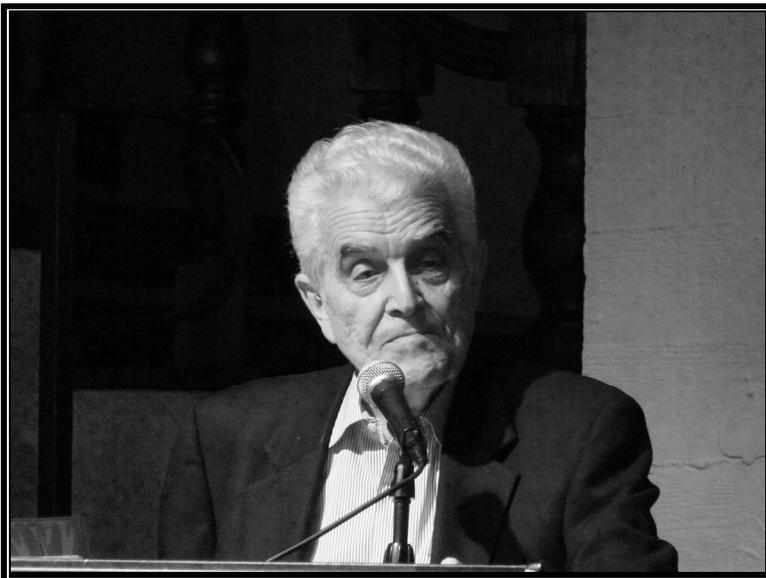




**RENÉ GIRARD**  
**DECEMBER 25, 1923 – NOVEMBER 4, 2015**



When the news spread around that René GIRARD had departed this world, obituaries, tributes and reviews sprang up everywhere (for an excellent collection see the COV&R Facebook-Page and the Bibliography here on p. 20). Respect, sadness and recognition of the man and his accomplishments permeated these writings.

We cannot reprint all these, yet the Bulletin wants to honor René GIRARD in its own way. Longstanding friends and collaborators of René and/or important COV&R members plus the new President in his first report and the new Executive Secretary were asked to give their short appraisal of René GIRARD, the man and the scientist. Stories around the sad event of GIRARD's passing constitute the main theme of this Bulletin. Everything else will be found in later pages or in the spring issue. **The preview for the upcoming conference in Australia can be found on p. 12.**

By the way, it might be called a fitting coincidence that the Bulletin will henceforth have a new editor, on whom the membership still has to decide, and will appear in a new format, which will then be announced. As already indicated in the Spring Bulletin of this year, I promise the new editor my full support and thank you, the readers and contributors, for your support during the years.

*Nikolaus Wandinger*

*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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***MY PERSPECTIVE ON RENÉ GIRARD,  
THE MAN AND THE SCIENTIST***

**Letter from the President**

I first met and got to know René GIRARD in what can only be described as his “old age.” Although I had been reading his works since 1993, I did not meet him until one Friday afternoon in August of 2001 at one of the bimonthly gatherings that Robert HAMERTON-KELLY ran. So René was 77 years old. If I condense my experiences of the man over the next 10 years, two words come to mind: light and serenity.

I mean ‘light’ in both senses – illuminating and as well as not heavy. René’s writings, as we all know, illuminate many things, among them some pretty dark and hidden things but always with a light that the darkness does not overcome. They have helped me to understand ROUSSEAU and KANT as well as the present day political situation, but I am most grateful for the light his writing has shed on the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, which is a paradox because it turns out that it was the light of these Scriptures that enabled René to see.

But I also mean light in the sense of not being heavy or difficult. My personal experience with René was that he was not a heavy presence. He did not dominate a room or a conversation. He was a gentleman. He seemed content to speak to those who wanted to listen. He made people, including me, feel comfortable in his presence. He was, in a word, gracious.

He seemed to me at this stage in his life to be serene also. I sensed that he had come through the very process that he describes DOSTOEVSKY going through: a progressive slaying of “the old human state, prisoner as it is of aesthetic, psychological, and spiritual forms that shrink his horizon as a man and a writer.” He said and wrote little about this long journey outside of his initial conversion experience, but I suspect that it was a much longer and more involved process. His writings bear indirect evidence to its stages.

René accomplished something remarkable – he had a message that no one, especially academics, wants to hear. None of us enjoy having our illusions exposed, our idols torn down, our follies revealed. René knew this and still he was able to deliver the message in such a way that it

was, however imperfectly, received. This, for me, is the deeper meaning of all the honors the academic world bestowed upon him. Sometimes we do not like to admit just how much the academy did accept him. The most amazing point for me, who looked on with a mixture of awe and envy, was that, while I think that René enjoyed the honors, he also really did not need them.

René was tested with a long final illness. It is a time when we often discover the cracks in the character of those we love. While I would be far from claiming that René had no faults, he bore this last trial with a docile spirit of acceptance that left me amazed.

With all this René leaves us, the members of COV&R, an invaluable legacy. He offers us a model of how to carry on the work, the public conversation, which his own work initiated. We can strive as an organization to further the conversation in his spirit, to bring forth the implications of mimetic theory, which will always be somewhat unwelcome because they involve acknowledging one’s own complicity in scapegoating, in a way that allows people to hear it. (See Suzanne ROSS’s beautiful tribute to René “Tears for Girard.” The tears are caused by our recognition of our own violence toward the most vulnerable.) We can make efforts so that we too do not need recognition and honor to carry on this task. We can do this work with lightness and serenity.

René was the Honorary Chair of the Board of Directors of COV&R, a position that will now remain vacant. His personal presence at the annual conference was always a great draw and his plenary talks constantly broke new ground. But COV&R was founded and structured to realize its mission even when René would no longer be with us. That day, sadly, has come. I see my own task, as I begin my term as COV&R’s President, to navigate this new stage of our organizational life as the first generation is gradually no longer with us. It is, quite honestly, sometimes sad, but it also speaks of hope and openness to the future.

So I express now my thanks to all of you who work so hard for COV&R in so many ways. I am especially grateful to the “Australian crew,” led by Scott COWDELL, who are doing such great work for organizing our 2016 conference. It promises to be very rich, very

exciting. I thank all the officers and Board members for their work as well. If any members have thoughts or suggestions about our common way forward, please contact me.

*Jeremiah Alberg*

### **Appraisals by 16 Authors**

At the end of a long, immensely fruitful life, René GIRARD has returned his life to God, who has surely prepared for him a well merited crown, an imperishable wreath (cf. 1 Cor 9:25). René, “you will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD” (Isaiah 62:3).

2005, the year of the COV&R Conference in Koblenz-Schönstatt, Germany, was also the year of René’s induction as an “immortal” into the Académie française as the holder of chair 37. As organizer of that year’s conference, I wanted to recapture the moment of the induction within the atmosphere of a family-like celebration. I had the childlike wish to place something like a laurel wreath on René’s head as a symbol of the pride and overflowing joy we felt in his achievement. The inspiration came to “crown” him with an impressive hat, a traditional German (Tyrolean) hunter’s hat, complete with a feather. Somewhat bemused, he received it graciously (although I somewhat doubt that he ever wore it on the streets of his beloved Paris!). Our honoree was so humble that he could stand in our midst like the father of a family, letting us simply share his joy with singing, poems, and gift-giving.

Because I had never studied with René, came to know him somewhat late in his life, and felt something akin to awe in his presence, I cannot say that I knew him well personally, although he and Martha were always gracious to me and warmly appreciative of my work for COV&R. In the late 1990s, when René came to Purdue University at the invitation of Sandor GOODHART to give some lectures there, I first spoke with him about Joan of Arc and about the sacrificial character of Christian hermits and ascetics. He encouraged me: “This is your work to do.”

René has brilliantly, generously, and faithfully completed his own life’s work. For those of us to whom he has communicated a share in it, work remains. Thank you, René, for giving us a precious gift that also entails a task.

*Ann Astell*

### **The Last Months**

Since I had the privilege of knowing René during the last years of his life, perhaps a short reflection on that period would be the most appropriate contribution to our ensemble of treasured memories. I was able to visit René regularly after a series of strokes had weakened him and severely impaired his speech. This was obviously a difficult time, especially for René’s wife Martha and the GIRARD family. But it was a remarkable period as well. A man of incomparable brilliance, known for the breadth of his erudition and his wit and wisdom, René was suddenly deprived of these things. He was only rarely and with great difficulty able to communicate with words. Laboring under this handicap, René expressed himself with his eyes, gesture, and touch.

