



A LAND BETWEEN TWO RIVERS:

Space, Place, and Mimetic Theory



An Iowa Impression

COV&R Conference: July 10-14, 2013, on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA USA

Humanity is more than ever the author of its own fall because it has become able to destroy its world.

-René Girard

From July 10-14, 2013, the University of Northern Iowa will host the annual meeting of COV&R. The theme of this year's conference is "A Land between Two Rivers: Space, Place, and Mimetic Theory." This theme is an appropriate one to consider in Iowa, because visitors to the state find most memorable the vast expanses of land and sky. But the land, which has been central to Iowa's economy and to the nation's food supply, is undergoing massive change as industrial agriculture replaces family farms. With Iowa as a focus point for reflection, conference participants will consider how mimetic theory can illuminate ecological issues, contribute to environmental ethics, and inform our reflections on interconnections among organisms and varied forms of life.

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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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Raymund Schwager, S.J., Memorial Essay Contest

To honor the memory of Raymund SCHWAGER, SJ (†2004), the Colloquium on Violence and Religion is offering an **award of \$ 1,500** shared by up to three persons, for the three best papers given by graduate students at the COV&R 2013 meeting at the University of Northern Iowa. To be eligible to compete, students must have registered for the conference and have had their papers accepted for presentation at the conference. Students presenting papers at the conference are invited to apply for the **Raymund Schwager Memorial Award** by sending a letter to that effect and the full text of their paper (in English, maximum length: 10 pages, double-spaced) in an e-mail attachment to Martha REINEKE (martha.reineke@uni.edu), organizer of COV&R 2013 conference. **The due date for submission is June 1.** Winners will be announced in the conference program. Prize-winning essays should reflect an engagement with mimetic theory; they will be presented in a plenary session and be considered for publication in *Contagion*.

COV&R Travel Grants

Thanks to a generous grant from Imitatio, travel grants to attend COV&R 2013 are available for **graduate students** or **independent scholars** who are **first-time attendees** of the COV&R conference. Such applicants will normally be expected to **give a paper** at the conference. Write a **letter of application** accompanied by a **letter of recommendation by a COV&R member** to that effect to the conference coordinator, Martha REINEKE (martha.reineke@uni.edu). Applications are due by the closing date of conference preregistration, June 1, 2013. The COV&R Advisory Board will sponsor the attendance of up to ten persons with a maximum award of \$500.00 each.

Our conversation will be facilitated by three keynote addresses on the conference theme. Laura JACKSON, who holds a Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology from Cornell University and is a professor of biology at UNI, will help lay groundwork for our discussion, drawing on her expertise in ecology and sustainable agriculture. JACKSON will speak about the demise of the family farm and the rise of industrial agriculture, which is posing serious ecological challenges. Her presentation is “Restoring Ecological Health in an Agricultural Sacrifice Zone.”

Our second keynote speaker, Whitney BAUMAN, a professor of religious studies at Florida International University and a graduate of Graduate Theological Union, will offer the Raven Foundation Lecture. The driving question behind BAUMAN’s specialization in the area of religion and ecology is: How do religious beliefs, insights, doctrines, and practices shape the material-physical worlds around us? Even if one does not adhere to or practice a given tradition, religions have shaped the cultures in which humans live. In BAUMAN’s work, he ana-

lyzes how answers to the “big questions” with which religions have grappled have shaped the human relationship with the rest of the natural world. He is especially interested in analyzing how these “big questions” are changed by forces such as global climate change and globalization. In the end, he understands these religious questions to be questions about ethics: how ought we to live responsibly as human beings vis. a vis. the rest of the natural world. Bauman will speak on “Religion, Ecology, and the Planetary Other: Opening Spaces for Difference.” Following his lecture, there will be a reception sponsored by the Raven Foundation.

Our final keynote speaker will be Mark WALLACE from Swarthmore College. WALLACE, a graduate of the University of Chicago, will deliver the Raymund Schwager, S.J. Memorial Lecture. Early in his career, WALLACE edited *Curing Violence: Essays on René Girard* with Thee SMITH. He has not been engaged directly with mimetic theory in recent years and views the invitation to join us this summer as an opportunity to forge links between his early and current work. WALLACE’s research and writing

now are situated within the emerging field of religion and ecology. Noting an affinity between religion and ecology, WALLACE sees the intellectual wager of this discipline as follows: the often unknown wellsprings of human beings' perspectives on the environment must be tapped if we are to understand adequately how individuals and societies have conceived of their place in the natural world. WALLACE reflects on questions such as: *Are human beings part of or beyond nature? Do human beings have obligations to other life forms? Does the cosmos have an inherent purpose or function?* For WALLACE, these questions are religious, moral, and ecological at the same time. They animate WALLACE's writing, especially in regard to the role Christianity has played in both deepening and ameliorating the environmental crisis in our time.

In order to facilitate our conversations with the keynote speakers, BAUMAN's and WALLACE's addresses will be followed by breakout sessions in which session participants will discuss the lectures in small groups. There also will be a "wrap-up" session on the keynote addresses that will afford the small groups an opportunity to share insights from their discussions when we reconvene in the auditorium. So also will all three keynote speakers engage each other in discussion on the conference theme. This synthesizing session will be facilitated by Wolfgang PALAVER.

We will continue our special emphasis on lynching during a plenary session. Julia ROBINSON, Barbara THIEDE, and Joseph WINTERS from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte will speak on "Literary Lynchings: Mimetic Theory, Race, and Lynching in Jewish and African American Literature." René GIRARD's treatise of the term "lynching" captures the socially constructed imaginary of perpetrators, the maleficence of rivalry and the dubious monsterization of their victims. Further, the term exposes the depths of mimetic transference of a society's deviant propensities to reclaim and revalorize a communal identity over against a mythic surrogate. As GIRARD states, "The representation of lynching in myth is always found in a context that necessitates the inference of its reality, because only that inference can illuminate that myth as a whole in all its details." The study of lynching, amid its multifaceted forms

within global communities, promises to reveal the central efficacy of collective acts of violence, thereby unveiling the paradigmatic patterns of thought and behavior that shape oppressive ideologies. Lynching then, can become a lens by which to expose and even deconstruct historically reified and culturally defined narratives of race, religion, and even, gender. This year's plenary on the study of mimetic theory and lynching addresses African American and Jewish literary productions.

The concluding plenary of the conference on Saturday afternoon, offered with the support of the Raven Foundation, will feature Brian MCLAREN and James ALISON speaking on "Exploring the New Paradigm: Girard and the Christianity of the 21st Century." With reference to the new curriculum, *Jesus The Forgiving Victim*, which is being launched, MCLAREN and ALISON will explore some of the differences which GIRARD makes to how we read the Bible, how we might live the reality of Church, and what sort of worldwide networks we might find ourselves getting involved in as this understanding of Christianity takes wing. ALISON, whose work is informed by the thought of René GIRARD, is the author of many books including *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* and *On Being Liked*. He is featured in *Jesus: The Forgiving Victim*. MCLAREN founded Cedar Ridge Community Church, an innovative, transdenominational church in the Baltimore-Washington region. He recently left the pastorate to devote full time to writing and speaking. His books include, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, *Everything Must Change*, *Finding Our Way Again*, and *A New Kind of Christianity*.

Other conference highlights will include a showing of the documentary "Hellbound?" A panel discussion of the film moderated by Adam ERICKSEN will feature filmmaker Kevin MILLER, Michael HARDIN, and Vanessa AVERY. Book sessions will feature *The Girardians* by James WILLIAMS, *Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts* by Jeremiah ALBERG, and *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* by Wolfgang PALAVER. Vanessa AVERY will offer a workshop about a new training program that has been designed to help institutional leadership, management and staff to identify the stages of scapegoating in the workplace,

find effective ways to intervene, and ultimately transform organizational culture into a culture of healthy, above-board, generous relationality. She will present an overview of the training, (with a focus on the scapegoating model developed out of GIRARD's thought), and some initial reflections from having completed the first run of the pilot program. In addition, over sixty papers will be featured in concurrent sessions at the conference.

I look forward to welcoming everyone to Iowa. In addition to hosting a conference that promises to be dynamic and engaging, I also will be introducing you to the history and distinctive culture of the area. Special events during the conference will acquaint participants with some interesting and unique aspects of rural life and small-town America. These will include a "Friday night down-town" evening of dining and entertainment on Cedar Falls' Main Street, an award winning shopping and dining district that is quintessentially Midwestern. There are three Saturday morning excursions from which to select. Some participants will travel to the Amana Colonies, site of one of America's longest lasting Utopian communities that was settled by German Pietists in 1855. Others will visit the Seed Saver's Exchange, a world-famous repository for heirloom seeds that features gardens, orchards, and White Park cattle. Because most seed companies produce only a few varieties of seed, seed repositories play a critical role. Large-scale agriculture favors genetic stock in which quantity of production and ease of transport (e.g. fruits impervious to bruising in transit) are more important than quality (e.g., taste). Further, large-scale agriculture crops lack genetic diversity. If diseases wipe out a particular crop, in the absence of a seed stock that is genetically different, the entire plant species may go extinct. The Seed Saver's Exchange preserves genetic diversity as a protection against plant extinction. The Exchange also makes available to the individual gardener genetically diverse fruits and vegetables that enrich our eating experiences. The third excursion will be to the Cedar Hills Sand Prairie and will include a showing of the award-winning documentary: *America's Lost Landscape: The Tallgrass Prairie*. The conference will conclude with a wine and cheese reception and the traditional banquet. "Mimetic Magic," a

show by New York magician and Girardian, James WARREN, will follow the dinner.

Registration is now open on the conference website. I thank you in advance for your patience in navigating the registration process. The university contracts out its conference registration to an external agency and that agency's process is cumbersome. Please note also that because public transportation is an anomaly in Iowa, we are collecting lots of information from you during the registration process to insure that all participants can get to/from the airports and the hotels by conference shuttle and to/from the hotels and the conference venue each day, also by conference shuttle. Please read the travel and accommodation section of the website with care and offer a complete and accurate reporting of your plans during the registration process so that we will be able to create a hassle-free transportation experience for each of you.

Please also check the website for updates that will include the conference program (aiming for a mid-May posting of the detailed schedule) and conference abstracts (aiming for an early June posting). The website is at: <http://www.vpaf.uni.edu/events/COVandR/index.shtml>.

