked THIEL for his very generous financial contribution to mimetic research. At the same time GIRARD asked everyone to keep up Raymund SCHWAGER’s spirit of detachment. One should also mention Stephen GARDNER’s fascinating talk on the notion of charisma and his strong dialectical qualities in answering the many questions after his lecture. Of course many others should be mentioned. It was also good to see a good number of contributions by young people. Among the first-time attendants was Hüseyin CICEK from the university of Innsbruck who is writing great things on mimetic theory and terrorism. I was happy he managed to get through the severe American airport security checks with this subject. The Israeli-Palestine back-up session was less conflictive than last year in Amsterdam and all the more interesting and balanced. Another positive aspect of the con-

ference (I am having a really hard time to find the negative ones) was the active participation of the non-Girardians. Many were amused and content to observe how, for instance, Gianni VATTIMO really felt at ease and participated at the conference as your average Girardian.



The Dorans – without their twins

This was indeed an excellent conference. Michael KIRWAN will have a hard time trying to do better. One should be very thankful for the young organizers ... and for their twins.

Simon de Keukelaere

A First-time Attendee’s Impression

As I looked outside the window of the plane I saw the fascinating skyline of the city of Los Angeles with its large number of suburbs. After leaving the airport and arriving at the “Mission Inn Hotel” I immediately noticed that the organizers couldn’t have chosen a better place for this year’s conference. There were these enormous spacious conference rooms, as well as an excellent restaurant with a fantastic service. All the countless speeches and panels which were held were brilliant and so it was very difficult to decide which one to take. One I didn’t want to miss was the special session on GIRARD’s new book *Achever Clausewitz*. A surprise was that one of the speakers was GIRARD himself. I thought that participating on that panel would help me to find new insights on the mimetic theory. It would help me with my PhD thesis which concerns martyrdom and its implications on politics. Another highlight was that Robert DORAN had asked me a few weeks earlier to be chair. I gratefully accepted his request. To my surprise René GIRARD was sitting in the audience. For more than two years I have been a member of the scientific cluster “Anthropology and Violence” which is em-

bedded in the platform “World Order – Religion – Violence” at the University of Innsbruck. Ever since I have come in touch with the mimetic theory I have wanted to meet René GIRARD personally. In the end I even could involve him into a discussion.

It was a great experience for me to participate on such a big conference. A lot of scholars from many parts of the world and with different backgrounds were sharing new insights on the mimetic theory. I am already looking forward to attend next year’s COV&R.

Hüseyin Cicek, Innsbruck

Summary of the COV&R Business Meeting at Riverside

Conference Feedback: The conference, especially the location and accommodations were praised highly, and emphasis was made that they cannot be models for the future, simply because it would be impossible to match them. The conference scope was so broad that at times it seemed like two conferences at the same time. Robert and Sabine Doran were thanked for achieving this even while haven twins just the year before.

A few suggestions were made for future conferences:

- desire to have more young scholars on plenary sessions;
- wish to have papers posted online, so that one could catch up on those missed.

Organizer Robert Doran announced that the French embassy’s gift of \$ 3,000 enables COV&R to publish the papers from the parallel sessions.

Changes on the Advisory Board: Five members were leaving the board after serving one or two terms on it. President Wolfgang PALAVER thanked them – some of them in absentia – warmly: Paul NUECHTERLEIN, Sonja BARDELANG, Benoit CHANTRE, Rusty PALMER and James ALISON. Special thanks and a little present for her long and devoted service went to COV&R’s North American Treasurer of 11 years, Julie SHINNICK.

The new American Treasurer will be Keith ROSS, whose appointment was greeted enthusiastically. Michael KIRWAN and Simon SIMONSE were nominated by the board for re-election and were elected unanimously to a second term. The five new nominees for the board were voted on in alphabetical order and were all elected unani-

mously. They are: Jay ALBERG, Simon DE KEUKELAERE, Martha REINEKE, Susan SRIGLEY, and Dorothy WHISTON.