One of the blessings I received during this period of his life was the radiant smile which seemed to light up René’s face when I came for a visit. Even near the end, he always recognized me and seemed genuinely happy to see me. Often I would just sit beside him and hold his hand. The words spoken, even mine, were little more than gestures in an otherwise wordless conversation. Often René would attempt with difficulty to say something only to smile and nod at his inability to speak, as if to acknowledge what we both knew. Over the years I had many conversations with René, but there was something especially tender and intimate about the garbled and wordless conversations we had in his last months. His goodness and kindness came across so beautifully.

The rock on which René depended during these years, as she was throughout their long life together, was Martha GIRARD. Though this was an especially demanding period for Martha, she has always been the unsung heroine of René’s life and of his work. We who will strive to bring René’s work to fruition in our various endeavors must never forget his debt, and ours, to Martha GIRARD. The treasure we have received from them was truly the product of a loving collaboration.

*Gil Bailie*

In the case of René GIRARD it is difficult to separate the scientist from the man, or the man from his religious convictions. He was a Christian man and a profoundly Christian intellectu-

al. I cannot imagine the revealing simplicity, and sheer intellectual honesty, of his theory without the Christian spirit that stood behind it. He was gentle and humble before the truth. He respected it, and never thought he possessed it, precisely because he believed that there is such a thing as the Truth transcending all theories. His own was meant to be a transparent, and sincere service to the Christian Truth in which he believed.

From my perspective, “gentle and humble” are also the key words to his early and continued attachment to CERVANTES. The father of the modern novel was indeed a kindred spirit. I say now about GIRARD what I have already said about the story of Don Quixote, which I have called a “humble story,” that is to say, written by a gentle spirit who saw more deeply than anybody could have imagined into the mimetically induced foolishness of a madman, and took pity on him. Instead of laughing him off to the insane asylum, as had usually been the case, or turning him into an impossible romantic hero, as was done later, he saved him, he cured him of his madness at the moment of his death. That was the essential point for René GIRARD. He admired CERVANTES and what he did with his character, not the “heroic” Don Quixote, as most everybody else has been doing. That was “the truth of the novel,” not the “romantic lie.” The romantic lie is what turned Don Quixote himself into a self-destructive fool. I cannot imagine a more appropriate homage from me to my dear friend, René, at this moment than to remember him in the company of his admired CERVANTES.

*Cesareo Bandera*



*Cesareo Bandera with René Girard, Stanford, 1991*

René Girard, or the Novel of novels

There is more to René GIRARD's oeuvre than “mimetic desire” and “the theory of the scapegoat.” To take away only those two terms is tantamount to reducing a Greek hero to his crest and his breastplate. Although it was useful in its day, the armor rings a bit hollow today now that he has left us. We must therefore go elsewhere in search of the truth of a life and a work: in the combat that he waged against himself, a young Sartrean intellectual who arrived in America in 1947. There GIRARD found a world as violent as the one he had just left. And one day he stopped accusing this world and accused himself. His entire work is contained in this reversal, the renunciation of his supposed “difference” and the discovery that he then made of the identity of all men. This identity is the identity of human brothers. He called the experience “novelistic conversion,” knowing that it was for him, in 1959, a conversion pure and simple.

Literature made it possible for him to express this truth, to such an extent that one sometimes wonders if he didn't first find it in the novels of STENDHAL and PROUST. But GIRARD was also interested in history, in its religious and sacrificial roots, then in its terrifying dislocation due to the revelation brought about by the Passion of Christ. It is a metaphysical novel, the one that speaks of that “strange and long war in which violence tries to repress truth,” to use PASCAL's expression. It was not immediately obvious, reading *Violence and the Sacred*, that this tireless thinker was interested in the “alpha point” only because he was aiming at the “omega point.” A third book, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, made it possible to understand this. Nothing less would do for this academician who in 2005 took his place in BOSSUET's chair. René GIRARD has left us. Even if history, all sound and fury, hasn't fallen silent, the creature has met his creator, the novelist his character. A novelistic ascension – or ascension period.

*Benoît Chantre*

My acquaintance with René GIRARD began in 1986 when I was asked to vet Maria ASSAD's translation of Raymund SCHWAGER, S.J.'s magnificent *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?*, first published by Harper & Row in 1987 (reprinted in 2000 by Gracewing and Crossroad)

as *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*. Her beautifully readable translation needed vetting by someone who could also do justice to the delicate theological nuancing with which Fr. SCHWAGER wrote. That began my own three-decades-long love affair with Girardian mimetic theory. However, it was not until 1995 in Chicago, when I began to attend the annual meetings of COV&R, that I began to enjoy the extraordinary privilege of personally knowing René GIRARD. Rare, for most of us, is the opportunity to meet and come to know, as I wrote in the “Foreword” to *Must There be Scapegoats?*, someone “whose insights,” as I had sense enough to recognize back then, “have far-reaching consequences.” And somewhat rare, too, are our opportunities to meet and come to know someone whose friendly, quiet and gentle joyfulness make them someone whose personal presence one also wants to enjoy. But all too rare indeed are those brothers and sisters of ours who combine in a singular way both of these extraordinary gifts. That is my remembrance of René GIRARD, the man, the scientist, and magnificently beautiful human being.

Robert J. Daly, S.J.

I knew René GIRARD for 55 years. I arrived at Johns Hopkins in 1960, and soon afterward chose him to be my mentor and dissertation director. That academic year he published *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, which remains in many ways his masterpiece, although it was only with *La violence et le sacré* (1973) and then *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978) that he would complete his anthropological system. When the latter book appeared, finally integrating Judeo-Christian religion into his anthropology, he said to me, “maintenant je peux mourir!” Fortunately he had over thirty more years of productive life.

René was a serious scholar and did not base his theories on either metaphysical or hermeneutical speculation. But his thought did not truly belong to the social sciences. Nor was it comfortably situated within the para-metaphysical, semi-scientific realm of “French theory.” René’s “fundamental anthropology” was truly a science, but a *humanistic* science. His celebrity, but also his marginal status in the

field of anthropology, was the result of his focus on the scene of human origin. This was for him an event of *emissary murder* whose ultimate function was to preserve the nascent human community from the potential violence of mimetic desire by means of what uniquely defines the human—the *shared representation* of sacrifice. I am convinced that it is only by constructing such a hypothetical scene that we can gain a real historical and cultural understanding of what it is to be human. But our hypothesis of the event that witnessed the first appearance of the sacred is not verifiable by empirical techniques, but only through the intuitions supplied by culture itself.

René’s was the first originary hypothesis of man as the symbol-using, sacred-worshipping animal, and I am confident that it is above all for this that he will be remembered. For this—and for the fact that his original intuition of the mimetic structure of human desire emerged from his reflection on the works of immortal secular and religious authors, among whom he has now found his place.

Eric Gans



Sandor Goodhart and Benoît Chantre after Girard’s Memorial Service in Stanford, CA

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend . . .

John Keats

To the outside world, he was the theorist of mimetic desire, of the relation of violence to the sacred (the breakdown of difference, the sacrificial crisis, the scapegoat mechanism, and the ritual commemoration of the original mimesis), and of the anthropological insight of the Jewish

and Christian scriptures exposing it, revealing the innocence of the victim of the violence with which he is charged. To those of us who knew him more personally, he was also a teacher, in some cases a parent, an academic mentor, but above all a model, an example for the best one may be in this troubled universe.

I met him at SUNY Buffalo in 1969 (he was 45), as a graduate student in the English Department. For the next 46 years, my life was turned inside out. I still recall the first words I heard in his course "Literature, Myth, and Prophecy." "Human beings fight not because they are different, but because they are the same, and in their attempts to distinguish themselves have made themselves into enemy twins, human doubles in reciprocal violence. All of ritual, and especially sacrifice, is an attempt to manage that violence."

Here was a thinker who touched every aspect of our social, psychological, and religious lives. I asked him to direct my doctoral dissertation and I never questioned that decision. I have no doubt when this age is viewed from afar, he will be acknowledged as having spoken to us the truth of violence and sacrifice, who disclosed the secret motor force at the heart of social community.

