VIOLENCE, DESIRE, *AND THE* SACRED

Girard's Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines

Edited by
SCOTT COWDELL
CHRIS FLEMING
AND JOEL HODGE

continuum

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To Reverend Professor James Haire AM
Scott Cowdell

To Mary, Ann, and Elizabeth:
astonishing sisters
Chris Fleming

To Draško Dizdar,
for introducing me to Girard's work
Joel Hodge

To our colleagues in the Australian Girard Seminar
The editors, collectively

Contents

Foreword

A geographical note on the development of mimetic theory

If we look at the geographical spread of interdisciplinary studies related to René Girard's mimetic theory by following the development of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), we discover that it took the reverse road of René Girard's own biographical itinerary. Whereas Girard was born in France and concluded his first doctoral degree in Paris before he moved to the United States in 1947, COV&R was founded in 1991 at Stanford University in the United States before it spread to Europe and Canada. For the first 20 years the annual meetings of the Colloquium took place either in North America or in Europe. Australia was at that time—despite Emile Durkheim's important work on the religion of the Australian Aboriginals that influenced mimetic theory—not yet recognized as a part of the Girardian community. This, however, has definitely changed in recent years. I became aware of Australians interested in mimetic theory in 2003 when I organized the annual meeting in Innsbruck and Ian Rock from Chinchilla in Australia was among the participants. At the Innsbruck conference I also met for the first time Sheelah Hidden, a musician and Girardian engaged in interreligious dialogue and who grew up in Australia before she moved to England and became a leading member of the Colloquium. In 2004, Chris Fleming's seminal book *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* was published by Polity Press in its series "Key Contemporary Thinkers." It was the first major book written on Girard in English and it was by an Australian scholar. Chris Fleming is a senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Western Sydney. In the summer of 2004, Peter Stork visited me in Innsbruck to talk about his dissertation project, "Human Rights in Crisis: Is There No Answer to Human Violence? A Cultural Critique in Conversation with René Girard and Raymund Schwager." Originally he wanted to interview Raymund Schwager himself, but the latter had died unexpectedly in February of that year. I later became one of the examiners of Stork's dissertation, which was successfully completed in 2006. In 2005 at COV&R's annual meeting in Koblenz (Germany), I met for the first time Joel Hodge who was among the winners of the first Raymund Schwager Award, which is given to the best young scholars who presented at the conference. In summer 2010, I

finally met Scott Cowdell at his first attendance of an annual meeting of COV&R in Notre Dame (Indiana, US). Due to my contacts with the Catholic University of Leuven, I also became an external reviewer of Kevin Lenehan's dissertation, "Standing Responsibly Between Silence and Speech: Religion and Revelation in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and René Girard," in 2010. I had met Kevin earlier in Leuven and at several annual meetings of the Colloquium.

In 2010, Australian scholarship in mimetic theory was already growing in such quantity and quality that a distinguished group led by Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge decided to hold the first conference of the Australian Girard Seminar in January 2011 in Sydney. With the help of *Imitatio*, I was invited to participate in this inaugural gathering. I, of course, hesitated a little bit to travel that far for just a couple of days but the expectation of meeting so many of my Australian friends soon convinced me to do so. It was really worth undertaking the long trip from Austria to Australia. It was not only the fact that I traveled for the first time "down-under" and it was not only the kind hospitality of my Australian friends, but it was also the conference itself that keeps this trip among my best memories. The papers and interdisciplinary discussions reminded me of the best conferences of the Colloquium in which I have participated so far. Thought-provoking new ideas and lively debates showed me how strong and active the scholars dedicated to mimetic theory have become in Australia. I am convinced that the Australian Girard Seminar will have a strong and fruitful future. I am also grateful to Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge for putting this volume together for it enables many more people to connect to the first fruits of this new enterprise. It is not by chance that this volume will be released in the very same year that COV&R will meet for the first time outside North America or Europe. In 2012, we gather in Tokyo, Japan, a place that is much closer to Australia than all our previous meetings. This meeting and this volume are clear signs that mimetic theory has become an interdisciplinary as well as a really international phenomenon. The ongoing work of my Australian colleagues will definitely contribute to a strong future for mimetic theory. This may even lead to the annual meeting of COV&R down-under in the not too distant future. Hopefully this will be an occasion for me to travel to Australia again and have a chance to stay a little bit longer.

Wolfgang Palaver

Contributors

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Kevin Lenehan is a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat (in rural Victoria, Australia), and Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Catholic Theological College, within the Melbourne College of Divinity. He holds doctorates from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium (STD and PhD). He is the author of *Standing Responsibly Between Silence and Speech: Revelation and Religion in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and René Girard* (Peeters, 2011).

