

COV&R



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“THE ONE BY WHOM SCANDAL HAS COME”



View at the Campus of Saint Louis University

COV&R Conference: July 8-12, 2015 at Saint Louis University

The 2015 Conference will take place at Saint Louis University, from July 8-12. It will be keynoted by Shawn COPELAND, a professor of theology at Boston College. She will give a talk on Friday July 10th called, “The Risk of Memory, The Cost of Forgetting.” James ALISON will also deliver a keynote on the evening of Wednesday July 8th, which will serve to open the conference. It is titled “Taking Cinderella to the Ball: how a mimetic anthropology restores the theological virtue of hope to its rightful place.” In addition, the conference is excited to have Peter THIEL back to give a keynote on the evening of July 9th. We also have a plenary panel on the future of mimetic theory and theology (July 10th) with Nikolaus WANDINGER, Brian ROBINETTE (theology, Boston College) and David BENTLEY HART (current occupant of the Danforth Chair, Saint Louis University). In addition, the lynching project, now in its fifth year, will organize a keynote panel around the theme of Ferguson and race. As usual, we will have a keynote devoted to the Schwager Award winners. We are especially happy to have a panel devoted to the founding and history of COV&R to celebrate its “Silver Jubilee.” James WILLIAMS, Martha REINEKE, and Gil BAILIE will recall their memories of the early years of the conference.

Grant Kaplan

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

The Bulletin is also available online: <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/bulletin/>

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

**Program of the Annual Meeting
November 21-24, 2015, Atlanta, GA**

COV&R will present two sessions at the 2015 AAR meeting in Atlanta, GA. An anticipated 9000 AAR members will attend this conference. Exact days and times of sessions will be determined by the AAR this summer and will be announced in the fall Bulletin. 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.

The 2015 COV&R sessions offer a wonderful opportunity to introduce mimetic theory to AAR members who previously may have been unfamiliar with the work of René GIRARD. Most important, the sessions will apprise attendees of the vitality of the field and of the varied ways in which scholars of mimetic theory are drawing on GIRARD's insights to illuminate and advance scholarship in theology and religion.

Session I (AAR Date and Time TBA)

René Girard and Catherine Keller: Engaging Process Cosmology and Mimetic Theory

Presiding: Thomas RYBA, Purdue University/University of Notre Dame

No Thing Outside: Affirming an Interconnected Reality to Reverse Patterns of Violence within a Whiteheadian-Girardian Paradigm
Katelynn CARVER, Harvard University

An Unfathomable God: Mimesis, Apocalypse, and the Process Theology of Catherine Keller

Martha J. Reineke, University of Northern Iowa
Respondent: Daniel London, Graduate Theological Union

Business Meeting: A brief meeting to plan the 2016 COV&R sessions at the AAR will conclude Session I.

Session I will break new ground for COV&R sessions at the AAR: we have not previously engaged process theology based on the work of WHITEHEAD. In addition, this session will develop environmental themes explored by COV&R when we met at the University of

Northern Iowa. Catherine KELLER, the author of numerous books on process theology, feminism, and the environment, (<http://users.drew.edu/ckeller/about.html>), is an important theologian of process theology. As KELLER describes process theology, "It is a relational matrix of metaphors about God and the world; an international movement of ecumenical Christian theology and practice; a major player in the dialogues between the world religions and in the rapprochement between religion and science, and a resource for activism on behalf of ecological, economic, social and sexual justice."

Katelynn CARVER will argue that René GIRARD's mimetic theory and Alfred North WHITEHEAD's process metaphysics can be applied to frame a model of violence that 1) is perpetuated through cyclical patterns of mimesis that reject novelty and succumb to the "evil of triviality," 2) proves harmful to all beings within a process-relational understanding of an interconnected reality, and 3) can only be reversed when the interconnected roots of existence are recognized, and respect for all within this relationality is genuinely exercised. In extending this model to address environmental concerns, CARVER will engage GIRARD and KELLER in order to illuminate the fact that human beings too often reject their overwhelming and innate connections to the natural world—a rejection that perpetuates the mistreatment of nature by conforming to the mimetic violence that stems from the act of "othering." She will suggest that when mimetic theory, process philosophy/theology, and religious naturalism are brought together, greater understanding can be achieved in considering the interconnectivity of life on earth and the devolution into violence that occurs when said interconnectivity is rejected.

Martha REINEKE will take KELLER and GIRARD's writings on the apocalypse as her starting point. In contrast to GIRARD, KELLER looks at a Jewish tradition that embraces apocalyptic as a proliferation of life, a new creation. The "darkness of God" points not to a dualistic absent or present God, but to a "profundity and fecundity within the womb of God." Key to REINEKE's observations will be KELLER's notion that apocalypse is joined with wisdom, in a disclosive process of truth, and that when apocalypse is expressed as an unveiling or disclo-

sure of a non-acquisitive desire, the senses are also opened in a mingling of creatures and Word.

Daniel LONDON will initiate conversation among speakers and the audience by offering a formal response to the two papers.

Session II (AAR Date and Time TBA)

Panel Discussion: Karen ARMSTRONG's *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*

Presiding, Martha J. REINEKE, University of Northern Iowa

Panelists: Chelsea KING, University of Notre Dame, David HUMBERT, Thorneloe University, Brian COLLINS, Ohio University, William JOHNSEN, Michigan State University, John DADOSKY, Regis College of the University of Toronto

Noted scholar Karen ARMSTRONG's recent book is attracting a large audience. In this book, ARMSTRONG answers the question, "Does religion lead to violence?" She argues against the inherent violence of religion and especially against those who wish to claim that "religion has been the cause of all the major wars of history." Drawing on examples across the breadth of history and religion, ARMSTRONG claims that violence is essentially a political activity into which religion is drawn only because it is embedded like "gin in cocktail" in a larger culture. ARMSTRONG bolsters her argument by making a "Western notion of religion" her foil: religion from the perspective of the West is "a codified set of beliefs and practices that are essentially separate from all other activities." ARMSTRONG describes political life in ways that make it, especially in terms of nationalism, the main engine of violence, even as she recognizes that economic, social and personal factors contribute to violence as well.

ARMSTRONG's book, dazzling in its expansive view of history, provides COV&R members with a splendid opportunity to bring René GIRARD's own analysis of the history of violence and religion into conversation with ARMSTRONG, thereby enhancing our understanding of and appreciation for the insights of mimetic theory. A memorably stimulating discussion is promised!

Martha Reineke

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members of COV&R:

As I write this last letter as your President, I am soon to board a plane to fly to Johannesburg, South Africa, the hometown of our late friend, Robert HAMERTON KELLY. In July I look forward to seeing many of you in Saint Louis, Missouri, in the American heartland.

This brief opening points to two themes that I would like to underscore. The first is the internationality of our Colloquium. Thanks to the legacy of René GIRARD, the great French intellectual who has spent most of his life in the United States, and to his friendship with Fr. Raymund SCHWAGER, S.J., the internationality of the Colloquium has been a basic feature from the beginning. One might call it an extension of René GIRARD's personality and hospitality and that of the ever expanding circle of his friends.

During the years it has been my privilege to serve as your President, this international character has grown. Before my election at the meeting in Sicily, four years ago, the pattern for our annual meetings was to alternate between sites in Europe and North America. Already at the COV&R Meeting at Notre Dame in 2010, however, the Board decided to dare to hold a COV&R Meeting in Tokyo, Japan. The 2016 Meeting will be held in Australia. The Pacific has become a vibrant platform for the mimetic theory—its study, its application, its critique and development. Such an expansion makes the repeated return to the founding places in the U.S.A. and Europe all the more treasured and valuable.

The second theme is that of constantly renewed friendship and sustained conversation. Because COV&R meets annually, both at different conference sites and in conjunction with the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion, our members have a remarkable opportunity to get to know each other, to establish ties, to collaborate on research, and to support each other professionally. In the ever accelerating haste and consumerism of our society and its attendant increase in violence, COV&R provides an antidote simply by the endeavor of sustained reflection on central texts and concepts and on their significance. As Sandor GOODHART once told me, "COV&R members like to 'vent', to mull over together what they have heard and read." There is, in sort, a com-

munal and contemplative dimension to our common work.

The simple fact of thinking together about important matters—"things hidden since the foundation of the world" and accessible only through revelation and graced reflection—means that COV&R has something of importance to offer to the Humanities as such and to their renewal. COV&R is, in fact, a sort of university, reflecting virtually every field of study, every walk of life, but simple in its central orientation toward basic questions of human self-understanding. To accept that the human being is an imitative and social being—indeed, hyper-mimetic, susceptible to the contagion of group influence, but also created in the image and likeness of God—is already to have found a starting point of fundamental importance for self-discovery and social analysis.

