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May 2011

**DISORDER/ORDER
IN HISTORY AND POLITICS**



The Island of Salina

**COV&R Conference: June 15-19, 2011
Salina, Aeolian Islands, Italy**

The 2011 Meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion will be held on June 15th-19th on the amazing island of Salina, Aeolian Islands, in Sicily, Italy. For the first time in the history of COV&R, *The European Center of Studies on Myth and Symbol* and the University of Messina organize the annual conference of the Colloquium in Italy. The program (posted at <http://ww2.unime.it/cover2011> and linked to the COV&R website) currently lists the names of a considerable number of participants. Their number will certainly continue to grow.

The organizers wish to thank the generous co-sponsorship of *Imitatio, Inc.* and of *Tulsa University* as well as the many distinguished scholars who graciously accepted their invitation to address the members of the Colloquium on topics related to the mimetic theory and the conference theme: *Order/Disorder in History and Politics*.

Inspired by René GIRARD's idea of mimesis as it relates to political and historical processes, and following René GIRARD's latest book, *Achever Clausewitz*, the Conference will explore the continuum of disorder and order in history and politics, considering it from an apocalyptic standpoint. In the case of Clausewitz facing Napoleon, the encounter between the imitator and his model turns into an escalation

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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://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/bulletin/>

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**COV&R AT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION ANNUAL MEETING
IN SAN FRANCISCO, CA, NOVEMBER 19-22, 2011**

COV&R will be offering three sessions at the upcoming AAR meeting. Exact days and times of the two sessions that will be on the main program will be determined in late summer. Questions about COV&R sessions at the AAR may be directed to Martha REINEKE, Coordinator of COV&R sessions at the AAR, martha.reineke@uni.edu.

Saturday November 19, 2011 9:00 AM-11:30 AM

Colloquium on Violence and Religion

9:00-10:10 a.m. Book Session: Charles Bellinger's *The Trinitarian Self: The Key to the Puzzle of Violence*

Panelist: Charles BELLINGER, Brite Divinity School;
Responding: Jim FODOR, St. Bonaventure University

10:10-10:20 a.m. Break

10:20-11:30 a.m. Book Session: Anthony Bartlett's *Virtually Christian: How Christ Changes Human Meaning and Makes Creation New* (see review in this Bulletin p. 12 and at http://www.christianspirituality.org/book_reviews/virtual_christian-br.htm)

Panelist: Anthony BARTLETT, Theology & Peace
Responding: Diana PASULKA, University of North Carolina

Colloquium on Violence and Religion Day and time to TBA

Theme: Mimetic Theory and Apocalypse

Martha REINEKE, University of Northern Iowa, Presiding

Kevin MILLER, Huntington University: *The Jewish Mirror: Double Mimesis in the Apocalyptic Narratives of the Christian Identity and Christian Zionist Movements*

William JOHNSEN, Michigan State University: *Achebe's Apocalypse*

Kevin LENEHAN, Catholic Theological College, Melbourne: *Living Faithfully Where Danger Threatens: Christian Discernment in Escalating Times*

Business Meeting to plan 2012 sessions

Co-Sponsored Session with the Religion, Film, and Visual Culture Group

Theme: Film and Mimetic Theory: Probing the depths of contemporary film with René Girard's insights

This session invites consideration of the theological and philosophical perspectives of French thinker René GIRARD when applying these insights to film (especially visual violence). Presenters apply a mimetic theory perspective to select films and interrogate such issues as the visual body as site of mimetic violence; the role of the filmic and narrative double; the social role of symbolic violence; and the role of deception in violent substitution.

Nikolaus WANDINGER, University of Innsbruck, Austria, Presiding

Brian COLLINS, North Carolina State University: *The Sacrificial Ram and the Swan Queen: The Surrogate Victim Mechanism and Mimetic Rivalry in "The Wrestler" and "Black Swan"*

David HUMBERT, Thorneloe University: *Hitchcock and the Scapegoat: A Girardian Reading of "The Wrong Man"*

Una STRODA, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago: *"No Country for Old Men," Rene Girard and Georges Bataille: Can Violence Make Sense?*

Nicholas BOTT, Graduate Theological Union: *"How Can Satan Cast Out Satan?" Violence and the Birth of the Sacred in Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight"*

More information on all these sessions will be in the Fall Bulletin.

Martha Reineke

which inexorably propagates to the whole of Europe. At the end of his analysis, GIRARD comes to the conclusion that there is no difference between chaos and order anymore. Neither political aims, nor objects or victims make the difference. It is only the “escalation to the extremes” which will drive—from now on—the relationship between doubles. Can we agree with René GIRARD that the mimetic clash between enemy brothers will eventually lead to sheer mutual destruction? This is the starting point of the Conference.

Within the framework of current international politics, this critical issue may be further developed. Are we approaching the day when the civilizations influenced by the West will play a global role without further need for a legitimizing model?

Hence a third group of questions, which America as well as Europe are concerned with. Will the West accept a ‘painless decline’? Or will it, otherwise, face a future of mimetic chaos, where more and more violence will be daily news? Can that really be the last word from the West about the mimetic roots of human culture? Of course, it is not our intention to launch some sort of pathetic call for the support of Western culture. We might rather feel challenged to explore the persistency of its roots. In the course of its own mimetic crisis, will the Western culture be able to face up to disorder and rivalry by establishing a model for creative mimesis?

The 2011 Cover Conference will be opened on June 15th in the afternoon with the Raymund SCHWAGER S.J. memorial magistralis lectio, Prof. Francesco MERCADANTE (Università La Sapienza di Roma) reading, after the welcome and opening introduction by Domenica MAZZÙ, director of The European Center of Studies on Myth and Symbol in Messina, and by Maria Stella BARBERI, organizer of the COV&R Conference.

Four sessions are lined up at the Conference. Looking at arts from the viewpoint of mimetic theory, first of all “Realism and Sacrifice in Figurative Arts, Literature and Cinema” will suggest that behind *realism* there is *sacrifice*. It is the *victimary mechanism* which enables the human kind to see *reality as it actually is*. More specifically, within the realm of the Christian tradition the victim becomes the *figura par excellence* of realism in art. Victimary realism shows that the arts bear on a representative and cognitive potential, which Christianity has freed and used in unprecedented

ways. This session will be opened on June 16th with a keynote lecture in which Giuseppe FORNARI (Università di Bergamo), Baldine de SAINT-GIRONS (Université de Nanterre), Giovanni LOMBARDO (Università di Messina) and Riccardo DI GIUSEPPE (Institut catholique de Toulouse) will reflect on this topic. A second session on the afternoon of June 16th will focus on the idea of Europe as a “land opposite”. The panel will be opened with a keynote lecture of Wolfgang PALAVER (University of Innsbruck), and it will focus on the different aspects—historical as well as cultural, religious, political and institutional—which have determined the mimetic nature of the European identity. Its title draws on a literary inspiration: from the very beginning of its history, poets have been moved by the ambiguous position of Europe, as a “desired land”. In this session, the speakers—Giulio M. CHIODI (Università dell’Insubria), Stephen GARDNER (University of Tulsa) and the philosopher Gorazd KOCIJANČIČ—will provide examples of mimesis in the history of the European identity. A session called “Revenge: Get Your Own Back!” will discuss revenge, or *vendetta*, the most perfect, almost didactic, example of mimetic violence. Based on symmetrical imitation, revenge should definitely be the most straightforward way towards human destruction. However, when ritualized, revenge has been able to absorb that very violence, thus turning into a means to maintain social order. We may wonder whether this is the case with today’s international politics and economy. With a plenary session on June 17th, presented by Robert HAMERTON-KELLY (Stanford University), and with the participation of John ALCORN (Trinity College, Hartford), Gianfranco MORMINO (Università Statale di Milano), Fabrizio SCIACCA (Università di Catania) and Lucien SCUBLA (CREA, Paris), the session will aim at better understanding the different aspects of the phenomenon of revenge by investigating the historical and cultural traditions where it is not uncommon.

The fourth session about the Mediterranean Sea will be opened by Magdi Cristiano ALLAM (European Parliament). It has become fashionable to look at the Mediterranean as a sea bound to be a peaceful dwelling for the different peoples living along its coasts. This portrait risks becoming sheer rhetoric, if not balanced by a study of its real history. At the very dawn of civilization, the Mediterranean was a huge and unique labora-

**A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT,
AND A SUMMARY OF THE RECENT SYMPOSIUM ON
“RENÉ GIRARD AND WORLD RELIGIONS” AT THE
GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION IN BERKELEY
(CALIFORNIA)**

tory for experimenting sacrifice. Since then, the Mediterranean area has been a really hellish region. Let us only remember those events not remote from us: two World Wars, the Spanish Civil War, the Cold War, the war in Algeria, the never ending conflict between Arabs and Israelis, the fighting between European and Islamic countries, not to mention the continuing tensions due to oil, immigration, and terrorism. Pretty awkward story for a peaceful place! From the archaic era down to our times, the apparent paradox can only be solved considering that peace can make sense only where conflicts have already taken place.

On Saturday, June 18th the plenary lecture above will be followed by a panel discussion on: “Mimetic theory and the Middle East Crisis”, with the participation of writer and essayist Jean-Claude GUILLEBAUD, about the current and so close Middle East crisis.

On June 17th evening, a special event will take place: celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first publication of *Mensonge romantique and verité romanesque* (1961). A panel discussion, moderated by COV&R’s Sandor GOODHART (Purdue University) will take place, with the participation of Benoît CHANTRE (ARM, Paris), William JOHNSEN (Michigan State University, editor of *Contagion*), Andrew MCKENNA (Loyola University Chicago) and Silvio MORIGI (Università di Siena). Each one of these sessions will be naturally followed by a series of parallel sessions, further exploring and developing the subject. A short debate will follow at the end.

As already experienced in recent years, a high point of the meeting will take place on June 18th, when the winning papers in the Raymund SCHWAGER, S.J. Memorial Essay Contest will be presented in plenary session. In the afternoon there will be an excursion to the Lipari island. Participants will be able to visit the Archeological Museum “Luigi Bernabò Brea” situated at the island’s castle, showing the history and evolution of the Aeolian civilization (Neolithic – 2nd cent. B.C.).