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Wolfgang Palaver is Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Chair of the Institute for Systematic Theology at the University of Innsbruck, Austria (where he earned his doctorate). He has published books and articles on religion and violence, Thomas Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, and René Girard. An English translation of his book *René Girards mimetische Theorie* (3rd. edn, 2008) is forthcoming with Michigan State University Press.

Peter Stork is Honorary Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University (Canberra campus), where he received his PhD in 2006 after retirement from an international career in management consulting (for which he qualified in his native Germany in the late 1950s). He is the author of *Human Rights in Crisis: A Cultural Critique* (VDM Verlag, 2007) and of several articles.

Introduction

In 1981 a conference was held at Stanford University with the enticingly ambitious title "Disorder and Order." Although it took place at a time well before talk of "interdisciplinarity" became fashionable, it rested on a bold interdisciplinary premise: that certain theoretical terms such as "structure," "order," "hierarchy," "chaos," and so on are not the privileged domain of any single discipline and, as such, provide fertile terrain upon which meaningful conversations between disciplines can occur. Apart from this unique—and uniquely open—epistemic orientation, another feature of the conference bears mention: it was centered around the work of René Girard. While this was not remarkable in itself, what *was* remarkable—and remains so—was that a thinker in the humanities could have seized the attention of experts in a wide range of academic fields. Among those in attendance were chemist Ilya Prigogine, political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, historian of science Michel Serres, psychologist and communications theorist Paul Watzlawick, economist Jean-Pierre Dupuy, and literary theorist Eric Gans. One wonders what kind of sea change would be required to get economists, chemists, philosophers, psychologists, and literary theorists into the same room to discuss issues of mutual interest; indeed, one wonders whether such a meeting could be imagined in the contemporary academy—even whether it could be made *intelligible*.

For obvious reasons, the conference at Stanford represents a high point in both interdisciplinary inquiry and Girardian studies. Of course, talk *about* interdisciplinary inquiry has now reached fever pitch: we academics profess to *love* interdisciplinarity—that is, of course, until people actually try to *do it*. If anything, the contemporary university rewards increasing specialization, even when such specialization threatens the wayward journey of genuine intellectual inquiry, of the task of generating new ideas out of the already known. This book is a humble attempt to gesture back to that spirit of open inquiry that reaches across disciplinary boundaries; it tries to model a kind of intellectual engagement that endeavors to be interdisciplinary without being undisciplined. Our palette here is, of course, vastly more restricted than the Stanford conference, and we boast no Nobel Prize winners in our cast of contributors—at least not yet. This is an altogether less ambitious enterprise, although we hope it is not

without its own significance, not least as a gesture toward a different kind of future of inquiry in the humanities.

More concretely, the book you are now holding is the first fruits of a new venture in exploring, engaging, and commending the Girardian vision, called the Australian Girard Seminar. Two of the editors, Scott Cowdell and Joel Hodge, were introduced to each other by James Alison at the July 2010 conference of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion at Notre Dame, Indiana, and soon decided that something needed doing in their own country. Quickly brought on board was Chris Fleming, who wrote the first major study of Girard in English. The editors organized an inaugural conference on Friday and Saturday, January 14 and 15, 2011, held at St Paul's College within the University of Sydney. Present were about forty people gathered from the editors' own networks, with other interested persons who were immediately attracted to a gathering of Girardian thinkers, comprising a good mix of scholars, ministry practitioners, community workers, and students—not to mention a film-maker *and* a community clown. The papers were of sufficient quality and interest that Continuum agreed to this publication, *et voila*.

Apart from the excellent hospitality of Canon Ivan Head, the Warden, and his staff at St Paul's College, a most convivial gathering was further enriched by the presence of Professor Wolfgang Palaver from that nest of leading Girardians, the University of Innsbruck, who was then completing his term as President of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R). Thanks to the generous and confidence-boosting support of Imitatio, an international body supporting Girardian research, Wolfgang made his first trip to Australia and endeared himself to all of us. Unfortunately the public lecture he gave to commence our conference was already promised for publication elsewhere, so instead we are pleased to offer here the paper he gave in June 2011 at the COV&R Conference on the Island of Salina, off Sicily. Also present at our inaugural conference in Sydney was another leading Girardian thinker, Professor Jeremiah Alberg, from the International Christian University in Tokyo, who had flown more or less due south to join us. His fine paper from the conference is reproduced here. One of us, Chris Fleming, was ill and reluctantly canceled his conference appearance at the last minute, though we have his paper in the collection. The only other text not from our conference is the one from James Alison, whose globe-trotting mission had brought him to Australia not long before our gathering. His paper reproduced here was given as a public lecture through the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre (PACT), at the Canberra campus of