To his family, to his beloved wife, Martha, and his children (Martin, Daniel, Mary), who welcomed me into their home, I remain in profound and continued gratitude. And to the man, I remain humbly grateful for having known him and for his having welcomed me into his life.

I will spend the remainder of mine in conversation with his example.

*Sandor Goodhart*

I am not fit to take the measure of René GIRARD. Undoubtedly historians and scholars of the future will do so; most will ponder how to measure the vast influence mimetic theory will have had by the time they write. I can say this: I have known a man who was the smartest person I have ever known and who showed remarkable faith in God, joy in people, and love of life. I am certain René had his rough edges although I never knew them. I knew him as a mentor, a father-figure, a friend.

It is not a sad day but a reflective one. A page has been turned. The one who is known as the EINSTEIN and DARWIN of the human scien-

ces is no longer among us. His work however will live on because mimetic theory is catching fire. It is amazing the sheer number of people who have discovered mimetic theory this past several years. The work of Imitatio is key in all of this. René's theory will have a greater impact in the coming years than even he could have imagined. Peace to Martha and the GIRARD family and peace to René's memory.

*Michael Hardin, Preaching Peace*

When all a man does is watch from the shore,  
Then he doesn't have to worry about the current  
But when affection places us in the stream,  
We have to agree where the water takes us.

Robert Bly

I have been following in René GIRARD's current since 1973. So where do we agree to go now?

I take my direction from a COV&R moment at Innsbruck where GIRARD said irrevocably: "The truth, nothing but the truth. Nothing else matters." That's it. That means, for all areas which mimetic theory ventures, that there is really only one way to go. It comes down to this: Is there a theory more comprehensive than mimetic theory, which answers for more of the data in each of the many fields it claims (such as the omnipresence of religion in archaic culture). If there is, we are obliged to go there. But don't let someone get away with saying GIRARD can't be right without testing the hypothesis. That is what GIRARD wanted. Barring a theory more comprehensive than his, if you find there is some human data in the field which he doesn't answer for, let's see if a refinement or enlargement of mimetic theory, which has so much promise and has already answered so many problems, can answer for this apparent anomaly.

When GIRARD entered the 21C (having just turned 77 years old), there were 3 questions that kept coming up, despite all he had written: 'where is the science in your hypothesis,' 'why haven't you discussed any religious traditions except Christianity,' and 'why haven't you talked about modern history.' Now we have the fruits of several cooperative research projects and essays across the sciences that he inspired, including *Mimesis and Science*, *Can We Survive our Origins*, *How We became Human* and the Imitatio Çatalhöyük project; we have *Sacrifice*, devoted to the Vedas, as well as Brian Col-

lins's book; for modern culture we have the stunning book *Battling to the End* – who can deny its pertinence now.

So, now, where does the current take us? We keep following GIRARD; we keep working, but harder.

*William Johnsen*

The teacher-student relationship is one of the truly deep experiences of one's life, perhaps the fullest expression of love that we may know. I have known this divine "space" several times. Robert HAMERTON-KELLY—my first advisor at Claremont—was one such monumental figure in my life—now after his death he surely knows the depth of my gratitude. As brilliant and challenging as Bob was for me, the crowning jewel of his instruction was his introduction of René GIRARD to me. When Bob first introduced us in the mid-1980s in Sonoma, CA, within the blink of an eye, I knew that I had met *the* teacher of my life. I still remember the first words René uttered to a small group of us at the moment of that initial encounter: "I am interested in the origins of culture." It was not simply the clear meaning of those words, *it was also René's spiritual tone*. I would spend the rest of my life grappling with those words *and* that manner of speaking.

If it is possible to be non-egotistic, yet fully embracing the light and rivers of wisdom that compel from within, that was René GIRARD. His personal humility was born of the clarity of his own vision and insight as he probed the substratum of human thought, of language, of thinking itself. It is said by the Buddhists that some may achieve complete wisdom, and some may achieve complete compassion. To achieve the two together is to achieve a full measure of Buddha-hood. Can we speak of a French Buddha? I came to experience both in equal measure as I grew intermittently in René's *presence*. That being said, somehow René was more than a Buddha, more than wisdom and compassion intricately combined—here was a profound incarnation of humanity itself. And, it was the latter quality that I will carry with me, and be instructed by, for the remainder of my life—I will always be a "Girardian". Thank you, René, for teaching me something of the things hidden since the foundation of the world, but just as importantly, thank you for imparting a vision of

the truly human. Thank you for instructing me of the Christ, *my teacher*.

*Charles Mabee, Detroit, November 2015*

Of the personal friendship I enjoyed with René, I have little, by definition, to say, except that I cherished it exceedingly among the many close friendships that the stunning appeal of his works made available to me over many decades, thanks to COV&R, to Imitatio, to Raven Foundation. So I owe him those friendships. My intellectual and professional debt to his teaching and writings is a matter of public record, thanks to the Festschrift volume published by MSU press in 2009. There is, for me as for a great many, a spiritual debt as well, as I reflect upon the way he enabled confidence in religious faith to comport convincingly, vigorously and abundantly with wide ranging scientific aspirations, with the unfashionable idea, as he wrote of PROUST, that "truth is one." For all that, we are told that "the gifts of the spirit are many" and I have known very few people in whom so many of them shone forth as they did in René. But I'll name just one, my favorite: humor—as I recall his remark about the Western novel that great literary works "tend toward the comic." The idea that truth is a laughing matter is no mean acquisition for our understanding. The flashes of humor that pervade René's critical prose no less than they did his personal demeanor have been a buoyant source of inspiration for me over the fifty years I have enJOYed teaching literature from his exhilarating point of view.

*Andrew McKenna*

Years ago I condensed the significance of René for my life into the short formula: he was the architect of my *spiritual* and *theological home*. Not without Raymund, of course. When I came from Poland to the West in the early 1970s I believed in the miracle of the "open", liberal identity of faith. The time I discovered GIRARD was the time when I was increasingly troubled by the question as to what exactly the sources of the liberal position were. If I look back today on the late 1980s, I thankfully see the enormous influence of GIRARD on my way. Since 1992 I've been teaching a class every semester in which I read one of GIRARD's books together with the students and discussed "God and the

world” with them as we read along. And I did this with the very purpose in mind for them to be initiated in into this model of thinking. In fact, some of the graduates, who are now in the workplace, told me that mimetic theory had allowed them to build for themselves a “spiritual home”, affording them a secure and certain standpoint amidst the absolute relativity of liberal thought. It is not only theology, but also my way of preaching that is influenced by René. What I learned at university and practiced during the first few years of my pastoral ministry was to preach “with my index finger lifted in moralizing fashion”, contextualizing my message by referencing topical political developments. The seasoning often consisted in portions of criticism of the Church, following the motto “The more critical of the Church, the better the sermon.” Mimetic theory and the dramatic approach to theology, which I learned from SCHWAGER, have turned me away from moralizing preaching, directing me instead toward attempts at “dramatizing” life situations that were of salvific relevance. The fact that I now focus my attention on underlying mimetic projections, on societal allegiances in daily life, and on the reconciliation we celebrate in the context of the liturgy brings with it an almost limitless pool of ideas for composing the sermon. René, in Austria we say: “Vergelt’s Gott!” [May the Lord reward you!]

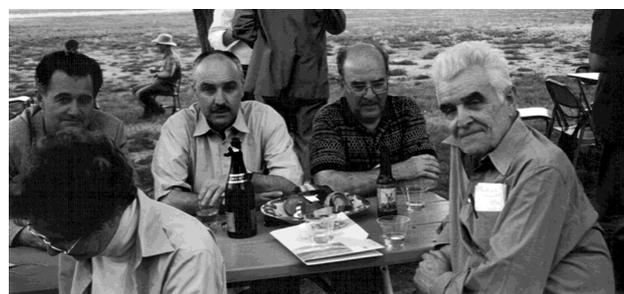
*Józef Niewiadomski*



*Gil Bailie and Józef Niewiadomski with René Girard in Riverside, CA, in 2008*

Reflecting on what I have learned from René GIRARD I first remember his deep dedication to come to a better understanding of human life. It was his reading of great European novelists that led him to his unfolding of mimetic theory. By

focusing on these insights he did not respect the boundaries of academic fields but was seeking answers to real questions. As a trained historian he was therefore forced to move into literary criticism, anthropology, philosophy, biblical studies, religious science, and finally even into archeology. By doing his work he remained excited by new discoveries and was always open for new challenges. When he addressed archeological findings in Çatalhöyük in his last public lecture in 2008 many of us could feel how excited he still was entering into this new field. During the discussion after his lecture he was even willing to change basic assumptions of his own theory if these new insights forced him to do so.