We are confident that the first COV&R Conference in Italy will be remarkable in two ways: for the amazing beauty of its *décor* as well as for its relevant reflection—a kind of sign, in these hard times, at the heart of Mediterranean Sea. *Benvenuti!*

*Maria Stella Barberi and
Pasquale Maria Morabito*

Like many of us I am very much looking forward to our forthcoming conference in Salina, an Aeolian Island north of Sicily. We already tried several times to have a conference in Italy. This time we were successful and are really happy that Maria Stella BARBERI and her team were able to organize this forthcoming meeting on the topic “Disorder/Order in History and Politics”. It will address several important questions that were raised in GIRARD’s recent book *Battling to the End*. The splendid climate on Salina will hopefully help us to work fruitfully on some of the more apocalyptic topics that are challenging our contemporary world and are in need of adequate answers.

Four years ago, Sandor GOODHART raised some important questions concerning the future development of the Colloquium in his farewell letter as the outgoing president of COV&R. Among other challenges to be addressed he raised the question of how mimetic theory relates to the different world religions. I will quote part of Sandor’s letter from May 2007 (*Bulletin* 30):

“The second danger is the idea that Girardianism privileges Christian or Judeo-Christian matrices. It does not. It remains open to other religious orientations within which similar insights may be obtained about the sacrificial practices. Recently, GIRARD has been describing the wealth of understanding regarding sacrifice and commentary about sacrifice within ancient Hindu texts and we have to imagine similar insights in other contexts—if we can only unearth them. Judaism and Christianity may be our way into these understandings, our access to them, but that does not mean other ways—via Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or other religious orientations—are not available and as valuable.”

I agree with Sandy. The question of how mimetic theory relates to other world religions is important and deserves a careful exploration. With the help of *Imitatio* we recently could make some important further steps in this direction. First, the book Sandy mentioned in his letter was just published in English. Bill JOHNSEN started with GIRARD’s book *Sacrifice* (trans. by M. Patallo and D. Dawson Michigan State University Press, 2011) a new and promising series: “Breakthroughs in Mimetic Theory”. Secondly, Richard SCHENK, a Dominican teaching philosophy and

theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and myself convened a symposium on “René Girard and World Religions” in Berkeley that directly addressed the question which Sandy raised four years ago and that benefitted from GIRARD’s recent book that was given to all participants in advance. The symposium convened scholars committed to mimetic theory on the one hand and scholars who are experts on different world religions on the other. It consisted mainly of four sections that tried to contribute to the general topic. A first section (“Situating Girard’s Understanding of Religions”) opened the systematic frame that is necessary to relate mimetic theory to the world religions. *Jean Pierre DUPUY* situated GIRARD’s theory of religion in relation to other main approaches by claiming that it can neither be identified with DAWKINS nor with DURKHEIM unfolding through this its key elements. *James ALISON* complemented this introductory opening from a theological perspective showing how a *via negativa* is important in thinking about God to avoid idolatry. *Robert DALY* who had organized our meeting at Boston College in 2000, which was dedicated to the question of world religions, summarized what we have achieved so far and what are the most important questions still in need of an answer. *Richard SCHENK* related mimetic theory to a scheme developed by the Church fathers and medieval theology according to which we can distinguish three different epochs of world history: *ante legem* (before law), *sub lege* (under law), and *sub gratia* (under grace). Different kinds of men correspond to these three epochs but it is important to note that thinkers like HUGH OF ST. VICTOR (†1141) emphasized that “these three kinds of men have never been wanting at any time from the beginning”. *Anselm Tilman RAMELOW*, like Richard SCHENK a Dominican who teaches philosophy at the GTU in Berkeley, related GIRARD’s theory to HEGEL’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* addressing through this the relationship between mimetic theory and HEGEL’s understanding of the struggle for recognition that, mediated by KOJÈVE and SARTRE, shaped to some degree—and not without important differences, of course—the early stage of GIRARD’s thinking. *John RANIERI*’s paper approached the political philosophy of Eric VOEGELIN, a thinker whose work is also helpful to understand the broader meaning of mimetic theory.

RANIERI showed how strongly VOEGELIN distanced himself from the biblical revelation in the later stage of his work, siding instead with PLATO whose philosophy seemed less dangerous for traditional ways of politics. The evening after this first section was reserved for a key note lecture by *Mark JUERGENSMEYER* (“Girard and Religion in an Age of Terrorism”), who gave an overview of the dangers coming along with certain religious justifications of violence in our contemporary world, however without overlooking the potential for peace that can be found in all the world religions, too.

The second section of the symposium (“Beyond Archaic Religion”) was mainly dedicated to Asian religions like the Vedic traditions, Buddhism and Hinduism. The framework, however, to discuss these religions was a much broader one introduced by *Benoit CHANTRE*, who related mimetic theory to Henri BERGSON’s distinction between static religions connected to closed societies and a dynamic religion leading to an open society. CHANTRE’s paper connected this systematic distinction with GIRARD’s recent reflections on HÖLDERLIN in *Battling to the End*, especially with his understanding of “intimate mediation”. *Brian COLLINS* was the first presenter to reflect on a religious tradition outside the Judeo-Christian realm. He showed how fruitful mimetic theory can be to interpret myth and rites connected to Agni, the Vedic god of fire and the acceptor of sacrifices. *Alexander von ROSPATT* and *Jacob DALTON*, both experts on Buddhism from the UC at Berkeley, related their own understanding of this religion to mimetic theory pointing to similarities and raising several important questions for further discussion. Von ROSPATT, for example, referred to the three roots of evil in the Buddhist tradition: desire, enmity, and delusion. All three of these roots have close affinities to mimetic theory without, however, being identical. Also *Noel SHETH* contributed to a fruitful exchange between his expertise on Hinduism and mimetic theory. He was easily able to show us similarities and underlined the value of GIRARD’s book *Sacrifice*. At the same time he also expressed important questions regarding the general approach of mimetic theory. One of them concerned the distinction between scapegoat and enemy, another focused on the interpretation of certain Indian myths. *Ted PETERS*, also from the GTU, Berkeley, reflected on sacrifice from a

Christian point of view. A most important insight was his distinction between the scapegoats of archaic religions on the one hand and types of scapegoating visible on the political stage of our contemporary world on the other. PETERS's distinction between these two types of scapegoats indirectly highlighted how the influence of the Biblical revelation no longer permits us to divinize our victims and why therefore only demonizing them remains in order to contribute to the escalation of violence in our world of today.

A third section of the meeting ("Girard and Monotheistic Traditions") dealt with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It was a section that addressed emotionally very loaded topics and the relationship between mimetic theory and Islam, of course, was one of the main reasons of the whole gathering. I myself opened this round of papers by claiming that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are justly comprised by the term "Abrahamic religions" because of their common distinction from archaic religion. A first example was the story of the binding of Isaac which marks the overcoming of human sacrifice and is also part of the Koran, which, however, does not name the spared son of Abraham. A second story was the story of Joseph and its rehabilitation of the scapegoat that is part of the biblical and the koranic legacy. A third step showed that the concern for victims has to include reconciliation and an awareness of our own entanglement in a common complex of sins, if the Abrahamic legacy is not to lead to a moralistic terrorism threatening our world today. *Sandor GOODHART's* contribution investigated the underlying religious dimension of GIRARD's mimetic theory showing how it is following Jesus Christ as its model and concluding therefore how much mimetic theory is rooted in the prophetic tradition of Judaism: "I want to make the claim, that Girard's work is fundamentally Jewish, that it is Jewish not in spite of its relation to Christianity, but because of it." *Adam ERICKSEN*, who is working for the Raven Foundation, contributed a paper on the potential for peace that characterizes Islam by focusing on the one hand on *Tawhid*, the oneness of God and its critique of archaic religion, and on the other hand on Islam's anthropology that consists in a desire for the good. He referred to several examples in the Muslim tradition that clearly underlined its potential for peace. Among others ERICKSEN mentioned the renowned Muslim paci-

fist Abdul Ghaffar KHAN, who joined GANDHI's nonviolent struggle against Great Britain by claiming to follow Muhammad's practice of non-violence during his time in Mecca. This section was concluded by *Rüdiger LOHLKER*, an Islam scholar from Vienna and a leading expert on online jihadism. It was important to have LOHLKER in this section because the problem of jihadist violence should not be evaded at this symposium at all. LOHLKER clearly showed the dangers coming along with jihadism, telling us at the same time, however, how modern and at the same time how separated from the Muslim tradition this movement is in fact. To underline his point about the modernity of jihadism he even used the term "humanitarian terrorism".