Charles Sturt University, where Scott Cowdell is currently based. Perhaps this is the right place to mention with thanks the support the editors also received from their own institutions toward a successful conference: Charles Sturt University (PACT), Australian Catholic University, and especially The University of Western Sydney for covering our professional editorial expenses. We would also like to thank James Alison who helped to make publication of this collection possible, along with the Australian Girard Seminar and several Girardian colleagues internationally. We are also grateful to Christopher Brennan for editorial assistance in the preparation of the manuscript, and to Haaris Naqvi at Continuum.

The fiftieth anniversary of Girard's first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, published in French in 1961, made 2011 a good year for reflecting on Girard's growing influence across the disciplines. Chris Fleming wrote in his 2004 study, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis*, about the range of areas—from anthropology to linguistics, from literature to theology—where *le système girardien* is making an impact. Here we show some of that range, from scripture studies and theology proper, to twentieth-century literature, to live current political issues against the historical backdrop of modern conflict. There are also three papers on Girard in conversation—with science, philosophy, and an alternative (Lonergonian) account of desire.

To begin the collection, Scott Cowdell provides a "Girard 101" overview of the three elements in Girard's account, namely the mimetic theory of desire, surrogate victimage—which lies at the root of culture and religion—and the decisive anthropological breakthrough of Judeo-Christianity, with its preferential option for the victim and desacralization of sacred violence. The apocalyptic reading of modernity that has increasingly preoccupied Girard in his ninth decade is also set out.

Under the heading of biblical studies, we begin with James Alison doing what he does best: reading scripture with a fresh, Girardian eye to bring new insight to well-worn biblical narratives. Here it is the Good Samaritan story, which proves—in Alison's purview—to be an account of gut-wrenching conversion to God-through-conversion-to-the-victim. Then Australian monastic theologian Draško Dizdar reflects on another Lucan passage, that of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, to demonstrate how we are guided to a right interpretation of scripture that privileges the outsider. New Zealand graduate student Debra Anstis offers a bold proposal linking scapegoats in Leviticus with the twinned figures of Jesus and Judas in the passion narratives.

Theological engagement with Girard's work is then explored from three complementary perspectives. Veteran Australian theologian and member of the Catholic Church's International Theological Commission, Tony Kelly, offers an extraordinarily rich meditation on the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit from a Girardian perspective, illuminating Johannine and Pauline themes, the justice dimension of Catholicism's natural law tradition, and the personal and spiritual ethical imagination in conversation with Thomas Aquinas on spiritual gifts. Joel Hodge then takes us on an empirical journey of Girardian theological reflection, charting the intensification of the false sacred consciousness which was manifest during the brutal Indonesian occupation of Australia's northern neighbor, East Timor, along with the emergence of a genuinely religious alternative beyond the power of torture and scapegoating. The story of Cristiano puts living flesh to Girard's conviction that Christ uniquely overcomes "the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him," as an Easter Eucharistic Prayer puts it. Then we are treated to a careful exploration of the theological implications attending Girard's vision by Kevin Lenehan, under the programmatic categories of any adequate postmodern theology: apologetics, hermeneutics, and dialogue.

Two essays on Girard and literature follow. Vijay Mishra's paper brings Girardian literary criticism and Derridian deconstruction into dialogue, with Salman Rushdie's controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* negotiating the exchange. Professor Mishra's figuration of Girard's conception of the *romans romanesque* ("novelistic novel") somewhat idiosyncratically casts it in terms of a particular kind of repudiation of the mediator—a renunciation of the project of turning other humans into gods, a spurning of the "absolute mediator." Thus, he provides salient observations about religious hermeneutics and a fresh perspective on the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jeremiah Alberg introduces the unfamiliar to one of America's greatest literary treasures, the mid-twentieth-century Southern writer Flannery O'Connor, and her unerring Catholic eye for the patient, accepting solidarity of real love over the regular descent of sentimental "popular pity" into destructive violence—beginning when the high-minded curse God for evils in the world, such as the suffering of children. Here is a strong and original confirmation of Girard's concern that, following Nietzsche, Dionysian sacrificial violence seeks to assert its moral superiority over Christian belief. Hitler claimed to be the truest friend of the German people, after all, though his real purpose was to erase Christianity's foundational concern for victims from the Western imagination (see the final chapter of Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*).