But also for the knowledge and the love of God. One of the things that really impressed me about COV&R and that attracted me to it was the religious disposition of its members, many of whom were and are people of prayer, all of whom are seekers. To list the names of founding members and leaders within the Colloquium is almost to intone a litany: "For Martha and René, let me offer thanks; for Fr. SCHWAGER, for Robert HAMERTON KELLY, ..." I cannot think of these people, I cannot think of YOU, without thinking of God and of his grace in your lives.

When asked "How can one measure the success of the mimetic theory?" René GIRARD gave an answer that astonished the inquirer trained in assessment. The mimetic theory has served its purpose, according to Girard, when a person realizes not simply that he or she has been a victim, but also (and much more crucially) that he or she has been part of a gang, a mob, a group that has turned against a victim. For such a realization, grace is necessary.

For true internationality, grace too is necessary. Saint AUGUSTINE calls the comprehension of the totality of things the recognition of its beauty. Only God can see the whole, can see the world—past, present, and future—in a single glance. Lifted above himself in ecstasy, Saint BENEDICT is said to have seen the world from above as a globe in a ray of light.

Such nocturnal visions are rare, of course, and given only to souls especially close to God.

But COV&R in its internationality, its contemplative attitude, can hope to approximate this vision through a realistic view of human violence and its causes and a corresponding empathy for its victims and victimizers.

During the course of his own religious conversion, René GIRARD reports that his insight into lovers' triangles and the violence generated by them was accompanied by moments of amazing beauty as he beheld the sunset, traveling on a train. My wish for us all is that we may lift our heads to see a similar beauty, rejoicing and thanking the merciful Lord who has loved us, even onto suffering our violence, forgiving us our sins, and teaching us a new way.

Sincerely yours,

Ann W. Astell

MUSINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

All of COV&R's members are aware by now that the organization is celebrating its Silver Anniversary. In the 25 years since its inception much has happened, but if I had to point to one thing that is different in 2015 from the world of 1990 from the standpoint of its impact on our group, it would be the way in which we communicate among ourselves. Indeed, while people did use personal computers from the mid-80's on, in 1990 there was no widespread use of the internet, thus no world-wide web, no email, also no cell or smart phones. So, although word-processing programs existed and were fairly widespread, once the text was written, one still needed to mail the disk or the hard copy to others and wait for it to appear in some printed form or another.

It is in light of these developments that I would like to take this occasion to muse a little about how we make use of these technologies and ask what further possibilities there may be.

I am not aware of exactly when the COV&R webpage was launched. It goes back at least until 2002. It seems to me that the website is and should be the main ways that COV&R reaches out to people today. Thus, it is disconcerting when one "googles" "Colloquium on Violence and Religion," the first thing that shows up is "Colloquiums on Violence and Religion - Universität Innsbruck" [sic]. I am not sure how one corrects the double error contained in the first

word of this listing. The present website is informative and serves as a good introduction to who we are. We do not take much advantage of the possibility of using images to attract attention and new information is only added on an ad-hoc basis. It was generally agreed by the members of the Board, that face-lift was needed.

So, one of the exciting events marking the 25th anniversary will be the unveiling of a new website designed by Carly Osborn. The old website should direct visitors automatically to the new site. I urge members to let me know what they think of the new website and to make suggestions for improvements.

The *Bulletin* you are now reading has been and remains the central form of communication between the members of COV&R. While we cannot get a sense of the material structure of the first issue from looking at it on-line, we can see that much of the content has remained steady throughout the 25 years. One will still find reports on the activities, especially the Conferences, of COV&R, book reviews, and the “Bibliography of Literature on the Mimetic Theory.” The only real change that has taken place in its basic conception and design has been the replacement of postal delivery of a hard copy to each member with an electronic version delivered via email for members in North America. The motivating factor in this move was largely economic; we saved the cost of postage. The issue it has raised is whether the *Bulletin* gets read or read as much when delivered in this form.

I would like to ask you to help me gather some data on just this question. If you are reading this on screen, then please, right now, send me an email at jlalberg@gmail.com with “Bulletin” in the subject heading. That is all you need to do. The results will remain anonymous. I would just like to get a sense of how many of our members are reading the *Bulletin*.

Thinking of the *Bulletin* and the website together, raises for me the question of whether it would be more effective to put things continually on-line with a notice to subscribers that lets them know that a new article, book review, or notice has appeared on the website. The key here would be the regular introduction of new content to get visitors to keep checking the website.

While *Contagion* is certainly another avenue that we have for communicating the results of our research with one another, I will not consider it here. It seems to me that with each member getting a hard copy and its being available on-line that *Contagion* has adapted well.

Finally, there is social media such as blogs, (Chris MORRISEY’s is a good example), Facebook (146 Likes), Twitter (Tweets from Gil BAILIE and the Raven Foundation), Linked In (Vern NEUFELD REDEKOP), Google+, and Academia.edu (over 1,800 people list Girard as a research interest and approximately 1,400 list mimetic theory). This seems to me an area whose potential we have not yet tapped. Grant KAPLAN has done a good job of getting this year’s conference listed on several different websites.

Again, these really are just musings, made in the hope that they might spark some ideas among you. As we approach the annual conference, I would love to hear some ideas of how we might reach out more effectively and make our work known.

Jeremiah Alberg

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Report on the COV&R Meeting at the AAR in San Diego, CA, November 2014

This year, the AAR had selected San Diego as its conference location. So while most of the U.S. was covered in snow and cold, conference attendees could enjoy the warm southern California weather and with it got served a number of interesting presentations and sessions, not the least of them the two sponsored by the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion* and organized by Martha REINEKE. Although the AAR computer system prevented the sessions from appearing correctly in the program book, the *Bulletin* had them printed out correctly (no. 45, p. 3), and they were well attended, although we were missing some long-term regular attendees.

It was a special joy for me that I could report that a project we had talked about at the 2013 AAR meeting in Baltimore, MD, (cf. *Bulletin*, no. 43, p. 4 and *Contagion* no. 21), namely the French-German edition of Raymund SCHWAGER’s and René GIRARD’s 17 year correspondence, had been successful and the publication would be available by December (see review in

this *Bulletin*, p. 13). But let us now focus on this year's meeting, although I am only able to report on the first COV&R session here, which was divided into two parts (for the second session, which was also very interesting, see the preview in *Bulletins* no. 44, p. 5-6, and no. 45, p. 3-4).

The first unit engaged Scott COWDELL's *René Girard and Secular Modernity* (review in *Bulletin* no. 44, p. 13) with Grant KAPLAN presenting and the author responding. Grant KAPLAN started out with a grand sketch, as to how COWDELL's book fits into an ongoing history of interaction between mimetic theory and theology. Giving a quick overview of all the important names in that discussion—starting with Raymund SCHWAGER, drawing attention to Robert HAMERTON-KELLY, James G. WILLIAMS, Mark HEIM, James ALISON, Michael KIRWAN and even taking into account the latest discoveries by Mathias MOOSBRUGGER—KAPLAN saw Gil BAILIES's seminal *Violence Unveiled* as one of the most important works in that vein, its only drawback being that it is somewhat dated now. COWDELL's book would come close to BAILIE's in its outlook and importance, with the clear advantage that it also deals with the later works by GIRARD, above all *Battling to the End* and the most recent interviews. COWDELL brings all these into a concise picture and thus enables his readers to compare and contrast the explanatory power of mimetic theory in regard to the phenomenon of modernity with competing theories of modernity, especially that of Charles TAYLOR. COWDELL argues that mimetic theory allows for a better understanding of the relationship between Christianity and modernity because it can plausibly construe a necessary relationship between the two, where TAYLOR can only see an accidental relation. Mimetic theory thus shows that NIETZSCHE was both right and wrong: right in his assessment that Christianity engendered a revolt of the weak; wrong in siding with Dionysos against this Christian Logos. Both modernity and atheism in a sense can be seen as fundamentally Christian because it is Christianity that teaches us how to be secular.

COWDELL responded by first explaining that his book is meant to serve two main purposes: giving an introduction to mimetic theory and reflecting on today's world from the standpoint

gained through it. In this, COWDELL sees several dimensions: Already in his early literary analyses GIRARD realized that there was an apocalyptic potential to modernity. After a decade he realized where its genesis lay when he wrote *Violence and the Sacred*. A third dimension is GIRARD's working through of the implications of his own adult conversion to Catholicism, thus bringing a new appreciation of the gospel and the importance of the Judeo-Christian revelation. Here the Catholic thinker Henri de LUBAC and the atheistic philosopher Friedrich NIETZSCHE agree when the one says that the gospel is the true twilight of the gods, while the other declares "God is dead", because Christianity has killed the stabilizing factor of religion and the question is how we can re-establish that. In his last book, *Battling to the End*, GIRARD recovers and develops his earlier insights into the apocalyptic dimension of modernity. From NAPOLEON onwards modern warfare represents the escalation to extremes that CLAUSEWITZ talked about. Because there is no working scapegoat-mechanism in place anymore to stop that, GIRARD sees no other hope than coming to a different conduct modeled on the example of Jesus.