The fourth and final section ("Religion in and after an Age of Criticism") discussed the relationship of mimetic theory and world religions against the background of contemporary criticism. *Otto KALLSCHEUER* started this section by discussing mimetic theory's relation to secularization. By drawing on contemporary approaches by Charles TAYLOR and José CASANOVA he convincingly claimed that GIRARD is not a secularist thinker but that his theory has been unfolded under the conditions of the secular age. According to KALLSCHEUER, mimetic theory is a useful methodology even if it could only be applied to a certain variety of cases and not to all of them. He also emphasized its ethical message that is related to its concern for victims and hinted at some reservations concerning its apocalyptic theology of history. *Jeremiah ALBERG* discussed GIRARD's mimetic theory in comparison to ROUSSEAU, who has shaped so much of our modern way of thinking. By focusing especially on ROUSSEAU's critique of MOLIÈRE, he showed that ROUSSEAU's problem is that he cannot laugh. With the help of mimetic theory ALBERG was able to illustrate how this lack leads back to ROUSSEAU's rejection of original sin. ALBERG's inspiring paper indirectly raised the question of whether modern terrorism is not closer to ROUSSEAU's humourless defence of virtue than to archaic religion. *Ann ASTELL's* approach to discuss the relationship between mimetic theory and world religions took Simone WEIL's book *Need for Roots* as a starting point. She related WEIL's siding with Greek philosophy with Pope BENEDICT's defence of Hellenistic rationality expressed in his Regensburg speech in 2006. At least in his book *Battling to*

the End GIRARD also expresses a real concern about dangers following the disappearance of Greek reason. According to ASTELL, the Dehellenization is in WEIL's eyes a form of uprootedness that breeds idolatry. Strong local roots, on the contrary, are the basis for hospitality and global exchange. WEIL understood that children should not be brought up in a narrow Christianity but should be enriched by the treasures of non-Christian civilizations. A laicist education would be the worst, because it would deprive children even of Christianity. The final paper was given by *Martha REINEKE*, who is a feminist critic and a long-time Girardian. She courageously showed that scholars committed to mimetic theory are fully able to engage critically with GIRARD's theory, questioning especially *Battling to the End*, which is in her eyes too strongly leaning towards dualism and a Hölderlinian quietism. Taking KRISTEVA's reading of PROUST and of IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA as a counterpoint she emphasized the importance of sensual experience as an antidote against dualism and showed how strongly the young GIRARD also expressed such an attitude. *Robert HAMERTON-KELLY* concluded the symposium by summarizing its achievements and the still unanswered questions. He especially underlined the importance of the epistemology of the victim that has to be unfolded even if the academy takes a critical stance against it. And he also emphasized that mimetic theory was an empirical and natural science. The papers of this symposium will be published soon, helping us to take them as an important step for an even deeper inquiry of mimetic theory's understanding of world religions. I think the symposium in Berkeley has shown us that an exchange between mimetic theory and experts on different world religions can really be fruitful. I was glad to meet scholars from outside the camp of mimetic theory engaging lively, critically, and constructively with us. And I was also glad to see that the group of people dedicated to mimetic theory is becoming more mature by being less self-defensive and more able to open up to approaches from outside its own camp.

Wolfgang Palaver

**MUSINGS FROM THE
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

A student here at Princeton Theological Seminary, W. Heath PEARSON, contacted me by e-mail

recently to ask if we could meet to talk about the work of René GIRARD. He told me that he had been reading GIRARD's work with a passion, finding in it the vital link he's been seeking between contemporary issues, lived experience, and his religious faith. Earlier in the year Heath had been present at a lunch I had had with a circle of four or five students (including Isak DEVRIES, who had participated in the summer school in Mimetic Theory in The Netherlands, and Arin FISHER, a former student of Curtis GRUENLER at Hope College). Our simple luncheon together in the seminary cafeteria was an object lesson in the effectiveness of the international "Girardian network" that continues to bring people together who share an interest in the mimetic theory.

I tell this story (like so many others could tell) because the spiritual hunger so evident in these students touched me and has served as an incentive to me personally to continue to serve our common work as a Colloquium. We need and want to keep the conversation about mimetic theory going, so that we can welcome into it a young generation eager to discover the truth of things "hidden since the foundation of the world." Paradoxically, because the mimetic theory has remained somewhat marginalized within the academy (even while influencing it tremendously), its appeal to the young people like Heath—who read GIRARD's books voraciously on their own, in stolen hours during the night—is perhaps all the greater.

Still, one of our goals as a Colloquium—and in this regard, *Imitatio* has proven a tremendous support—is to encourage the study of mimetic theory in recognized academic settings; to make it easier for young academics to find established scholars, conversant with mimetic theory, with whom they can study; to organize opportunities for papers to be delivered on GIRARD's work at academic meetings; and to keep venues open for scholarly publications using the mimetic theory (publication being, of course, a crucial requirement for tenure at most academic institutions).

Here at Princeton's Firestone Library, two copies of Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* are being held on reserve this semester, a sure sign that it is required reading for at least one course currently offered at the University. Fifty years after its first publication, that important work in literary theory and criticism is being celebrated—thanks to *Imitatio* and the efforts of

many people, including COV&R members—in an impressive series of international symposia being held in 2011 at Stanford University (April 14-15), Cambridge University (May 6), Berlin’s Institute for Cultural Inquiry (June 10-11), São Paulo (Sept. 1-3), and Yale University (October 14). The journal *Religion and Literature* (published at the University of Notre Dame) is also planning to publish a forum (a collection of short essays, co-edited by Justin JACKSON of Hillsdale College and me) on “*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel Fifty Years Later: The Religious Dimension.*” Taken together, these papers and discussions attest to the enduring value of GIRARD’s groundbreaking study of the novel as a mirror of mimetic relations.

If these symposia call renewed attention to the first phase of GIRARD’s career-long inquiry into humanity’s mimetic desire and its social and cultural consequences, the symposium on “Girard and World Religions,” to be held April 14-16 at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, focuses renewed interest on the second (anthropological) and third (Biblical and theological) stages. It marks the publication (2011) of *Sacrifice* by Michigan State University Press, the English translation by Matthew PATILLO and David DAWSON of GIRARD’s 2002 lectures on the Vedic literature of ancient India.

In the meantime, we as a Colloquium prepare for our annual meeting, which is to be held in beautiful Salina, Sicily, June 15-18. The theme “Disorder / Order in History and Politics” and the conference’s subthemes could not be more timely, given the recent political turmoil in the countries around the Mediterranean. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Ann W. Astell

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

COV&R Activities at the AAR-Meeting 2010 in Atlanta, GA

Again Martha REINEKE had put together a rich participation of COV&R at the AAR, both in our own sessions and in the joint session with the Psychology, Culture and Religion Group.

The traditional Saturday morning COV&R session was dedicated to John PAHL’s book *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence*. The author gave a very accessible overview of its theses. The book is very critical

about violence exerted by America and justified by religious language. PAHL basically argued that American civil religion is a hybrid, partly borrowed from Christianity that places sacrifice on others to divert attention from problems at home. He claimed that this characterized American identity in history and was most visible in the doctrines of millennialism, manifest destiny, and the idea of America as a redeemer nation that was innocent of domination.

After defining its key terms and introducing the main theorists it builds upon—namely GIRARD, APPLEBY, JUERGENSMEYER, and SCHWARTZ—in chapter 1, the book argues for its positions in chs. 2-5 through case studies from U.S.-history in reverse chronological order, starting with youth culture and recent cinematic art, through slavery, the discrimination of women to executions performed in Boston at the time of the early Puritans. All these events are seen by PAHL as types of a sacrificing religion.

The ensuing discussion, initiated by respondents Kathryn LOFTON and Michael HARDIN, centered on questions of methodology, as well as the question of whether there is an innocent religion at all.

The joint session with the Psychology, Culture and Religion Group gave James W. JONES another opportunity to present his ideas on the psychology of religious terrorism (he had done so already at our meeting at Notre Dame University, although my impression was that he was almost overshadowed there by his vociferous respondent, which made his presence at the AAR a welcome second chance; this time, however, JONES was respondent to Kirk A. BINGAMAN, Naomi R. GOLDENBERG, and Martha J. REINEKE talking about his book).

BINGAMAN agreed with JONES that religion had the greatest power to harm or heal, divide or unite. He read Jones as an encouragement to live in the complexity of that. Peace requires the end of any theology that sees the divine as an overpowering, violent, subjugating force.

While GOLDENBERG professed to differ with JONES about what the agenda of religious studies should be, she saw his book as a very important explicit engagement with contemporary events grown out of JONES’s work as a theorist and analyst. GOLDENBERG, however, saw problems in JONES’s use of the terms “religion” and “sacred”. In her view, these remain unclear throughout the

book. While the difficulties in defining “religion” are acknowledged at the outset, this is forgotten later on. Therefore JONES’s statements about religion are too generalized.

Martha REINEKE argued that Lacanian abject ancient Fathers should be taken into account. She pointed to the fact that JONES draws on GIRARD’s model of scapegoating and shows that Muslims today are becoming a focus for scapegoating. JONES inserts a wedge into the reader’s propensity for scapegoating: there is no innocent mimetic desire; even the desire for peace can deteriorate into violence. Thus JONES elicits from the readers a recognition of their own mimetic entanglement. REINEKE argued that the analytic promise of the book will be enhanced by more study of the terrorists’ God-representation. She drew attention to the tension between the fact that the 9/11 terrorist Atta hoped for a mystical unity with God, while JONES sketches the God-representation of terrorists only as punitive and wrathful. For further analysis REINEKE referred to several other authors, among them R. Stein (whose book is reviewed in this Bulletin on p. 18).

In his response J. JONES acknowledged that the panelists had placed his book in three different discourses. He responded particularly to GOLDENBERG’s objection to his use of “religion”, arguing that using a general term does not commit one to hypostasizing it. The same could be said about terms like “political” or “psychology”. He emphasized that religious terrorists from different religions probably had more in common with each other than with their non-terrorist co-religionists.

The third COV&R-sponsored event suffered somewhat from bad luck. One scheduled speaker could not attend due to illness, while another had simply canceled the promised appearance. Nathan R. B. LOEWEN and his paper on *Religions as contingent variables in social conflict* remained from the original program and long-time COV&R member Vern Neufeld REDEKOP agreed on short notice to act as a substitute with a paper on *The mimetic dimensions of economic development based on reconciliation in a post-colonial environment*. Since the session had been scheduled for three speakers, there was plenty of time for discussion after the two papers.

A business meeting of COV&R at the AAR did some quite fruitful brain-storming and planning for the next AAR conference in San Fran-

cisco. The results of these deliberations can be seen in the short pre-view on p. 2, and there will be more information in the Fall Bulletin. I do think that, especially thanks to Martha REINEKE, COV&R’s engagement at the AAR is making splendid progress.

Nikolaus Wandinger

**Violence, Desire, and the Sacred
Australian Girard Seminar; Inaugural Conference; 14-15 January 2011;
St Paul’s College, University of Sydney**

The month of January is mid-summer on the Australian continent, so while our friends in the northern hemisphere shivered under a blanket of snow, the inaugural gathering of the Australian Girard Seminar was called to order under bright blue skies and in soaring temperatures. St Paul’s College in the University of Sydney proved to be an elegant and relaxed setting for the Conference. The warm welcome and generous hospitality, coordinated by the College Warden Dr. Ivan HEAD, enabled participants to connect with friends old and new, to learn of each other’s interests and projects, and deepen our understanding of Girardian theory during conversations over the dinner table and in coffee breaks.