Next we have three essays on history and politics. Wolfgang Palaver reflects on Europe's foundational enmity against militant Islam in Girardian terms, looking to a counter-history of *convivencia* and to various Catholic saints as models for a united Europe, able to maximize a spirit of inclusiveness. This is a timely call, given the present Pope's visionary proposals for Europe's spiritual vocation among the nations, seen against the economic crisis currently threatening the European Union. Ivan Head's regular retreats to the Lambeth Palace Library in London to immerse himself in the foundational documents of Anglican sensibility yields a sobering meditation on Girardian themes in the English Reformation and beyond. Foundational violence against the Catholic "other" is insufficiently acknowledged and repented-of among Anglicans, whose much-vaunted tolerance owes more to John Locke than to anything a Reformation or Restoration monarch, or their court theologians, could have imagined. The apocalyptic escalation of warfare that Girard has traced from the undeveloped insights of Carl von Clausewitz in Chapter 1 of *On War* lead Dr Head on a trajectory from Henry VIII to Cold War über-hawk, General Curtis Le May. Peter Stork then offers a timely analysis of human rights discourse as an inadequate bulwark against violence, showing how it has been usurped ideologically and politically—how, echoing Flannery O'Connor in turn echoing the Gospels, "the violent bear it away." Vigilant critique remains necessary even in enlightened times, lest the gospel impulse toward the victim be hijacked and weaponized.

Three varied essays conclude our collection. Scott Cowdell surveys recent empirical evidence for Girardian mimetic theory emerging in studies of human behavior, located against the evolving arc of primate brains. Studies of infant intersubjectivity, illumined, broadened, and deepened by the recent discovery and mapping of the mirror neuron system, add up to a strong case. Another of the editors, Chris Fleming, here writing with John O'Carroll, considers the different versions of Nietzsche that have been offered to us since the German philosopher's death in 1900. Nietzsche was obsessed with religion, especially biblical religion, and yet there are few commentators who have taken this dimension of Nietzsche's thought seriously. Fleming and O'Carroll consider both the reasons for this stunning neglect and some of its implications, drawing on Girard's work as the best way into this hermeneutic thicket. We end with a reflection by Australian Lonergonian theologian, Neil Ormerod, in a beginning engagement with Girard on the theological nature of desire. Though we think that there is a more satisfying Girardian account of authentic desire to be had in the liberating practices of "good mimesis," we welcome these first steps toward a

dialogue between Girard and Lonergan that one of us, Joel Hodge, now intends to pursue.

This is a diverse collection of essays, though a number of themes recur. These reflections take us deep into the mimetic reality of human life, ordered and preserved by scapegoating at the root of culture and religion, with the Judeo-Christian scriptures beginning to tell a different story. Girard has been accused of not providing a technique or a program for taking this cause forward, and it is clear throughout this collection how much there is at stake. But we hope it is also clear that Girard provides the resources for understanding why things are as they are, as well as prompting us to countenance the idea that the emergence of a new human reality and forms of social order is a genuine possibility—and perhaps even unstoppable. With Australia as its base, we offer this international collection to showcase important interdisciplinary work in Girardian studies as it provides much food for thought about some of our most pressing concerns and issues.

Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge

Part One

Finding Our Bearings

1

René Girard, Modernity, and Apocalypse

Scott Cowdell

The year 2009 marked the sesquicentenary of one of humanity's greatest intellectual achievements, the theory of evolution by natural selection. Darwinian molecular biology is now foundational for everything we know about life's development, illuminating so much complexity by an essentially simple mechanism. Similar attempts to unify the human sciences—from grand positivistic aspirations in nineteenth-century cultural anthropology (fictionalized by George Eliot in the character of her scholar-parson Edward Casaubon, who collapsed under the weight of his search for "the key to all mythologies") through to today's sceptical postmoderns (who question not only the likelihood but also the morality of encompassing cultural diversity in a single theory)—have met with less success. And of course the possibility of a Christian intellectual synthesis holding faith and reason together has scarcely been conceivable since the late Middle Ages, when faith and reason went their separate ways in the West and the modern *saeculum* began to emerge.