Plans for Future Conferences: After 2009’s London conference, COV&R will be at the University of Notre Dame in July 2010. For 2012 another venture to Canada seems likely. There are preliminary plans to have the conference a couple of hours from Toronto,



Julie accepting a fitting gift

hosted by Nipissing University. 2011 would be a European year. No proposal has come up so far. So please, whoever might be in a position to host a COV&R conference, 2011 could be the year.

Editors’ Statements: Bulletin editor Niki WANDINGER thanked for contributions to the Bulletin and asked to keep it up, send books for reviews and reports about ongoing activities in the different places. The Bulletin lives only through that generosity of COV&R members.

Bill JOHNSEN, editor of Contagion and the new book series, informed us that Contagion is now on the premium edition of Project MUSE. If an institution has no subscription of that edition, members should see to it that it subscribes to Contagion. Several new books will appear in the new series, and the arrangement holds that members of COV&R will receive a free copy. Members are strongly encouraged to have the institutions they work at to order these books for their libraries. All members are encouraged to submit papers and ideas to Contagion.

The information about travel grants and the COV&R meeting at the AAR, contained on p. 2 and 3 of this Bulletin was also provided at the Business Meeting.

Nikolaus Wandinger

Workshop
‘Analyzing Cases of Mimetic Violence’
at Florence, April 10-13, 2008

Amidst hunting trophies at an old estate of Lorenzo DE MEDICI, a follow-up of the 2007 Amsterdam COV&R conference took place, aimed at sharpening the analytic tools for the study of conflicts and for making the mimetic theory more accessible to the next generation of scholars. Lorenzo’s place, turned into a Pax Christi ‘*casa per la pace*’ (peace center), proved most apt to host participants from Italy, France, Belgium, Latvia and the Netherlands for this gathering, scheduled by the Dutch Girard circle. Its president Simon SIMONSE managed to come over from Nairobi and described Pax Christi’s role in the negotiations between the Ugandese government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which was about to be finalized. He reported how posturing mimicry on both sides was still holding up the negotiations in this brutal conflict that arose in the aftermath of AMIN’s murderous regime and Alice LAKWENA’s spiritual movement. Simon discerned the mimetic rivalry, proper to the African political scene which he had studied before in Sudan.

Three other case studies joined this report. Peter ZVAGULIS summarized his study of the ethnic rivalry in Latvia between the locals and the large Russian community, in which he saw mainly a ritual of scapegoating via the press, making it a virtual and yet effective process of doing mutual harm. Peter analyzed the contagion at work in this process and hinted at some ways of remedying it. An analogous case was Sri Lanka’s stand-off with the Tamil Tigers, described by Thérèse ONDERDEWIJNGAARD, who focused on an academic Human Rights activist who left the Tigers and was (probably) murdered for her ‘treason’, but whose courage continued to inspire attempts at non-violent resolutions. I also mentioned a ‘treason’ that went sour in the case of the Dutch refugee parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi ALI, who left the socialist party for its being too soft on Muslim violence against women, but who came to be scapegoated due to tensions on three levels. After analyzing the party political side, I highlighted the tripolar rivalry of Islam – Secularism – Christianity, and thirdly showed how the West and the Muslim world had taken opposite positions in the gender issue that originated from the Fall in Eden (Gn 3), with the West viewing its

salvation as an individualistic link to a Redeemer who overruled the gender divide and with Islam seeking deliverance primarily in the submission to the role patterns installed by the Creator. Their mutual rivalry had deepened the respective one-sidedness and caused both to ignore the original issue.