*William Johnsen, Wolfgang Palaver, Cesareo Banderera with the Girards at Ghost Ranch in 2004*

He always remained a scholar who was not interested in his status or in his past achievements but in a sound theory that aimed at an anthropological apology of Christianity. It was his scholarly work that led René GIRARD back into the Catholic Church. I met him as a humble and regular churchgoer at Palo Alto deeply in love with Gregorian chant. He understood that by imitating Jesus’s mimesis of the heavenly father Christian sacraments are an important antidote against the deadlock of mimetic rivalries. René GIRARD did not talk a lot about his own spirituality but I am quite convinced that he himself as well as his work has a mystical side. One can discover this mystic dimension by reading the last chapter of his first book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, which is deeply influenced by Simone WEIL and by reading the central chapter of his last book *Battling to the End*, in which he deals extensively with HÖLDERLIN. Both WEIL and HÖLDERLIN share an emphasis on the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Jesus. This matches with René GIRARD’s humility that characterized him deeply.

*Wolfgang Palaver*

Last August, a photo of a grieving father holding a child who had not survived the dangerous passage from Syria to Europe elicited widespread compassion from Americans. But following the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015, Governor Chris CHRISTIE and Dr. Ben CARSON, Republican candidates for president, put a new face on the Syrian immigrant. Tapping into American anxiety about admitting to the US individuals who, notwithstanding their seeming innocence, are potential terrorists, CHRISTIE proclaimed that “even three-year old orphans” must be denied entry. CARSON opined that, just as parents protect their children from “a rabid dog running around your neighborhood,” so also must Americans guard against a potentially lethal contagion of Syrian immigrants in their communities. When the House of Representatives subsequently voted in veto-proof numbers to effectively close US borders to Syrian immigrants, CHRISTIE’s and CARSON’s fears were enshrined in the political mainstream.

Days before the Paris attacks, on November 4, 2015, René GIRARD died in Palo Alto, CA at age 91. In the wake of ISIS panic that ensued after the attacks, GIRARD’s legacy—a lifetime of writing on violence, religion, and the human condition—has never seemed more vital. After all, GIRARD writes in *The Scapegoat* that, “Each person must ask what his relationship is to the scapegoat. I am not aware of my own, and I am persuaded that the same holds true for my readers. We only have legitimate enmities. And yet the entire universe swarms with scapegoats.” Little wonder that Rabbi Jonathan SACKS, who draws on GIRARD’s insights in his recently published *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, stated in a recent interview that “the two people who have had the most profound insight in the 20th century were Sigmund FREUD and René GIRARD.”

As we know, GIRARD laid the foundations for his theory with *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Arguing that literature is reflective and revelatory of human experience, GIRARD also claims that literature can transform human experience. Offering models to be imitated, these authors reveal a different existence in which “deception gives way to truth, anguish to remembrance, agitation to repose, and hatred to love.” Eugene WEBB has helpfully, for my un-

derstanding, placed GIRARD in a lineage of “morally serious literary critics” inclusive of DANTE, Samuel JOHNSON, and SARTRE who turn to literature “not just for the sake of purely intellectual or aesthetic satisfaction but in order to find a way to deal with these problems in practice.” That GIRARD was committed to “problems in practice” enabled him to make his mark not only on the study of literature but also on the study of religion. Indeed, if the theory of mimetic desire emerged from GIRARD’s explorations of the novel, from my perspective, his theory achieved its greatest realization in his reflections on religion.

In my exploration of his work over the past thirty years, GIRARD’s openness to criticism has played a decisive role in my own efforts to address “problems in practice.” In 1981, GIRARD stated, “Theories are expendable. They should be criticized. When people tell me my work is too systematic, I say, ‘I make it as systematic as possible for you to be able to prove it wrong.’” GIRARD became a model for others in following his own advice. His correspondence over a decade with theologian Raymund SCHWAGER and his conversations with Sandor GOODHART about the disclosure of the scapegoat mechanism in the Hebrew Bible are but two examples.

Seeking to follow Girard in addressing “problems in practice” while also engaging his work critically, I have engaged in a constructive application of mimetic theory, exploring gendered violence even as I have given new attention to how embodiment shapes mimetic conflict. It has been exciting also to see how other scholars have followed GIRARD’s own example in pursuing a critical engagement with his theory, whether through drawing on mimetic theory in study of the world religions or by investigating the implications of mimetic theory for neuroscience, evolutionary biology, archeology, and cognitive psychology. But truly, the most exciting witness to GIRARD’s call to address problems in practice has occurred in my own classroom. Students’ eyes light up as they see that mimetic theory can illuminate issues about which they care deeply. They frequently come up to my desk and, with urgent voices, tell me that I simply MUST include a book, a film, or an episode from a TV show in the course because it is a perfect illustration of mimetic theory. I always listen attentively to their appeals

and promise to consider the film or book the next time I teach the course. Not wanting to dash their enthusiasm, I do not tell them that every expression of human experience is a perfect illustration of mimetic theory!

Reflecting on GIRARD's legacy, I cannot but believe that it hangs in the balance. GIRARD called for an engaged scholarship capable of addressing problems in practice; however, in *Battling to the End*, GIRARD takes a grim view of humanity's capacity to avert a world-ending apocalypse. He asserts that "violence is a terrible adversary, especially since it always wins." Confronting the utter "powerlessness of politics against the escalation of extremes," GIRARD places humanity at the brink. Girard asked others to challenge rather than dismiss his theory. In a world caught up in a sacrificial logic that portends mutual destruction, more than ever, GIRARD would want us bring our best critical insights to bear on his provocative and unsettling body of work.

*Martha Reineke, Executive Secretary of COV&R*

I count myself fortunate to be *unable* to think of René GIRARD simply as "GIRARD." Rather I find myself always returning to "René." That's the name of that special human being whom I came to know and care about. "René" is the name that I want to invoke even when I'm engaged in the most disputatious debates over his thought and writings.

Why is that? What about the man made him so personable? Was it my idiosyncratic response or do others share that tendency? What was there about this scholar that we carry such a proclivities to personalize him?

My own answer is that he embodied the very theory of consensual mimesis that was the positive side of the theory of rivalry that he is more popularly known for. Unlike those who act as model-obstacles in our lives René was intentionally and consistently consensual: he embodied an ethic of saying 'yes' to other persons as far as was practicable in his professional and social relationships. And his saying 'yes' to me was key in my own openness to apply mimetic theory to my quandaries as an African American scholar.

How account for the perduring reality that many persons of intelligence and integrity, virtue and otherwise nobility across the millennia

have been so incapable of acting non-violently and non-rationally? What makes us all so abysmally complicit in events and processes that result in vicious behaviors, violations both gross and routine, and in genocidal projects that merit censure and condemnation and even contaminate the generations that follow us?

Mimetic theory has provided me answers to those perplexing questions in ways that have 'saved the appearances' of our humanity and viability as a species. For that intellectual and philosophic feat I remain forever grateful to René. Whatever the shortcomings or troubling features of his own development of mimetic theory, he nonetheless launched its trajectory so clearly and effectively that we who follow can make the needful corrections and extrapolations as his legacy and memorial. And what a legacy it is! Thank you, René, good teacher, model and friend.

*The Revd Theophus "Thee" Smith, PhD*

I have had two "before and after" events in my life, events around which my sense of my life-direction and myself turns. The first was marriage to my wife, Yvonne, in 1955; the second was my discovery of René GIRARD in 1985. The first event began the life-long adventure of understanding the meaning of conjugal love and its attendant responsibilities; the second initiated the ongoing adventure of understanding the meaning of Christian fraternal love as an impulsion to the life of both mind and spirit. GIRARD's own experience of conversion to Christian faith in conjunction with his "global, massive intuition," which included both a commitment to the Christ of the New Testament Gospels and his dawning awareness of mimetic desire, would lead to a whole series of insights. The most basic of these was the scapegoat mechanism as the non-conscious social remedy to mimetic crisis and scandal and the Passion of Christ as the definitive disclosure of this mechanism, a mechanism which has served as the primordial human remedy to overcome violence (although it in turn only produces more violence). The configuration of the wild oscillations of mimetic desire, the inevitable outbreaks of violence, and the drive to find scapegoats when violence threatens or occurs, have left human history in an apocalyptic predicament. The atmosphere of apocalypse stands

in stark contrast to the revealing of a loving, nonviolent God in the Passion of Jesus and his message of God's reign.