A lively discussion followed which I can only sketch here with a few broad strokes. One interesting theme was GIRARD's position within Christian thinking. Although he is a Roman Catholic, some of his thoughts seem more Protestant than Catholic—or described differently—more Augustinian than Thomist. Different responses were given to that question: It needs to be remembered that GIRARD is no theologian himself, thus some of the theological intricacies are not in his repertoire. Sometimes his intuitive ideas might have a more Augustinian twist to themselves, especially when one also considers his critical view on philosophy. However, after longer reflection and discussion GIRARD often came to a more nuanced statement, being closer to a Catholic viewpoint. And it was added: AUGUSTINE is a Catholic thinker too.

The second part of the session was dedicated to Joel HODGE's *Resisting Violence and Victimisation. Christian Faith and Solidarity in East Timor* (review in *Bulletin* no. 43, p. 13-15) with William T. CAVANAUGH and Thomas RYBA presenting and the author responding. To start it

off HODGE gave a brief introduction to his book, which wants to document the experiences of violence that people in East Timor had to endure under Indonesian occupation and to describe how their Catholic faith helped them cope with it. On a meta-level the book wants to reflect on the consequences for church-state relations. William CAVANAUGH praised HODGE's work as an important book, especially because it sees religion as a real and irreducible factor in its own right and not just as a motivating factor, as do so many other empirical studies. The growth of the church is not only explained by extrinsic factors but also intrinsically, namely because faith in the crucified helped people to endure and interpret their situation of victimization. CAVANAUGH then shared some observations that might be taken as questions regarding mimetic theory's consistency as an analyzation tool and HODGE's way of employing it. CAVANAUGH drew the attention to GIRARD's emphasis on God's otherness and his claim that because of this otherness there can be no rivalry between God and humans (something that CAVANAUGH saw equally strong in AQUINAS when he declares that God is innermost to all beings and can make an act that is both a human and a divine act). This otherness of God actually makes the incarnation possible, makes it possible that Jesus is divine and human. In that context CAVANAUGH formulated some questions for Girardians: 1) Given the importance of Christ's divinity for GIRARD, does Christianity have resources to deal with violence that Islam lacks because it does not acknowledge the divinity of Christ; does a Christian theologian have to argue that? 2) About the relationship of HODGE's book to GIRARD's theory: Is there a sense in which HODGE tests the theory and not only applies it? Are there any critiques arising from the situation in East Timor? At least it seems that no divinization occurred of the victims there. How does mimetic theory account for that? And finally: 3) The view of the state that mimetic theory gives seems to be quite critical because the state's monopoly on violence is also seen as stemming from the scapegoat-mechanism. Does that mean that Girardian Christians necessarily have to be conscientious objectors because state violence is also scapegoating violence?

Tom RYBA offered the following comments on HODGE's book: he commends the book for its creative way of bringing ALISON, CAVANAUGH and RATZINGER together. For lack of time RYBA then immediately proceeded to his questions. The most important of them to me was whether Girardian anthropology was "naturalizable" in the sense that it could be a method without a theology, an anthropology that could be independent of Christian faith? Concerning the Eucharist: HODGE is emphasizing the social-collective metaphor of the Eucharist because it was especially important for his book. Yet, is there also an ontological dimension to it? Is it real or only a belief?

Joel HODGE responded on several points. He explained that in his view GIRARD sets up an apologetic with regard to the divinity of Christ. Hodge did not deal with religiously informed resistance coming from other religions in his book because that would require a closer study of those religions but he supposes that Christianity can draw on resources that are not present in other religions. His remarks on the institutionalization of violence were meant for the totalitarian and malicious state, not the liberal state. The dictatorship in East Timor intentionally wanted to take on supernatural power. Here the role of the church was to resist this kind of sacred violence. About the question of grace and naturalization, Hodge admits that he hasn't thought about this. He had tried to show that the Christian experience can be made explicable beyond theology. However, maybe in doing that, the theological points had become weaker; but the experience of forgiveness in violence needs to be seen as the working of grace. He stated that other authors beside GIRARD were needed because GIRARD has not a complete theology, not even a complete anthropology. Scott COWDELL added something as a response to the question about the necessity of Christianity. He drew attention to the fact that Nelson MANDELA managed not to be drawn into mimetic rivalry; he was not a practicing Christian although he had some Christian roots. Niki WANDINGER remarked that according to GIRARD, a divinization of the victim does not occur anymore, once the scapegoat-mechanism has in principle been uncovered. The mechanism still produces victims but its stabilizing function is weakened and a divinization does not

occur anymore. Moreover, Joel HODGE added, in the case of East Timor, a divinization of the state occurred.

As so often I left this session enriched and excited about the material discussed at COV&R's meetings at the AAR.

Nikolaus Wandinger

BOOK REVIEWS

Antonello, Pierpaolo and Gifford, Paul (eds.), *Can We Survive Our Origins? Readings in René Girard's Theory of Violence and the Sacred*. 2015. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, ISBN-10: 1611861497, ISBN-13: 978-1611861495; \$ 19.05

There seems to be no end to creative thinking inspired by the ideas of René GIRARD. Conferences of all kinds engage with his theories and apply them to many different fields and disciplines. This collection of essays emerges from one such set of gatherings and in a brief but insightful foreword Rowan WILLIAMS argues that work needs to continue on the frontiers between GIRARD's theories and other areas of critical thought. Among his concerns is to combat the current tendency to presume that to be human is to be 'a will in the void' (xv). The particular concern of the editors of these essays is to explore GIRARD's ideas within the framework of Darwinian evolutionary theory and hence address the question of origins and the continuing impact of those origins. GIRARD argues that humanity's beginnings were violent and that symbols, the defining characteristic of human societies, emerge as the result of the murder, subsequently unanimously misrepresented by its perpetrators, of an arbitrary victim. The corollary of this is that our cultures require, indeed demand, further violence if they are to continue. Hence the question posed in the title.

In addition, there are two further related questions in the background, and sometimes the foreground, of the articles in this collection. The first concerns the apocalyptic dimensions of mimetic theory. These have been present in GIRARD's writings for decades but have recently become more prominent. They suggest that the gospel's exposure of the truth about humanity's violence has the potential to provoke uncontrollable violence. The question is therefore

not so much whether we can survive our origins as whether we will survive the revelation of the truth about those origins. At least one of GIRARD's recent books suggests that we will not. We will not survive the gospel because we are not willing to live the gospel. The other question concerns how those persuaded by GIRARD, particularly by his apocalyptic ideas, should respond to the argument of Steven PINKER's *The Better Angels of Our Nature; a History of Violence and Humanity*. The book's purportedly counter-intuitive assertion that violence is, proportionately, decreasing rather than increasing implies, at first sight, that GIRARD may be mistaken.

The editors have arranged the contributions into four discrete sections preceded by WILLIAMS's foreword and an introduction that presents and contextualizes the essays. The first section is on the 'Programming of Origins' and is interested in the continuing impact of human beginnings. The opening article is by Paul DUMOUCHEL and engages with recent findings of animal behaviourists which have exposed the extent of conflictual violence among certain higher apes. The author shows how cooperation and conflict may not be in opposition to one another but are 'independent, reciprocal functions' (19). Pierpaolo ANTONELLO's essay takes its lead from the black box that appears at decisive moments in KUBRICK's *2001: a Space Odyssey*. The appearances coincide with transitions between stages in humanity's awareness and the author compares these with moments of liminality in rituals. He says that the 'victim is the liminal figure *par excellence*' (38) and that in modernity, as we live with a particular consciousness about victims, we experience a kind of everlasting liminal state which has enormous potential for both creativity and violence. ANTONELLO concludes that our hearing of the voice of the victim will help us to transcend our origins. The next contribution is Harald WYDRA's piece on peril and possibility. This concludes with the thought that acts of conversion are a form of dissidence, a kind of break with the mimetic consensus, that reveal a potential to turn vengeance into empathy. The final article in the section consists of pieces by Jon PAHL and James WELLMAN which offer a thoroughgoing critique of US domination of other nations and the related uses of narratives of sacri-

fice and the language of innocence to enable the practices that underlie it. There are interesting discussions of the religious foundations of US violence, of creationism as a form of cultural warfare and of the appeal of megachurches. At times the approach seems to miss the nuances of different theological positions and Calvinism seems to get treated as an all-purpose scapegoat.