To supplement these case studies, there were three rather more theoretical papers on topical subjects. Hans WEIGAND investigated how a complex system approach suited mimetic studies as he used the Rwandan genocide as a case in point. He explained how crises that originate in mimetic settings, go through cycles of polarization and sacrificial reconciliation and how they are stored in a collective memory so as to be brought to bear on new cases; but they may also, as in the case of the growing Tutsi-Hutu divide, leave a residue too hefty for any communal mediation. Hans showed how breaking down the conflict in smaller cycles could help control the stakes. Mark ANSPACH, by contrast, scaled upwards as he tried to grasp how very different trends such as suicide bombings, school shootings and anorexia epidemics might feed on common aspects of ritual violence and victimization divulged by the media. He saw the notion of martyrdom as an ambivalent value playing havoc, which called for a perspicacious analysis. Joining this line, Philippe DE KEUKELAERE spoke of a deviation of the archaic sacred factor, inspiring modern suicide bombings aimed against a demonized enemy. Although the juridical system of the West makes the archaic sacred inconceivable, Philippe pointed out that its avatars crop up all over in many crooked deviations. Both Mark and Philippe thus pointed at the transformation of ritual violence and evoked the apocalyptic dimension which GIRARD has paid a growing attention to.

On a methodological note, Michael ELIAS had ushered in the case studies and theoretical analyses by discussing how the English analytical philosophy on speech acts (notably the illocutionary, analyzed by Dell HYMES) could be combined with GIRARD’s idea of the mimetic as the core of cultural activities, because all speech is intending to achieve something within a setting of rivaling interests. This methodological approach clearly appears quite promising. Roberto FARNETI concluded this mini-conference by pursuing the question of methodology, stressing that the mi-

metic theory is to be framed as a new approach to the entire field of human sciences. Applications to all fields should be elaborated, from philosophy to the arts (not just literary arts, but musical and plastic arts as well) and to the sciences (from political, economic and religious down to neuroscience). Pulling all these together should hopefully lead to a solid base for mimetic theory to enter the academic curricula.

Wiel Eggen, The Netherlands

Scottish Honorary Degree for René Girard

On June 27, 2008, René GIRARD was made an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of St. Andrews. The picture below shows him with laureator Prof. Paul GIFFORD.



BOOK REVIEWS

**Anspach, Mark R. ed: *René Girard: Les Cahiers de l'Herne*
Paris 2008, 276 pp.,
ISBN 978-2-85197-152-4, € 39**

In the series of *L'Herne* on French celebrated authors it befell to Mark ANSPACH to compose a *Cahier* to honour René GIRARD's elevation to the *Académie Française*. More than a Reader, the *Cahier* seeks to position the author's key contribution, the mimetic theory, by its progress and areas of impact. In having his select mix of key texts open with Michel SERRES' response to GIRARD's speech at the *Académie*, ANSPACH purports to document the changes this theory has brought to several fields, from literary studies and philosophy to psychology and theology, gravitating round the anthropology of the 'inter-individual'. If this Girardian neologism barely features in the *Cahier*, it nonetheless forms its backdrop, as it has inspired many a researcher. First of all, there is GIRARD's own account of how he got drawn into various disciplines as a French medievalist in the US reacting to European debates deadlocked between ego-centred existentialism and holistic structuralism. His selected letters and partly unpublished texts (e.g. on

SHAKESPEARE) make prized reading, as also do his associates' densely argued articles (often in brilliant translation, mostly by ANSPACH).

