

TRANSFORMING VIOLENCE: CULT, CULTURE, AND ACCULTURATION

**COV&R Conference: June 30-July 4, 2010
University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA**



Topic

Violence transforms persons and communities. Violence is also transformed by those same, affected persons and communities, as they struggle to live in its wake or under its continued threat. René Girard's mimetic theory obviously applies to the sociology of assimilation, whereby members of a vulnerable minority group seek (often in vain) to become like the majority, sharing its values and blending into its culture so as to be lost (and thus protectively hidden) in it. Assimilation is, however, only one of several patterns of acculturation,

each of which retains a violent potential. Marginalized, the minority group may be refused avenues of assimilation. Alternatively, the minority group may refuse to assimilate, defining its communal existence as a prophetic counter-culture. Mimetic relations vary across a spectrum. Whether the minority group assimilates to, separates visibly from, haunts and troubles from within, or provokes the majority at its cultural margins, it dynamically affects the dominant culture—so much so that, in a pluralist scenario, the dominant culture imagines itself to be a colorful aggregate of minority cultures, a Girardian “interdividuality” writ large. What was formerly marginal can become symbolically central to the dominant culture’s self-definition—a hopeful proof of its “rags to riches” opportunities, a humble badge of its acknowledged shame, a trophy of its religious (in)tolerance, an icon of its scandalous transgression, a memorial of past strife, perhaps also a symptom of its own perceived vulnerability.

For Girard, “culture always develops as a tomb,” a monument erected over the victims of mimetic rivalry. The apocalyptic end of a fundamentally sacrificial culture can only be projected, therefore, against the horizon of a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1) of unconditional non-violence, already revealed in Christ’s Passion, death, and resurrection. What sort of cultural formations, then, result from the experience of social violence? How do they give and conceal evidence of their violent genesis? What determines whether or not a cultural form puts violence to rest, keeps it at bay, perpetuates it, or awakens its reappearance in yet another, related form? Can the “art” of violence become the “work” of peace? If so, how and under what conditions?

The Colloquium of Violence and Religion seeks to further its exploration of the transformation of violence into a myriad of cultural forms—religious, legal, political, economic, medical, artistic, literary, philosophical, and professional—at its annual meeting, held in 2010 on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. Proposals for papers, panels, and seminar sessions on any aspect of mimetic theory are welcome. Of particular interest to the organizers of COV&R 2010 are studies of the complex role of religion in the lives of members of minority groups who have suffered and continue to suffer social violence—immigrants, refugees, convicts, conscientious objectors, the poor, the disabled, the indigenous, the Amish, African-Americans, Catholics, Jews, Hispanics, Asian-Americans.

Call for Papers

In addition to proposals for papers, the organizers of COV&R 2010 welcome proposals for seminars on specific topics of interest to the Colloquium. Such proposals should include a designated seminar leader to facilitate discussion, a description of the topic to be discussed, and a reading list. Accepted seminar proposals will be posted on the conference webpage. Seminar participants at the conference will be required to sign up in advance for a given seminar, to read the assigned essay(s), and to write a short reflection (150 words) in response to the reading(s) as a preparation for discussion.

Proposals for papers, panels, sessions, and seminars are **due March 15, 2010**. They should include contact information, a title, and an abstract of 300 words, sent to Margaret Pfeil via e-mail mpfeil1@nd.edu or mailed to her at the Department of Theology, 130 Malloy Hall, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.

Campus & Lodging

The COV&R 2010 theme “Transforming Violence: Cult, Culture, and Acculturation” is especially appropriate to the University of Notre Dame du Lac. A famous Catholic campus, founded in 1842 by Fr. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., Notre Dame ranks among the top twenty universities in the United States. Its Golden Dome remains the academic icon of a Church of immigrants—French and Irish—who struggled for survival in a foreign land, who served as missionaries to the Potawatomi Indians, who faced down the local Ku Klux Klan in 1924, and who increasingly risked assimilation into the American mainstream.

That immigrant background makes the University of Notre Dame a fitting site to explore, in particular, the issue of acculturation from a Girardian perspective, given the enduring presence of distinct ethnic groups (Amish) in the area, the on-going service of Notre Dame students to the migrant and urban poor, Fr. Theodore (“Ted”) Hesburgh’s legacy of collaboration with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the Civil Rights Movement, and the presence at Notre Dame of a rich array of relevant academic Departments, centers, and research institutes—among them, the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, the Institute for Church Life, the Institute for Latino Studies, and the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

Located on 1,250 acres containing two lakes, walking trails, and 138 buildings, the University of Notre Dame is famous for the beauty of its wooded campus. Next to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart stands the 130-year-old, recently renovated Main Building, topped with its legendary Golden Dome. Across from the football stadium can be seen the 14-storey Hesburgh Library and its 132-foot-high mural depicting Christ the Teacher. These three structures—the Basilica, the Main Building, and the Hesburgh Library—are among the most widely recognized university landmarks in the world.

Participants in the COV&R 2010 conference will find easy access to the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. From O’Hare International Airport in Chicago, one can take a bus (Coach USA) directly to Notre Dame’s campus or fly by plane to South Bend Regional Airport. From downtown Chicago, one can also take the South Shore Train around Lake Michigan to South Bend Regional Airport, a fifteen-minute drive by car away from Notre Dame’s campus.

200 rooms have been reserved for conference participants in air-conditioned university dormitories. Hotel rooms in the on-campus Morris Inn are also available. Meals will be served in the South Quad Dining Hall (estimated cost daily for three meals: \$41.00 total—\$10.00 for breakfast, \$14.00 for lunch, and \$17.00 for dinner). Estimated cost per night for those staying in dormitory rooms is \$47.00 per night for single occupancy, \$32.00 per person for shared occupancy.

The organizers of the COV&R 2010 conference hope that next summer’s meeting at Notre Dame will feature the work of the Colloquium at its best, continuing the great tradition of serious reflection, animated conversation, warm hospitality, intellectual friendship, and prayerfulness that has been characteristic of COV&R since its first founding at Stanford University in the 1980s. Into that conversation we also want to welcome new members, especially graduate students. We look forward to greeting you next summer in South Bend.

Ann W. Astell and Margie Pfeil