The power of GIRARD's boldly stated ideas was a new source of light and energy for those of us who wanted to find a bridge between self and other, Bible and modernity, and religion and science. The academic societies formed in many parts of the world around his mimetic

scapegoat theory will continue as extensions of his thought and his spirit.

As for myself, I have already indicated the fraternal love I have known and treasured—with René and his remarkable and gracious wife Martha, as well as with many other friends in this extraordinary adventure of mind and spirit.

*James Williams*



*The Founding of COV&R, Stanford, CA, 1990*

**Back Row**, L-R: Hans Jensen, Jørgen Jørgensen, Byron Bland, Vernon Robbins, Mark Anspach, Richard Keady, Charles Ozeck, Gil Bailie, Charles Mabee, Robert Bater, Bruce Chilton

**Middle Row**, L-R: Brigitte Cazelles, René Girard, James Williams

**Front row**, L-R: Ed McMahon, Mark Wallace, Barbara Mabee, Diana Culbertson, Theophilus Smith, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, Stefano Cocchetti

Thanks to the photographers who permitted the use of their pictures: p. 1: Roman Siebenrock, p. 4 and 11: Jim Williams, p. 5: Michael Hardin, p. 8: Nikolaus Wandinger, p. 12: Joel Hodge, p. 15: Dietmar Regensburger

## COV&R CONFERENCE 2016

**Theme: Violence in the Name of Religion  
Wednesday 13 – Sunday 17 July 2016**

**St Patrick's Campus, Melbourne  
Australian Catholic University**



*A View of Melbourne*

The Australian GIRARD Seminar and the Australian Catholic University are pleased to invite all COV&R members to the 2016 COV&R conference in Melbourne on 13-17 July, 2016.

One of the most pressing issues of our time is the outbreak of extremist violence and terrorism, done in the name of religion. In this conference, we aim to bring together the insights of GIRARD's mimetic theory with the latest scholarship on religion and violence, particularly exploring the nature of extremist violence. The conference will critically analyse the link made between religion and violence, and explore contemporary topics of great significance, such as Islamist terrorism and radicalization in its various political, economic, religious, military and technological dimensions.

*The conference is open to academics, professionals, religious practitioners, military, police, and anyone interested in engaging this topic in respectful dialogue.*

We have an exciting range of *internationally acclaimed speakers* who will present at the conference, including:

- Professor Anne ALY (Edith Cowan University, Western Australia);
- Rev Dr Sarah BACHELARD (Australian Catholic University, Canberra);
- Professor Greg BARTON (Deakin University, Melbourne);
- Reverend Professor Frank BRENNAN SJ (Australian Catholic University, Canberra);

- Professor William T. CAVANAUGH (De Paul University and author of *The Myth of Religious Violence*), who will give the Raymund Schwager Memorial Lecture;
- Professor Jean-Pierre DUPUY (École Polytechnique, Paris / Stanford University, California);
- Dr Chris FLEMING (Western Sydney University, NSW);
- Most Rev Dr Philip FREIER (Archbishop of Melbourne);
- Professor Wolfgang PALAVER (the University of Innsbruck).

The conference will also feature a panel on violence and religion in Australian-Indigenous history.

There will be two rounds in the Call for Papers and Workshops. Details are available on the conference website. The first round is currently open and will close on 14<sup>th</sup> December. This round is designed for those who need to have their paper proposal confirmed for funding or planning purposes. The second round will occur in 2016.

For more information, please visit the conference website: <http://www.acu.edu.au/covr2016> or email [covr2016.FTP@acu.edu.au](mailto:covr2016.FTP@acu.edu.au).

The conference will also feature local field trips during the conference and the possibility of a week-long trip following the conference. If anyone is interested in joining a group trip to significant Australian sites following the conference, please visit the "Field Trips" section of the conference website and email [covr2016.FTP@acu.edu.au](mailto:covr2016.FTP@acu.edu.au) to register your interest.

*Joel Hodge*

## REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### René Girard's Memorial Service

On Saturday November 14<sup>th</sup> 2015, approximately 65 family and friends gathered at St Thomas Aquinas Church in Palo Alto to pay their last respects to René GIRARD. With the exception of one granddaughter who lives overseas and could not get away from school, the entire family was there. Friends and colleagues from Stanford were also present as was Jimmy KALTREIDER and Trevor MERRILL representing Imitatio. The governor of California, Jerry

BROWN, also attended. Girardians were well represented including Gil BAILIE, Caesareo BANDERA, Sandor GOODHART, Eric GANS, Jean-Pierre DUPUY, David DAWSON among others.

The Requiem Mass sung by Saint Ann's choir was beautiful, focused not so much on René but on the liberation from death the Gospel brings. Fr. FRANCESCO's homily invoked Pope BENEDICT XVI's Regensburg speech and noted René's contributions to the dialogue between Christianity and our contemporary world. Following the Mass, most gathered in the hall next door to remember and reminisce.

Following the gathering at the church a smaller group of family and friends were invited back to the house for a brief time for refreshments followed by a sumptuous dinner at a local Italian restaurant where a few speeches were made, notably that of René and Martha's oldest son, Martin, who shared what life with René was like from the family's perspective. It is uncertain at this time where René's ashes will be interred. May the peace of God abide with the GIRARD family and may René's contributions continue to enlighten the world.

*Michael and Lorri Hardin*

### **COV&R 2015 in St. Louis, MO**

COV&R celebrated its silver anniversary this year in St. Louis, MO. After 25 years of debate and development in Mimetic Theory, the theme of the 2015 conference was very appropriate: "Critically Engaging the Girardian Corpus." It was also somewhat risky. For while much critical analysis of Mimetic Theory has led to fruitful results, there are some questions that tend to get asked and answered ... and asked again by scholars that have forgotten or are unfamiliar with the lessons of the past. A conference dedicated to "critical engagement" with Mimetic Theory could have easily degraded into a rehashing of stale old arguments that have popped up occasionally in previous conferences.

I am happy to say that this was not at all the case. In fact, the overall feel of the conference was much more creative than critical, drawing from older themes in the service of new ideas. And as if to make the point that my fears were unfounded, three of the best presentations came precisely from our newer scholars in the Schwager Award session. All three papers ap-

proached Mimetic Theory with one eye on its limitations and another on its potential, and they approached it from very different directions: ecumenical, theological and literary.

This year also saw the final session of the series on Mimetic Theory and lynching, started by Sandor GOODHART in Riverside in 2008. This panel focused on examples of persecution against black Americans, in particular the recent shooting of Michael BROWN in Ferguson, MO. As this series has made clear, the relationship of this topic to Mimetic Theory is both profound and important, and we Girardians have, I think, an obligation to shed light on events such as the one in Ferguson. While the connections are obvious to some degree, this year's panel could have benefitted from a deeper exploration of the relevance of Girardian Theory. Sandor provided this intellectual bridge in previous conferences. As powerful as this final session was, it could have used Sandor's help to make the connection one last time.

A similar comment could be made about the final keynote lecture, a moving admonition by theologian Shawn COPELAND entitled "The Risk of Memory, the Cost of Forgetting." As so often happens with invited speakers and guest lecturers, there was no significant reference made to Mimetic Theory or the works of GIRARD. Any connections to Girardian Theory were left for the Girardians in the audience to work out for themselves. Nonetheless, COPELAND's poetic style and powerful message had its effect on us all. She reminded us of the difficulty of remembering those tragic and defining chapters in our history, and the damage we inflict on ourselves if we fail to do so. In casual conversation afterward, one of our COV&R colleagues from Innsbruck made the very relevant connection to his own country's history, regarding the challenges of remembering and forgetting the brutal lessons of World War II. This sort of personal connection is indeed the mark of a good lecture.