Spanning about 25 years, this treasure of 45 texts will be valued, even if some inclusions may be deemed too adulatory to win over any critics. My best way of reviewing it is by mimetically depicting how its themes directed my journey, like they steered studies in psychology (by GRIVOIS, OUGHOURLIAN), economics (by ORLÉAN) or history (by ESCOBAR, ATELL). Indeed, GIRARD's *La violence et le Sacré* had just come to perturb my structuralist tutors in Paris when, as an anthropologist in pastoral service, I set out for my fieldwork among the Banda in Central Africa (CAR). Their social system pivoted on kinship rules which they 'snobbishly' (DEGUY) dubbed mere tools to allow marital exchanges. Their sober 'structuralist' discourse, however, could not veil how their numerous kinship rituals played the intricately morphogenetic role described by SCUBLA (here remarkably backed up by ANSPACH's study). Likewise, their scorning of the chiefs as dirt or the worst of all wizards, whilst they honoured them as safeguards against the unforeseen, recalls SIMONSE's analysis of Sudanese sacred kingship. They offered sacrifices to keep the spirits aloof, whilst also arguing that the latter's hassle was only an index of human *ama* (fracas, words, tongue). They spoke of a supreme being as 'it' and consulted 'it' via divinations chiefly to offset rivalries. This theist idiom of sorts (BAILIE, GANS) conveyed a deep awareness that all religion is an avatar of some primal rivalry. It recalls RICOEUR's lucid tribute to GIRARD as he argues that, in returning to earthly affairs after facing the transcendent (e.g. during *ganja* initiations), humans are bound to apply some (ritual) violence, the deceitful origin of which any religion fathoms. This might explain why the Banda – and many a non-European student – distrust western modernity and its recent views of Jesus' cross.

We no doubt welcome the *Cahier*'s inclusion of the famous exchanges between SCHWAGER and GIRARD about Jesus' death not being a divine decree but the result of him staying faithful to the revelatory word despite murderous reactions. But we also appreciate how this evokes a double protest from (non-western) Evangelicals. They object that no sooner had they learned about God sacrificing his Son for their sake than the West changed its take on this message, while hushing up its ugly part in causing global injustice. It is no doubt the mimetic theory's acclaim to enable and urge a scrutiny of this enigma and the five centuries of modern ambiguities (see section IV). But referring us back to GIRARD's own charming text on infants in medieval Avignon, this raises an intriguing question. Set before modernity ushered in its focus on the individual – with novel-writing and SHAKES-

PEARE's or DE SADE's diatribes on social disorders (BRUCKNER) to follow – it portrays a social order not yet dominated by that 'individual' who was soon to arise in oblivion of the other's call (LEVINAS) and of gift-giving (DERRIDA), as GODDARD, CHANTRE and MCKENNA depict.

But if the 'individual' emerged due to biblical faith overcoming medieval victimising and scapegoating habits, the enigma of modernity's global injustices is quite strident. ANSPACH's selection goes a long way to prove the mimetic theory's ability to analyse issues of violence (DUMOUCHEL). But African contacts urge the following question. Given that the incubation of that 'individual' occurred amidst centuries of clerical moralisations – during which marital schemes became subject to ascetic sexual laws replacing the kinship exchange rules – what to make of the reading of the biblical Eden-event (Gen 3) in terms of a rivalry between God and man, rather than as man's refusal to heed the divine caution against seeking the skill of telling good from evil? For, the later arguably led to all rivalry, as Adam's rebuking of Eve shows. Could that dogmatic option have triggered the birth of the 'modern individual', for whom sexuality got de-territorialised and so detached from kinship exchange rules that homosexuality could get idealised (LANCE), despite being a contradiction in terms?

GIRARD's replies to GOODHART and GODBOUT on the Jewish idea of self-sacrifice may hold a clue to this quandary. Accepting DUPUY's idea of a morphogenetic corollary of mimetic views on both social and material data, his work hints at this in terms that recall CUSANUS facing the 'individual' that emerged from the Great Schism of Avignon. ANSPACH's *Cahier* is a precious working document for further reflection in this respect, thanks also to his own insightful *Avant-propos* describing GIRARD as the king of 'however' (COETZEE).

Wiel Eggen

Achever Clausewitz

Paris 2007, 363 pp.