But, wonder of wonders, an audacious claim to do just this has been in place for 35 years now, and is beginning to win intellectual as well as spiritual converts among scholars, theologians, and clergy. In 2005, the French-American thinker, René Girard, in his ninth decade, was acclaimed by Michel Serres on his election to *L'Académie française* as the "new Darwin of the human sciences."[1] The postmodern academy—deeply wedded to the dogma of culture's irreducible pluralism—remains largely unimpressed, also despising any attempted rehabilitation for the Queen of the Sciences. Girard, with a dash of Gallic insouciance, shrugs off these detractors, referring to their small intellectual ambitions as "the comprehensive unionization of failure"[2]—and of course his theory gives a good account of such academic rivalry, and of the arrogant individualist's refusal of personal conversion that appreciation of his theory demands. Besides, his agenda

is bigger than the intellectual, or, indeed, the theological: Girard believes that, having uncovered the origin of culture and explicated the emergence of secular modernity, he has now revealed the apocalyptic acceleration of history toward a tragic denouement. Hence, from his study at Stanford, this scholar's scholar emerges as planetary prophet.

Desire, rivalry, violence, scapegoating

Girard's account of modernity is one of a deepening crisis, with less and less to stop it. What sort of crisis, and from whence does it come? The first of three planks in Girard's theory has to do with human desire. Through his early literary studies, Girard discovered what Shakespeare called "borrowed desire" or "desire by another's eye." Today's romantically minded individual claims originality and autonomy, but Shakespeare knew better, as did his Renaissance contemporary, Cervantes. Girard prefers the ancient word "mimesis" over simple "imitation," because it is the desire of the other that we emulate. So, for example, the young lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all fall in and out of love according to the desires of others, with Puck's love juice serving as a literary device for their mimetic desire,[3] while Don Quixote lives in the desire of his chivalric model, Amadis of Gaul.[4] Unfocused desire finds an object thanks to a model, who, in circumstances of close proximity, can become a rival—for the girl, the job, or the accolade. Girard realized that all great modern literature shares this insight, explicating Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust, and Dostoyevsky—also giving honorable mention to the writers of *Seinfeld*.[5]

All this is fairly straightforward, though at this stage many either fail to see themselves in this account or else bridle at it. To proceed with Girard, the need for conversion, from the romantic lie to what he calls "novelistic truth,"[6] emerges. This is not necessarily Christian conversion, though the Gospels stand centrally in Girard's vision. Proust never really became a Christian, though after recognizing the *snobbisme* that had controlled his life and imagination in the ultramimetic salon life of nineteenth-century Paris, he withdrew to his *appartement* on the Boulevard Haussmann, devoting the last 12 years of his life to crafting his great penitential exposé, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which translates as "in search of lost time."[7] Girard strengthens the intellectual credentials for his case by offering his own encompassing account of Freudian psychology, with no need to invoke phantoms such as the unconscious, and the Oedipus complex.

From the father as only the first of many rivals, to the coquettish narcissist whose desire for herself awakens men's desire while in turn depending on it, to the psychology of sadomasochism, gambling, and other self-destructive behaviors as obsessively pursuing the being of one's model of desire, Girard simplifies Freud.[8] He also develops something Freud glimpses but does not know what to do with, making it the second plank of his theory. Here I refer to the founding murder.

Girard concluded from reading Euripides' *The Bacchae* that the escalation of rivalry into violence finds a standard outlet in antiquity.[9] He devoted the 1960s to studying classical literature and mythology, also to sociology and anthropology, testing this hypothesis. The result in 1972 was his best-known work, *Violence and the Sacred*, revealing the single victim mechanism at the origin of human life, culture, and religion.[10] A premodern crowd was a dangerous thing, with envy becoming mimetically contagious until the original object of desire is forgotten and an undifferentiated mass of rivalrous doubles coalesces, escalating toward violence. He postulates that, on the cusp of humanity's evolutionary emergence, mimesis appeared as a potentially good thing, but so quickly did it lead to rivalry and violence that no community could really take root—until something happened, which Girard believes is coded into the founding myths and rituals of all ancient cultures. And that is the sudden zeroing-in of crowd violence on a scapegoat, who creates unity around a new desire. Perhaps someone threw the first stone, and mimesis did the rest. Differentiation returns as one is separated from the undifferentiated throng. This slain victim thus becomes the first symbol, from which Girard the French structuralist sources the binary oppositions underpinning all languages and cultures.