On the other side of the spectrum (with respect to style, not quality) was the keynote lecture by Peter THIEL. Unlike COPELAND's broad and poetic commentary, THIEL gave a very Girardian critique of the "problem of imitation" in modern education, business and technology. The picture he paints of the mimetic rivalries that internally drive these fields is somewhere

between comical and disturbing. It is a picture that the COV&R community might want to keep in mind as it expands organizationally over the next 25 years.

The other two keynote lectures were very Girardian as well, focused more specifically on the theological dimensions of Mimetic Theory. The standard was effectively set by James ALISON (no surprise there) in the opening plenary lecture on “restoring the theological virtue of hope.” This hopefulness was carried into the other plenary session – a panel discussion between David Bentley HART, Brian ROBINETTE, and Nikolaus WANDINGER that explored, in very personal terms, the influence of Mimetic Theory on theology. The conference organizers did an excellent job here of bringing together three knowledgeable and engaging speakers with different perspectives on Mimetic Theory to tell their stories in the service of a common theme.

The final celebration of the conference was an anniversary celebration led by three distinguished panel speakers: James WILLIAMS, Martha REINEKE and Andrew MCKENNA. The thoughts and reminiscences of these COV&R veterans inspired almost everyone in attendance to share the various ways in which COV&R has influenced their work and lives. The session ended with a sense of gratitude for the past and hope for the future.

This theme of past-and-future continued in the closing banquet, in which the presidency of COV&R was passed on from Ann ASTELL to Jeremiah ALBERG. There is no doubt that COV&R is in good hands with Jeremiah at the helm, and this feeling was only reinforced by the eloquent sincerity of his speech at the banquet. Nonetheless, I’m sure we all agree that Ann is a tough act to follow. And I’m not just talking about the presidency, but also the pun stylings of her comedy routine performed just before Jeremiah’s speech. I tell ya, it was funnier than an AA meeting in a beer tent (i.e. an Ann ASTELL meeting under COV&R).

Congratulations to Grant Kaplan on a job well done. And here’s to the next 25 years!

*Pablo Bandera*

#### **COV&R Business Meeting 2015**

At the end of the St. Louis conference there was a Business Meeting of the COV&R Member-

ship, as usual. Here is the most important information from it that is not contained yet anywhere else in this Bulletin:

The “Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture Series” is supported by *Imitatio* but its editor William JOHNSEN is free in editorial matters. The contract by which *Imitatio* provides for COV&R members to receive these books might change, so that members can select three or four books per year instead of receiving all of them.

Bulletin editor Nikolaus WANDINGER, who indicated his wish to pass on this task last year, will do one final issue of the Bulletin in December 2015. The Advisory Board has instituted a transition committee that will discuss possibilities to integrate the Bulletin, the new Website, and social media. The committee will be headed by Scot COWDELL, its members are Carly OSBORN, David BROAD and Curtis GRUENLER, Niki WANDINGER will serve as an advisor. The purpose is to make the newsletter quicker and more flexible, while not losing its resource as an archive. The successor of the Bulletin editor will be decided in due course.

Finally elections on the recommendations of the Advisory Board took place: Christ CARTER was re-elected to a second term on the Advisory Board; Petra STEINMAIR-PÖSEL was newly elected to the Board; finally Martha REINEKE and Jeremiah ALBERG were elected Executive Secretary respectively President of COV&R.

*Nikolaus Wandinger, drawing on minutes by  
Jeremiah Alberg*

#### **(Re-)Collecting the Theology of Raymund Schwager, S.J.**

This year not only has seen the passing of the founder of mimetic theory, René GIRARD, it also marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of COV&R and would have marked the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Raymund SCHWAGER on November 11. This therefore is also an occasion to remember this man without whom COV&R would not have come about. In this respect, Raymund SCHWAGER, the Colloquium’s first president and one of René GIRARD’s earliest intellectual companions, was tremendously important. As professor of theology in Innsbruck, Austria, for almost thirty years, he was the first and arguably the most important thinker in bringing together mimetic theory and theology. He died unexpectedly in February 2004, aged 68 years.

A research-group in Innsbruck under the direction of Józef NIEWIADOMSKI – including Karin PETER, Nikolaus WANDINGER, and myself – is doing its share to remember this important figure from the history of COV&R. We do that by collecting his most important writings. Beginning in 2014 through 2017, the 8-volume book series *Raymund Schwager Gesammelte Schriften* (*Raymund Schwager Collected Works*) is being published (See: [http://www.herder.de/theologie/programm/index.html?par\\_onl\\_struktur=704728&onl\\_struktur=4092753](http://www.herder.de/theologie/programm/index.html?par_onl_struktur=704728&onl_struktur=4092753)). Even though the critically established volumes of this series are in German, they are of interest to Girardians worldwide. After all, GIRARD stated that Schwager's theology was the paradigmatic way of doing theology with the tools of mimetic theory.

Our research project at the Theological Faculty of the University of Innsbruck, supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), was originally designed to follow a very clearly circumscribed three-year-timetable (2010-2013). Our aim was to publish two volumes with yet unpublished material from SCHWAGER's estate. Both were published in 2014: One contains the critically established text of his French correspondence with René GIRARD – including a German translation –, beginning in 1974 and spanning almost two decades (see review in Bulletin no. 46, p. 13; an English translation is to be published next year). The other one contains Schwager's last, yet unfinished monograph *Dogma und dramatische Geschichte* (*Dogma and Dramatic History*), which deals with the development of the Christological dogma in a very complex historical process, and its further repercussions on the formation of Western civilization. This spring, a separate volume with insightful commentaries by experts, several from the ranks of COV&R, was published as a companion to these two volumes.

However, we were lucky beyond our very clearly timetabled imagination. The renowned publishing house Herder, Germany, was not only interested in publishing these volumes as intended in our three-year-research-project. They wanted more SCHWAGER. Herder is known for its multi-volume collections of the writings of the big names of German theology – Karl RAHNER, Walter KASPER, Joseph RATZINGER, Jo-

hann Baptist METZ, Bernhard WELTE, Hans KÜNG. That is why we developed the plan for the eight volume *Collected Works* series, our two project-volumes now being vol. 5 and vol. 6 of this edition. The plan behind it is simple and threefold:

(1) In one category, SCHWAGER's best-known and most important scholarly monographs are edited: *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?* (*Must There be Scapegoats?*) from 1978 (vol. 2), *Der wunderbare Tausch* [*The Marvelous Exchange*] from 1986 (vol. 3), and *Jesus im Heildrama* (*Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*) from 1990 – along with the “novel” that accompanied this book, *Dem Netz des Jägers entronnen* (*Jesus of Nazareth*), from 1991 (vol. 4). All these books, which were either published in 2015 (vol. 3 and 4) or will be published by summer 2016 (vol. 2), reflect – some in a more obvious way, others more opaquely – SCHWAGER's deep intellectual engagement with René GIRARD and mimetic theory. Apart from *Der wunderbare Tausch*, all of the studies in this segment are also available in earlier English translations, as shown in round brackets.



*René and Martha Girard with Raymund Schwager in Innsbruck in 2003*

(2) Nevertheless, SCHWAGER is more than a theological translator of GIRARD (which can easily be found out by carefully reading the already mentioned books). To show this very clearly in the design of our edition, we also wanted to include in our collection, in a second category, his two earliest works, written *before* meeting GIRARD in 1973/74. Therefore vol. 1, which is to be published in 2016, will consist of his dissertation on the spiritual formation of Ignatius of Loyola, *Das dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola* [*The Dramatic Understanding of the Church in Ignatius of Loyola*] from 1970 and his book *Jesus-Nachfolge* [*Following Jesus*] from 1973. The

latter is a remarkable study on the foundations of Christian faith, in which Schwager objected against a view that was specifically put forward by Thomas LUCKMANN, Peter BERGER and their disciples, that all convictions – and, consequently, all religious convictions as well – are merely the products of sociologically describable processes. These two volumes have not been translated into English yet.