ISBN 978-2-35536-002-2, € 22 or

René Girard's Global Warning

Less than a year before the release of the prestigious *Cahier de l'Herne* on GIRARD (edited by Mark ANSPACH) and shortly before French president Nicolas SARKOZY had mentioned René GIRARD in his Lateran discourse in Rome, two new books by GIRARD were published in his native country: *De la violence à la divinité* (Paris: Grasset) and *Achever Clausewitz* (Paris: Carnets Nord). *De la violence à la divinité* is, strictly speaking, not a new book: it is a collection of GIRARD's first four essays, from *Mensonge Romantique* to *Le Bouc Émissaire* (*The Scapegoat*). In the preface to this lengthy and well edited anthology GIRARD underlines the continuity of his

thought. He also points to a fresh footnote to *Des Choses Cachées* (*Things Hidden*). In this annotation GIRARD repeats what he first wrote in an article in honour of Father Raymund SCHWAGER, i.e. that his rejection of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and of the term "sacrifice" was a sacrificial error of his. As GIRARD most succinctly summarised the case in *Les Origines de Culture* (2004) the greatest mutation in human history, in his view, is the change from one kind of sacrifice to another, a change "accomplished by Christ, not by humanity that does everything to escape the dilemma and to remain blind to it" (Girard 2004, 128). The paradoxical similarity and abysmal difference between the two kinds of sacrifice comprehends both the unity of humanity's religious history and the Judeo-Christian uniqueness.

René GIRARD's *Achever Clausewitz* is a new and important essay. It is an extended dialogue with Benoît CHANTRE on the acceleration of modern history and its apocalyptic consequences. Benoît CHANTRE is doing a lot to promote GIRARD's thought in the francophone world. This nicely edited new book by his new publishing house *Carnets Nords* (Paris) with a poignant and spectacular picture of atomic violence on the front cover is one of the many fruits of CHANTRE's recent endeavours to make GIRARD's thought known to a wider audience. *Achever Clausewitz* is nevertheless not an easy read, especially for readers who are unacquainted with mimetic theory. The book is full of flashing insights and startling intuitions which, in my view, would profit from a more systematic rendering, something which is of course not easy for an interview format.

To make his point that mimetic violence plays a key role in the acceleration of modern history GIRARD does not consult literary works of genius (although he refers a lot to them in the book) but the famous unfinished treatise *Vom Kriege* ("On War") by war-theorist and Prussian general Karl VON CLAUSEWITZ (1780-1831). CLAUSEWITZ has been a fascinated observer of the Napoleonic wars. At the age of 26 he became one of the 25,000 prisoners captured as the Prussian army was defeated and humiliated by NAPOLEON after the twin battles at Jena and Auerstedt (after only 19 days). CLAUSEWITZ has ever since resented and been fascinated by NAPOLEON. According to GIRARD this resentment and CLAUSEWITZ's search for the most effective kind of war has been the motor behind some of his most interesting insights.

GIRARD first read about CLAUSEWITZ in Raymond ARON's *Penser la guerre*. However much admiration GIRARD has for ARON, he thinks ARON's is too much of a rationalistic reading of CLAUSEWITZ that thinks away the problematic aspects of *On War*. Part of ARON's misreading is due to CLAUSEWITZ himself. He happens to be inconsistent and contradict some of his most terrifying insights. Therefore the title of

GIRARD's book is a play on words. The French word "achever" means at once "to complete" and "to kill". GIRARD wants to complete the unfinished treatise by pointing to its logical conclusions and to "finish off" the rationalistic CLAUSEWITZ. Indeed, CLAUSEWITZ' unfinished treatise is mainly famous for its axiom that "war is the continuation of politics with other means". Yet, the success of this formula conceals the subversive elements of the treatise, according to GIRARD. As a fascinated observer of NAPOLEON's campaigns CLAUSEWITZ rightly understood the nature of modern war. Using such revelatory terms as "duel", "reciprocal action", "escalation to the extremes" etc. CLAUSEWITZ points to an implacable mechanism that has become a law of modern history. Far from containing violence, politics runs behind war.