The stability of human life together issuing from this founding murder is an unexpected miracle, and it is protected in three ways.[11] First, *prohibitions* ensure that rivalry is not allowed to return, hence the elaborate gift-giving customs and incest taboos of ancient peoples. Second, *rituals* offer at least a limited hint of the primal crisis and reclaim the order which emerged from it, perhaps by sacrificing an animal, with the sacrificial origins of institutions like kingship revealed in the mock sacrifice of many initiation rituals. Third, *myths* grow up whereby the founding murder is coded into tales of man-beasts, for instance, with errant gods returning to the sky or disappearing into lakes, providing a sanitized sacred narrative of cultural origins. Thereafter, with these stabilizing elements in place, the essentially positive nature of our mimetic desire allows the buildingup of various human institutions, languages, and religions. Humans learn linguistic and practical skills by mimesis, and the essential plasticity of mimetic desire, beyond

the fixed repertoires of animal instinct, allows cultural diversity to expand from just a few basic elements. On the basis of this simplicity yet comprehensiveness, Girard claims that his account of human culture is scientific.

Following the guiding insight, if not all the specific detail of Émile Durkheim's sociology,[12] Girard recognizes that premodern civilizations form cultural-social-religious wholes, demonstrating what he labels "deviated transcendence" or the "false sacred." The religious awe and wonder attaching to these human totalities, which Rudolf Otto identified as a unique and irreducible experience, is explained more straightforwardly by Girard in terms of the scapegoat's dual nature.[13] He notes that scapegoats are always guilty in antiquity, when for instance Oedipus was condemned for incest and parricide—extreme accusations so characteristic of an angry mob.[14] Yet victims are regularly rehabilitated because the pacifying and unifying impact of their scapegoating is so extraordinary; hence the birth of gods and heroes. The wife of Caesar in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* believed that "great Rome shall suck reviving blood" from the slaying of its founder.[15] This peace won ultimately through violence is necessary for the survival of premodern societies, which lack a rule of law and the accompanying threat of force sufficient for restraining violent escalation. The breakdown of this comprehensive order sets humanity on the path to modernity, and that breakdown—according to the third and most controversial plank of *le système Girard*—begins with the Bible.

The deculturing, secularizing gospel

With the mimetic desire drawing Eve and then Adam into rivalry with God, and Abel's primal murder prior to founding the first city, the scripture exposes humanity's fall away from the innocence of prehuman life. The tenth commandment of the Decalogue warns against coveting and rivalry, which undergird the escalation named by earlier commandments toward murder via theft, adultery, and slander.[16] An Egyptian version of the Joseph saga blames Joseph for his troubles, in consistent mythical fashion, while Genesis insists on his innocence, with the repentant brothers who scapegoated Joseph refusing to scapegoat another brother in the case of Benjamin.[17] The sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac is averted, and while the Israelites are ordered to massacre the Canaanites, they are immediately told not to intermarry with them, so that even in such texts of terror there is evidence of violence being averted. Two-thirds of the Psalms center on the innocent victim's lament, claiming God's help against an encircling lynch mob.[18]

And Job the innocent scapegoat by and large resists the false sacred represented by his wife, his three friends, and even by that awesome voice of a harsh status quo who speaks from the whirlwind, clinging instead to the real sacred, to Israel's faithful God, in his stubborn retort, "I know that my redeemer lives."[19] Isaiah's Servant Songs register the leveling, undifferentiating effects of mimetic crises, with every valley lifted up and every hill made low, and the rough places plain, while the suffering servant is sacrificed.[20]

The Gospels represent the completion of this revelation, with the innocent one sacrificed to the angry, boundary-preserving false sacred of temple and empire—to the mob, and to the satanic show that could not tolerate exposure. Jesus' death need not be understood as appeasing an offended heavenly Father but, rather, in terms of a loving God beginning to liberate our world when the time was right. The resurrection of Jesus begins a new creation beyond the violent sacred, offering human life new foundations. Satan, the advocate for the prosecution—the Bible's shorthand for this whole process of violent escalation and appeasement—is now put on notice by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, our "advocate for the defense."[21] Previously, violent mimetic crises were resolved by a collective murder, which the Gospels call "Satan driving out Satan." Now a new instability enters the picture, because targeting an innocent victim no longer works so well. Myths and rituals begin to give up their innocent dead, while incidents of violent escalation become harder to repress. Hence, the world becomes a more straightforwardly violent place. Girard understands Jesus' warning about bringing not peace but a sword[22] as the new creation beginning to undo the old creation by letting its inherent violence get the better of it.