Martha Reineke

**COV&R AT
THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION**

**Program of the Annual Meeting
November 23-26, 2013,
Baltimore, MD**

COV&R will offer two sessions at the 2013 AAR meeting in Baltimore, MD. Exact days and times of sessions will be determined by the AAR this summer and will be announced in the fall Bulletin. Please read the description of Session 1 with care: [we are still seeking contributors to this session](#). 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.

Session I

Date and Time TBA

Topic: Book and Pedagogy Session on Atonement

We are announcing a new twist on our perennial book session: a discussion of the pedagogy of atonement theory will be linked with our book session. For the first half of our session, we will be discussing Darrin SNYDER BELOUSEK's book *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church*. The session will begin with summary comments on the book by BELOUSEK. Willard SWARTLEY will offer a response to the book and there will be opportunity for discussion.

The second half session will build on our conversation about atonement and focus on a pedagogical problem: Students are so imbued with a penal substitutionary mindset that, when any other perspective (i.e., a perspective informed by GIRARD's thought) is presented, they either fail to comprehend the alternative theory, rework and reinterpret the alternative theory in terms of penal substitution, or compartmentalize. Compartmentalization happens when students accurately describe an alternative to penal substitution theory when writing an exam or essay but quickly revert (sometimes within minutes!) to penal substitution theory, as if an alternative has never been presented to them. Our goal in the second half-session will be to address this problem together as we explore how we can facilitate more effective learning about atonement theory in educational settings.

Leadership in this conversation will be offered by Darrin BELOUSEK, Michael HARDIN, Suzanne ROSS, and Daniel LONDON. Each will share strategies they have found helpful when working with undergraduates, seminary students, and adults engaged in religious education.

If you are reading this and have experienced the challenges of teaching atonement theory, please consider offering leadership in this session by submitting a one-page contribution proposal to the session coordinator, Martha REINEKE (martha.reineke@uni.edu). In this proposal, please discuss your course setting (e.g., undergraduate, seminary, adult religious education) and assignment or context in which atonement theory has been discussed. Please also describe

and attach (if applicable) a course artifact that you would like to share/discuss that demonstrates your approach to teaching atonement theory. Finally, explain how your proposal is informed by mimetic theory or will lend itself to dialogue with mimetic theory in our session. We particularly seek contributions from persons who teach primarily undergraduate students. Please consider sharing your experiences and strategies with us.

Session II

AAR Date and Time TBA

Topic: Beautiful Minds in Dialogue: The Correspondence between René Girard and Raymund Schwager (1974-1991)

The inventor of mimetic theory, René GIRARD, and the developer of a special "Innsbruck brand" of Dramatic Theology, Raymund SCHWAGER, kept a longstanding, academic and personal correspondence, which was discovered when Schwager unexpectedly died in February 2004. Ninety-nine available letters span almost two decades. These letters cover topics such as Christ's death and sacrifice and how to talk about them best, mimeticism and freedom, original sin and the understanding of the story of temptation in Genesis, the meaning of the law, and many others. By the correspondents' own admission and in accord with many scholars' assessments, SCHWAGER and GIRARD considerably influenced each other's thinking. The correspondence documents this in a unique, historically verifiable, way and has already forced the correction of some previously held assumptions among those who have seen it through. The correspondence is currently being edited for a first bilingual (French-German) edition by a research project in Innsbruck; an English translation is sure to follow soon after legal questions have been resolved.

The AAR session will consist of a panel discussion featuring experts who are involved in this first edition and its commentary and can give a first-hand view of the material.

Chair: Nikolaus WANDINGER: Associate Professor at the University of Innsbruck; co-editor of the correspondence

Panelists:

Mathias MOOSBRUGGER: Executive Secretary of the Research Project; commentator on the correspondence; author of a dissertation on

the concept of sacrifice in the discussion between SCHWAGER and GIRARD

Józef NIEWIADOMSKI: Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Innsbruck; Director of the Research Project

James G. WILLIAMS: Professor emeritus of Religion of Syracuse University, New York; specialist in New Testament Studies; contemporary witness and friend of the correspondents'; commentator on the correspondence.

After a brief introduction by the chair, the panelists will give a statement of 15 minutes each and then enter into a dialogue, which will then be opened for general discussion.

Compiled by Martha Reineke

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

On this Pentecost Sunday I write from South Bend, where joyful graduation ceremonies have just been concluded, and the summer has officially begun.

After meetings in Sicily (2011) and Japan (2012), it is time for COV&R to reconvene in North America—this time at the University of Northern Iowa, July 10-14. Conference organizer Martha REINEKE reports that the response to the Call for Papers has been strong.

The ecological theme of COV&R 2013, "A Land between Two Rivers: Space, Place, and Mimetic Theory," reminds me of the evolutionary interest that was so strongly foregrounded nine years ago in the 2004 COV&R meeting in Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, entitled "Nature, Human Nature, and the Mimetic Theory." The prairies of the American Midwest have an ancient beauty vastly different from that of the Southwest, with its hills, deserts, and canyons, but both these regions have much to teach us about the interconnectedness of biological forms, the fragility of life, and the need for careful stewardship of the natural resources that are too often sacrificed in the competition for short-term gains.

The program that Martha REINEKE has put together for the 2013 conference features a number of panel discussions on recent monographs by COV&R members: James WILLIAMS' *Girardians*, Jeremiah ALBERG'S *Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts*, David DAWSON'S *Flesh Becomes Word: A Lexicography of the Scapegoat*, and Wolfgang PALAVER'S *René Girard's Mi-*

metic Theory. The publication of such books (three of them in the wonderful series edited by William JOHNSEN for Michigan State University Press) bears witness to the intellectual fruitfulness of the mimetic theory.

The Colloquium's vitality as "colloquium" (literally a "talking together") depends, however, on the sustaining of the conversation between and among its members. For that reason COV&R meets twice annually—at the American Academy of Religion and during the summer—and its members delight in fostering the Girardian Network of allied groups, organizations, and foundations, many of which also host lectures, symposia, and conferences.

Among these many events, I would like to highlight the René Girard Lectures—a series of lectures to be held alternately in Paris and Stanford. Inaugurated by *Imitatio*, the series began with lectures by Yale historian Timothy SNYDER, author of the award-winning book *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, who spoke in Stanford on March 13 on the topic, "Why Did the Holocaust Happen? A History Lesson for the Future." The named lecture series honors the life-long work of René GIRARD, who also recently received an award from the King of Spain.

Together with the Raymund Schwager S.J. Memorial Lecture, held annually at the COV&R conference (this year's to be given by Mark WALLACE, a founding member of the Colloquium), the René Girard lectures guarantee that the legacy of the co-founders of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion will be honored and continued. The Raven Foundation Lecture, also to be given at the COV&R conference, similarly contributes to that great cause.

Certainly the members of the Colloquium have serious work to do. In the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings and as thousands perish in the Middle East, religion and violence continue to command our attention, as does the mimetic desire that undoes the difference between rivals. In 2012 the ABC political thriller *Scandal* began to air. Given the regular use of the word "scandal" in political news coverage, at least here in the United States, it may warrant a lexicological study of its own, alongside "scapegoat," "lynching," and "pharmakon."

In *Achever Clausewitz (Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre)*, René GIRARD devotes a chapter to “Hölderlin’s Sorrow” and a chapter to the historical rivalry between the pope and the emperor. In a newly published interview, Pope FRANCIS lists Friedrich HÖLDERLIN, DANTE, and DOSTOEVSKY among his favorite authors. A list familiar to Girardians! One wonders: what GIRARD and Pope FRANCIS would say to one another about HÖLDERLIN?

The Colloquium continues! I look forward to seeing you this summer in Iowa.

Ann W. Astell

MUSINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The school year in Japan begins in April. Each year we take all of our new students (around 600) on an overnight “Retreat” to give them a chance to get to know each other and reflect on their transition from high school to university life. Each year we vary the theme that we use to structure the retreat. The theme this year is “The Student Pledge and Academic Integrity.” For those readers associated with education this theme probably functions as code words for the problem of plagiarism or students copying other people’s work.

Indeed, that is what is being addressed. Every year we seem to face one or two serious cases of students plagiarizing major amounts of work in graduation thesis or a final paper. When the students are caught, a complex, lengthy, semi-legal process kicks in that ends with a faculty vote to determine how the student will be punished. Needless to say, it is an unpleasant task all the way around and one we would all like to avoid.

I have been asked to speak at this retreat and my preparations for it have led to some interesting discoveries. In some ways it has, as is proper I suppose, complicated my thinking about plagiarizing and has made sweeping generalizations more difficult. I have not settled all of my opinions of these matters; hence some musings.

One very interesting argument came from Paul GRIFFITHS in his book, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2009). He argues that from a Christian viewpoint there is no such thing as plagiarism, because there is no

such thing as ownership of knowledge. Knowledge is not property and so cannot be owned, rather it is meant to be shared. While I cannot totally accept his argument, his vision of the intellectual life as conceived by Christianity is quite compelling. He also makes a good case that some of our attempts to curb plagiarism by stigmatizing it as stealing ultimately undercut the more vital foundations of a liberal arts education by implicitly accepting the presuppositions of capitalism in which everything is a commodity.

The other way in which I found this work helpful is the way GRIFFITHS articulates the phenomenon that our anxiety about ownership and originality is simply the enemy twin of the anxiety that drives our students to plagiarism. The more deep-seated cure treats this underlying anxiety rather than its manifestations.

The other interesting work was Marcus BOON’s *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). BOON’s work helped me to understand the way in which students are surrounded with technologies that make copying easier and more efficient than ever, at the same time that they are more anxious than ever about copying. They receive very mixed messages and find themselves in a double-bind: copy, don’t copy. One cannot be educated without copying. In a certain sense that is all that education is, learning to copy. But then there are good ways of copying and bad ways of copying and learning those too is part of an education.

BOON makes interesting use of GIRARD’s work. He writes: “According to Girard, the act of finding someone to blame for all of those mimetic tricks, slips, transformations, all those copies, and then punishing that someone, is what hold society together. The escalation of mimetic energies and rivalry, and the sparks of mimetic violence that occur as a result, would threaten to engulf the whole world if there were no possibility of focusing all the collective violence onto a scapegoat figure. . . . More broadly, we can say that the word ‘copy’ today carries with it that negative judgment, that subtle but decisive abjection from the realm of legitimacy, that indicates scapegoating. The ‘copy’ is the scapegoat for the immense and apparently unsolvable problems that mimesis, as a basic constituent of our situation, poses for us.”