CLAUSEWITZ is writing at a key moment in western history. The French Revolution had marked the end of the "guerre en dentelles". The Prussian general witnessed how war was breaking free from its sacred and ritualistic origins to become an act of violence that "knows no bounds". As the German general notes: "War is an act of violence, which in its application knows no bounds; as one dictates the law to the other, a reciprocal action ("Wechselwirkung") follows, that as a concept, must lead to an escalation to the extremes." The old sacred laws are dying and now "one dictates the law to the other" in a reciprocal action. Without the sacred and ritualistic boundaries that, according to GIRARD, sprang forth from the scapegoat mechanism, mimetic violence literally knows no bounds any longer. Especially since the Judeo-Christian revelation has made it impossible to recreate the sacred boundaries through collective violence. We may still hate our scapegoats very much, but we can no longer turn them into gods. As Friedrich NIETZSCHE lamented in his *Antichrist*: "Almost two-thousand years and no new god!"

One could read *Achever Clausewitz* as an extended commentary upon the famous gospel-passage in which it is said: "I have not come to bring peace, but war". GIRARD's Christ is not a romantic blue-eyed boy. Taking away our sacred illusions generated by collective violence is a tricky business. If humanity does not accept the Kingdom, if humanity does not choose unconditional forgiveness and "the peace the world cannot give" then total destruction is upon us. In some sense the cross is the pinnacle of the failure of the predication of the Kingdom. The apocalypse will only amplify this failure. At the same time the cross is Christ greatest victory (see also *I See Satan*). The message of a humanity trapped in violence and a God who is only love has never been made as plain as on the Cross. So, the apocalypse will make plain, as nothing else, that *we are violent* and that we need God. GIRARD points to the irony that many thinkers point to the dangers that are upon us, but in the estab-

lished churches one does nearly never hear a sermon on the apocalypse today. According to GIRARD the fundamentalists who thinks that all the violence will come from God "have no sense of humour". We are capable of doing it on our own.

CLAUSEWITZ sees total war as an abstract possibility. Yet CLAUSEWITZ fears (!) that it will never become reality. He fears the abstract possibility inscribed in the nature of war will never become concrete. Here GIRARD refers to a famous quote from BERGSON to which Jean-Pierre DUPUY often refers. BERGSON describes his thoughts after August 4, 1914, after Germany had declared war on France: "In spite of my shock, and my belief that a war would be a catastrophe even in the case of victory, I felt [...] a kind of admiration for the ease with which the shift from the abstract to the concrete had taken place: who would have thought that so awe-inspiring an eventuality could make its entrance into the real with so little fuss? This impression of simplicity outweighed everything."

Clausewitz also reveals another side of GIRARD, as Trevor MERRIL has excellently summarized:

"[Girard plunges into the heart of] of European romanticism—a movement that his past books have tended to hold at arm's length (cf. the "romantic lie"). *Achever Clausewitz* thus reveals another side of René Girard—the chartiste and the historian, and even the repressed romantic ('J'entre dans Clausewitz par Chopin,' he writes on page 193). Having once looked upon Christianity as a panoramic vantage point from which to survey the errors of both archaic religion and modern rationalist utopian projects, Girard has revised his point of view. He no longer seeks to establish a conceptual distinction between 'non-violent' Biblical texts and violent 'historical' Christianity. He now appears to see the errors of historical Christianity [...] as forming an indissoluble part of Christianity as a whole, impossible to elide by means of a theoretical 'third way'. He had already begun this self-revision in an essay on mimetic theory and theology published in *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*. But in this book he voices his conviction with renewed force, presenting us with a humanity trapped in history, faced with the difficult choice between violence and renunciation."

Achever Clausewitz is GIRARD's global warning. Because of the ongoing effacement of archaic sacrificial protections and our unprecedented technical possibilities we are the first human beings capable of destroying the whole planet. The acceleration of unbounded mimetic rivalry (in war and commerce) is having disastrous consequences. Today the confusion between natural/ecological and human disasters described in the apocalyptic passages in the synoptic gospels becomes stunningly intelligible, GIRARD stresses. It is not a small archaic village that is threatened now but our "global village".

Simon de Keukelaere

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