Around forty participants registered for the conference program, and these were joined by a public audience for the Conference Address given by keynote speaker, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang PALAVER, President of COV&R. Wolfgang addressed the topic ‘Religion and Violence: The Perspective of Mimetic Theory.’ As COV&R members know so well, Wolfgang’s creative use of Girardian insights and his well-honed skills as a teacher and communicator make him an ideal choice for this important opening address. Wolfgang drew on all the resources of René GIRARD’s thought in order to examine the dynamics of inter-personal and international violence, the responses and responsibilities of the Abrahamic religious traditions in the contexts of violence, and the invitation to the creative renunciation of mimetic rivalry offered by those faith traditions. A response to the Conference Address was given by Prof. Jeremiah ALBERG of the International Christian University (Japan), pointing to the importance of positive, non-violent mimesis in the structuring of human desire. Our two international guests admirably set the tone for the Australian

Girard Seminar in both scholarly quality and social relevance.

Papers given at the conference ranged over a variety of issues: evolutionary psychology, literary figures such as Flannery O'CONNOR and Salman RUSHDIE, biblical and theological applications of Girardian themes, the English Reformation, human rights theory, and a critique of the Girardian understanding of desire and agency. Papers were delivered in three sessions under the headings 'Developments and Critiques of Mimetic Theory' (Rev. Canon Dr. Scott COWDELL, Prof. Neil ORMEROD, Dr. Joel HODGE), 'Mimetic Theory, Literature and The Bible: Deceit, Desire and the Novel's 50th Anniversary' (Prof. Vijay MISHRA, Prof. Jeremiah ALBERG, Dr. Drasko DOZDAR), and 'Applications of Mimetic Theory' (Rev. Can. Dr. Ivan HEAD, Dr. Peter STORK, Dr. Alex REICHEL). Prior to the opening of the Conference, a specialist seminar chaired by Scott COWDELL focussed on key issues identified by participants in the interpretation and application of Girardian theory.

Taken together, the papers and specialist seminar highlighted the level of interest and engagement with Girardian thought in various Australian contexts. The public discussion sessions and informal conversations underlined the diverse nature of participants' use of Girard's work: in academic scholarship, as a resource for Christian ministry and preaching, as a tool for critical analysis and social commitment, as a guide in personal and communal spiritual living. The need for such a meeting place of ideas, interests, research and social commitments was well demonstrated over these two days, and opportunities were taken to alert the wider public to the important themes of the Conference through the national and ecclesiastical media.

Registered participants attended a business meeting towards the close of the Conference. A proposal to formalise membership in the Australian Girard Seminar (AGS) was heartily accepted. Office-bearers were decided: Assoc. Prof. Scott COWDELL (Charles Sturt University) – President, Dr. Chris FLEMING (University of Western Sydney) – Vice-President, Dr. Joel HODGE (Australian Catholic University) – Treasurer and Secretary. An initiative was taken to develop local reading groups to further understand and disseminate Girardian themes and perspectives. Groups in a number of Australian cities have already be-

gun to meet. Plans are underway for a second AGS Conference in January 2012. Participants were also encouraged to consider membership of COV&R and attending the annual conference.

This inaugural AGS Conference was brought about through the excellent organisational work of Scott COWDELL, Joel HODGE and Chris FLEMING. The AGS is very grateful to *Imitatio* for financial support which made the conference and specialist seminar possible. Organisational and administrative support was provided by Charles Sturt University and the University of Western Sydney. The AGS is also very grateful to Warden Ivan HEAD and St Paul's College in the University of Sydney.

Rev. Dr Kevin Lenehan,
Melbourne College of Divinity

BOOK REVIEWS

Barberi, M.S. (ed.): *Catastrofi generative. Mito, storia, letteratura.* Transeuropa, Massa (2010), 369 pp.; ISBN: 8875800693; € 24.90

The book edited by Maria Stella BARBERI, for *Transeuropa* 2010, gathers contributions by scholars who participated in the International Conference in April 2009, organized by the European Centre for the Study of Myth and Symbol (University of Messina) entitled "*Katastrofé tra ordine culturale e ordine naturale.*" In fact, both the symposium and the volume presented here, resulted from the questions raised by the editor during consultations at the city's anniversary of the catastrophic earthquake of December 28, 1908. The century-old history of the post-earthquake city of Messina is that of an "uneventful" *polis*. It is therefore not unreasonable, says BARBERI, as a pioneer of Girardian studies in Italy, to reread this earthquake in light of the great insight by René GIRARD on "sacrifice"; for sacrifice is the event generator of culture. This stands as an "almost nothing" loaded with meaning, which is opposed to the "nothingness" of natural disruptions that leaves "prohibitions and lack of words." The sacrificial event is the small key by which socially disruptive trends and the leveling nature of the event will reverse their effects.

Therefore, the attention of the book focuses on the forces at work in a catastrophe. The anthology of critical contributions in this volume are not studies of the ontology of a catastrophe, nor a

phenomenology of the event, rather it is a careful and thorough analysis of those forces that act and fill the history of mankind, with its cosmologies and myths regarding origins.

The power of all the “leveling” events is the same: whether it destroys the two communities on the Homeric Strait at the beginning of the twentieth century, or when every social order established in the world is in check. Indeed, the chaos of the natural order is always accompanied by the upheaval of social order. So the images of the end of life and of the world multiply just as those linked to catastrophic events—like the ancestral fear of crying “wolf”—from Aesop to La Fontaine—that have generated our myths. Disaster launches in the thoughts and fears of mankind the challenge of creation and the maintenance of social order. In the Sicilian homeground—the genitor of the most prolific of myths—fourteen of the most authoritative scholars of the mimetic theory responded to this challenge. This review will cover only the four major contributions. GIRARD himself organized the questions within which the dynamics of this debate unfolded. The father of mimetic theory proposed another stage of his masterly analysis of the concept of *mimesis*, in *Mythos und Gegenmythos: Zu Kleists Das Erdbeben in Chili*, 1985, now published in Italian.

The Girardian axiom’s distinctive feature of imitation is “desire” or “more precisely, the desire for appropriation.” But now the desire for appropriation takes on a dimension of conflict that arises because of the rivalry in humans, one that triggers a process which quickly leads to “revenge without limits” (GIRARD claims that rivalry among animals, in the process of appropriating any object, develops into *Prestige-Rivalität*, that is a rivalry of prestige). The exclusion of this negative aspect of human behavior from the Platonic-Aristotelian concept of mimesis represents for GIRARD the limit of classical mimesis and all its applications, particularly in the production of literary works. This finding, on the literary level, has allowed GIRARD to distinguish between works that lack mimetic desire and works of “mimetic revelation”. Dramas and novels of our greatest literature and greatest masterpieces of antiquity, according to GIRARD, contain an “objective element of superiority”, that consists in the complex scope of mimetic behavior, or shows the two aspects of mimesis: i.e. the disintegration and the unity of community. One wonders then,

GIRARD points out, “how can the conflicting and destructive mimesis change in the mimesis of education and learning which is essential for the creation and continuation of human society?”

HAMERTON-KELLY’s essay analyzes the relationship between nature and culture, questioning “if there exist a moral order in history.” Through a concise summary of the most salient points of mimetic theory, the author states that the myth of moralism (in which natural disasters in human history affect only the corrupt and preserve those that are pure) is demystified by the Gospel. From the books of Daniel, Job, Proverbs, Psalms, and up to Ecclesiastes, there emerges a perfect description of a ruthless “immorality” of a catastrophe (p. 27), “without sense, driven by time and chance”. Several times this goes against the words of Jesus. There are two passages in particular that are examined by HAMERTON-KELLY: Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-3. The words of Jesus reveal the total vulnerability of human beings to catastrophes and the impossibility of knowing the nature of divine causality. It is in the exercise of freedom by conversion of their actions that HAMERTON-KELLY puts the true relationship between nature and culture. This is underlined by Jesus in Luke 13:5 with the words “unless you repent.”

The essay of Francesco MERCADANTE studies the work of Giovanni VERGA. He offers an example of the thesis upheld by HAMERTON-KELLY through the reading of the Verganian catastrophe. MERCADANTE outlines the ruthless immorality of nature, of senselessness, of death. He contrasts this with the iron will of the Verganian victims by which they are sustained. Through the immensity of moral nobility that characterizes the protagonists of the Verganian opera, there develops a Homeric psychology which is almost evangelical, capable of confronting the fury of the elements.

Maria Stella BARBERI studies the relationship between the political theology of DANTE’s *Divine Comedy* and *De Monarchia*. She analyzes the earthquake in XII *Inferno* in which “He (...) who took from Dis the great spoils” saved man from the chaos of violence. The catastrophic event of the earthquake in *Inferno* takes on a ritual symbolic meaning that appropriates a place and converts it to a new beginning. For Barberi this is the “revenge of God”. In the symbolic religious rituals, man restrains his chaos. In the sac-

rificial space of man, God sacrifices Himself as a model *par excellence*, by learning from man the imitator, how to imitate and be imitated. This self-sacrifice of God is a salvific event for man because it saves him from the violence of chaos and his attempts to find order; it is also a salvific event of God because it becomes a “revenge” that generates catastrophe but brings Resurrection. BARBERI understands the revenge of God in DANTE’s *De Monarchia*, in the light of Medieval Latin *vindicare*, meaning “to reclaim” and not “to punish”.

Wolfgang PALAVER’s essay, regarding the apocalyptic challenge of our times, treats GIRARD’s Christian vision of history from *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* up to *Achever Clausewitz*. Palaver studies the Girardian apocalyptic in the light of the Christian virtue of hope. This is because GIRARD himself removes the apocalyptic from fundamentalism and clarifies that the apocalyptic is not a “war of God against man”, but rather a purely human threat. GIRARD is apocalyptic because he takes seriously the apocalyptic prophecies of the gospels.

All future catastrophes are possible. PALAVER quotes DUPUY that even if man knows that a catastrophe is imminent and is capable of taking measures against it, in the end, he will not believe it will actually happen. Given the theological dimension of hope, PALAVER explains why: “we must pass from the metaphysical *time-as-is* to a metaphysical *time-projected*.” To allow humanity to postpone the actualization of future catastrophes, it is necessary to project oneself into the future in order to face these probable catastrophes. Thus PALAVER concludes with the words of Jorge Louis BORGES: “the future is inevitable, but it may not happen.”