The Roman Empire was the first to collapse, its violent fatalism overcome by a hopeful church made invincible by the resurrection. But then, with notable exceptions, such as the desert fathers, and Benedictine monasticism, Western Christianity settled into a compromise with the old false sacred in the Holy Roman Empire. Sufficient sacrifice and violent exclusion were retained to keep a relatively stable peace through the Middle Ages. Bloodthirsty atonement theology, rampant medieval anti-Semitism, and the Crusades are all examples of this resurgent false sacred, which helped manage the social panics of medieval Europe. All of which finds its clearest literary exemplar in Dostoyevsky's figure of the Grand Inquisitor, from *The Brothers Karamazov*, who leaves no doubt about which version of the sacred it is that demands Jesus' death. But eventually the myths—from the anti-Semitic persecutory writing of Guillaume de Machaut to the witch trials marking the last gasp of the premodern order—lose their power

to convince.[23] The distinctively Western form of modernity dawns with the breakdown of a sacred hierarchy in the late Middle Ages and the emergence of a more differentiated world that we recognize as secular. And all this is God's work, through the Bible's impact in general, and the Gospels' impact in particular.

Modern institutions: A stabilizing stopgap

Widespread violence from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries in Europe demonstrates for Girard the absence of new sacred orders fit to restrain it. The integral fabric of feudal Europe had given way to naked kingly authority on earth matched, under nominalist influence, by naked divine power in heaven, and against this new horizon of sovereignty a new mercantile society of greater equality emerged. The rivalry that did not typically arise between separate orders in the medieval hierarchy was now rife (Girard points out, for instance, that Sancho Panza was not prey to mimetic rivalry with his master Don Quixote). With modernity, however, individual desire escalated as newfound equality strove for differentiation,[24] while the capacity to release collective tensions through scapegoating diminished.[25]

Two major modern institutions for keeping a lid on violence arose from this struggle. One was the nation-state, with Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan representing the powerful rule of law in the person of the sovereign. The established religion emerging in Hobbes's era contributed to a watered-down version of the old false sacred, though even Hobbes had to allow private opinion in religious matters, hence acknowledging the impossibility of achieving the total violent consensus possible in premodern times.[26] Thus secularization, which centers on the reification and retreat of religion from the center of public meaning, can be understood as a fruit of the Gospel, unpicking the old false sacred that could admit of no such separation. The second modern institution is the market, which serves both as an engine of mimetic escalation—think about how modern advertising works, awakening our desire via the desires of others—and as a means of keeping that escalation safe.[27] The proliferation of desirable goods brought to Europe by the colonial sea trade and, later, made even more widely available by mass production, fueled an explosion of desire awakened through the market, while providing sufficient goods to prevent its escalation through rivalry into violence. Simply put, everyone can aspire to the Hamptons' lifestyle, all of us accessing the being of those lithe models of our desire, as Girard would explain it, by buying

the same mass-produced Tommy Hilfiger fashions. Even the nonglamorously proportioned are catered for, as I discovered in an upmarket Manhattan clothier for the larger gentleman, with its own exclusive outsized line of Polo Ralph Lauren knitwear.

In tribal societies, the scarcity which spawns rivalry is managed by prohibitions, ensuring equality in the distribution of tribal resources, and discharging potential tensions through elaborate rules of gift giving. Today's market manages a sense of scarcity by isolating people as autonomous economic units unlikely to make common cause, by preoccupying them with the necessary business of earning while offering the pacifying distractions of fantasy, and by proliferating standardized models of desire via niche marketing, with manufacturing servicing the desires so created—all of which successfully channels potentially violent mimetic energies into economic expansion. Hence the first genuinely world religion, the global market, shows some continuity with the full-blown sacred orders of premodern times. There are still victims, for instance, particularly the third world poor whose suffering underwrites our Western greed, also economic victims and refugees closer to home who occupy the slow lane of our information super highway. The environment, too, is emerging as a new Girardian victim.[28] Yet there is widespread protest about all this, and a growing commitment to redressing these abuses—no modern society will be entirely unified by punishing a universally despised "other," as was possible under the old false sacred.

For the sake of these two highly successful modern institutions, the nation-state, and the market economy, what we Enlightenment Westerners have reified into the separate category of "religion" must remain a private matter. Religion nowadays is typically docile before both masters, serving the official quasi-sacred agenda of our national myths, as we put our faith in militaristic nationalism for keeping anxieties in check, or else is reduced to one commodity among others in the market. Here is the deepest truth of secularization, from a Girardian perspective. Nietzsche was right that the old sacred order has broken down, and that we have effectively killed it. We now bear the responsibility, having been cut adrift from all suns, to reconstitute the violent sacred on the Dionysian lines Nietzsche favors. "What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?" asks Nietzsche's madman.[29] Girard argues that Nietzsche was the first to realize the fundamental difference between Dionysus and the Crucified, identifying Nietzsche's legacy in world affairs in Nazism's attempt to write biblical compassion for victims out of the script for modernity.[30] Nietzsche's vision of a full-fledged modern false sacred order was thankfully stillborn, and he himself