“Mimesis, as a basic constituent of our situation” is not simply a poser of “immense and apparently unsolvable problems,” but is also the promise of an even more immense resolution. As a promise that is already there implicit in our human condition, it invites a response of trust and of searching for its fulfillment. Education is one of the ways that respond with that trust and search for the fulfillment. We copy one another in the faith that those who went before us have left us a record to direct our steps. We accept the fruit of their labors with thanksgiving. We step up with responsibility to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Jeremiah Alberg

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

AAR-Conference November 17-20, 2012, Chicago, IL

The three sessions COV&R held at last year’s meeting of the AAR were so rich in content that any description here is either inadequate or would have to be a long treatise, which might not be able to transport the rich interest that the session engendered and then even become tedious. To avoid this, I have decided for the inadequate. And that will be very inadequate for two reasons. 1) I will only concentrate on some aspects that especially sprang to my attention; the selection will therefore be very subjective and not even try to be complete in any sense of the word. 2) I cannot give a summary of the second session on GIRARD and BONHOEFFER. The papers in it were intriguing but since I felt that as chair of the session I should not take notes for a report, I asked another participant to do so. However, he did not get around to sending me his summary in time; I am sorry for that but sometimes this happens.

Now what were the things that especially captured my attention in sessions I and III?

Session I discussed two books with themes of interest for COV&R. Both authors were present to introduce their thoughts, then panelists and the audience chimed in. In *U.S. War-Culture, Sacrifice, and Salvation* Kelly DENTON-BORHAUG poses the question whether sacrifice is central to the rhetoric of war culture in America and she gathers a lot of arguments for an affirmative answer. She acknowledges that her analysis of the strong connection between

the symbolism of sacrifice and economic liberalism is very much influenced by liberation theology and post-colonial thinking. She is convinced that the criticisms that have been brought forward against the idea of sacrifice can also be utilized against war culture rhetoric. She also acknowledged that she was not so much influenced by mimetic theory as by Nancy JAY and Barbara EHRENREICH. She sees George W. BUSH’s war rhetoric as a good illustration of her point. For me the high points of the respondents’ reaction and of the discussion were: Mark HEIM asked in his thoughtful response for stronger support for the book’s thesis of a connection between a certain kind of Christianity and the military-industrial complex. He felt that this was more of an association and criticized that the dots were not connected in the way one would hope for. Moreover the parallelization of Christian theories of sacrifice with war rhetoric of the soldiers’ sacrifice so far does not include a point of comparison for Christ’s role. Who would be the Christ-figure in war? If the soldiers are seen that way, is there a connection between their death and our sins, between their dying and the forgiveness of our sins? HEIM also observed that the book criticizes several attempts of reformulating the truth of the cross for keeping too much of the sacrificial language and he finds this reminiscent of the early GIRARD, who then changed his mind. He referred to Bob DALY’s argument that the church was precisely the attempt to live without scapegoats and therefore also without sacrifice in the old sense. HEIM added several arguments why we should not drop sacrificial language completely. In the further discussion Michael HARDIN drew attention to the fact of high suicide rates among soldiers and asked whether soldiers were the true victims of our society.

Richard BECK’s *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* is a book about purity psychology and its problems. It argues that purity psychology and the psychology of scapegoating are interrelated. Both place great import on the barriers between outside and inside, and the fear that the inside might become contaminated. The idea of contamination always works toward the negative: something pure can be contaminated through contagion by something impure; the reverse is impossible. The gospels, however, make the re-

verse statement: “Go and learn what this means, >I desire mercy, not sacrifice.< For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Mat 9:13 with Jesus quoting Hosea 6:6) In Jesus’ presence the impure is “contaminated” by the pure. In as much as Christians didn’t realize this, they applied purity standards to the Church. BECK then tries to analyze the phenomenon of scapegoating along this vein. It has been unmasked and yet we still do it because something is hiding our victims from us. Scapegoating has already been branded as negative; but we don’t see scapegoats, we see monsters. Monsters are locations of defilement—here the logic of purity and the logic of scapegoating meet each other. The logic of purity helps to conceal our scapegoating from ourselves. Respondent Martha REINEKE emphasized that the quoted text Mat 9:13 in fact names two ideas—mercy and sacrifice—that pull in opposite directions. She went on to ask whether our analysis of scapegoating would be changed by a better analysis of disgust. What enabled Jesus to draw near to sinners and what repelled Pharisees in disgust from them? The discussion centered very much on the link between ideals of purity and the psychology of disgust and how they affect Church and society in a problematic way. Is, in a final analysis, a misguided will to purity what defiles us?

COV&R’s third session drew together specialists to discuss René GIRARD’s book on the Brahmanas, *Sacrifice*. The arguments exchanged between the respondents—Brian COLLINS, Kathryn McCLYMOND, and Francis X. CLOONEY—dealt with questions of whether GIRARD did justice to the Brahmanas, although he did not directly deal with them but tried to analyze them through Sylvain LEVY’s *La Doctrine du sacrifice dans le Brahmanas*. Some answered this to the negative; others claimed that without that lens limiting his vision, GIRARD might even have found stronger evidence for his argument. I found Kathryn McCLYMOND’s statement particularly interesting because she very candidly addressed her difficult position: she is a scholar of comparative studies in religion—the very antagonist of GIRARD’s approach—and she becomes nervous when she perceives a clear purpose that could preclude the results of a study beforehand—something she senses in GIRARD’s aim to show the

uniqueness of Christianity. Despite these problems McCLYMOND did not only see weaknesses in GIRARD’s book but could also find benefits of it, even for comparative studies. I was impressed by her openness and fair treatment. Francis CLOONEY argued that GIRARD neither succeeded nor failed in his book. It should be considered as a starting point. He explicitly challenged “a younger Girardian” to take up the topic again and, by including more Vedic and Brahmanic texts, to try and find out whether he/she could make GIRARD’s case stronger.

The discussion touched on several methodological subjects. One was the question of how to deal with religious texts. Comparative study takes them at face value: if they state sacrifice isn’t about killing, it isn’t about killing. GIRARD tries to look behind the veil of the text and deconstructs it: its insistence that sacrifice isn’t about killing is likely to be its means to conceal the truth. Participants pointed to the fact that criticism of earlier texts is part of the Biblical canon and they posed the question whether Hindu tradition has something similar. However, when does one have to de-construct a text, and when should one believe it? Are there criteria? Another question was the scientific status of the mimetic theory.

Once again COV&R has shown through its presence at the AAR conference its determination to stay in dialogue with religious thinkers of different backgrounds and to weave its own thread into the discussion. I think this is very valuable about its AAR commitment. It is also notable that topics which are important to COV&R were discussed at this year’s AAR meeting independently of COV&R. For instance, I attended a session by the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group and Sociology of Religion Group whose theme was *Theorizing Religion and Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches, the Future of a Subfield*. The experience was mixed. On the one hand, the choice of the theme showed that COV&R’s concerns are shared by other scholars, which is a good sign. On the other hand, the total absence of mimetic theory from the discourse of very learned people was somewhat disappointing. Although, David FRANKRUFTER, of whom a book had been the theme of the COV&R book session at the AAR in 2006, posed some questions pointing in the right direction, when he

opined that the means of religious violence might show a common religious foundation of religious violence independent of a particular religious tradition. Scholars studying religious violence might have to move from the violence that religions do to the religious aspects of the violence done. Here mimetic theory should be able to provide some input.—One more incentive to keep going there!

Nikolaus Wandinger

**Working Conference of the Austrian-
Science-Fund supported project
*Raymund Schwager: Dramatic Theology***

From December 13-15 2012 experts on Raymund SCHWAGER and René GIRARD met in Innsbruck to discuss two volumes the research project is editing under the guidance of Józef NIEWIADOMSKI. The two volumes will publish material that so far is only accessible in the Raymund-Schwager-Archive in Innsbruck: The correspondence SCHWAGER and GIRARD conducted from 1974 to 1991 and Schwager's last unfinished monograph on *Dogma and Dramatic History*.



Conference Participants in the Archive

Project researchers include Mathias MOOSBRUGGER, Karin PETER, and myself and Simon de KEUKELAERE as translator of the correspondence, which was conducted in French and will be published in a bi-lingual French-German edition (for a hopefully soon to follow English publication, legal questions have to be resolved first). Invited participants of the conference were those who will contribute commentaries to the two works, namely James G. WILLIAMS, Wolfgang PALAVER, Michael KIRWAN, Mathias MOOSBRUGGER, and Benoit CHÂNTRE for the correspondence and Ralf MIGGELBRINK, Roman SIEBENROCK, Wilhelm GUG-

GENBERGER, Elmar KOZIEL, Gerhard LARCHER, and Jan-Heiner TÜCK for *Dogma and Dramatic History*.

The discussions were lively and very fruitful and the project is now in the phase of finalizing the text and negotiating with the publisher. For COV&R members the correspondence is of special importance. Therefore members of the research team, with the support of James WILLIAMS, will report about it at the next AAR-meeting (see p. 5 above.)

Nikolaus Wandinger

BOOK REVIEWS

Normally we have one review per book—and I think in general we should continue that tradition. But sometimes, there might be an exception. This time two competent reviewers volunteered to review the first book. The two reviews are from different perspectives and different disciplines: literature and theology; and although they clearly talk about the same book, they hardly overlap and certainly do not become tedious. Therefore and because there is still room in this Bulletin, I thought this would justify an exception to established rule. I hope you, our readers, agree.

Nikolaus Wandinger, Editor

**Alberg, Jeremiah L.: *Beneath the Veil of Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts*
East Lansing; Michigan State University
Press; 2013; xviii, 139p.
U.S. \$ 19.95; ISBN-10: 1611860768**

“The Hermeneutics of Scandalous Reading”

What is the relationship between looking, reading, and scandal? ALBERG answers with a subtle, thoughtful, and finally stunning meditation on the work of NIETZSCHE, ROUSSEAU, DANTE, Flannery O’CONNOR, and the Christian Gospels. Beginning with PLATO’s account of a story Socrates tells about Leontius, who is torn between fascination and disgust at the corpses he discovers lying before the executioner, ALBERG argues we feel both attracted and repelled by what we see when we read some literature; we are “scandalized” by it. Using René GIRARD’s insights to show how great literary texts lead us to look beyond scandal and beneath the surface of violence, ALBERG offers us finally a new

theory of reading—what he dubs a “hermeneutics of forgiveness.”

Reading WORDSWORTH and COLERIDGE and their romantic inheritors (principally, SHELLEY and KEATS), Matthew ARNOLD famously identified a certain equivalence between this secular writing and the scriptural tradition whose place it challenged for “high seriousness.” In our own era, Cambridge scholar Nicholas BOYLE, in *Sacred and Secular Scriptures* (2004), draws our attention to the same equivalency.