Agostino Guccione PhD

Bartlett, Anthony W.: *Virtually Christian: How Christ Changes Human Meaning and Makes Creation New*

(Winchester & Washington: O Books, 2011; 290 pp); ISBN 9781846943966; \$ 24.95

Virtually Christian is a book that encounters the reader as a theological burst of light and energy, appealing to and challenging the mind and imagination in a call for Christian renewal in these times that are the most secularist and yet also the most apocalyptic of worlds. Tony BARTLETT proposes an evangelistic theology for a new era,

a new cultural situation. We are in the midst of a cybernetic revolution and significant new developments in brain science, specifically the discovery of mirror neurons. At the same time there is crisis after crisis of political polarization and conflict and violence. In this whirlpool of problems and possibilities Tony BARTLETT affirms the contemporary relevance of Christ with us, in us, and among us. This is, in other words, a serious and important updating of the affirmation of the Incarnation, as it has been called in traditional theology, God coming in the flesh as a human being. But BARTLETT never uses that word; rather he celebrates its intrinsic meaning as he discerns the figure of Jesus Christ rooted in our contemporary universe of meaning. This is not simply a divine presence: it is a divine-human presence, in keeping with the witness of the New Testament gospels to Jesus of Nazareth. For Jesus was about the earth, about compassion and love for friends (he weeps when he hears of Lazarus’ death) and enemies (“love your enemies,” he says, and he forgives those who torture and kill him).

The presence of the Christ in our midst in contemporary media, in virtual realities, in the discoveries of science, in time and history, is a profound opening to the divine as love. BARTLETT argues this with vigor and felicity, intimating that we have every right to give a modern apology in the classical sense of an answer, a word in response to contemporary questions and dilemmas because the subject of this discourse is One who not only informs the “western” culture that has now spread everywhere on the planet, but also is the primary agent, the divine sign, which informs its entire evolution. As such, BARTLETT’s response to the cultural situation is a pioneering presentation, a breakthrough in theology which is fitting and seminal for a new millennium.

But of course, all this has to be demonstrated, not simply asserted. The title of the book indicates that a concept of the “virtual” is one of the keys to understanding what BARTLETT wants to say. He is using virtual in the sense of strength or power, as indicated in its Latin root, *virtus*, strength. The virtual is what has the force of reality, even though it is not fully in effect or realized. It does not refer to the unreal or inauthentic; it is what is still provisional. “Virtually Christian” means “provisionally Christian,” not yet fully realized or completed.

The idea or category of the virtual has explicitly emerged out of two phenomena in the modern world: the growing awareness of the central importance of *signs* in human culture and a revolutionary change in communications which is associated with words such as “digital” and “cybernetic.” The sign may be construed as an indicator of meaning. It could be a word, a picture, a gesture, a sound, or some combination of these in a totality of occurrences that we name “event.” Human beings have always existed within some sort of sign system. Even most thinkers who trust in the overall dependability of language accept that in the modern age we must acknowledge that signs correspond proximately, but certainly not exactly, to that which they point or express. In other words, we human beings always have lived in a world which is virtual. As BARTLETT says, “To be inside a sign is to be human” (24). So, he concludes, “Virtuality can stand ... for the way human beings have always existed within some kind of sign system” (24).

“Cybernetic” is an adjective derived from cybernetics, which comes from a Greek word meaning to steer. It is the science of human control in the world through communication systems, beginning with the brain and nervous system but more well known to most of us as complex electronic systems in computer technology and the extraordinary phenomenon of the Internet. This cybernetic world, as well as important antecedents in symbolic communications, such as motion pictures, is a world of virtuality, but the only real departure from the past is the great increase in the intensity of focus on the virtuality of human language and culture.

The author discerns that “for the first time, Christianity is coming into its authentic character as *virtual*” (21). The message of the Christian gospel has always been that the Christian lives “between the times,” between the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the fulfillment and restoration of all things in the new divine community (the kingdom of God). Neither the Christian nor Christianity ever attains to perfection in the present; they are a virtual form of the yet to be completed reality. This virtuality potentially intensifies eschatological consciousness as we become aware of what we are (yet to become what we are) and what we are not (not yet what we are).

The more contemporary meaning connected to signs deepens the experience of the “not yet,” of the reality provisionally realized. The human interaction with the universe always produces a swirl of images, but today there is an exponential increase in the means or media of image production. This world of images both mobilizes and diffuses our sense of reality and thus we have become ever more conscious of the mobile or provisional character of reality. BARTLETT’s insight and key contention is that in our world of virtuality the sign of Christ is both the cause of this cultural movement and the goal yet to be realized in and through this sign. The sign of Christ impels us toward its own horizon, its goal a transformed, nonviolent humanity.

So Christ is at the center of this virtual revolution. He is the sign that works as the central dynamic of the sign system transmitted through Christianity and Western culture generally. To set forth his understanding of Christ as central sign, not only for Christianity but at the roots and depths of Western culture, BARTLETT turns to René GIRARD’s theory of desire, violence, and cultural origins.

In the evolutionary process of becoming human beings as we know them (*homo sapiens*), our hominid ancestors were developing a neural system in which animal instincts were becoming much weaker and brain development was becoming more and more capable of coping with the world through imitation of others. This is the authentic meaning of desire from the standpoint of GIRARD’s mimetic theory. Although needs, drives or the residue of animal instinct, and variation in genetic inheritance all enter into desire, desire in this sense is formed from what any human learns through imitation of others. Thus, for example, from birth humans are driven to consume food like other living creatures, but *what* they desire to eat and *how* they desire to eat has to be learned. The first learning is primarily imitative or mimetic. Even from birth infants begin to imitate parents and siblings and others around them. From the time infants and toddlers begin playing with others, the desirability of a toy will often depend on whether the playmate has it. This is not an appetite, drive, or instinct—it is *desire*.

This form of desire, which other creatures don’t share except perhaps some primates to a certain degree, is the necessary condition of human violence. The non-conscious process of desiring what another, the subject’s model, desires can and often does lead to conflict if the subject tries to take the desired object from the model, or if two or more subjects quarrel over a prize that they covet because they all have the same model. (This prize or desired object could be prestige, or some sort of power, or some object of property.) GIRARD postulates that at given times in various parts of the world,

different groupings of hominids found themselves in a situation fraught with danger because some problem or misfortune—famine, disease, loss of group leader or leaders to death or battle—brought about panic. Panic is essentially a state in which everyone imitates everyone else. If that state or condition is fear or anger, it can lead to the chaos of all against all as mimetic contagion seizes the group. What happened to resolve this was the accidental discovery that convergence upon one member of the group, the victim, united the group against this unfortunate. Thus emerged, if only for a short period, group unity. Repeating the lynching of a victim was something that worked in circumstances felt to be desperate. Over long periods of time this resort to violence became ritualized and sanctified, which is why variations on sacrifice and scapegoating are all-pervasive in human cultures.

The victim then becomes the fountainhead of meaning, the point of differentiation distinguishing “us here who are all right, as we should be” and “that one there who is the cause of our misfortune.” The primordial victim, in other words, is the *first sign*. BARTLETT asks what the consequences would be “if a sign should arise from the midst of history reproducing the contours of that original violent phenomenon but actually as a gesture of infinite forgiving love?” (32-33). Would it not become an event implanted in many who see and hear and stir up a primal memory of what seems to be the most “natural” thing in the world to do: offer a human or animal victim in sacrifice? *But this time the memory of it would be astonishingly, stunningly, free of violence*. This is the Sign, the Word, that has now become the gravitational center of our virtual humanity.

Jesus Christ as the revelatory and revolutionary sign is the transformational personal reality of love, compassion, and forgiveness. BARTLETT, drawing upon a term from physics, calls him the “photon of compassion” in our midst. The photon is a particle of light characterized by energy and momentum. Christ is “the elementary particle or principle by which light shines at all, by which this universe of vision was set in motion in the first place” (48).

In spite of the author’s dependence on GIRARD in the foundations of his thought, he sees a great deficiency in the work and perspective of his mentor. “Girard has produced a structural genealogy of violence; he lacks an equivalent genealogy of compassion” (34-35). BARTLETT holds that his argument “is both more radical and more hopeful than Girard’s” (35). Many Girardians may find this comparison exaggerated, for GIRARD speaks and writes frequently of the positive

mimesis of love and forgiveness. But BARTLETT is correct that the great mimetic theorist has never offered a genealogy of love, compassion, and forgiveness. Moreover, in his latest book, *Battling to the End*, GIRARD indicates his fear that Christianity may be a historical failure and expresses deep pessimism about the future of the human race. This is far removed from BARTLETT’s message of transformation and hope.

Indeed, BARTLETT argues that Christ is changing the nature of the sign and our sign systems. He seeks to demonstrate this by reference to the emergence of courtly love in the 11th and 12th centuries, to the science of brain and mind, and most importantly to the Christological formula of the Creed of Chalcedon. I cannot discuss these at length here but I will set out very briefly what these are about.

Courtly love in the early second millennium might seem a strange subject to bring into this theological essay, but BARTLETT observes that it stems from Christian influence on the notion of desire and is an important example of the virtual. Courtly love was indeed a matter of romantic feeling, subject to the temptations of hypocrisy and seduction. However, its valid aspect was the mental and emotional stance of holding the object of love “on the virtual level—desire both released and held in abeyance” (37).

The science of the human brain and mind has to do especially with the research beginning in the later decades of the 20th century that resulted in the discovery of nerve cells in the brain which become activated not only when the individual performs certain goal-directed actions, but also when he or she sees another individual perform that action. They are the neurological basis of imitation. BARTLETT views this significant discovery as the confirmation of TEILHARD DE CHARDIN’s thesis “that the nervous system as exterior system carries with it an ‘interior’ psychic state which is as much a part of biological evolution as the exterior” (103). There is, then, in human evolution a neurological basis for concluding that the self is the part of the other and vice-versa. This is of capital importance for Christology and the nature of religious experience. To locate the basis of this claim we must go back to the fifth century of the Common Era.