The second section of the book focuses in the roles played by Christianity in mimetic theory and its application. It opens with Wolfgang PALAVER's discussion of parochial altruism (a concept captured I suppose in the idea that 'charity begins at home') and Christian universalism (the radical idea that the 'other' may be my 'neighbour'). Next comes Paul GIFFORD's article addressing the question in the book's title by means of a presentation of GIRARD's ideas in dialogue with ideas drawn from physics. The final essay is by the late Robert HAMERTON-KELLY to whom the collection is dedicated. It's a fascinating piece that leaps from idea to idea as though time is short. It covers everything from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the Apocalypse by way of Steven PINKER and PAUL the Apostle. His argument is that both Christianity and Darwinism are approaches to the central fact of nature's violence. Mimetic theory can show how they are complementary.

The next section of the book is concerned with peace-making in the contemporary world. Its foci are Northern Ireland, South Africa and Israel-Palestine. Both of the first two contributions, one from Duncan MORROW and the other from Derick WILSON reflect on the peace process in Northern Ireland in the light of GIRARD's ideas particularly as they are mediated through the work of KAPTEIN. They explore the fragility of the peace process between two communities largely defined in opposition to one another. They advocate the continuing need for places of true meeting and for change enabled by being with the 'other'. There are some interesting comments on the issue of gender and its role in both encouraging and overcoming sectarianism and it might have been interesting to read further reflections on this theme. The essays are followed by two responses. In the first Mel KONNER draws on his experience in Israel-Palestine while in the second Leon MARINCOWITZ reflects on the situation in South

Africa. The final essay is by the anthropologist Scott ATRAN who is sympathetic to some of GIRARD's ideas but deeply critical of others. He seems to contend that the truth claims of Christianity (and all other such truth claims) 'create the conditions of violence' (246). From his standpoint all religious-salvational positions are false because they are idealistic, teleological and essentialist. Why any claims that fall into such categories are to be regarded as self-evidently false is not altogether clear but ATRAN does at least offer a different perspective on GIRARD's views from most of the other essays in the collection.

The book's final section begins with a significant piece by Jean-Pierre DUPUY on the balance of terror and the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction. He repeats his longstanding criticism of GIRARD's thought on the notion of misrecognition. He believes that GIRARD's theory leads to political nihilism and that it can only avoid this by abandoning the idea that self-knowledge is incompatible with the sacred. It is this conviction that lies behind GIRARD's apocalyptic conclusions. If DUPUY is right then, I suppose, the idea of the sacred might offer some prospect of survival. There then follow three responses which focus on this issue. The penultimate essay is by Michael NORTHCOTT and addresses climate change. This offers a powerful critique of the 'cult of consumerism' (298) which is driven by the linking of the promotion of products and services and even signs and symbols to mimetic desire for status. The cult demands the sacrifice of the earth. NORTHCOTT, like other contributors finds hope in the possibility that those who follow Jesus have embraced an alternative mimesis. The final essay in the collection is by Michael KIRWAN and directly addresses GIRARD's apocalypticism. He helpfully sets out the options but carefully leaves things open.

This is a wonderful collection, full of interesting articles each of which offers insights. Its four sections reveal the breadth of its contributions which must be a good thing even if it means the book seems occasionally to stray from its claim that its goal is to set GIRARD's theories in an evolutionary and Darwinian frame. Some contributions do this admirably. Others, understandably, seem to have other agendas in mind.

One of the issues with cross-disciplinary explorations is that sometimes different presuppositions are at work. While GIRARD's ideas begin in literary theory and in anthropology, they sometimes appeal to transcendence which can easily make them difficult to assess for those accustomed to working within a framework of methodological atheism (or agnosticism). This comes to the fore in some of the discussions although it is not always framed in the same terms. For example, is the survival of our origins to be historical or trans-historical? Or to put it in the terms favoured by some of the contributors, is the discussion about survival or salvation? And what is the relationship between these two? Does GIRARD himself, in his published writings, explicitly discuss the two? Finally, do certain presumptions made by theologians, and others who think theologically, need to be bracketed if representatives of certain other disciplines are to engage in discussions of this kind?

None of these questions are intended to challenge the validity of the material in this book. Indeed, while reflecting on the essays collected here, I found myself wondering what other spheres of thought might be brought into intentional engagement with mimetic theory. I shall restrict myself to two suggestions. I am aware of some work already in the areas I intend to mention and it may be more extensive than I know. Firstly, the critique of market capitalism in NORTHCOTT's essay resonated with some Marxist positions and secondly, PALAVER's reference to the work of YODER reminded me that many of his successors have done extensive work on post-Constantinian and post-Christendom understandings of gospel. Perhaps further dialogues with Marxists and Anabaptists are in order.

By its nature, a collection of essays by writers with different perspectives is a different animal from a monograph with a sustained argument. Inevitably, then, I occasionally found myself wishing I could listen to some of the contributors in conversation with one another. Nevertheless, this book succeeds because of the range of issues it tackles and because each contribution offers insights and suggestions that encourage, indeed demand, further reflection.

Stephen Finamore
Bristol

Bartlett, Andrew, *Mad Scientist, Impossible Human: An Essay in Generative Anthropology.*

Aurora (CO): The Davies Group, Publishers, 2014. (346 pp.), ISBN: 978-1-934542-35-4 (pbk) \$ 32.00

Andrew BARTLETT is a passionate humanist and among the core circle associated with Eric GANS' generative anthropology (GA), which developed from mimetic theory but is also quite distinct from it. Even as a GA initiate myself, I was concerned about readability as I approached his book, since GA can be notoriously opaque. Would I be able to *just read it*, or would I spend sweat-drenched hours parsing paragraphs full of GA terminology?

Happily, my fears (with one major exception) were unfounded. BARTLETT writes powerfully, gracefully, compellingly. The book is an erudite, readable, sweeping and deeply insightful tour through four iconic and very well-chosen science fiction masterpieces: Mary SHELLEY's *Frankenstein*, H. G. WELLS' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Karel CAPEK's play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, and Ridley SCOTT's film *Blade Runner* (arguably the greatest science fiction film ever made). BARTLETT's book will be a major contribution to generative anthropology, and should be of much interest to GIRARD scholars.

As a scholar and critic, BARTLETT is a joy to read. Starting with the *Frankenstein* chapter (chapter two of the book), he strikes a near perfect balance between attention to plot, interpretation and engagement with the critical literature. He has clearly mastered that literature well but presents it deftly and unobtrusively—sometimes critically, but never uncharitably. There are many beautiful and highly quotable insights in this book; I finally gave up trying to underline them all. As for the thrust of his arguments (more below), when BARTLETT lets SHELLEY, WELLS, CAPEK or SCOTT make the case for him, he almost never goes wrong.

If only any of this were true for the first chapter! Readers are strongly urged to skip it, go straight to chapter two, and revisit chapter one later. It is long, plodding, difficult, rambling, and often redundant—so strikingly *unlike* the rest of the book. (Also, I fear those not already familiar with generative anthropology will find no reader-friendly explication here.) I

got halfway through chapter one, then finally jumped ahead in frustration. Returning to it later, I found that BARTLETT actually gives comparable advice (but not until page 59!). It is unfortunate that what could have been a short, serviceable introduction became such a barrier to entry; some readers may give up early and miss out on BARTLETT's interpretive brilliance.

But enough on form, and on to substance. Each of BARTLETT's four masterpieces presents, in a very different way, the "mad scientist" trope that SHELLEY first introduced to the world. BARTLETT designates this a "myth," meaning not a Girardian myth or a "false belief" but an important, enduring, culturally resonant story. As the title indicates, BARTLETT develops two parallel theses, the first about the "mad scientist." BARTLETT sets himself against "scientism," which would reduce *the human* to something other than what it really is or ever can be: physics, chemistry, genes, electrochemical signals. The myth of the mad scientist "playing God" may be thought hackneyed and overplayed by sophisticates, but BARTLETT wants to rehabilitate it, refurbish it, and demonstrate its continued relevance through his exploration of the four masterworks, which he sees as powerful rebuttals of scientism. Here, Bartlett succeeds quite well.

The second part of BARTLETT's project, the "impossible human" thesis, is much trickier, as he himself notes. I think BARTLETT succeeds only partially here. To know that the mad scientist has gotten it horribly wrong means for BARTLETT that he has tried to re-enact human origins, and created something—very tragically and pitiably—other than human. BARTLETT in turn relies on general anthropology's account of the human, as an exchanger of signs, with both an internal scene of representation and a communal scene of physical presence that confer value: language users, lovers, laborers, eaters of daily ritual meals—humans inhabiting a very human world. BARTLETT argues that we must resist the *victimary* interpretation that would see the tragic creations of Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Moreau, Rossum or Eldon Tyrell (*Blade Runner's* corporate scientist) as actually human.