“What is the word of reconciliation that we, Paul’s addressees are commissioned to speak in conversation with the secular scriptures of our modern era? It must be a word that opens the way back to the origin in God of those writings—in the primal and unfulfillable commandments to responsibility and in the primal act of forgiveness by which God has taken on himself all the pains of our failure to fulfill it. (viii)”

Staring from BOYLE’s idea, ALBERG undertakes to explore “how an intelligent appropriation of mimetic theory leads to a hermeneutics of forgiveness” (ix). He does so by examining five distinct strategies of reading. Reading, for ALBERG, involves in the first place looking at, regarding (or failing to regard), the text before us, and proceeding, on that basis, to consider (or fail to consider) what is beneath the surface, “beneath the veil.”

In the case of texts that offend—like those of ROUSSEAU, or NIETZSCHE, for example—our first impulse may be not to read. Why? Because they scandalize us. They both attract and repel us. We are drawn to look at them because their presentation is unconventional, quirky. But once we look, we realize that they are leading us into an arena in which we are in some danger, where the purity we would like to maintain, the boundary lines we would secure between ourselves and others, is in jeopardy. Such texts are contagious, infectious with the illnesses we would avoid in order to maintain our current condition of health. They are likely to leak, we feel, spill over into our own hitherto safe domain, and render us a part of the scandalous miasma they promote. So we back away. We take our “sacrificial” distance from the offending text, and recommend that others take similar precautions.

But in the case of certain texts we have dubbed “great” or “literary” (a dubbing itself no doubt a containment procedure), we discover

that such texts are themselves already literary readings, already deconstructive interpretations of the more rigidly conceived distinctions of the stories or narratives at work in the circumstances of their own origins, and so looking at them more sympathetically—more forgivingly in ALBERG’s language—may afford us a way of learning both about them and more critically about ourselves.

Thus in his chapter on NIETZSCHE, and in particular on *The Birth of Tragedy in the Spirit of Music*, ALBERG describes our “fascination” with NIETZSCHE. NIETZSCHE forces us to look “long and hard” at the victims of Greek tragedy, the victims that earlier readers in the German university system (presumably Friedrich HEGEL) would allegedly refuse to read. But the virtue of his method is also its limitation, in ALBERG’s view, because NIETZSCHE will not go beyond this surface reading. He compels our reading of the victim but only the victim. He cannot go on—as a reader like René GIRARD for example can—to explore the sacrificial origins behind such Greek tragic reading or to recognize that Greek tragedy itself is already such a deconstructive reading that NIETZSCHE in the modern setting has simply rediscovered. Thus we encounter NIETZSCHE’s flagrant misrecognition of EURIPIDES, who is nothing if not the NIETZSCHE of the ancient world.

Or again in his chapter on ROUSSEAU, ALBERG describes our attraction as based upon scandal from beginning to end. Already in *The First Discourse*, ROUSSEAU launched “a broadside against all of European culture” (41). And in *The Second Discourse* he went deeper, “setting aside the facts” of sacred scripture themselves, a gesture for which, ALBERG notes, he gets praised in the 20th century by ethnologist Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS as the “father of modern anthropology” (42). The move is a subtle one as it at once disempowers a Christian audience from naming the scandal—to the extent that such a naming depends upon that Christian orientation—and yet names the scandal itself. “I foresee that I will not easily be forgiven for the side that I have dared to take,” ROUSSEAU writes in the preface to one of his first works, and then, later in his career, proclaims “that he would never be forgiven by others for the evil that they had done against him” (44). The “hermeneutics of forgiveness” is thereby an-

nounced, ALBERG points out, even as it is also rendered impossible.

Thus our potential interest and good will is once again rebuffed. Having recognized the blindness of the writings he is reading, ROUSSEAU in ALBERG's view would re-affirm that blindness or scandal in his readers. In both the case of NIETZSCHE and ROUSSEAU, we are encouraged to remain on the surface of these strange texts. In NIETZSCHE's, we are encouraged to play with signifiers on that surface, to examine the varieties of victimage we have precisely chosen not to see, but never to examine its anthropological origins. And in ROUSSEAU's, we are encouraged to close down what has been opened thematically, forbidden the discourse on pardon we are invited to appropriate.

In his chapter on DANTE, ALBERG describes how the famous Italian poet takes the opposite approach. DANTE, he suggests would like us to read beneath the text exclusively. From the very outset of *The Divine Comedy*, we are lost in the middle of a dark woods. We are encouraged to read only figuratively, as if literal reading were to be discounted before the more significant figurative levels of reading that Dante inherited from Church doctrine (55). "O you who have sound intellects, / look at the doctrine which hides itself / beneath the veil of these strange verses. (IX. 61-63)." The danger, ALBERG asserts, is one of "petrification," a concept he borrows from the story of the Medusa and from John FRECCERO's famous readings of the medieval poet. To avoid being "scandalized" is to avoid being made into a scandal, or more precisely to avoid being made into a *skandalon*, which is to say, a stumbling block, a stone over which one trips, a stone that has become, in other words, an obstacle or blockage to one's understanding rather than its facilitation. The Jewish name for such petrification and "skandalization" is of course idolatry.

But an enhanced understanding of the literal remains equally important in ALBERG's view, as important in fact as the figurative (on which in interesting ways it is based). ALBERG endorses Joseph CONRAD's perspective as much as he notes that Flannery O'CONNOR does the same: "To render the highest justice possible to the physical universe. ... before all, to make you *see*" (101). In fact, the only genuine hermeneutics available to us, ALBERG affirms,

comes from the Gospels. For example, in the parable told by Jesus to the lawyer of the Good Samaritan in LUKE, ALBERG finds the answer to the question "how do we read?" A man is beaten to a state of near death. Two figures of the Law pass him by, taking their distance by walking on the opposite side of the street. Only a "good" Samaritan alone (so identified because the Samaritans are not generally known in the Gospel text for their neighborliness) stops to assist him. How are we to act, Jesus asks the man, and correct answer is given: mercifully. The text offends, ALBERG tells us, and it is meant to do so. It offends the lawyer so that he may find in it the proper response. And it offends us as readers in a variety of ways. It may offend Christian readers for example who would derive from it support for an anti-Judaic stance. But to that extent, ALBERG asserts, we may fall into the very trap the text has laid for us, the trap that the man who comes before Jesus has fallen into. For the entirety of Judaism, ALBERG points out, at the moment of the writing of this text, is based upon precisely the concern for the indigent, to the extent of suspending the customary ritual laws of Sabbath (to take only one example) if someone is ill, and doing so not as a permitted or tolerated breach of the Sabbath law but as its fulfillment. What Jesus teaches by way of care for the ill is not against the Jewish law but *is* the Jewish law. To the extent that we think Jesus has turned away from that law is precisely the extent to which we as readers have fallen into the trap laid for us by the Gospel text, a trap that the thought of René GIRARD would teach us (and ALBERG's book would teach us) scrupulously to avoid.

What are the potentials in our own age for scandalous reading, for reading in such a way that engages the surface of things but does not stop there, that proceeds to a merciful forgiving second reading of the deeper scandals of our lives, the dead bodies (to echo KEATS) that "lie too deep for tears"? In an age dominated by media representations and the spectacular, one could hardly choose a better commentator, ALBERG notes, than Flannery O'CONNOR. O'CONNOR's early death foreclosed a career of extraordinary promise along just these lines. In the final full-length chapter of his book, ALBERG explores O'CONNOR's examination of violence, of the sacrificial and the murderous in

our own American moment, “the logic of scandal that goes from tenderness and pity to the gas chamber” (109).

To explore that logic, ALBERG comments upon an incident in her second novel, *The Violent Bear it Away*. The novel’s protagonist (“the nephew of a backwoods prophet” who kidnapped him as a child to raise him in the Christian faith) returns to the home of his youth upon the uncle’s death. Tracking his own younger nephew (who has run away), he finds himself one day outside a church where he hears the Gospel words verse “Suffer the little children to come unto Him.” Accusing his uncle in his own mind of having committed the worst sin in the New Testament—having scandalized “little ones”—the character decides he will become the avenging angel. He “has a vision of himself gathering up all the children that the Lord, not Herod, had slain” (113). Not unlike Ivan in DOSTOYEVSKY’S *The Brothers Karamazov* (which, ALBERG notes, O’CONNOR mentions in her notebooks), the protagonist imagines himself becoming a scandal, literally “scandalized” as a Satanic rival to the novelist herself. That the novelist did not live to write the novel she hints might follow this one ironically bequeaths to us the conflict between violence and grace in which the novel concludes. Like the character himself standing outside the church, we are left as readers to decide between two scandalous paths: one that leads to literature (and perhaps to the holy), and one that leads to the apocalypse. We are offered the option of reading O’CONNOR as staging violence (and scandal) or as the cause of both.

How do Girardian insights inform this book? The “mimetic hypothesis,” its appearance as “deviated transcendence” in the great novelists of our tradition, its origin in the sacrificial and scapegoat structure of archaic societies, and its exposure in Greek tragic writing, in Hebraic anti-sacrificial and anti-idolatrous texts, and in Christian texts about the life and ministry of Jesus are at work throughout. The book is drenched in them, in ways too numerous to elaborate. But what the book does in addition—and this sets it apart from other books utilizing GIRARD’S ideas—is ask the ethical question. Where do we go from here? What do we do now differently? What do we do that we didn’t do before?

One answer is that we read differently. We recognize the importance of literary reading and in particular the value of great texts of our tradition—Greek tragedy, scripture (in Jewish and Christian varieties), SHAKESPEARE, the great writers of the 18th and 19th century like NIETZSCHE, ROUSSEAU, and DOSTOYEVSKY, the great writers of the 20th century like O’CONNOR. Another answer may be, ALBERG suggests, that we read more sympathetically. We read the narratives and other texts considered as “teaching us how to interpret or understand in such a way that what seemed to be a stumbling block becomes a bridge” (120).

“We take up an attitude toward texts that is in some ways analogous to the attitude Christ claims is God’s own: I desire mercy not sacrifice. We do not sacrifice the texts that scandalize us. ... We read such texts with a quality of mercy, with forgiveness (120).”