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE another attempt was made to clarify an aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity—a doctrine that many

moderns, Christian and non-Christian, find incomprehensible and outdated. However that may be, its effect has reached out through Christianity far beyond the technical scholarship practiced by theologians. In the affirmation that the divine nature and human nature of Christ form “one person and subsistence” (*hypostasis*), a major transformation occurred in religious thought and feeling. “Hypostasis” in the Chalcedonian context means a *person*, one having an independent existence and in relationship with another person. It is the key to Jesus’ divine-human identity (135-136). It has to do not only with the identity of Jesus as the Christ but also with those who are informed and illuminated by him as the “photon of compassion” in the world. Here, affirms BARTLETT, “there was born the modern category of person, something other than a nature or thing but of truly infinite worth” (136). Now in the present historical moment we can conceive of the material and the spiritual as interrelated and interfused, and that human evolution may be—indeed, must be—a theological datum. It is possible now to think that the discovery of mirror neurons, for example, is what Christ has been leading us to understand: in manifold ways we are all part of one another. So to want what the other person wants means that “we both occupy the selfsame ‘neural’ space of desire. Or should we say the same hypostasis?” (146). We all belong to the same Hypostasis—the same reality of Person. Sharing the same neural space and pathway is the biological basis of sympathy, empathy, and compassion. Of this Christ is the Sign.

I have mentioned production of motion pictures as an antecedent of our new cybernetic world of virtuality. BARTLETT’s extensive discussion of film in chapter three is in one sense much less weighty than Chalcedon, courtly love, and brain science in the impact of Christ as Sign on our neural pathways. However, it is remarkable that a Christ figure appears in so many films. It must be an indication of something that will not go away, indeed something for which there is a longing in popular culture. The author refers to almost three dozen movies, with particular focus on a half dozen or so. Any great detail on his film commentary in this review essay would push it to inordinate length. Let it suffice to give two examples. The *Matrix* trilogy of films moves eventually to the defeat of the hero Neo, who does not resist and is cloned by Smith, who becomes pure

virus, a *diabolos* or devil. But “Neo’s body is embraced by a form of light, perhaps the Source. From the center of Neo’s physical frame the dark shape of a cross then forms the core of a brilliant emanation of light” (69). After Neo’s body assumes the T-shape of the Crucified, “all the cloned Smiths fill with light and explode Back with the machines the godlike figurehead says, ‘It is done’” (69). The latter is an obvious quotation of John 19:30 where Jesus utters his last words on the cross: “It is finished.”

The other example is a surprising and remarkable defense of Mel GIBSON’s film, *The Passion of the Christ*. If one brackets GIBSON’s antics and attitudes in his personal life, the screen presentation may be seen as having great integrity as a pure sacrificial crisis in which Jesus’ attitude is one of pure nonviolence and forgiveness. The film does not permit us “to fantasize revenge on the perpetrators. . . .” (83). BARTLETT speculates that this forgiveness is experienced as an inconceivable abyss by many spectators, so in casting around for someone to condemn we turn to the person who put it up there before us, Mel GIBSON.

What BARTLETT seeks above all to argue in this foray into cinema is exemplified in his discussion of the *Matrix* movies, and particularly the third one, *Matrix Revolutions*: “The movie should be read as a seminal contribution to a theology of Christian virtuality—*meaning that the Christian tradition is a radical shift in the human sign system*, simultaneously showing the violence that lurks deeply within it and possibility of something wonderfully new and true beneath that again” (71; italics mine).

The penultimate chapter, “A Virtual Church,” will be extremely important for any reader who becomes engaged with this book. BARTLETT speaks of his longing to get this chapter because “it is the heart of everything” (171). The church is both the “place of the Lord” (from the Greek *kyriakon*, the root of our word “church”) and the Lord’s “assembly” (from the Greek *ekklesia*, thus *iglesia* in Spanish and *église* in French). BARTLETT proposes that this is a time to renew the sense of church as small gatherings in people’s homes and other sites conducive to intimacy and a movement away from church in the sense of a powerful institution with large buildings and a restrictive theological and political agenda. He gives a nod to the necessity of institution as high-

ly developed organization and views it as inevitable in the long run of history, but he discerns the present time as a *kairos*, a moment in history which is ripe for church as a network of smaller groups, as in the New Testament period. The church, like the Christian and Christianity, is virtual, both becoming transformed and not yet transformed. It therefore needs smaller, informal structures more conducive to the transformative work of Christ.

As a former Catholic priest, BARTLETT acutely takes on the Roman Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession that is the historical undergirding of its authority, while he also draws on that rich Catholic tradition in his revised teaching on the Eucharist. There is no evidence in the New Testament of one person or group of disciples from whom the authority of the later bishops can be historically derived. The conferral of authority on Peter according to Matthew 16:13-20, whose meaning is controverted, is the primary warrant for the Roman Catholic doctrine of the primacy of Peter, who was the first bishop of Rome according to later tradition. But then both the Acts of the Apostles and passages in Paul's letters indicate that James, the brother of Jesus, was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. There is the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John whom Jesus favors over Peter. And of course the great missionary apostle, Paul of Tarsus, claimed apostolic status from the revelation of Christ, not the apostles in Jerusalem. There were also other leaders in the early church, such as Apollos and one calling himself the Elder in 2 and 3 John, plus probably many others whom we know nothing about. There is no doubt then that an apostolic succession in a straight line from Peter and the Twelve is a historically dubious doctrine.

Concerning the signs and sacraments for the virtual church, BARTLETT's formation as a Catholic is apparent in his passionate concern to elucidate their core meaning, particularly that of the Eucharist, even as he rejects Catholic dogma. His proposed new interpretation of the Eucharist, for example, lays claim to correspond to the true meaning that goes back to the heart of Jesus in the Gospels. Participating in the Supper of the Lord is to share in his Person—to become one with one another in his Person—the saving, compassionate Hypostasis. It is not an inhuman sacrificial mystery, “but precisely the communicative flesh of a new humanity based in infinite giving

rather than endless violence” (215). It is the liturgy (a word from the Greek *laos*, people, and *ergon*, work) or work of the people of the assembly of Christ, and the focus must be on the whole Gospel story of Jesus, not the “words of institution,” which historically carry the baggage of hierarchical privilege (218).

It is striking that in dealing with the topic of the last chapter, “What Signs Did He Give,” BARTLETT does not mention the Last Supper or even Jesus' table fellowship with all sorts and conditions of people. This chapter sketches a selection of what Jesus actually did and said, and includes also the author's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. He says, “[W]e can suggest there had to be *both* some transcendent event overcoming death *and* a radical teaching of forgiveness underpinning it from Jesus' actual life” (225). The separate sections of this chapter show BARTLETT's learning, insight, and verve, but the way he attempts to tie everything together in Wisdom as the central sign and Jesus as God's Wisdom will probably be difficult going for anyone not well advanced in biblical studies.

It is interesting to compare BARTLETT's new “virtual Christology” not only to René GIRARD's apocalyptic mixture of pessimism and hope, which tends more to a darker outlook in *Battling to the End*; but also to Jozef NIEWIADOMSKI's theological critique of the media in “Extra Media Nulla Salus?” [in: W. Palaver and P. Steinmair-Pösel (eds.): *Passions in Economy, Politics, and the Media—In Discussion with Christian Theology* (Vienna: LIT, 2005), 489-508]. NIEWIADOMSKI and BARTLETT appear to be far apart in their views of the cybernetic age of media virtuality, whereas their theological concerns are strikingly similar. Both of them affirm that the foundation of Christianity is the coming of God into human life in the person of Jesus Christ, who excluded no one from table fellowship with him and whose good news included potentially all human beings. However, by the fourth century CE the “dream of Constantine” whereby the church pretended to be “God's only religious form” led to the paradox that the “the church gradually debased the traces of God acting in the world The mystery of God's universal salvific will thus mutated into a social mechanism of exclusion” (“Extra Media,” 497). Yet now that the all encompassing Internet has become the locus of communication, its attractions are seductively satanic in the illusory

promise of autonomy and freedom. It offers what to many is the dearest gift of all, *attention*, as they presuppose that *fame* is a kind of self-divination.

NIEWIADOMSKI holds that the Christian theologian must respond to this cultural predicament with the confession, "I know my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25), and is called to demythologize the media on the basis of faith in the Triune God who descends into the world of desire, "submits himself to [human] passions, becomes a victim of rivalry and envy in order to reveal ... what is true fulfillment of desire, and to redeem humanity from the trap of mimetic desire" ("Extra Media," 505).

The rhetoric of NIEWIADOMSKI's Christology, or theology of salvation, is more traditional and therefore very different from BARTLETT's, and he certainly holds that in the media as such there is no salvation. However, are the two theologians saying the same thing at a deeper level? For BARTLETT certainly recognizes the entrapment of mimetic desire, rivalry, and violence in the cybernetic world of virtuality, but he discerns in this cultural frame new possibilities for the demythologizing influence of the divine-human hypostasis, that is, the Person in whom we live and move and have our being. What he says concerning the *Matrix* trilogy, particularly *Matrix Revolutions*, could be extended to the whole cultural situation: "...the Christian tradition is a radical shift in the human sign system, simultaneously showing the violence that lurks deeply within it and the possibility of something wonderfully new and true beneath that again" (71).

In conclusion, what I get from this stunning offering of anthropological theology is a strong sense of the author's re-visioning of the ancient seer's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth," which is what being virtually Christian is all about.

James Williams

Dennis, Ian: *Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction*. (London:

Macmillan Press, 1997; 203 pp.);

ISBN 0312172443; \$ 95

***Lord Byron and the History of Desire* (Newark:**

University of Delaware Press, 2009; 266 pp.)

ISBN 1611491231; \$ 55

"--You come too" (Frost)

At the "Thinking the Human" Stanford meeting last November, round two of the series of Darwin/Girard conferences, Henri ATLAN, Emeritus Professor Biophysics at Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem, Director of Research at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, recommended David J. Depew & Bruce H. Weber's *Darwinism Evolving* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press,

1995) for its revisionary characterization of evolution by natural selection as a major but perhaps not sole agency for the species we have now. Following from this, DEPEW and WEBER also propose the concept of a Darwinian research tradition, meaning a recognizable family of practices and research agendas akin to DARWIN's, which could mean (for us), should we follow suit, a loose grouping of the fellow researchers and readers most likely to influence and be influenced by our interest in mimetic theory.