(3) A third and last category includes the above-mentioned two project-volumes with SCHWAGER's last monograph and the Schwager-Girard-correspondence (vol. 5 and 6) and some other so far unpublished materials, along with important articles and essays that were already published throughout his career. The two concluding volumes of this four-volume segment, coming out in 2017, will put together what we regard as the most important strands of SCHWAGER's theology apart from Christology and Soteriology. Firstly, his thinking about the Holy Spirit, original sin, and creation (vol. 7); secondly, texts which reflect his engagement in political, ecclesial, and theological challenges of his time and culture, including correspondences with theologians Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, Norbert LOHFINK, Joseph RATZINGER, and others (vol. 8). Apart from the 2006 translation of his 1999 book *Banished from Eden*, a volume compiled of earlier essays, to date none of this material has ever been translated into English.

Our hope is that our efforts in recollecting the theology of Raymund Schwager by critically collecting his theological writings, will enable second, third, and fourth generations to discover this fascinating way of doing theology. Not only because it is intellectually stimulating (for Girardians and others), but also because it is a way of doing theology, that our time really needs.

Why is that so?

(1) SCHWAGER was a theologian who did theology in the Cold War. His theology is, from there, deeply informed by the attempt to show that scripture and the tradition of the Church are, rightly understood, indispensable means of appropriately assessing the socio-political conflicts in the world that threaten the future of humankind. Even when SCHWAGER deals with, say, theological problems in the Church Fathers, he is not simply doing “esoteric” studies

for theological experts. Even then, he tries to better understand Christian faith as the single most important power to transform the forces of rivalry, injustice, and oppression in the world. Today, we need this sort of theology – probably even more than when SCHWAGER originally developed it.

(2) SCHWAGER was not interested in small problems – historically, systematically, or practically. From his earliest to his latest writings, he tried to develop an overall approach to all things theological (and beyond). Of course, he did not have the opportunity to do all the necessary research in all the necessary fields, to find out whether his Dramatic Theology could really be a helpful tool for so many problems in theology (and beyond). That is why, from the very beginning, he built up research groups to help him do this. His theology is, in fact, not *his* theology, but a style of theology for others. The quality of this theology is, therefore, something which only its further employment can really assess. His Dramatic Theology was not a set of answers, but a box of tools to work on future problems. These tools have to be put in the hands of future generations of people digging into theology (and beyond). We would be happy, if our *Collected Works* edition were helpful for them.

(3) SCHWAGER has always been a contested theologian, especially in the German-speaking world. His approach to the specific features of the truth of Christian dogma – taking into account the thinking of René GIRARD and many others – as a revelatory means of transforming the processes of rivalry, scapegoating, and violence, that, secretly and openly, pervade all human culture, and proposing a new logic of inclusion in processes of dramatic interaction, has unsettled many. Some of his colleagues have accused him of antisemitism, others – only recently in a major book – of the heresy of Marcionism (a harsh verdict among Catholic theologians!). Moreover, there are those who see in his theology, which had no fear of asking scientists' and sociologists' expertise for theological questions, a sell-out of Christian faith to sociology and other non-theological disciplines. Probably it is a false hope, but publishing a *Collected Works* edition, including introductions addressing not least those who have objected to SCHWAGER's theology, will help make

it quite clear that his theology is, in fact, to be judged differently.

I think we live in a time, where, for theologians and others, it is time to discover and re-discover Raymund SCHWAGER again. In the end, this is what our book series is for. It also pays tribute to a man without whom COV&R would not have become what it is today and whose legacy contains many stimuli for the Colloquium's future. It seems likely that he and his great interlocutor René GIRARD, who left us so recently, are already engaged in a continuation of their dialogue—they both had faith in a life of abundance beyond the grave.

*Mathias Moosbrugger*

### BOOK REVIEWS

**Cojocar, Daniel: *Violence and Dystopia: Mimesis and Sacrifice in Contemporary Western Dystopian Narratives*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015; ISBN-13: 978-1443876131; \$ 88.68**

*Violence and Dystopia*, a work based on the author's Oxford University DPhil dissertation, provides for its readers a wide-ranging and kind-spirited exploration of contemporary dystopian and post-apocalyptic fictions by seven writers: J. G. BALLARD, Iain SINCLAIR, Stewart HOME, David PEACE, Will SELF, Margaret ATWOOD, and Chuck PALAHNIUK. The focus on fictions about Britain by English writers (particularly SINCLAIR, ACKROYD, HOME, SELF, and PEACE) contributes something to the book's politics. Reading through the 308-densely packed pages, one gradually realizes that COJOCARU dislikes the forcefulness with which Margaret THATCHER and her cronies beat the human eggs of Britain into an omelet of irreversible servitude to global neoliberalism: "Thatcherism" is unequivocally bad, perhaps COJOCARU's only "scapegoat." His analyses of David PEACE's Yorkshire fictions, particularly *GB84*, a disorienting treatment of the brutality and mayhem that marked the miners' strikes of the middle 1980s, make that disapproval clear. Explorations of novels by the American PALAHNIUK and of ATWOOD's futuristic extrapolations *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* broaden the scope, however; they place COJOCARU's satellite cameras over the American continent. "American," I say: COJOCARU's two

selected ATWOOD fictions are her thinnest in Canadian content; a cynic might opine their only "Canadian" quality is their anti-American paranoia of big mean capitalist machines.

I judge *Violence and Dystopia*, without question, a valuable work. COJOCARU is no dabbler in mimetic theory. He demonstrates a familiarity with all GIRARD's major works and a grasp of the relations between them. He offers (for example) a sensitive re-reading of "The Demons of Gerasa" in *The Scapegoat* and a sharp summary of *Battling to the End*. He borrows observations from Girardians such as Andrew MCKENNA, Paul DUMOUCHEL, Robert DALY, and Stephen FINAMORE when appropriate. It seems obligatory that students deploying GIRARD's ideas as framework for a literature department's doctoral dissertation must, even now, "introduce" him to their committee members in a way that DERRIDA, FOUCAULT, and other victimary theory superstars need not be "introduced" (a symptom of the academic normativity of leftist victimary thinking and the aggressive expulsion of anything resembling Christian humanism from the academy). COJOCARU deserves praise for performing that obligatory introduction brilliantly: "René GIRARD's Mimetic Theory" (10-29) packs accurate content into concise form.

In keeping with his expertise in mimetic theory, COJOCARU applies what we might call Girardian lenses and filters to the works in question with persistence and sensitivity. His key concepts are (not surprisingly) sacrifice and sacrificial crisis, scapegoating and the scapegoat mechanism. "Sacrifices" (chapter two) brings together GIRARD's thought and the notion of psychogeography to focus on "the violence of late capitalism represented by the car crash," exploring J. G. BALLARD's *Crash* and PALAHNIUK's *Fight Club* and Brad ANDERSON's movie *The Machinist*: "It is only through a slowing down that the non-places, seemingly void of history through the speed of the car, yield their secret history of victimization" (97). "Atrocity" (chapter three) takes up the work of Iain SINCLAIR, who, according to COJOCARU, shows himself attuned to the ways in which the city with atrocious self-perpetuation covers up, in structures such as the anonymous high-rise tower, the founding violence that permits its violent energies to circulate. The "atrocity" chap-

ter benefits from its contrast between SINCLAIR as one who seems in tune with Girardian intuitions and Peter ACKROYD as one not so attuned: ACKROYD (COJOCARU persuades us) accepts and abides in the violence that sustains London even as he dramatizes it; he seems happy to mythologize collective violence as a natural necessity of great civilizations. In “Crovvds” (chapter four), I was most intrigued by COJOCARU’s pages on the radical Stewart HOME. Alone among the writers COJOCARU studies, Home has studied GIRARD and has acknowledged a debt to GIRARD’s thought. “Violentropy,” chapter five, seeks to “detect” in the postapocalyptic fictions of Margaret ATWOOD and Will SELF, along with SINCLAIR’s “Radon Daughters,” what COJOCARU calls “a secret collusion and continuity between Western capitalism and consumerism, fundamentalism and neo-pagan archaic religion” (306).

*Violence and Dystopia* does creak with the joints of dissertation-style organizational markers: “But before the secrets of Rant’s identity are discussed, some attention has to be devoted to the genesis of Party Crashing” (83); “Before turning to *Oryx*, the question of Offred’s objectivity with respect to her historical situation has to be addressed” (262). Sentences like those occurred frequently enough to make me wonder, frustrated, *why* we were being informed we must cover X before getting to Y (see also 85, 88, 99; 133, 267, 298). It must in fairness be said that such directives can be the kind of thing needful in a book as ambitious as this. But some readers might miss the logical continuity that comes from an overarching polemical thesis. COJOCARU does not back down from objecting to particular points of interpretation concerning single texts in scholarly journals, but he seems unwilling to risk one big idea to act as the map for charting disparate forays.