The strength of this argument ebbs and flows as we pass through the key works. BARTLETT has to sift the differences between human and non-human so finely that I finally wonder why

he had to saddle such a brilliant book with this very *insistent* thesis. (I might also point out that GA itself does not seem to demand it; all of the characters involved use language.) It seems to me that BARTLETT is right about half of the time; yes, Moreau's miserable Beast People and *most* of Rossum's robots seem non-human. However, one doesn't have to be a "victimary thinker" to resist BARTLETT's evaluation of Frankenstein's monster or *Blade Runner's* replicants. They are sentient beings who can make moral distinctions. There are pastors who would not refuse them baptism, and the God who is not just "playing God" might not turn them away.

But this objection is not merely whimsical. BARTLETT includes Kazuo ISHIGURO's *Never Let Me Go* in the list of primary works treating the Frankenstein myth. The characters in ISHIGURO's novel (spoiler here) are cloned, bred, raised and groomed to be medically harvested as adults. They talk, go to school, laugh and cry and play together, grow up, consume, fall in love, make love, betray each other, reconcile, rage against injustice Would BARTLETT argue that these characters are *not human*? (By literary association, it seems he does.) If so, there is something very wrong with this thesis and either he should reconsider it, or we should reject it.

As final notes, the *Terminator* films are not referenced, but the first two, at least, deserve mention. René GIRARD *is* respectfully mentioned in BARTLETT's book, but given the clearly sacrificial elements in the key works more references would have been appropriate. Conversely, BARTLETT is attempting something that ought to challenge Girardian thinkers. He is *defending* the human, *justifying* the human, *celebrating* the human. Could mimetic theory do the same? Can it provide a basis for human value? BARTLETT may persuade some in mimetic theory to consider the claims of generative anthropology in a stronger light.

Matthew Taylor

Calasso, Roberto: *Ardor*. Translated by Richard Dixon. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. 432 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0374182311, \$ 35.00.

Ardor is the newest installment in Roberto CALASSO's now-seven volume project, previous

volumes of which have taken as their subjects the 18th-19th century French cleric and diplomat TALLEYRAND (*The Ruin of Kasch*), Greek mythology (*The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*), Indian mythology (*Ka*), KAFKA (*K.*), the 18th century Italian painter TIEPOLO (*Tiepolo Pink*), and BAUDELAIRE (*Folie de Baudelaire*). “Subjects” is a bit of a misleading word; TALLEYRAND and the rest serve in each book as something more like centers of gravity for CALASSO’s impossibly wide-ranging thought, which is as comfortable with symbolist poetry as with PARMENIDES or the history of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

For the general reader, the words “Vedic” and “Sanskrit” are synonymous with “arcane” and “impenetrable.” Consequently, some will assume that *Ardor*, which is focused on the ancient Indian scriptures called the Vedas along with their commentarial works, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads, is beyond the average reader’s interest or comprehension. The opposite is true. The English translation of *Ardor* is lucid and at times even conversational and the subject matter of the book is in some ways incidental compared to the larger questions CALASSO asks.

He poses one such question (“which lies at the root of all others” and which is familiar to all readers of GIRARD) near the end of the book: “[Why], in order to establish contact between human and divine, does a living being have to be killed?” (p. 345). To answer this question, CALASSO turns to the Vedic tradition, especially the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* [*ŚB*] and its corollary the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, not to analyze them, but to show how they can analyze us. For CALASSO, the *ŚB* is “a powerful antidote to current existence.” And though it is 2,800 years old and the culture that produced it is all but gone and long supplanted, “all that still shines out of it has a power that stirs any mind not entirely enslaved to what surrounds it” (p. 335). And, I would argue, it speaks directly to any reader with an interest in René GIRARD’s work on sacrifice.

The *ŚB* was produced by and for a class of ritualists who performed, more or less incessantly, an elaborate system of sacrifices ranging from the simple *agnihotra*, in which a libation was poured into a fire before sunrise and after sunset, to the elaborate *sattra* that was meant to take twelve years to complete. They offered to

the gods milk, clarified butter, a drink made from the hallucinogenic plant *soma*, flour cakes, animals, and, in the *puruṣamedha*, human beings. Perhaps most importantly, they offered words in the form of mantras composed in dazzlingly complex metrical forms. The *ŚB* is part of a corpus of written and oral literature dealing with the science of sacrifice that dwarfs the amount of words dedicated to the subject by any other culture. And in this literature, CALASSO sees the answer to one of the great anthropological squabbles of the 20th century (one which GIRARD takes up in *Violence and the Sacred*): Which came first, the myth or the ritual? For CALASSO, the Vedic corpus confirms MAUSS’s intuition that “myth and ritual cannot be dissociated except in the abstract” (p. 158). But since the Vedic seers preceded MAUSS and his uncle DURKHEIM by three and half millennia, “[it] should not, therefore, be a case of anthropology bending benevolently over the Brāhmaṇas to extract some useful relic from the jumble,” writes CALASSO. “But the Brāhmaṇas themselves might help anthropology to recognize something on which its whole practice is based” (p. 159).

Ardor returns again and again to an issue that plagued the Vedic ritualists and remains unsettled in India today: the killing of animals. It is equally unsettled in the cities of the modern West. Speaking of the incongruity of banning ritual animal slaughter among Haitian immigrants while millions of animals live and die in agony in the horrific conditions of the industrial slaughterhouse, CALASSO says that the gap between our disgust at the killing of a chicken in a New York apartment and our indifference toward the anal electrocution of the cows that will become our fast food represents “a remarkable omission when it comes to the killing of animals.” “And,” he adds, “there is no more direct way of discovering how thought can become so subtle and can agonize over the question than by reading the Vedic texts” (p. 348).

CALASSO is unusual, if not unique, in that he is well versed in the scholarly world of the history of religions (his press publishes the work of contemporary Indologists like Wendy DONIGER and Charles MALAMOU and *Ardor* was reviewed in the *NYRB* by Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s David SHULMAN), but not bound by its conventions. He shares GIRARD’s disap-

pointment that anthropologists since DURKHEIM have tended to dismiss the universality of sacrifice, which “like the sexual act, can be practiced in many ways, but follows an immutable pattern” (p. 243). CALASSO and GIRARD also share the conviction that sacrifice cannot be defined out of existence: “*Sacrifice*,” argues CALASSO, “is, by definition, something that society will *not* accept, belonging to an age that is dead and gone forever” (p. 357).

But where Girard sees the gospels as the supreme decoding of the riddle of sacrifice, CALASSO grants that honor to the Vedic literature. In a critique of *Sacrifice*, his monograph on the Brāhmaṇas, CALASSO uses the word “fallacy” to describe GIRARD’s conclusion that the Brāhmaṇas, while they come close to unmasking the scapegoat mechanism at the heart of sacrifice, are in the end another species of myth designed to conceal its workings. In unmasking “first, Greek tragedy and then, little by little, other literary and religious forms, including finally the speculations of the Brāhmaṇās ... Girard was doing nothing more than tracing back the movement in secularized society that can no longer see nature or any other power beyond itself and believes it is itself the answer for everything” (p. 349). This hubris belongs “the religion of our time, the religion of society” (p. 353), which CALASSO in his November 5, 2014 René GIRARD Lecture referred to as “the last superstition.”

“Certain ideas of the Vedic ritualists could be set out without resorting to their categories and reasoning,” CALASSO tells us, “but using words acceptable even in a twenty-first-century university lecture hall” (p. 293). There is however, a deeper layer, belonging to the realm of the esoteric, “an area in which it is increasingly difficult to find parallels in other civilizations” (p. 291-292). It is here that the Brāhmaṇas maintain what CALASSO says GIRARD has lost, namely, the hidden and unstated truth that there exists “a break between the invisible and the visible” such that “the visible ends up suspended over the void” (p. 293).

If there is much in CALASSO’s project that is anthropological in the Girardian sense, there is also something that might be described as Confucian: gathering together the classic works of human intellectual endeavor—in distilled form in his books and in physical form in his fabled

library—with the aim of helping his reader to live a fuller, more conscious life, more elevated and at the same time more integrated. Like GIRARD, CALASSO thinks anthropology has as much to learn from STENDAHL as from DARWIN. But CALASSO’s field of inquiry (and what he expects of his reader) is far more expansive than most. And if the reader thinks it sufficient to know MALLARMÉ and PROUST without knowing YĀJÑAVALKYA, then she is impoverished by the fact.

Not surprisingly, the attention and respect he gives to the Sanskrit canon has won him admirers in India, where his previous work *Ka* was published in several Indian languages and where *Ardor* is set to be published in Hindi. In light of the history of orientalist scholarship and the currently ascendant Hindu nationalism in India, some scholars might accuse CALASSO of privileging and reifying a Vedic past that we can only view through the narrow aperture that is the collected writings of its most elite inhabitants. They would be wrong to do so. CALASSO approaches the Vedic literature with a genuine intellectual humility, assuming it has something to teach him—and us. And if he prefers the rapidly fading world of Vedic ritual to the subsequent proliferation of popular Hinduism, well, he also prefers the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council.