Not unlike Theseus in SHAKESPEARE’S *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, who urges love in the face of the players’ “mistakes” (“in the modesty of fearful duty / I read as much as from the rattling tongue / Of saucy and audacious eloquence. / Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity / In least speak most, to my capacity”), ALBERG urges forgiveness. We recognize (I interpret him to say) that we can only read blindly, that there is no such thing as non-blind reading however much we may want one and whatever precautions we undertake to get one, but, at the same time, that there are blind readings and there are blind readings. That there are readings that are merely blind, or simply blind, and readings that are aware of the blindness in which they cannot help but participate, readings in other words that take stock of that blindness, and in moments of violence and extremity give it up.

And that it is to these latter readings that the category of the literary draws our attention. Awareness of the blindness, the scandalous obstacle-like nature of our own readings, the assumption of responsibility for the blindness and failures of those readings, the pardoning or forgiving of such failure and blindness both in ourselves and in others—is there any other definition of the literary, or the ethical, or literary ethical reading, worth preserving?

Sandor Goodhart / Professor of English and Jewish Studies, Purdue University

Opportunities for stumbling and being caught by the grace of God

Like a murder mystery, this book begins with a corpse; several corpses, actually. In PLATO's *Republic*. Leontius passes by the corpses of executed men. He both desires to look at them and to turn away from them. In a murder mystery, we want to know who did it so that we can feel comfortable with the guilt of someone else. But neither Leontius nor the reader wish to know the truth about these corpses, for they point to the truth of the victim of the society of which we are each a member. Such corpses are a scandal, a stumbling block.

ALBERG argues that scandal "can entrap us, but it also can be an occasion for a deeper entry into the truth" (xvi). In an analysis of scandal in a number of carefully chosen literary texts, ALBERG brings the reader up against scandal in ways to help the reader see below the surface to find a deeper meaning, the kind of meaning that Leontius resists. The analyses are so subtle and evocative that it is not possible to do them justice in a short review. I can only hint at the riches of this book.

Not only are corpses on display a scandal, but language itself is a scandal. "Words are and are not their referrers," they can "conceal as well as reveal" (11). Walker PERCY suggests that our concepts "package" reality so that the packaging becomes the "reality," as in the expression "the Grand Canyon is as pretty as a picture" (12). ALBERG says that "the Grand Canyon has been photographed, painted, and filmed in order to represent its actuality, but now the actuality has to measure up to our image of it." (12) PERCY deepens the problem of language when he observes that "in the end the signified becomes encased in a simulacrum like a mummy in a mummy case" (13). Speaking of corpses, GIRARD roots the origin of language in society's founding of culture on the victim. In its beginning, language stumbles over the corpse as does Leontius during his walk about the city.

ALBERG presents NIETZSCHE and ROUSSEAU as two thinkers who purposely trap the reader in scandal so as to induce paralysis. In his *The Birth of Tragedy*, NIETZSCHE traps the reader in the rivalry between Dionysius, a sacrificial deity who was himself torn to pieces, and Apollo represented by Socrates, a philosopher scandal-

ized by Dionysius, who became a victim of political violence. In a cunning line of reasoning, NIETZSCHE leaves the reader with two choices of victims that are mirror images of each other so that this stumbling block will forever hide another victim of collective violence. ROUSSEAU presents scandal as a repudiation of forgiveness. A conscious rejection of Christ. ROUSSEAU argues that the criminal on the rack is a scandalous image, one grounded on betrayal. The odd use of the term betrayal echoes another alleged criminal who was betrayed and killed by the state. ROUSSEAU tries to freeze the reader in the scandal of the criminal on the rack so as to read no further or deeper. In ALBERG's portrayal of ROUSSEAU, I get an image of a dense web of words designed to tie the reader's mind in knots so that the reader cannot see beyond the words to the forgiving victim.

The chapter on a few verses of DANTE's *Divine Comedy* is pivotal to the book. The characters Dante and Virgil are stymied at the gate to the city of Dis. When the demons send Medusa, a look at whom would turn Dante to stone, Virgil covers Dante's eyes to make sure he does not look at her until an angel from God sends Medusa packing. While stuck before the gate, unable to look, unable to move forward, Dante addresses the reader with these telling lines: "O you who have sound intellects, / look at the doctrine which hides itself / beneath the veil of these strange verses." (55)

These "strange verses" allude to 2 Cor. 3:14 where St. PAUL refers to the veil covering Moses' face when he comes down from Mount Sinai to hide the glory that has been revealed. It isn't just "Jews" for whom the text is veiled but everybody, perhaps Christians especially, who cannot or will not look beneath the surface. What PAUL is asserting here is that Christ, the key to the scriptures and also to universal history is the one who lifts the veil. Having a "sound intellect" entails getting beyond words "that figuratively get written on stone—that is, petrify the heart—or the same text, the same words, can be read as life-giving" (62). One could say that the *Divine Comedy* shows Dante's history from seeing the girl Beatrice as a dazzlingly beautiful girl to seeing through her to the Divine Glory so that Beatrice becomes Dante's guide into Heaven.

Not surprisingly, ALBERG discusses DANTE's famous comments on the four levels of allegory that use Psalm 113 as an example to lead us deeper into the text but with some extra twists through the scandal of language. The Bible "uses its literal understanding of an event both to subvert the dominant interpretation from within and to open itself to progressively deeper meanings" (63). The literal level of Psalm 113 referring to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is ambiguous. The Egyptians may see it as an act of expelling a troublesome tribe of foreigners who had "caused" the disrupting plagues while the Israelites may see the same event as a deliverance by YHWH. The same can be said of the Gospels. From the standpoint of the Roman authorities, a seditious person was put to death, Caiaphas had spoken rightly when he said it was better for one man to die than that the people perish. But the same text also re-defines "the logic of the scriptures" (69) to show that Christ had to be killed, not because God willed it, but because humans willed it.

From DANTE, ALBERG moves back to the Gospels as the source of scandal for NIETZSCHE and ROUSSEAU. This scandal is like the stone the women thought needed to be rolled away, only they found that this had already been done. In light of the Resurrection, the "real obstacle turns out not to be an obstacle at all" (72). Yet, in MARK's account, the empty tomb with the obstacle rolled away still scandalized, petrified, the women so that they fled, unable to speak. Eventually the empty tomb led to a deeper faith. Will it do the same for us? This time, we will not be helped by finding allegorical levels of meaning; we will have to deal directly with scandal and find our way through it.

The first of three Gospel texts ALBERG deals with is the call of Matthew. The scandal on the surface, of course, is that Matthew, a notorious sinner, is called by Jesus to become one of his disciples. Jesus' reply to the scandalized Pharisees that they learn the meaning of Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy not sacrifice" seems straightforward until one looks for the connection between mercy and renouncing sacrifice. Does it mean that the righteous are doing what God does not want and are not called? No, it means that "the Pharisees have to learn the true meaning of God's desires," to "see the Hebrew Scriptures in their proper light" (75). The scan-

dal is that anyone called by God is a sinner, and in being called has become a forgiven sinner. The Pharisees are challenged to reread the Scriptures "in a certain way" (77) so as to be one with Matthew and his friends. If we condemn the Pharisees as sinners, then we, too, must go and learn the meaning of Hosea's words. These words lead us to the forgiving victim at the center of our faith who "puts our belonging in a violent and sacrificial way to groups at the center. That is the way we learn to see ourselves as part of the mob." (81)

To ground us in this troubled and troubling center, ALBERG discusses the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4. That so much seed falls on bad soil where it cannot grow is bad enough. Jesus makes it worse by telling his disciples that he tells parables so that his listeners will hear but "will not understand so that they may turn again and be forgiven" (82). Jesus' interpretation of the parable makes it worse. The scandalized scholar Frank KERMODE concludes that "the Word of God is the seed producing kinds of people" (83). The parable divides the world between those who bear fruit and those who don't, with various subdivisions of fruitfulness and the lack of it. ALBERG pushes us into the question of insiders and outsiders by revealing the distinction as one made by *us* and not by Jesus. If we divide the world between "us" and "them," we will not understand the parable. The secret is: "there is no inside or outside—no in-group and no out-group." (85)

To take us deeper into this secret, ALBERG discusses the Parable of the Good Samaritan, a story with violence and a body taken to be a corpse at the start. The priest and the Levite *must* pass by because they must keep themselves ritually pure. The outsider, the Samaritan is free to help the injured man. We can easily congratulate ourselves on not being hung up on ritual purity or racial bigotry like Jesus' listeners and characters in the parable. This blinds us to our "blindness to the subtle ways in which we have structured our world into an order that gives recognition to some and withholds it from others" (89). We become blind to what scandalizes us. If we decide not to order our lives by the exclusion of others, we are one "short step away from excluding those who exclude others" (90). We still need to find ways to turn stumbling blocks into bridges. "How does one

become the kind of person whose religious sensibilities move him toward rather than away from the victim?" (94)

ALBERG turns then to the parable of Mary and Martha which follows directly from the Parable of the Good Samaritan in LUKE. The two sisters represent two ways of reading Scripture: with offense, or without offense. Martha is scandalized that Jesus does not ask Mary to stop sitting at Jesus' feet and help her with the work. We, too, are scandalized when Christ "does not help us with our projects" (96) and "does not command others to do the same" (96) although it is *we* who have chosen to bear these burdens. Mary is more like the scribe in MARK who realizes that God prefers mercy to sacrifice.

From the Gospels, ALBERG moves to Flannery O'CONNOR, a Catholic writer whose stories and novels are built on scandal. O'CONNOR says that when she cannot assume her audience shares her faith she has to make her vision "apparent by shock" (100). ALBERG goes on to say that O'CONNOR doesn't really wish to scandalize the reader, but she "dramatizes reality in such a way that allows to the reader to see beneath its surface" (101). The violence in O'CONNOR's fiction is not directed against truth or other people. "We might go so far as to say that with O'Connor this is violence against scandal, scandal being the obstacle to truth." (101)

In *The Violent Bear it Away*, Rayber Tarwater was kidnaped briefly by his uncle, a fanatical backwoods prophet, and baptized. After growing up to be a school teacher and an "empiricist of the most narrow kind," (109) he tried to rescue his nephew Francis Tarwater (simply called Tarwater in the novel) and was shot in the ear for his trouble, leaving him deaf in more ways than one. With the old man dead, the adolescent Tarwater has come to stay with his uncle because there was nowhere else to go. What is important about Rayber is that unbelief is "due to someone else's belief" (110).