Ultimately, that unwillingness may result from the problem of the relation between GIRARD’s theory and political thinking, which Stephen GARDNER more than anyone else in COV&R circles has dared to spotlight with glare. COJOCARU’s political imprecision may be reflecting that of GIRARD himself, to whose insights he is respectfully faithful. And yet COJOCARU certainly expects his readers to know exactly what he means by the derogatory phrase “late capitalism” and to assume the world

would be better without it. I associate contempt for “late capitalism” with the resentment-saturated abstractions of Althusserian Marxism; its value as analytical label seems at best only uncomfortably compatible with GIRARD’s thought. Furthermore, as COJOCARU himself points out, the utopian-oriented socialist alternatives to capitalism have been discredited and mimetic theory has taught us to suspect the kind of mob violence that revolutionary leftism sentimentalizes. Why rely on recourse, then, to a ritual disparagement of “late capitalism”? The book’s steadily negative remarks about “consumerism” likewise would have more power if the critique of consumerism were more explicitly theorized.

One must respect *Violence and Dystopia*, however, for its originality and even-handedness. The book exemplifies responsible, searching scholarship; its cautiously detailed interpretations give it the weight one associates with reference works. And it does what all good literary criticism should do: communicate the desire to read the texts being scrutinized so that the reader wishes to make contact with them himself or herself. Incidentally, the hardcover volume is very handsomely produced on fine paper with robust binding. If you have a commitment to GIRARD’s thought and you are working in an institution where contemporary literature is studied, you should ensure your campus library orders a copy of Daniel COJOCARU’s fine book—or buy a copy for yourself. It is valuable work.

Andrew Bartlett

**O’Conaill, Sean, *The Chain that Binds the Earth*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse UK 2015. ISBN: 978-1-5049-4228-7 (sc), 978-1-5049-4229-4 (e).**

*The Chain that Binds the Earth*, written by Sean O’CONNAILL, is a novel for young adults that turns out to be a must read for their parents and teachers as well. Set in Northern Ireland after the Troubles, the violence of that time haunts the lives of the parents, and so also, the children. As we journey through a school year with four fourteen-year-olds attending an exemplary Catholic school, we encounter the way in which the sins of the parents are visited upon their children. Cruel, sometimes violent, bullying is a constant part of the children’s lives yet remains invisible to the adults who love them.

Mimetic theory is, of course, a theory of violence and religion. It has proved a valuable tool for those working toward a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. Roel KAPTEIN and Duncan MORROW in particular have used mimetic theory to analyze the conflict and create a workable pathway out of it. Hope that the lessons of the Troubles could benefit other areas afflicted with religious/political violence has led to exchanges with peacemakers in the Middle East. Applying the structure of the sacrificial mechanism to such conflicts illuminates the resistance of the participants to conflict resolution. The necessity of an enemy to cultural cohesion means that scapegoating is so enmeshed with group identity that to do without it feels like death.

For those of us who work with children and youth, the mimetic theory allows us to understand bullying as a particularly pernicious form of scapegoating. Pernicious because it is a scapegoat mechanism wrapped inside a larger one. Bullying among children is a spot on imitation of the larger cultural phenomenon of scapegoating, something too easily denied by adults. Because we associate bullying with children, adults are often unable to see their own culpability and so blame children for the problem. In other words, children are the convenient scapegoats of a scapegoating culture, helping to sustain the blindness necessary for the system to function.

O'CONNAILL does a good job of dramatizing the various and random ways in which scapegoats are chosen as we follow a series of bullying incidents. These encounters carry the threat of violence, which is often realized, and adult readers will wince at the ignorance of the teachers to what is happening on their watch. We wince because we recognize the truth of this fictional account, especially the way in which O'CONNAILL connects the bullying in the school to the scapegoating violence perpetrated and endured by the adults. The children are sadly victims of the sins of their parents and O'CONNAILL clearly intends this to be a message for all of Northern Ireland to hear. The novel warns that violence risks replicating itself in the next generation, but it is also the next generation that can, perhaps, reverse the trend. It is the scapegoats, after all, who have the clearest understanding of the lies and deliberate blindness that sustain the system. This truth is what James

ALISON refers to as the "intelligence of the victim" and it is this very intelligence that motivates O'CONNAILL's characters.

These children want answers. Why does bullying happen? Why do we want what other people have, especially when what they have makes us feel small or less important? Does this type of wanting have anything to do with bullying? And they especially want to know why their teachers can't answer any of their questions! Before long they are making a connection between the commandment not to covet and the world of desiring they see all around them. They invent a term, "copy-wanting", for what we know as mimetic desire.

The children see what the adults around them cannot – that all sorts of problems in the world begin with copy-wanting, which they define as "wanting something that someone else has because you think it makes them better than you." Wanting to be better than others even appears to be behind the bullying that's going on in their class, especially from one Gavan McGuire. Gavan picks on a number of classmates for a variety of reasons: stuttering or being adopted, overweight or shy. Johnny and his friends, Margaret, Mary and Eddy see that Gavan enjoys feeling like top dog and putting others down gives him the lift his ego craves.

The foursome calls themselves *bridgers* with a small b, an idea that begins with the main character, Johnny Mullan, and spreads to his friends. Johnny is from a Catholic family living in the Protestant section of town – on the wrong side of the bridge, as it turns out. He crosses the bridge by bus every day to attend his Catholic school with the other wrong-siders Margaret, Mary and Eddy. Each is troubled by issues that defy easy answers, from crime to the environment to the sheer number and variety of obstacles in the way of peace. But they are united by two things: a deep desire to stop bullying in their school and their prayerful search for a solution to the world's problems.

When they get picked on by Gavan and his fellow bullies, or when they see someone else in their class being ridiculed or taunted, they are tempted to dish the abuse right back. But that only seems to make things worse and besides, they don't want to turn into bullies themselves. Luckily, prayer comes as naturally to these friends as does their passion for knowledge.

O'CONNELL offers us prayer seasoned with youthful imagination, which may be what adult prayer sometimes lacks. There is nothing dry or rote about the inner dialogues these children have with God. In response to their prayerful longing for help, guides visit them in their dreams. Ordinary in appearance yet magical in their knowledge and insight, the guides teach them how to respond to bullies. In the moment when the bully seems to have the upper hand, when you want to run away or strike back, pause before responding. The dream visitors advise that they take a moment to pray for the "power of the bridge". A response will come that builds a bridge between the bully, the bullied and the confused and frightened bystanders.

Soon the friends are interrupting the abusive bullying and protecting the most vulnerable in their class. Humor seems to work well as does agreeing with the bully but adding a twist to the meaning of their taunt, almost the way parables

work. The victims are amazed and grateful, but the bullies sulk away promising revenge. Revenge is a dangerous business when you live on the wrong side of the bridge, and we soon discover that the worst bully in the class, Gavan McGuire, comes from a family that scapegoated Johnny's father during the Troubles when Johnny's dad was only 14 himself.

O'CONNELL was born in Dublin and taught history in Catholic schools in Northern Ireland for thirty years. The problem of festering scapegoating in schools as well as the inability of Ireland's religious educators to come to the aid of the children prompted him to speak directly to young people about mimetic theory. With his fictionalized account of parents and their children wrestling with the consequences of the Troubles, O'CONNELL has found a way to share the wisdom of mimetic theory with children and perhaps most poignantly, through the children offer hope to the adults who love them.

*Suzanne Ross*

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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](mailto: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).

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**COV&R-President:** Ann W. Astell, Dept. of Theology, University of Notre Dame, 130 Malloy Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA, E-Mail: [aastell@nd.edu](mailto:aastell@nd.edu)

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COV&R c/o Institut für Systematische Theologie  
Karl-Rahner-Platz 1  
A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria  
Fax: +43/512/507-2761

Money transfer:

IBAN: AT10 6000 0000 9301 2689

BIC/SWIFT: OPSKATWW;

[dietmar.regensburger@uibk.ac.at](mailto:dietmar.regensburger@uibk.ac.at)