Brian Collins

Schwager, Raymund: *Briefwechsel mit René Girard* (ed. by K. Peter and N. Wandinger) *Gesammelte Schriften 6* Herder, Freiburg 2014, 464 pp, ISBN 978-3-451-34226-4, € 42.00

What happens when a dedicated young scholar reads a book that puts into words what he himself had been thinking for some time, but wasn’t able to say with the same clarity? Will envy, mimetic rivalry and resentment be the inevitable consequences of such a discovery? And what if the author of this book in his young, committed reader finally finds someone who deeply shares his research interests and his desire to make them known to a greater public? Will he soon perceive him as a potential rival and obstacle to his own success and fame? Although those familiar with mimetic theory might consider such a development very likely,

the book which I gladly introduce here, proves another outcome to be possible.

The book, the recently published volume in the Raymund SCHWAGER *Collected Writings*-series, provides an exciting insight into the development of Mimetic Theory and Dramatic Theology. But it is also the history of an emerging and intensifying intellectual as well as spiritual friendship of two outstanding scholars of the late 20th century. Titled *Briefwechsel mit René Girard [Correspondence with R.G.]*, it includes more than a hundred letters by Raymund SCHWAGER and René GIRARD, thoroughly edited by Karin PETER and Nikolaus WANDINGER. The collection provides the original French letters, supplemented by a German translation, which was skillfully done by the young Girardian scholar Simon De KEUKELAERE in close collaboration with the editors. Thus having the French original on the left pages and the German translation on the right, the reader capable of either the language of STENDHAL, PROUST and FLAUBERT or that of GOETHE, SCHILLER and HÖLDERLIN gets a good impression of the development of this exchange of ideas and concepts.

It is fortunate that the correspondence can be traced back to its very beginnings on March 18, 1974. That is the day when Raymund SCHWAGER, by that time editorial journalist of the Swiss theological magazine *Orientierung*, writes a letter to the 12 years older René GIRARD. He had read an interview with GIRARD about *La violence et le sacré* in the magazine *Esprit* and immediately bought the book, which – after having completed its reading – he found “admirable”. Thus, he reviewed it for the *Orientierung* and also published a translation of the *Esprit*-interview there. In his first letter he asks GIRARD if he has written anything else on Christianity, and announces that he will try to find a publishing house willing to do a translation of *La violence et le sacré*. René GIRARD answers within a few days, evidently delighted by the interest of the Swiss Jesuit. It is “with impatience” that he awaits the translation of the *Esprit*-interview, and he stresses how precious SCHWAGER’s interest is to him, as he feels “fairly isolated – especially in California” (51 [English translations by the author of the review]).

After this jump-start, the correspondence slowly starts to evolve. In his second letter, dat-

ed December 1974, SCHWAGER admits his preliminary failure to find a publisher; two publishing houses had shown interest, but then withdrew due to economic reasons. Nevertheless, he says that—counting *La violence and le sacré* among the few books that really matter in the large tide of scientific production—he would like to stay in contact with Girard. And—almost prophetically—he goes on: “Thus I hope that your hypothesis will once be the subject of a great intellectual, religious and political debate. Perhaps the ground is not well prepared yet, but I on my part will do my very best to attend to it with my very limited means.” (53) And in fact, over the coming months and even years, he proves the pertinacious perseverance of a well-trained Jesuit, trying time and again to find a German publisher for *La violence and le sacré*. (Despite these efforts it will not be before 1987 that this book will finally appear in German.)

Again, GIRARD responds within a few days, announcing that he will be in Geneva one month later and suggesting that they could meet there if SCHWAGER was perchance passing through. Obviously, as his subsequent letter indicates, this was not possible for SCHWAGER, but it is not long until they finally meet in Avignon for the first time in summer 1975. From this time on, the letters increase in length, frequency and density. Below, a few aspects shall be picked out and highlighted:

A first, more personal one, is the emergence of an intellectual as well as spiritual friendship between two seemingly very different men: they are living on two continents, one a literature scholar, the other a theologian, one a professor, the other a journalist, one a married father of three, the other a celibate Jesuit. But, beyond their differences, they are increasingly united by their common interest in the relevance of mimetic desire, violence and the specific role of the Judeo-Christian tradition in uncovering what GIRARD calls the scapegoat mechanism. In some phases, the correspondence almost resembles that of two lovers, eagerly waiting for the next letter to arrive, for some new information or notice. But of course, with GIRARD and SCHWAGER, it’s their scientific “eros” that becomes noticeable in their correspondence: for example, both of them repeat in several letters how impatiently they are waiting

for the next letter to arrive and how excited they are to read the new books or articles of the other. And step by step this shared scientific commitment also evokes deep mutual appreciation, even affection for each other: While the first letters open formally with “Cher Monsieur”, later ones indicate their cordial connection through phrases like “Très cher ami” to open and “Je t’embrasse”, “en union profonde” (236), “avec toute mon affection” (118) and “Je pense à toi dans ma prière” (394) to close a letter. GIRARD also starts talking about “our common work” (198) and stresses how glad he is that Raymund Schwager is there to—especially among theologians—smooth out misunderstandings and to defend what is true in their common hypothesis. In each other they find an “esprit fraternal”, a like-minded companion, that proves to be all the more important as within their own surroundings they often find themselves isolated or misunderstood. Especially GIRARD complains several times about the lack of interest, or even rejection, which he experiences in the academic field: He talks about the incomprehension when it comes to religious questions (cf. 119) and his appraisal of some of his colleagues is devastating (cf. 273).

But how is such a friendship possible? Very few passages—especially in SCHWAGER’s letters—show that it is not easily or casually accomplished. In one of his early letters he writes towards the end: “I take the liberty of closing with a very personal remark: In my prayers I thank God that he has given you this wisdom. This prayer is for me at the same time ‘the means’ to not fall into a ridiculous rivalry by taking you as a model (master of thought).” (84) This remark, among others, shows how existentially relevant their common research had become for Raymund SCHWAGER: how self-critically aware he was of the pitfalls of rivalrous mimetic desire, and how thoroughly he had started analyzing his whole life and relationships by means of René GIRARD’s mimetic theory. It increasingly served him as a hermeneutic tool to better understand his own—especially academic—relationships and to try to master his proneness to rivalry (183). For SCHWAGER, this was also a spiritual process. In one of his later letters, dated Easter 1984, he refers to the necessity of the divine life-giving power, which is essential for overcoming, at

least in part, the violence within humanity and within oneself. And he adds: “I feel the resistance of these powers which want that everything stays a bit in the dark, a bit mixed—a bit of the new life and a lot of the life of this world. I also feel this resistance within me, the in-between stage is more comfortable.” (327) But not only SCHWAGER bears witness to the existential dimension of Mimetic Theory: GIRARD, as well, admits “the presence of *sacrificial* elements” (149) in his book *Des choses cachées*. He even mentions envying SCHWAGER for the academic sobriety of his superb presentation of their common hypothesis in *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? [Must there be Scapegoats?]*, an emotion GIRARD seems to tame by yielding the field of theology to his Jesuit friend (135). Apart from this impending but mastered rivalry among themselves, they both share the experience of troublesome “mimetic difficulties” at their respective universities: “Nothing is more propitious for this kind of things as academic life” (387), GIRARD notes in one of his letters.

But it is not only their personal friendship, their search for the translation and promulgation of each other’s works and their reflections about the existential dimension of mimetic theory that become visible in the correspondence. Also, the emerging controversial discussion on the understanding of sacrifice in the Christian context, especially the evaluation of the Letter to the Hebrews, is part of this exchange of letters. As Józef NIEWIADOMSKI has retraced this controversy in detail in the current issue of *Contagion* (Vol. 21), only a few remarks shall be given here: The discussion on the question of sacrifice is started by SCHWAGER in 1977, shortly after he had finished his book *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?*. There, in spite of its sacrificial language, he counted the Letter to the Hebrews among the texts with revelatory power concerning the amalgamation of violence with the divine, and he thought that GIRARD would share this perspective from reading *La violence et le sacré*. GIRARD, however, is confused by this interpretation, and rejects this very letter in *Des choses cachées*, as he assumes it to be a relapse into the sacrificial logic. He is convinced that his hypothesis goes into the direction of a complete dissolution of the sacrificial, whereby it nevertheless respects and even justifies medieval theology “in a relative and historic man-

ner” (111), although it is still sacrificial. Whereas SCHWAGER wants to retain the notion of sacrifice for Christianity and to use the same word for different, though related things, GIRARD is afraid this will only cause misunderstandings. It is not before 1995 (and thus beyond the correspondence documented in the *Briefwechsel*), that GIRARD finally in an article titled *Mimetische Theorie und Theologie* recognizes that he “was wrong twice”: Firstly, because a radical separation between sacrificial religions and the Christian religion was not absolutely necessary, and secondly, because the use of the same term to name two different types of sacrifice—bewildering as it may be on a superficial level—can nevertheless bear witness to the paradoxical unity of all religions in human history.