ALBERG zeroes in on an episode where, while chasing Tarwater through the night, Rayber stumbles upon a mission service where the first words he hears is, "Suffer the little children to come unto Him." When a twelve-year-old girl starts to prophesy, Rayber is scandalized over what he can only see as another

example of religious exploitation of children such as experienced by himself and his nephew. When the girl preaches about the Holy Innocents and Jesus raising the dead, Rayber imagines himself as an avenging angel "gathering up all the children the Lord, not Herod, had slain" (113). In an act of what GIRARD called "misrecognition," Rayber blames God for what a human being had done, thus putting himself in rivalry with Jesus. When the girl sees Rayber poking his face through the window, she cries out that she sees a "damned soul," a "dead man Jesus hasn't raised" (114). This moment of grace is experienced by Rayber as violence. Grace is also experienced in the novel when Tarwater baptizes Rayber's boy Bishop and drowns him in the process. How scandalous can a story get? In the novel, Rayber wins the battle against grace, Tarwater "loses" his battle and goes back to the backwoods to follow his great uncle's vocation.

This book is intellectually difficult to some degree but it is much more challenging on a spiritual level. Any attempt to understand the book through concepts and ideas will fail. Scandal is not an idea one can put into a capsule. In themselves, words about scandal only trip up the reader. Scandal is what we stumble over time and time again in life as *lived*. The literary passages presented in this book are not about the authors, they are about each one of us and the challenge of the Gospel presented to each of us. To this end, ALBERG has given us an extraordinarily valuable book, a book that presents opportunities for stumbling and being caught by the grace of God.

Andrew Marr, OSB

Angenendt, Arnold: Die Revolution des geistigen Opfers. Blut – Sündenbock – Eucharistie. Freiburg i. Breisgau: Herder, 2011. 180 pp. € 18.95; ISBN: 978-3451305191

Arnold ANGENENDT, one of the major scholars of church history in Germany and beyond and now professor emeritus of the University of Münster, has written a small book on the still very delicate issue of the notion of sacrifice in Christian theological discourse and piety. Armed with a tremendous knowledge of the developments in the history of religion in general and theological thinking specifically along with an impressive overview of the more recent the-

oretical approaches applied in Systematic Theology, he intends to shed light onto what he calls the “revolution of the spiritual sacrifice”, a revolution which climaxed 2000 years ago on Calvary and, from there, implemented a force into history with the power to change the way of life and the course of the world as a whole fundamentally.

ANGENENDT’s undertaking is ambitious and without any doubt quite important, not least for theologians eager to find ways to deal constructively with the difficult and somewhat irritating fact that an important strand in Christian piety and theology is focused on the death of Jesus seen as a salvific sacrifice for all humankind. Contrary to certain theological developments in the 20th century, ANGENENDT states that sacrifice not only is the centre of Christianity, but has to be re-discovered in a time, where the grasp of the sociologically vital concept of sacrifice has almost entirely been lost. For this purpose he contextualizes this issue in the history of religions and theological thinking. From there he wants to sketch the outlines of a systematic approach to what he regards as the inner core of a specifically Christian notion of sacrifice as the only way to live the necessary attitude of sacrifice without falling into the abysses of bloodshed and violence.

What makes this especially interesting for the members of COV&R is the fact that in developing his concept ANGENENDT is constantly referring to the work of René GIRARD and his congenial theological companion Raymund SCHWAGER. The reference is not in the least favourable, though, and apart from ANGENENDT’s actually commendable systematic concern to recover the notion of sacrifice one almost gets the impression that his digging through an awful lot of material, both historical and systematic, was not least motivated by the urge to find arguments to prove that GIRARD and SCHWAGER were wrong in their thinking about this issue. The single most important theoretical backup for this claim is Walter BURKERT’s very well-known book “Homo necans”. ANGENENDT states that in this study an approach to the understanding of ritual sacrifice is developed that is totally different from GIRARD’s. While for GIRARD sacrifice was nothing but a “religious disguise for social violence” (13), BURKERT had a perspective from which he could incorporate

an intrinsically positive value of rituals of sacrifice insofar as they were “restraints of aggression by means of cultural rules” (19). Therefore, ANGENENDT reasons, in order to find the actual meaning of what he calls spiritual sacrifice, which was promoted to “exclusiveness” in Christianity (39), the theorist to follow is BURKERT and definitely not GIRARD, who could not see the importance of this concept in Christianity. Consequently, ANGENENDT blames SCHWAGER and his “Innsbruck school” of Dramatic Theology for having backed the wrong horse and even obscuring the central element of Christianity when they used GIRARD’s theory of the scapegoat-mechanism to explain what Christian sacrifice really is about. Especially the important New Testament “statements on atonement” (99), ANGENENDT claims, cannot be adequately understood when seen through the eyes of GIRARD.

Throughout his book ANGENENDT launches an all-out attack on GIRARD’s theory of sacrifice, using practically all objections against GIRARD ever made from German-speaking scholars over the years. This is nothing bad per se; being criticized—even harshly—may be the hardest, but often the most fruitful way to detect actual weaknesses in such overarching theories as mimetic theory and to further develop it where such development is necessary, or to put it aside where the critique actually shatters the foundations of such a theory. Unfortunately, ANGENENDT’s critique is not a critique of this kind. It is often based upon an eclectic and sometimes bluntly false reading of GIRARD and SCHWAGER. Furthermore, his tone of reasoning sometimes even gets sardonic, for example when he says that in developing his theory of sacrifice GIRARD has “denigrated” the attitude of Christian sacrifice (95). He also questions GIRARD’s scientific ethos, when he claims that GIRARD did not dare to put his thinking in critical comparison with other theories like, for example, BURKERT’s (23), whereas BURKERT, whom he describes as some kind of Anti-Girard, has often dealt with GIRARD (24) and has therefore – in contrast to GIRARD – developed a theory generally open for critical discourse. Apart from the fact that, as Wolfgang PALAVER has demonstrated several times, BURKERT and GIRARD actually have very much in common, it is quite frustrating to notice that

ANGENENDT makes hard accusations like this without even knowing of—or deliberately concealing—the existence of the book-length discussion between GIRARD and BURKERT (and J. Z. SMITH) in *Violent Origins*. The same applies to ANGENENDT's claim that GIRARD's theory of the sacralization of collective murder does not in the least cover important facts of the history of religion, because for example in the persecutions in the Christian Middle Ages—an epoch in which ANGENENDT is one of the leading experts—“no heretic, Jew, witch/wizard or Muslim” (115) had ever been sacralized nor had their killing ever been declared the foundation of peace nor had their tombs ever been venerated memorials as GIRARD described it in *Violence and the Sacred*. Again, one is surprised that the historian ANGENENDT has simply not taken into account GIRARD's *The Scapegoat*—ironically maybe his most interesting book for historians—in which he deals quite extensively with the specific situation in the Middle Ages when it comes to the persecutions of scapegoats. ANGENENDT's reading of GIRARD becomes extra-irritating when he gets to *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. When this book was first published in German in 1983, it contained only part of the original text and the translation had some problems. However, in the meantime it has been reissued in 2009 in a very good translation. ANGENENDT knows both editions and even cross-references them in his explanatory notes, but he does not even mention the single most important new element in the 2009 edition, which is based upon GIRARD's revised original French version: the extensive footnote in which GIRARD describes his new approach to the idea of a specific Christian sacrifice on the cross.

At least from the viewpoint of Catholic theology, GIRARD's early approach to the notion of Christian sacrifice was actually quite questionable insofar as he had thought for years that there could not be any such thing as *Christian* sacrifice. GIRARD himself has admitted this openly in many of his works, in interviews and, most notably, in his essay “Mimetische Theorie und Theologie” (*Mimetic theory and theology*) in a 1995 Festschrift for Raymund SCHWAGER. It was SCHWAGER who, in long years of personal discussion and correspondence, eventually succeeded in convincing GIRARD that calling

Christ's death on the cross a salvific sacrifice is not only a reminiscence to an old theological tradition, but touches the central element of the importance of the cross insofar as it is transforming the dynamics of collective violence. The cross, SCHWAGER insisted, had not only brought an end to archaic sacrifice, but had launched a new beginning of a specific Christian attitude of sacrifice founded on the attitude of Christ himself. It was *his* specific belief in the all-loving and forgiving father, not the persecutors' “belief” in the power of violence, that made the cross what it is for Christianity: the instrument of salvation for all humankind.

Again, ANGENENDT absolutely misrepresents the relationship between GIRARD and SCHWAGER when he claims that GIRARD's early theory of sacrifice was attractive for SCHWAGER because in it the idea of sacrifice was eventually eliminated (97). It was exactly the other way round. SCHWAGER found GIRARD's thinking very important to find ways to articulate what the Christian tradition actually meant when it spoke of the sacrifice of Christ, even though, in the beginning, GIRARD rejected this concept. Almost all of SCHWAGER's books—especially *Must There be Scapegoats?* and *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* come to mind—and many of his articles are driven by the desire to find a way to incorporate GIRARD's fundamental critique of the mechanism of sacrificial violence into the concept of a positive sacrifice on the cross without obscuring either element by the other. He did so by developing his Dramatic Theology, by which he could finally convince GIRARD. It is strange to see that, despite overwhelming evidence in SCHWAGER's work, ANGENENDT claims that in following GIRARD's non-sacrificial concept of Christianity, SCHWAGER's theology cuts out the New Testament's important declarations of atonement (99) and ends in a dangerously naïve ideal of nonviolence (109) by giving up the real concept of Christian sacrifice. Quite to the contrary, SCHWAGER clearly stated as early as 1976 in his first book that drew from GIRARD's thinking, “Glaube, der die Welt verwandelt” (*Faith Transforming the World*), that Jesus himself was the root for the specific Christian idea of atonement in his death. This idea was, in SCHWAGER's interpretation, well beyond the imagination of his disciples, so that it took gen-

erations for it to sink into the minds of Christians.

But ANGENENDT not only makes badly informed and often very harsh verdicts about GIRARD, SCHWAGER, and, as he calls them, GIRARD's "adepts" at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Innsbruck in order to expulse GIRARD from Christian theology once and for all. His own approach to an understanding of Christian sacrifice is, especially when one is sensitized by GIRARD's warning against sacrificial concealments of dynamics of violence, at least quite questionable. In Christianity, ANGENENDT claims, sacrifice is no longer a bloody ritual, but has become an attitude of "altruism" respectively an "ethos" (121). At the same time, he argues, using thoughts of J. HABERMAS, that a democracy is not only in need of the logic of sacrifice, but—and here is where it becomes tricky—it has every right to demand them from the people (131). At this point, it becomes quite clear that ANGENENDT's study is very much driven by a specific problem of contemporary German politics: for the first time in decades, he writes, the German "public has to realize the death of soldiers" (133). In this situation, ANGENENDT says, the attitude of sacrifice, which has been naively suppressed for a long time, is needed to cope with this extremely difficult situation. It is very conspicuous that ANGENENDT develops his concept of a Christian sacrifice not least to meet the needs of a society that has, once more, come to revive the spirit of military logic. In his eyes, it is very important that sacrifice, especially when it is used for military purposes, has to be a spiritual attitude, which means for him that it has to be situated within a framework of ethics and altruism.