Ian DENNIS (aka T.F. Banks, a very successful author of detective fiction) has given mimetic theory two remarkable books: the first, *Nationalism and Desire in Early Historical Fiction* (1997) is dedicated to René GIRARD, from its first to last page, researching positions virtual but not explored by GIRARD at that point: the role of the novel in nationalism and feminism, the expansion of the mimetic syllabus to include Scottish, Irish, and American fiction. *Battling to the End* gives us at last GIRARD's own take on nationalism, but DENNIS's earlier book shows us that the road GIRARD paved ahead of us has bypaths, his operating system leaves sockets for "apps." May we be forgiven for not seeing some of these potentials before they were enabled. Lucien GOLDMANN did not see that the doubles in GIRARD's first book could lead to enemy twins in ancient myth and tragedy, and perhaps only GIRARD and Raymund SCHWAGER saw the road open out from *Violence and the Sacred* to the Gospels.

DENNIS generated his remarkable book out of a few sentences in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* devoted to nations being rivalrously obsessed with each other: a "collective fascination spawns a 'collective individualism' in reaction to the failure to identify with the model culture, which is called nationalism and chauvinism" (*DDN*, 212). In successive chapters DENNIS treats Scottish, Irish, and American nationalism by analyzing carefully both dominant and neglected novels, Walter SCOTT and James Fenimore COOPER, but also Jane PORTER. *Nationalism and Desire* is one of the best examples I know of for successfully addressing the problem of how to introduce the theory before getting down to work (pp. 1-8), a problem even Girard faced, with great patience and good humor.

DENNIS's second book *Lord Byron and the History of Desire* (2009) is interested, roughly, in the same historical moment, but is by no means a repeat or even expanded performance. Here DENNIS is more interested in the (reading) community larger than the nation, Europe (at least), in writing a chapter in the history of how manufactured desire fuels the modern world. DENNIS draws more on Eric GANS than GIRARD to argue for seeing BYRON's modeling of victimhood at the center of both romanticism and modernism, a modeling by which BYRON exploits the

paradoxes of resentment and identity but also concludes in an irony which partially disables it. Finally, in a heartening last chapter, DENNIS argues for the efficacy of the alliance as well as the insights that BYRON offers to the reader.

DENNIS's acute and detailed discussion of BYRON, generating one remarkable insight after another into the modern writer's fascination with being persecuted was a revelation to me. This is my field. I took a grad course in BYRON from an embattled scholar who resisted the general contemporary disregard of BYRON as rhymester-publicist; nevertheless I simply fell in line with the common understanding pro and con, even though James JOYCE, my favorite writer, took a beating by his school-fellows rather than renounce BYRON.

DENNIS accomplishes the difficult task of at once pushing forward theory, literary history and single author study, audiences that tend to drift apart or turn on each other or, better still, resist whoever would talk to them together and, of course getting these books published—commercial and academic presses do not automatically publish work in mimetic theory and generative anthropology.

Beyond the issues of literary history and the analysis of modern culture, DENNIS is one of the people to watch who can work in an up-to-date manner in both generative anthropology and mimetic theory. We have just completed a series of articles in *Contagion*, beginning with Pablo BANDERA's "Love versus Resentment: The Absence of Positive Mimesis in Generative Anthropology," (volume 14, 13-26), Andrew BARTLETT's full-dress review of Eric GANS's *The Scenic Imagination* in the context of GANS's writing in English (volume 15/16, 89-172), followed by "Mimetic Theory and its Rivals," Richard van OORT's reply to Bandera (volume 17, 189-204). In this book one theoretical orientation is picked up after the other is laid down. This may be a better way forward than insisting on transcendence in a way that only reinforces the already converted, never enlarging either group of readers.

This has been a slow-moving conversation only in the sense that we are an annual publication. In our forthcoming conference in Japan in 2012, we can perhaps move faster, featuring the best of both worlds.

William Johnsen

**Stein, Ruth: *For Love of the Father: A Psychoanalytic Study of Religious Terrorism*
Stanford University Press, 2010. 220 pages.
ISBN 9780804763059; \$ 23**

Practicing psychoanalyst Ruth STEIN has provided us with a notable contribution to the literature of reflection on the 9/11 attacks. Her starting point is the letter found in Mohammed Atta's luggage, which she notes is about love and service to God rather than rancorous

hatred of enemies, as one might expect. The hijackers, as she describes them, seem to have ridden a vertical elevator which lifted them up to heaven, while leaving this corrupt world behind. STEIN does not use the term "Gnosticism," but her analysis very effectively paints a picture of the hijacker gang as a Gnostic cult that seeks liberation from the cosmos.

She takes Atta's letter as her starting point, but aside from a brief reference to Atta's father expressing doubt that his shy son could have committed such a dramatic act, STEIN shows little interest in the biographies of Atta and the other hijackers. She slides quickly from the particular to the general, as she develops an armchair analysis of the psychic milieu of militant Islamic terrorists. She quotes with approval Zygmunt BAUMAN's assertion that "cruelty is social in its origin much more than it is characterological," which creates an awkward tension at the heart of her efforts. If her expertise as an analyst of individuals in the clinic is of limited use for comprehending larger scale political violence, then she has no more authority in this arena than other scholars, such as sociologists, historians, religion experts, and so forth.

With that caveat in mind, I find her reflections to be very insightful. She paints a picture of the jihadist milieu as being "vertically" structured; Muslim men who are spiritually attuned to God are the pinnacle of humanity; beneath them are Muslim women; beneath them are all infidels. The upward flight of the truly devoted man offers a joyful liberation from the too-enclosing cosmos and the temptations of the flesh, symbolized by women. The deepest feelings of the soul move along a vertical vector characterized by awe, shame, humiliation, exaltation, inferiority, and so forth, rather than along a horizontal plane of compassion, care for others, communal solidarity, and so forth. The horizontal plane could also be a vector for intergroup hatred, as in Rwanda or Yugoslavia, but her central argument claims that the psychic configuration of the hijackers was so transcendent that it was "beyond hatred." From such a perspective, which has exalted itself to a God's eye view, the superhuman agent has left behind all mundane notions of crime, sin, and evil. Attachment to the divine "Father" enables the obedient sons to carry out his will (and annihilate the Father's enemies) with a perfect sense of calm. STEIN observes that very few suicidal terrorists become fathers in an earthly sense; they remain eternal sons.

STEIN argues that the "God" believed in by the jihadists is an external projection of internal psychological factors. "Thus, at the core of variously structured fundamentalist groups, we find psychodynamic processes involving transformations of fear, hatred, and (notably) self-rejection into idealizing love." This idea is obviously not original with STEIN; language concerning the externalization of internal processes is

common in social scientific literature. Her references to fundamentalism may lead the reader, however, to question where this observation is headed. Is she implying that “fundamentalists,” however that term is defined, are the only people who externalize, or do all human beings do that? Her comments on the “triadic” structure of large-scale violence raise the same sort of question. Dyadic violence is smaller scale, as when an abused child grows up to be an abuser; triadic violence involves a (divine) ideal, the true believers in the ideal, and the enemies/infidels, who are attacked by the true believers. But this sort of triad can also be seen in other situations, such as the tsarist “God,” the tsarists, and the Bolshevik infidels. The Bolsheviks, in turn, establish the triad: the Glorious Revolution, the champions of the workers, vs. the tsarist butchers. If such triads can be seen in many different social and historical contexts, then STEIN’s claim to be analyzing “religious” terrorism is undermined. Unless, of course, she is saying that human culture and human psychology are always and unavoidably religious.

That is a view advocated by René GIRARD, but even though STEIN refers to GIRARD here and there, the reader does not receive the impression that she actually agrees with him on that point. There is a subtle, assumed Feuerbachian perspective at work in STEIN’s argument. While she does not display any overt hostility toward religious faith, per se, one gets the idea that she believes that “God” is nothing but a human invention. While GIRARD says that most religiosity in human history is projective and idolatrous, he maintains strongly that modern intellectuals who are sensitive to victimage mechanisms and who write books about such things have only gained their sensitivity because human experience has been impacted by a genuine revelation of a nonviolent God. STEIN’s reading of GIRARD should have alerted her to the possibility that her analysis of the psychological states that motivate violent acts might have biblical roots, which would have set the stage for her to question her Feuerbachian assumptions.

Another question raised by this book concerns the scope of STEIN’s efforts. It is obvious that there are many different forms of violence: spouse abuse, war, ethnic cleansing, armed robbery, and so forth. If STEIN is seeking to understand one particular form and episode of violence, the “religious terrorism” of the 9/11 attacks, what is the relationship between her efforts and the efforts of other authors who are writing about the other forms of violence? Is it necessary to have a comprehensive view of all forms of violence in order to understand any one particular form? Must one draw on a foundational philosophical anthropology as one turns the spotlight on a certain aspect of human behavior? Or not? STEIN does not seem to be aware of this issue, which hinders the success of her project.

STEIN gives hints here and there concerning her positive vision of what constitutes mental health and ethical behavior. The narcissistic personality, she says, tends to be either inflated or deflated; healthy self-esteem would avoid these extremes. In fundamentalism horizontal relations with others are blocked in favor of a vertically projected “God”; ethical maturity would clearly involve constructive and loving horizontal bonds. The fundamentalist psyche is “denuded of diverse and complex parts, and licensed to act on a simplified, impoverished version of oneself”; the flourishing person would constitute a “center of being” who is able to successfully hold in tension the complex dimensions of reality: transcendence, individuality, community, and nature. That is implied, rather than clearly stated, by STEIN. If STEIN had wrestled with the task of expressing her positive vision of health, then she would likely have engaged more deeply with GIRARD and with other thinkers, such as KIERKEGAARD and Eric VOEGELIN, who have already been addressing such issues.