succumbed to the insanity that any ancient Greek would have predicted of such Dionysian excess unrestrained by ritual. Secularization today is best understood as the sidelining of potentially contrary religious impulses so that a more modest false sacred can be established around the nation-state, and the market, containing violence in some degree of continuity with premodern sacred forms. Hence the measure of sacred awe still attaching to politics, and economics. This is a kind of "false sacred-lite," if you like—the best that can be had in a world where Jesus' living legacy continues to expose and undermine all such attempts.

And here, by the way, we find our clearest answer to the criticism often leveled at Girard—that his distinctive social scientific account of Judeo-Christian uniqueness represents an imperialistic ideology incompatible with his program, and with modern tolerance more generally. As for modern tolerance, Girard curls his Gallic lip and points to victimizing excesses hidden in the respectable folds of today's political correctness.[31] He takes the imperialistic challenge more seriously, insisting that Jesus reveals and overcomes the false sacred charade not to bolster the claims of institutional churches that have regularly failed to get the point, but for the sake of the world God loves. There is discussion in Girardian circles about how much awareness of mimeticism and the victim mechanism may be present in other religious traditions, with Buddhism's developed critique of illusion of particular interest. Girard's account does not represent religious one-upmanship and he would not want it read as such. Nevertheless, he is an adult convert to Roman Catholicism, stating matter-of-factly that the clearest picture of the problem and path to a solution is offered by the Gospels.

"Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war"

Despite the real but limited success of modern Western institutions in restraining violence without a full-fledged false sacred, Girard now doubts whether this can be sustained internationally; hence the accelerating apocalyptic current in his thought. The crisis of violent mimetic escalation is essentially one of undifferentiation. We have noted the differentiation that commodification and the markets introduce for keeping rivalry at bay, along with the controlling force of nation-states. Girard acknowledges the limited role such forces have always had in God's plan—St Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2: 6–7 calls them the *katéchon*—though they must eventually give way as Christ allows the old creation to collapse so a new one can come to birth. But now, Girard thinks, this collapse is showing itself.

Girard ascribes the first recognition of this to the early nineteenth-century Prussian Carl von Clausewitz, in Chapter 1 of the general's much-studied military classic, *On War*. Clausewitz sensed that, with Napoleon, a new spirit of total war had appeared in Europe. The duel of violent doubles at the root of mimetic crises in prehistory and antiquity, according to Girard, reemerges in such modern warfare. Girard's latest book is called *Achever Clausewitz*, "completing Clausewitz," in which he unpacks this insight from which Clausewitz anxiously withdrew, having first stated it, burying it under the remainder of a book devoted to war as a rational expedient—as "the continuation of policy by other means."[32] Instead, Girard traces the tit-for-tat escalation of violent doubles, from Napoleonism to the reaction of pan-Germanism, from Bolshevism to Nazism, and from Nazism to Stalinism. Gone is the older, more gentlemanly code of war; dawning is an era of utter loathing for the enemy, of whole populations mobilized, of partisan movements, and of terrorism.

Girard will have none of the Huntington thesis—that today we suffer from a clash of civilizations. It is proximity rather than differentiation that ignites, with brothers far more likely to fight against each other than against strangers. In today's global marketplace everyone is increasingly like everyone else, with the inequalities tolerably managed within particular nations now flaring up internationally. Girard could have predicted the outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit, for instance, having claimed that China is not really different from America at all, but just wants more cars than America has;[33] hence China's stubborn noncompliance on reduced carbon emissions, thereby ensuring its continued rapid economic growth. As for the war on terror, Girard is struck by the sleeper cells of terrorists living indistinguishably within Western societies, and how Atta and his fellow 9/11 perpetrators spent their last nights before the attacks in bars. What is going on? he asks.[34] Certainly not a simple clash of civilizations. Girard believes that populations around the world whose desire is awakened by Western affluence and who are then systematically excluded from it gravitate nowadays to Islamic jihad in the same way that oppressed masses once found a rallying point in communism.

Girard suspects that it is only a matter of time before terrorists go nuclear and deploy a dirty bomb,[35] while our fragile stability in the West, won by channeling violence into endless economic expansion, causes the rest of the world to follow our desire, hence further polluting the environment and advancing the technology of genetic manipulation in ways that court wider apocalyptic consequences. He looks again to the Bible, finding in the book of Revelation