As good as that sounds in the first place, one cannot overlook the grave problems that come with such a concept of sacrifice, especially when it is argued for as being an intrinsically Christian concept. This becomes quite manifest, when ANGENENDT refers to St. Peter's promise to Jesus on the day before his death to back his approach to Christian sacrifice: "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." (Matt. 26:33) (127). This reference shows quite clearly that an ethically, respectively altruistically understood Christian sacrifice in the wake of ANGENENDT can hardly escape exactly those mechanisms that the Passion actual-

ly wanted to unveil and transform: It is, according to the Gospels, precisely not a heroic act of altruistic devotion for Jesus' cause that is at the centre of the concept of Christian sacrifice. Peter not only could not live up to such a promise—SCHWAGER called this the "catastrophe of ethics"—, but deeply misunderstood what Jesus was really up to. It is, in fact, not Peter's heroic ethical attitude—the attitude of a real soldier in the spiritual sense ANGENENDT promotes in his book—, but Jesus' attitude on the cross that is the foundation of the Christian understanding of sacrifice in its specific soteriological way, a way that does not obscure the abysses of violence and scapegoating in the Passion by declaring it to be an event of extra-altruistic and ethical behaviour. The concept of Christian sacrifice is, actually, founded on the specific relationship of Christ to the Father, a Father who "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (Matt. 5:45) It is not a relation of demanding between the two and, therefore, Christian sacrifice cannot be explained from the sociological need of a society that can and must demand sacrifices, of whatever kind, from humans, as ANGENENDT suggests,—even if such demands are hidden under the veils of altruistic and ethical convictions of the perfectly spiritual soldier.

ANGENENDT's book has been very well received in theological circles and the feuilleton in the German-speaking world. It has been shown in this review how tremendous the misunderstandings and false verdicts on GIRARD and SCHWAGER have been; therefore the Innsbruck research group "Dramatic Theology" has decided to back an article I have written in response to ANGENENDT and which has recently been published in the "Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie", one of the leading theological journals in the German language. We sent a copy of the respective issue to ANGENENDT and invited him to come to Innsbruck in fall 2013 to discuss the matter of sacrifice, as the topic is too important both for theology and society to leave it to disputes between theological or theoretical schools. ANGENENDT, who is currently finishing a book on the development of the Mass in the Middle Ages, graciously has agreed to come and is very willing to engage in a, hopefully, fruitful discussion with members of

“Dramatic Theology” and other members of the Innsbruck faculty of Catholic Theology. Maybe his book marks, after all, the beginning of a new discussion about GIRARD and SCHWAGER in German theology and helps to better understand what Christianity actually means when it talks about the salvific sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Mathias Moosbrugger

Limbeck, Meinrad: *Abschied vom Opfertod. Das Christentum neu denken.*

**Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald, 2012.
(159 pp.) € 14.99 ISBN: 978-3-7867-2945-7**

Meinrad LIMBECK earned his doctorate in 1970 with the thesis *Die Ordnung des Heils. Untersuchungen zum Gesetzesverständnis des Frühjudentums* (The Order of Salvation. Inquiries into the Understanding of the Law in Early Judaism) at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Tübingen. From 1981-2000 he taught Biblical languages there. He worked intensively in ecclesial adult education and authored a number of books for that purpose, among them popular commentaries to the gospels. *Abschied vom Opfertod* belongs into that category as well and even radicalizes earlier positions. A number of positive reviews and the publication of the third edition attest to the fact that it deals with a topic that is important for many Christians in Germany.

The small-sized booklet of only 159 pages, including 5 pages of notes, mainly provides LIMBECK's understanding of the Christian message in a brief and summary way embellished by many, sometimes lengthy, Bible quotations. It purports to portray the results of modern, historical-critical theology and in doing so to bring the Christian message up to date. Its positive intention is to show that the permanent center of the Christian message is Jesus' message of the approaching Kingdom of God. This message has two emphases: On the one hand, the proclamation of God's unconditional, loving care for all humans, especially for sinners. On the other hand, it challenges humans to discover the possibilities of doing good that are concealed in the world and to energetically realize them. It differs from other Jewish expectations of the Kingdom of God by the emphasis it places on the actual presence of this Kingdom of God: It has already come: “Our world and life

in it is the place of positive developments that seems inconceivable at first but then become possible! God's kingdom is present in our world by way of potentiality!” (114) A number of private charities is given as supportive examples of this claim.

The fact that Jesus' proclamation led him to death on a cross is explained by his harsh criticism of the Temple. This criticism had a political dimension; thus he was executed as a political rebel. We have to surmise that Jesus saw this possibility when he went to Jerusalem. By engaging a style of discussion that was not very communicative, Jesus even heightened this danger, LIMBECK reasons. In the arguments with the High Priests and the Scribes “more concessions on Jesus' side would have been possible *and* necessary” (55). For the disciples, Jesus' death on the cross did not constitute an insurmountable obstacle, because they could interpret it in the light of the conviction of early Judaism that the violent death of a prophet does not compromise his message. Jesus did not evade his death and by this he clearly showed how serious he was about his message.

LIMBECK harshly and polemically rejects the traditional interpretation of Jesus' death as a sacrifice planned and demanded by God, whereby Jesus has born God's wrath about human sins substituting for the sinners. The criticism of this interpretation of Jesus' death has become widely accepted in theology—independently of the work of GIRARD and beyond the circle of his scholars. However, while scholars in general consider this theory the result of a deviation of theology in the second millennium, LIMBECK directly attributes it to St. PAUL and claims it to be the center of his theology. LIMBECK considers it completely alien to Jesus' message and to have misled Christianity onto a detrimental path to nowhere. Jesus announced a loving Father who turns to His creatures with unending patience. In contrast to that, St. PAUL is focused on God's permanent wrath about sin and sinners: Jesus' death is seen as salvific because he substitutes for sinners and bears God's wrath and in this way he works expiation for human sin. This, according to LIMBECK, is the only aspect of Jesus that is of import to St. PAUL. Beyond that “there was no reason for Paul to be interested in the life, message or actions of the earthly Jesus. Even if Je-

sus had done nothing but die on a cross, the Apostle Paul's theology would not change one bit!" (88)

Already in 2001 LIMBECK published *Zürnt Gott wirklich? Fragen an Paulus*. Stuttgart 2001 (Is God really angry? Questions to Paul), detailing his interpretation of St. Paul. I cannot give an elaborate critique of LIMBECK's position here, but some questions from a biblical-exegetic perspective must be raised: Are we permitted to apodictically construe God's love, as proclaimed by Jesus, and God's wrath, as described by St. PAUL, as mutually exclusive opposites, like LIMBECK does? Already in the Old Testament God's wrath appears as a form of His love for His people. For a systematic-theological perspective we have to emphasize that wrath is not only a sign of destructive judgment or even hate, but it can also be a sign of love whose intention is that the sinner may live. Moreover we have judgment words in Jesus' own message, his warnings against imminent destruction resulting from a rejection of his message. In these questions a look into Raymond SCHWAGER's *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* (Schwager, Raymond. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. Translated by James G. Williams and Paul Haddon. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) would have been most helpful because SCHWAGER not only gives an interpretation of Jesus' judgment words that makes them compatible with the message of the Kingdom of God (53-81)), he also elaborates on St. PAUL's theology of the wrath of God, analyzing it as PAUL's depiction of what happens when God retreats and leaves humans to their own devices, thereby delivering them to their own depraved thinking and their own passions (164-166). Above all, Jesus' proclamation of God's love aims at conversion, repentance, a human coming to terms with guilt and sin. The New Testament's invocation of God's wrath emphasizes that God reacts to human sin. He warns humans of the danger of irreversible disaster and still offers them a way to return. This is to be found with Jesus as it is in St. PAUL. Yet, LIMBECK does not consider this.

LIMBECK's criticism of interpretations of Jesus' death as satisfaction rendered to God for human sin is justified (it must be noted that LIMBECK does not use the term "satisfaction").

It is not, however, as one reviewer claimed, a result of feminist theology. It must be noted that this criticism is centuries old. Already David HUME refers to the Scotsman Andrew Michael RAMSAY (1686-1743), who converted to Catholicism under the influence of FENELON. RAMSAY argues against the image of God propounded by freethinkers, reformed theologians, and Jesuits because they divinized "cruelty, wrath, fury, vengeance, and all the black vices" in their interpretation of salvation history. He attacks their understanding of the fall into sin, original sin, predestination, and then also salvation: "Then he [God] sent his only begotten Son to the world, under a human form, to appease his wrath, satisfy his vindicative justice, and die for the pardon of sin." This way these theologians "disfigured and dishonoured the sublime mysteries of our holy faith; thus, they have confounded the nature of good and evil; transformed the most monstrous passions into divine attributes, and surpassed the pagans in blasphemy, by ascribing to the eternal nature, as perfections, what makes the most horrid crimes amongst men." (David Hume: *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. by A. Wayne Colver, Oxford 1976, p. 84f, cf. Andrew Michael Ramsay: *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*, Part II, Glasgow 1749, p. 403-6.) For several decades at least, a broad theological discussion has been going on about the theory of satisfaction. Most theologians endeavor to positively interlink Jesus' message of God's unconditional love and the theology of the cross. It is regrettable—and also characteristic—that LIMBECK does not take note of this discussion. Of course, his is a popularizing book, which need not deal explicitly with an academic discussion. However, it should be even more noticeable that the author knows this discussion and has taken a good look at it.