Ruth STEIN died suddenly and unexpectedly on January 17, 2010. The many engaging insights in this book, and the unfinished agenda for further exploration and development, are a poignant reminder of how much the academic community lost on that day.

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Ward, Bruce K. *Redeeming the Enlightenment: Christianity and the Liberal Virtues*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010. (244 pp) ISBN 0802807615; \$ 26

In Charles TAYLOR’s book *A Secular Age* the current struggle for the heart and mind of modernity is characterized as a three-sided struggle between secular humanism, Neo-Nietzscheans, and acknowledgers of transcendence. Bruce WARD’s fruitful dialogue between Christianity and liberalism takes this framework as a starting point by slightly changing its three sides in order to focus not so much on the question of whether transcendence is acknowledged but “*how* it is acknowledged” (22). According to WARD, the three-sided debate of modernity involves “liberal humanism, neo-Nietzscheanism, and Christian humanism” (p. 22). WARD’s starting point is the crisis of liberalism as it is highlighted today especially by the neo-Nietzschean critique of it. Four “liberal virtues” are at the center of his critical reflection on liberalism: (1) respect for the fundamental *equality* of dignity of human beings; (2) *authenticity* or authentic self-realization; (3) *tolerance*, especially for religious differences; and (4) *compassion* for the suffering of victims. Three thinkers play a crucial role in WARD’s dialogue between Christianity and liberalism: First, ROUSSEAU, who is the key example of what WARD

calls liberal humanism; secondly, NIETZSCHE as the founding father of contemporary neo-Nietzscheanism; and finally DOSTOEVSKY as the primary representative of Christian humanism. To these three central authors WARD adds—depending on the particular virtue he is looking at—LOCKE, KANT, HEIDEGGER, TOLSTOY, KAFKA to list the classical authors he deals with more extensively and among contemporary thinkers especially Charles TAYLOR, René GIRARD and Martha NUSSBAUM. WARD avoids too easy and simple approaches of how Christianity and the enlightenment relate to each other. He neither gives in to a conservative rejection of the enlightenment nor to a liberal reclaiming of it, but opts for its redemption. By this he means a “possibility dependent on a recollective rethinking of the inner connection between the Christian tradition and the moral aspirations of the Enlightenment” (p. 2). WARD’s book achieves what it promises. He convincingly shows in what way Christianity can redeem the enlightenment and in what way the enlightenment also contributes to a much better understanding of Christianity. In this short review it is not really possible to follow all the subtle, illuminating and interesting threads of arguments that constitute this book. It is a rich book that gratifies its readers with a better understanding of the key thinkers it reflects on. It really helps to come to a better understanding of Christianity and of liberalism. For the readers of the *Bulletin* it might be especially interesting to focus on the chapter of tolerance that brings GIRARD’s mimetic theory into the debate.

By turning to recent acts of violence like the murder of Theo van GOGH by a Dutch Islamist in 2004, WARD highlights the crisis of contemporary liberal tolerance claiming that “the multicultural dream of contemporary western liberal democracies is threatening to turn into a nightmare” (p. 113). According to WARD, the weakness of liberalism concerning tolerance consists in the fact that it deprives itself of religious sources to overcome human passions that result in violence. GIRARD’s mimetic theory may help to overcome this problem: “To those who see that it is now well past time to revisit the question of the possibility of a *religious* basis for religious tolerance, GIRARD’s thought offers an interesting opportunity, not least in its capacity to mediate between biblically based theology and Enlightenment liberalism.” (p. 130) Several reasons underline the importance of mimetic theory in this regard. Like the Enlightenment it is committed to the “persuasive power of rational thought” (p. 131) and to criticism. GIRARD is aware that a recovery of the theological is in need of a “rethinking of Christianity to its very roots” (p. 131). Contradictions between the teachings of love and practices of violence have to be addressed and criticized. WARD explicitly praises mimetic theory for offering a “more complete account of the interrelations

among human nature, religion, and violence than is to be found in the political psychology of liberal thought” (p. 132). He also highlights the fact that GIRARD’s analysis shows clearly how much a “mechanism of persecution as a response to social crisis” (p. 134) has contributed throughout history to the problem of religious intolerance. With GIRARD he emphasizes that we have to turn from social science to a theologically inflected literature to understand how we can overcome the persecution mechanism. He turns therefore to KAFKA’s novel *The Trial*, which WARD interprets as a very clear example of scapegoating. “Joseph K. is an *exceptional* victim.” (p. 143) But WARD’s subtle analysis of *The Trial* leads us further by showing us that Joseph K. is not an “*exemplary* victim” (p. 144), meaning that he does not help us to find a way out of the persecution mechanism because he remains unable to leave resentment behind. “K.’s desire is not to finally transcend the mechanism, but to change places within it—the desire characteristic of *ressentiment*. “*The Trial* is KAFKA’s brilliant testimony to the reality of a cycle of persecutory power and resentment from which there is no exit.” (p. 145). Resentment is the primary temptation accompanying our world of today, a world that according to GIRARD follows the spirit of the Antichrist. WARD is clearly aware of this danger: “Even our sensitivity to the wrongness of scapegoating fails to negate the impulse; it merely prompts us to scapegoat the scapegoaters. This reality has been characterized in its inner nature as a cycle of persecution and resentment that breeds violence.” (p. 151) Building on Walter BENJAMIN’s understanding of KAFKA, WARD underlines the fact that KAFKA’s novel results in despair quoting his famous remark that “there is an infinite amount of hope, but not for us” (p. 145). This interpretation of KAFKA corresponds well with GIRARD’s short comment in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* that “like Moses, Kafka’s hero will never see the promised land” (pp. 286-287; 308-309). Do we have to share KAFKA’s pessimism, which does not see a way out of the mechanism of persecution? WARD does not give in to this temptation and instead refers to DOSTOEVSKY, his key example of a Christian humanism. In *The Brothers Karamazov* we can find the example of Dmitri, who becomes a scapegoat when he is unjustly sentenced to prison for having apparently killed his father. Although he is innocent, he does not succumb to resentment because he realizes that he nevertheless has participated in persecution. “While innocent of the crime of parricide, he has been guilty of complicity in the human cycle of persecution and resentful reprisal.” (p. 148) By accepting his own responsibility he overcomes revenge against his own persecutors. Dmitri therefore does not repeat violence but transforms it through suffering: “Dmitri Karamazov experiences a transformation and renewal through

his suffering, while Joseph K. does not.” (p. 148) WARD’s emphasis on the transformative power of transcendence, as it was understood by DOSTOEVSKY, is the most valuable achievement of this book. Again and again he shows that it is not a belief in transcendence as such that characterizes genuine Christianity but in a transcendence that is incarnated and transformative. Christian humanism consists in this emphasis on transformation and DOSTOEVSKY especially exemplifies it. “As an artist at the center of whose aesthetic is the image of Christ, Dostoevsky’s concern was to show the transcendent ideal as incarnate in and transformative of immanent reality.” (p. 29) ROUSSEAU, who is WARD’s example of Enlightenment liberal humanism, differs from DOSTOEVSKY exactly in regard to the transformative power of transcendence: “Rousseau is more than willing to affirm God and immortality as a reality transcending the world, but without transformative presence in the world. Whereas for Dostoevsky compassionate love can be a mediator between this world and the other world, Rousseau denies that our experience of love can have any connection with a higher reality, that it is anything more than a modification of the more fundamental, self-regarding passions of the body-in-the-world.” (p. 193) But it is exactly this transformative love that can help to redeem the enlightenment.

In a footnote WARD shows that GIRARD also contributes to an overcoming of the persecution mechanism by referring to his understanding of positive mimesis: “While the acquisitive sort of *mimesis* is Girard’s most fully developed subject, he repeatedly contrasts it with the other, ‘positive’ *mimesis* that offers the only way out of the deadly cycle of violence. The way is through imitation of Christ’s non-acquisitive imitation of God the Father.” (pp. 136-137). He continues this remark, however, by referring to a theological critique of GIRARD’s understanding

of positive mimesis arguing “that it remains too much an abstract concept and not enough an ecclesiastically embodied set of practices”. This criticism, however, goes far beyond a critical look at GIRARD’s mimetic theory because it refers to the concluding chapter of WARD’s book “The Church and Liberal Society” (pp. 218-221) in which he underlines DOSTOEVSKY’s vision of the church as an alternative society. This position comes close to Stanley HAUERWAS’s theological stance with which WARD sympathizes:

“Dostoevsky insisted on the character of the church as *polis*, and he insisted also that it is the church that must illumine the surrounding society, rather than *vice versa*. This vision of the church appears close, among contemporary theologians within western Christianity, to that of Stanley Hauerwas, who insists that in the midst of a society that in the modern West is best characterized as ‘liberal,’ the church must first be the church by recalling and enacting its meaning as a community of disciplined practices that form people capable of living a certain way of life.” (p. 219)

I join DOSTOEVSKY, HAUERWAS and WARD in this attitude. And what about the theological critique of GIRARD? Well, I understand GIRARD’s mimetic theory primarily as an anthropology and not a theology. I do not expect mimetic theory as such to develop an ecclesiology or a particular church ethics.

This book is an excellent example of Bruce WARD’s careful and sophisticated work that builds bridges between different disciplines—especially between philosophy, theology, and literature—and reflects on achievements and dangers coming along with modernity. The book gains from its very clear structure. Its argumentation is subtle and very well balanced. Readers of it will gain by getting new insights on many of the important thinkers and topics it deals with.

Wolfgang Palaver

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We invite you to send books and articles dealing with René Girard and Mimetic Theory to Dietmar.Regensburger@uibk.ac.at (digital format and references) or to Girard-Documentation, c/o Dr. Dietmar Regensburger, University of Innsbruck, Karl-Rahner-Platz 1, A-6020 Innsbruck / Austria (print copies).

The *Bibliography of Literature on the Mimetic Theory* (Vol. I–XXX) is Online available at: http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/mimetic_theory_biblio.html

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Just a reminder: The due date for submission of papers for the Schwager Award is May 15, for application for travel grants to the Salina conference it is June 1. For further information see the conference home page: http://ww2.unime.it/cover2011/Cover2011/Awards_and_Grants.html

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