Apart from reflecting their essential controversy on the understanding of sacrifice up to 1991, the correspondence also provides some interesting historical information, as the correspondents mention in passing the disarmament debate, the first encounter with emerging computer technology, and GIRARD’s appraisal of the RATZINGER report—to name but a few. So, to conclude, one may say that this collection, though incomplete (by necessity, as not all letters could be found), provides a deep insight into the emergence of a fascinating way of thought and friendship. Completed by tabular overviews of SCHWAGER’s and GIRARD’s biographies, works and letters, as well as a helpful register of persons and a subject index, *Briefwechsel mit René Girard* turns out to be an indispensable reading for all interested in the theories and personalities of SCHWAGER and GIRARD, but it will also be of note for those interested in models of interdisciplinary research and intellectual friendship.

Petra Steinmair-Pösel

Weaver, Denny J: *The Nonviolent God*.

Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2013, xii + 304 pp., ISBN: 970-0-8028-6923-4, pbk, \$ 30.55

J. Denny WEAVER’s 2001 book, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, investigated the Christian doctrine of atonement in the light of recent challenges to the various versions of satisfaction theory that have held sway in the second Christian millennium. Satisfaction theory’s conceptual link be-

tween God’s salvific action in the world and the intentional violent death of Jesus has been called into question by new theological lenses, such as the nonviolent hermeneutics of KAUFMAN and YODER, René GIRARD’s exposition of sacralised violence in the production of human community, and the contextual perspectives arising from the struggle for justice and visibility expressed in black, feminist, and liberationist theologies. In that book, WEAVER had worked out of the conclusion that ‘Anselmian atonement was an abstract legal transaction that enabled the Christian believers of Christendom to claim salvation via the death of Christ while actively accommodating the violence of the sword’ (*TNA*, 5). He went on to retrieve and reframe the classical atonement motif of the *Christus Victor*, as popularised by Gustaf AULÉN, by outlining the ‘content’ of this motif from the Gospel narratives of Jesus’ nonviolent and socially radical ministry of the reign of God. He gave the term ‘narrative Christus Victor’ to this understanding of atonement.

WEAVER’s call for a paradigm change in the theology of the atonement was met by strong responses, both in agreement and disagreement. For some, WEAVER’s argument that the God revealed in Jesus’s teaching and ministry could in no way be implicated in the violent death of Jesus provided a theological refutation to claims that Christian redemption was founded on a more or less explicit form of ‘divine child abuse’, whereby a dishonoured (or disobeyed) deity required (or tolerated) the death of an only son as the necessary and effective satisfaction for the offence created by human sin. For others, the narrative Christus Victor motif left important theological issues unattended, such as the trinitarian and christological dimensions of salvation, the nature and guilt of human sin, and the requirements of justice in re-establishing broken relationships and social order. WEAVER responded to several critical readers of his book at the Mennonite and Friends Forum at the AAR/SBL Annual Meetings in 2007; these papers were subsequently published in the *Conrad Grebel Review* 27 no. 2 (2009). Agreeing with his critics’ insistence on the correlation of the doctrine of atonement with the trinitarian character of God, WEAVER emphasised that ‘more than an analysis of the life, death, and resurrec-

tion of Jesus, atonement is about our understanding of God' (*CGR*, 42).

This emphasis is systematically developed in WEAVER's recent book, *The Nonviolent God*. The author takes up again the 'narrative Christus Victor' motif of his earlier work, and by identifying the points of similarity and dissimilarity between this and the classical form of the atonement theory, he makes the case that 'atonement imagery is less about the death of Jesus and more an understanding of the character of God and how God works in the world' (*TNG*, 2). Central to that understanding of God is the rejection of violent and wrathful conceptions in imaging God's nature and God's way of relating with creation. 'That God should be understood with nonviolent images constitutes the major thesis of this book.' Doctrine, however, is integrally related to ethics. The nonviolent configuration of our image of God both emerges from and contributes to a way of living grounded in the practice of that same nonviolence. WEAVER thus refers to his work as 'a discipleship theology', a way of conceptualising God's salvation in Christ that flows out of the committed practice of the way of Jesus described in the Gospel narratives. Beginning from this narrative foundation, living our story with and through the narrated accounts of Jesus Christ, enables us to recognise 'the extent to which theology that treats the classic images of Christology as the unquestioned norm can accommodate violence' (5) and can result in theologically legitimated forms of violence.

The Nonviolent God consists of two parts: Part I, 'The God of Jesus,' which outlines the key elements of WEAVER's narrative Christus Victor approach to atonement theology in the New Testament and the revelation of the character of God made possible through this motif, and Part II, 'The Reign of God Made Visible,' which develops the nonviolent atonement motif in terms of christology and ecclesiology, exploring several contemporary issues which call for the lived theology of nonviolence to be applied. In Part 1, chapters 1 and 2 survey the New Testament material relating to the issue of violence and nonviolence, tracing through the various stages of the apostolic witness to highlight the nonviolent and culturally nonconformist quality of the ministry of Jesus within his first century imperial context. The story of Je-

sus attests to his rejection of violence, both in his understanding of God within his own scriptural tradition, and in his ministry of making visible the reign of God. At the same time, Jesus exercises an assertive and sometimes confrontational ministry on behalf of those suffering as a result of religious and political oppression. It is through this lens of the narrated 'story of Jesus' that WEAVER reinterprets the *Christus Victor* type of salvation/atonement favoured by many patristic authors. In the story of Jesus is enacted the struggle between the emerging reign of God and the current rule of Satan (enfleshed in the imperial system of Rome); the resurrection of Jesus is God's victory over the demonic rule and the empowerment of Christian disciples to 'change sides' (27) from the persecutory and victim-making rule of Satan to the nonviolent and life-giving reign of God. The letters of PAUL and the Book of Revelation attest to this victory of the risen Lord over the powers of violence and destruction.

Chapters 3 to 5 engage with key elements of classical (violently configured) atonement theology from the perspective of the narrative Christus Victor paradigm. Chapter 3 traces the gradual shift from the patristic emphasis on the victory of Christ over Satan to the medieval transactional accounts of satisfaction exemplified by St ANSELM's *Cur Deus Homo* (1098), which was published about the time that Pope URBAN II called for participation in the 'pilgrimage' to release the holy places from the dominion of the infidels. WEAVER interprets this 'rise of church-sponsored, redemptive violence' (81) as a product of the changed social conditions of the Christian church as an official agent of the imperial state. Chapter 4 rehearses the Old and New Testament texts that are generally assumed within classical atonement thinking to refer univocally to God's use of violence in relations with humanity, either by directly acting in a violent manner or inciting humans to do violence to others in obedience to God. WEAVER offers an alternative reading of these texts, arguing that there is a 'conversation about the character of God' at work intertextually within the scriptures, in which anthropomorphic attributions of violence to God are reframed within the nonviolent horizon of the narrated story of Jesus. Chapter 6 develops that conversation by affirming the authoritative and

arbitrative role of the Gospel narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and by pointing to the ongoing work of de-coupling God and violence in the mission of the church and the life of disciples. WEAVER's argument is close to that of Brian MCLAREN at this point (*A New Kind of Christianity*, 2010). The chapter concludes with a reflection on the motifs of divine wrath and judgement, and of the implications for God's sovereignty of stripping these terms of violent associations, recasting that sovereignty within the eschatological victory of the reign of God in the world.

Part II opens with an exploration of the correlation of christology and ecclesiology from the perspective of the 'narrative Christus Victor'. The story of Jesus reveals the character of God who is recognised to be present and active within that narrated event. Based on the five New Testament christologies identified by John Howard YODER, WEAVER reflects on the 'lived theology' that emerges from each of these, showing the form and mission of the Christian community in the world. Essential to the mission of the church is the task of 'asking how to express the meaning Jesus in a changing context and in other cosmologies and worldviews' (158) than those of the classical christological councils. The church, as a voluntary and nonviolent community of 'resident aliens' (using HAUERWAS' term), is the privileged but not exclusive place as the 'visible representative of God's reign' (186). Chapters 7 and 8 explore the making visible of God's reign within the lived discipleship of the church, describing examples of how the church can confront violent and victimising structures or policies in socio-political contexts with assertive nonviolent alternatives, and how re-enacting the gracious, non-retributive salvation offered by God in Christ leads the church to concrete practices of forgiveness which, unlike the retributive justice modelled on satisfaction theories of justification, promote letting go the desire for retribution and building up the conditions of restorative justice. In chapters 9 and 10 WEAVER extends the range of contemporary issues in which the church is being called to make visible the reign of God, and the unfolding of the victory of God's nonviolent, redeeming love within history. He reflects on the issues of race and ethnic discrimination, gender equality, economic jus-

tice, and the place of suffering in an evolutionary cosmology.