His polemics against the theory of satisfaction as a supposed center of Pauline theology provides LIMBECK with a means to relativize core elements of the New Testament. This concerns not only Christology but indeed also anthropology, in as far as prayer, striving for conversion and self-criticism do not play a role anymore. Being a Christian means being charitable, nothing more. "This way to view life and thus to be able to face the world in order to eventually bring to light God's goodness and to

make it tangible is owed to none other but Jesus” (152). Yet, notwithstanding the import of the love of neighbor, human life occurs in complex interactions of self- and world-relatedness; retreat into oneself, turning around to the community and to God. Dialogue, contemplation, prayer, reflection are indispensable. LIMBECK grants these hardly any import. He interprets the Bible from a fixed set of systematic presuppositions which considers a modern view of reality as absolute. He even thinks that by utilizing modern sciences he will be equipped to give a better explanation for the conflicts leading to Jesus’ death than the Biblical witnesses. “We are able to draw insights from modern history, social sciences, and psychology to better understand the events that led to Jesus’ conviction and execution.” (82) Biblical testimony is clearly subordinated to modern thinking—as LIMBECK understands it. However, it is too simple to try to determine the current significance of Christianity by using the three parameters charity, polemics against the theory of Jesus’ sacrifice, and modern science.

One might ask now: What has this to do with the concerns of COV&R? Quite a lot with the themes that have come up among religious thinkers within COV&R; very little with the results of the work that has already been done, which does not seem to have had any beneficial effect at all, one has to notice sadly. LIMBECK rejects violence and sacrifice in such a matter-of-factly and undifferentiated fashion that he is not interested in a reflection on their role in the life of individuals or of society; nor in the difficulties one faces when attempting to overcome or at least to channel them.

A final remark: Diverse forms of traditional piety of the Passion and of a theology of the cross must not be reduced to the theory of satisfaction. An impressive argument for that is a statement by the German philosopher Karl JASPERS. When critiquing Rudolf BULTMANN, he writes: “I would consider the scandal provoked by the belief in justification and the salvation from sin small compared to the scandal that Jesus, the messenger of God, suffered the most ignominious and painful death. This scandal, lying in the conjunction of the historical reality of the dying of a human person (how horrendous when compared to Socrates!) with the myth of the God sacrificing himself in that act,

is enormous. ... The most horrible pain, the most terrible injustice, the guiltless perishing as a slave and a criminal, this insistence on the reality of boundless suffering has cast a brightening light on all our human necessity and ability to suffer, a light which can protect us from Stoic apathy” (Karl Jaspers: *Rudolf Bultmann: Die Frage der Entmythologisierung*, München 1954, S. 88). Talking about the “God sacrificing himself”, JASPERS certainly does not have any theory of satisfaction in mind but he senses that through the centuries the faithful have experienced God’s solidarity with their suffering in the image of the crucified Christ.

Bernhard Dieckmann,
transl. Nikolaus Wandinger

Palaver, Wolfgang: *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*. Transl. by G. Barrud. Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI \$ 29.95; ISBN-10: 1611860776

Wolfgang PALAVER reads a lot.

This conclusion will surely seem inescapable to anyone who finishes his erudite book, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory* (henceforth *RGMT*). In this volume PALAVER sets out to both explain the fundamentals of GIRARD’s theory and to show its relevance to the wider field of studies in the humanities and the social sciences. He accomplishes these tasks splendidly.

PALAVER is Professor of Catholic Social Thought and now Dean of the Theological Faculty at the University of Innsbruck after serving for many years as Chair of the Institute for Systematic Theology there. He structures the book as a triptych. The left panel is largely biographical, with a focus on the evolution of GIRARD’s thought. This is followed by a chapter that situates GIRARD within the context of contemporary debates over the meaning of secularization. The right panel consists of chapters dealing with the implications of GIRARD’s theory for politics and gender issues. The three central chapters are organized around the three fundamental ideas that structure GIRARD’s thought: mimetic desire, scapegoating, and the role of the Bible in exposing the practice of scapegoating. In theory, the organization of the book as a triptych is fine; in practice the right side of the triptych (the chapters dealing with politics and gender) seems oddly placed. Rather than end with a concluding chapter that pulls together or

reflects upon the themes of the book, *RGMT* ends abruptly with “Mimetic Theory and Gender.” However, the central chapters are superb.

I first came to GIRARD’s thought indirectly, reading Gil BAILIE’s *Violence Unveiled* on the recommendation of a friend. In some ways, PALAVER’s book reminds me of BAILIE’s. But whereas BAILIE has an amazing knack for pointing out the connections between contemporary events/trends and mimetic theory, PALAVER is similarly skilled at bringing GIRARD’s thought into conversation with a wide array of theoretical perspectives. His book could quite appropriately have been titled *Girard and ...*

Throughout the book, PALAVER is attentive to the development of GIRARD’s thought, and he clearly delineates the various intellectual influences that have contributed to that development. When teaching mimetic theory to my students I always begin by making the point that the strength of any theory depends on how much it is able to *explain*, not whether it is possible to find an exception to it. PALAVER is particularly adept in this regard, showing in case after case the applicability of mimetic theory as an interdisciplinary interpretive tool. This comprehensiveness and wide range of *RGMT* is, in my opinion, the greatest strength of the book. Of course this very strength entails certain consequences. In the case of *RGMT*, the very comprehensiveness and engagement with multiple perspectives means that interesting and important arguments (especially with critics of mimetic theory) are necessarily abbreviated or left undeveloped. Reading the book, I found myself on several occasions turning the page in anticipation of following the author’s discussion of the point under consideration, only to find only a paragraph or two more on the next page, followed by a different but related topic. One instance that comes to mind is the point PALAVER raises about the paradox of anti-sacrificial violence (235-36); a point that is raised only to be dropped rather quickly without much commentary or investigation. Another instance is the chapter on the political implications of mimetic theory, which could easily become a book in itself. I hesitate to call this a weakness of PALAVER’s book, since it would be unfair to him (and to any author) to expect him to enter into extended discussions of all the authors he considers. If he did that, he would have

a 2,000 page book that not even his closest friends would read.

Given that PALAVER engages so many other authors and perspectives in this work, it is to be expected that readers will find themselves thinking and raising questions about any number of the topics he addresses. This was certainly my experience in reading *RGMT*. However, here I will limit myself to a few observations.

As mentioned earlier, the second chapter deals with the issue of religion and the process of secularization. It was not entirely clear to me, though, how the term “religion” was being used and what exactly it meant throughout the chapter. This is not really the author’s fault, since the more one reads about the topic of religion the more one comes away with the sense that no one knows exactly what it is. I used to think that I knew what religion was; even if I could not define it, I could at least recognize it when I saw it. But years of reading philosophers, theologians, sociologists, and anthropologists have sapped my confidence here. Certainly GIRARD has distinctive ideas about what it is that constitutes religion (at least in its archaic forms), but the term is used throughout the second chapter with reference to authors who do not share his ideas. Thinkers as disparate as Jean-Marie GUEHENNO, Benjamin BARBER, Eric VOEGELIN, Denis de ROUGEMENT and Walter BENJAMIN are all cited (17) as thinkers who have something to say about religion in the modern world. Do they all mean the same thing when using this term? If they do, what precisely do they take religion to be? If they do not agree on the meaning of the term, then what specific conception of “religion” is being juxtaposed to secularization throughout the chapter? And further, what is the relationship between these varied conceptions of religion and that offered by GIRARD?

Throughout the book, PALAVER compares a variety of authors with GIRARD; some are judged to be very close to GIRARD in terms of insight into mimetic behavior, while others are understood to possess only partial awareness of the place of mimesis in human affairs. Some are found to be naïve in their ignorance of the potential for conflict stemming from mimetic desire, while others are criticized for thinking that mimetic desire inevitably and necessarily leads to violence. AUGUSTINE and DOSTOEVSKY are

two of the heroes of *RGMT*; understanding the dangers to which mimesis can lead, while avoiding the temptation to claim that human relations are inherently conflictual. One thinker who does not come off so well here is ROUSSEAU, who, in PALAVER's judgment, falls into the naïve camp with regard to mimetic desire, because of his tendency to focus on the natural goodness of human beings. In my estimation, though, ROUSSEAU is much closer to GIRARD with regard to human desire than PALAVER maintains. I do not think that ROUSSEAU believes in the natural goodness of human beings; rather, much like GIRARD, he thinks of humans as inherently malleable—capable of having their desires shaped by those around them. I would also argue that in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* ROUSSEAU makes it clear that in their desire to satisfy their appetites, humans are drawn into patterns of cooperation, and that once this occurs, comparisons inevitably follow, along with the potential for tension and violence. So the problems associated with mimetic desire are latent in the natural condition of humankind—society and civilization only exacerbate tendencies that are potentially fraught with tension from the very start. Clearly, ROUSSEAU is not HOBBS; but the difference between them is more one of degree than of kind. And to the extent that ROUSSEAU distances himself from HOBBS he is that much closer to GIRARD.

A final observation has to do with an issue that bedevils (perhaps “besatans” would be more appropriate in this context) interpreters of GIRARD with regard to the relationship between his avowed stance as an anthropologist of religion and the theological uses to which his thought has been put. Some critics assert that despite his denials, he is not actually an anthropologist but a crypto-theologian who just won't come clean about his true commitments. In fact there do seem to be times when the lines between anthropology and theology become blurred—not so much in GIRARD's own work, but in the work of those who draw upon his thought. In *RGMT* PALAVER has an interesting

discussion concerning the concept of original sin in GIRARD. PALAVER is defending GIRARD against the accusation made by some German theologians that GIRARD is an “apologist for man's violent nature (223).” In doing so PALAVER cites theologian Raymund SCHWAGER to the effect that “GIRARD's theory can only be truly understood against the backdrop of the Christian teachings of Original Sin (223).” PALAVER goes on to argue that “insofar as GIRARD positions the mimetic theory within the teachings of Original Sin, it is clear that he argues for the intrinsically nonviolent nature of the order of creation. ... In contrast to HOBBS, GIRARD does not espouse man's violent nature; the chaos he speaks of at the beginning of human culture stands for man's fallen condition, that is, for the world after the Fall of Man (225).” I am not an anthropologist; but as far as I know, original sin and the fall of man are not terms used by practitioners of the discipline to talk about what it is they are doing when they are doing anthropology. Now one way to read the passages just cited is to simply note how PALAVER is showing the applicability of GIRARD's theory to certain areas of theology. And that would be entirely appropriate. But if what is meant is that mimetic theory can only be fully understood within a theological context, then those critics who suspect GIRARD of being a theologian in the guise of an anthropologist might very well have a point. Obviously this is not a question that can be settled here; but I do think it is an important one.

As noted, these are simply some of the questions and observations that emerged from my reading of *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*. This is a wonderfully rich and insightful work of scholarship. It is the best book I have read in terms of identifying and pointing to further areas in which GIRARD's thought can be developed. I learned a great deal from this book, and I hope that Wolfgang PALAVER keeps reading.

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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–XXXIV) is Online available at:

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