I would anticipate that responses to this book will reflect those made to WEAVER's earlier work. The current book repeats and reinforces the main lines of argument set out in *The Non-violent Atonement* and, while the author indicates awareness of alternative positions to his own, the theological convictions of the former work are restated without major development. Rather, the author pursues his stated aim of exploring what the story of Jesus, released from violently configured satisfaction models of redemption, reveals about the character of God, and what this understanding of God implies for the mission of the church in contemporary 'imperial' societies. There remain, therefore, several clusters of questions that require further clarification. One set of questions are christological. Preferring to begin with the New Testament narratives of Jesus Christ to articulate the content of the revelation of God in Christ, rather than the classical formulae of the early ecumenical councils, WEAVER bypasses the ontological categories of patristic theology, which often reflect a neoplatonic, participative theory of being. An effect of this is to separate the 'person' and 'work' of Christ, and to prioritise 'work' over 'person' in the economy of salvation. There is, thus, little attention to the incarnation in WEAVER's argument, even though it provides the implicit worldview of the apostolic witness. This raises, secondly, a set of soteriological questions, as the patristic theologians were very aware ('what is not assumed is not saved'). WEAVER sets himself the question: "How does the salvation found in the saving story of Jesus impact ... our lives today, as Christians?" (4) The 'lived theology' of the book suggests that Jesus' saving work offers moral motivation and direction to disciples' acts, but it is not clear whether human being or personhood is changed beyond the realm of moral responsibility. WEAVER speaks of a universal participation in the sin that results in the violent death of Jesus (202), but is there not also a God-given participation in the re-creation of human nature that occurs in the dying and rising of Christ? The Gospel of salvation in Christ is both a *way* modelled on the story of Jesus and a *power* of existence communicated

by participation in the dead and risen humanity of Christ.

A third set of questions raised by WEAVER's approach are ecclesiological. The narrated Christus Victor model of redemption WEAVER outlines correlates to an understanding of church as the community of disciples which reproduces the radical social agenda of Jesus' ministry of the reign on God. As citizens of God's realm, Christians of the twenty-first century, like the audience of the Book of Revelation at the end of the first, must take care 'not to become complacent and allow themselves to be deceived by an empire not currently engaged in oppression of Christians' (244). This vigilant and confrontational stance towards society is presumed to better reflect the New Testament ecclesiology than the later accommodation of the church's mission to the ordering of the Constantinian and Carolingian empires (165-6). However, as the creation of the new humanity in Christ, the church's character is both prophetic and sacramental. The church is both the 'visible representative' of the reign of God before humans, and the first-fruits of humanity redeemed in Christ before God. Christian communities both belong to and prophetically challenge the human communities in which they dwell.

Finally, a fourth set of questions arise around hermeneutical issues. WEAVER's argument exemplifies the paradigm shift in theology from 'the humanity of Christ' to 'the historical Jesus'. The methodological starting point in the narrated account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is regarded as providing the authoritative arbiter of later theological constructions. Thus, if it is agreed that Jesus rejected violence in his ministry of God's reign, and God is truly and fully revealed in Jesus' story, then God 'should be pictured in nonviolent images' (5). The question is whether WEAVER's starting point is the Gospel narrative or the pacifist commitment from within which the author approaches the scriptures. While I fully agree that we can be confident that Jesus rejected retaliatory violence, it is not clear methodologically that a principled pacifism is the only authentic theological enactment of discipleship in Jesus' name. I am mindful here of Dietrich BONHOEFFER's theological refusal to reduce the Gospel

command of peace to a formal principle of pacifism.

The book displays the excellent production standards we expect from an Eerdmans publication. There is a useful index and a list of works cited. Denny WEAVER has provided a well-structured and clearly presented argument, which helps us to think more Christianly about the God revealed in the person and work of Jesus.

Kevin Lenehan

EDITOR'S THANKS

Checking my files, I realized that this will be the 22nd issue of the COV&R *Bulletin* that appears under my watch as editor. I do not yet know whether it will be my last one, but this seems likely, given that I have indicated my wish to pass on this task to someone else and given that we have two volunteers for this task. The COV&R Advisory Board and Membership in all probability will decide on my successor at the COV&R meeting this summer in St. Louis. It could be that a successor is named who will only take over after a little while, so there might be some other issues of the *Bulletin* edited by me, but the time to hand over this task has come, and I want to take the liberty to say some words of thanks and vent some thoughts on my way out.

First of all thanks are due. When I agreed to edit the *Bulletin* at the conference at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico in 2004, I was not very sure how I would manage. Wolfgang PALAVER, who was then Executive Secretary of COV&R and a former editor of this *Bulletin*, offered me his help, especially gave me his files on the layout of the *Bulletin*, so that I could manage to bring out a *Bulletin* that was recognizable to members. I hereby pledge the same support to my successor. Then I have to thank the many "old hands" in COV&R who gave me advice, encouragement and support. I appreciated this very much. When I made a mistake in printing a review that hurt and offended an author, several members of COV&R, some directly involved and related, some only involved by their interest and generosity made it possible to find a solution that—I dare say—minimized the hurt and the damage as much as was still possible and also supported me in my position and function as editor. Here again apologies for the mis-

take and great appreciation for your support. Those who are concerned will know whom and what I am talking about.

Special thanks to the many authors who wrote for the *Bulletin* during my editorship. Above all my colleagues in Innsbruck were easy prey for me when I needed a reviewer because I only needed to walk down the corridor to nag them. But in fact, it didn't need much nagging. Whenever they could they agreed. Still, the *Bulletin* would have been very one-sided, if only Innsbruck people had written in it. I tried to avoid that as good as I could. Whether I was successful is not for me to say. But I want to thank all others who wrote for the *Bulletin*, again especially long-standing members who still found time and motivation to write for our small *Bulletin*. When I look at this issue, I think it is a very fine example of excellent, informative reviews for books that must be worth reading when such reviews are given. Still, many of us don't find the time to read all those books. The more important is it to have a good review at hand. Therefore I think this and the bibliography are the most important staples the *Bulletin* provides. For the bibliography I want to give special thanks to my colleague Dietmar REGENSBURGER. I had to grant him an extension of time every now and then, but the bibliography then arrived perfectly formatted, concise and a great tool for COV&R members.

Let me add some thoughts on the future, not to preclude anything my successor might want to do but to offer some ideas on paper. In German we have the saying "paper is patient", meaning that it might be of no consequence anyway.

My impression is that the *Bulletin* has lost interest in the past years. Since I am not aware that its quality has diminished (I might be wrong there, of course), I gather there are other reasons for this. Some years ago the treasurer of the North American branch decided that he'd rather not mail the *Bulletin* by snail-mail anymore but only e-mail a link to the digital version on the COV&R web-site, because our funds were scarce. To me it was and still is strange that during the time when COV&R had no support from Imitatio or from the Raven Foundation, we could afford to mail a printed *Bulletin* to North American members, but now

we cannot. Financial reasons rarely are purely financial reasons, they are also priority statements. I have been asking myself whether this change of priority was the result of a diminishing interest in the *Bulletin* (in which case it was a very good decision but maybe a too timid one) or whether the diminishing interest is the—unforeseen and unwanted—consequence of abolishing the printed issue for North Americans (in which case this decision should be reconsidered). Therefore I am very much in favor of J. ALBERG's initiative to poll the North American members on whether they in fact do read the online *Bulletin*. Still, there is no control group. We will not know afterwards whether more people would read a printed version.

It might be the case that the way we are communicating has changed and that a printed *Bulletin* is not up to the task anymore. Then I hope my successor will have ideas on how to transform the *Bulletin* into something topical and important for the current membership. It might also be the case that the COV&R membership in its majority has not come around to read a members' *Bulletin* online. Of course, we read academic articles, maybe even books online; but a membership journal might be different. The offer I made some years ago of a *Bulletin* for the Kindle reading device received no response. Recently someone with some media expertise told me: What does not work is taking a format created for printing and then just put it online; either do it digital and use a design that is made for that—or do it the old-fashioned way (which does not rule out a digital availability, as we've had it for a very long time with the *Bulletin*, as an additional offer, not as the main staple).

My intent here is to instigate thoughts by COV&R members on what the *Bulletin* is worth to them and in what format it is most useful for them. It is up to the Advisory Board to decide on that form. And it will be the new editor's task to realize the best possible *Bulletin* for the coming years. I wish her/him the best of luck with this and will support him/her to my best abilities.

Thank you, COV&R members, for all these years as editor of your *Bulletin*.

Nikolaus Wandinger

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Dietmar Regensburger

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–XXXVIII) is Online available at: http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/girard/mimetic_theory.html

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