

**Reason and Violence in Girard's Mimetic Theory:
The Anthropology of the Cross.**

By

Robert Hamerton-Kelly

Stanford University (ret)

8/24/09

Chair of the Board of Advisors:

"Imitatio: Integrating the Human Sciences."

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the work of Rene Girard as one of the noteworthy transformations in the field of Christian thought. Rene Noel Girard was born on Christmas day in 1923 and grew up in Avignon, where his father was curator of the Palais des Papes. Following in his father's footsteps he trained as a librarian, archivist and medieval historian at the Ecole des Chartres in Paris. The fact that he had no formal training in literature might be fortunate, and is in any case worth mentioning here, because when he turned to literature

he asked fresh questions, and at a time when literary interpretation was emphasizing the unique features of the individual work he paid attention to the common features of many works, and thus discovered Mimetic Desire (MD).

In 1947 he came to a junior position at Indiana University where he wrote a dissertation on the view of France from the United States in the recent decades. He was turned down for tenure at Indiana, an event he says was fortunate because it forced him to start scholarly writing in earnest. We are all grateful to the tenure committee of Indiana University because as a result of their decision RG began to produce a literary, social science, theological, and historical oeuvre that is now, 60 years later, a treasure of 20th century intellectual achievement and, some of us believe, the Truth that could rescue the western intellectual world from its current trendiness and triviality. Michel Serres, in the customary laudation welcoming RG into the Academie Francaise in 2005, called him the “The New Darwin of the Human

Sciences.¹” I share that view, and Imitatio, the small foundation for which I work has the motto “Integrating the Human Sciences.” As natural selection was a radically new way to understand biology and transformed that science, with profound consequences, so MT (Mimetic Theory) is a transforming insight that recasts epistemology and promises to bridge the chasms that currently separate the natural sciences, the social sciences, the literary sciences and the theological sciences from each other. Our foundation, Imitatio, claims only half facetiously, to offer “Epistemological continuity from the quantum to the eschaton.”^{t h}

† There are two ways to introduce MT; one is a narrative of its discovery, the other a systematic

¹Ä Addressing RG “under the Cupola” on December 15, 2005 Serres, speaking of the hidden mimesis of the bodily processes said, “Leur histoire raconte comment les objets que nous fabriquons explorent, les uns après les autres, les performances de la vie. J’ai appelé cela, jadis, l’ ‘exodarwinisme’ des techniques; grâce à vous, je comprends qu’il continue, qu’il imite, culturellement, le darwinisme naturel. Je vous nomme désormais ‘le nouveau Darwin des sciences humaines’” Rene Girard & Michel Serres, Le Tragique et la Pitié, Discours de Reception de Rene Girard a l’Academie francaise et reponse de Michel Serres, (Paris: Le Pommier, 2007) p.63. I take this to mean that RG has demonstrated a continuity between the natural sciences and the human sciences that opens up a new epistemology now decisively beyond the Cartesian dichotomy.

account of its structure and dynamics. Let me present them both in this order

A Narrative of MT's Discovery

MT unfolded in four stages.² The first was the Literary stage, the second the Anthropological stage, the third the Theological stage, and the fourth the Historical stage. Each stage was marked by an innovating publication coining a term or category, describing it, and then indicating the way ahead for research.

a

Stage 1. The Literary Stage:

Here RG established the category of Mimetic Desire (MD), and the important book is Mensonge romantique et verite romanesque (Paris: Grasset, 1961). The analysis of the interactions of characters in selected 19th century novels shows that people imitate each other's desire and that objects are desirable not through need, scarcity, or intrinsic desirability but because some one else desires them.

² For a recent guide to this history by RG himself see, Rene Girard, De la violence a la divinite, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2007) pp. 7-28.

The other's desire makes them desirable because the desiring self imitates the desire of that other.

⌘The biblical story of the first sin shows this to be the case when the serpent makes Eve think that the withholding of the one tree from the gift of all trees shows that God desires that withheld tree above all others, in effect desires it alone. This is proven by the fact that God will not give it or share it. Therefore, there is only one tree that God desires, namely, the one He will not give, and because her desire imitates God's desire, it is for Eve herself the only desirable tree. This is, of course, a misunderstanding, as the role of the serpent attests; God is infinitely generous. He withholds the one tree not out of mimetic rivalry but for the necessary purpose, to preserve the difference in status. For the creator to be creator he must be superior to the creature and the exclusive use of the one tree expresses and symbolizes that superiority. For the creator to trespass that exclusivity is to desire to be as gods (Genesis 3:4-5).

⁵The tree itself is of passing significance, the desire of the other (God) for the tree is all, and it is that desire that compels Eve's desire to imitate it and thus thwart its rival. The original sin occurred when we made God, who is the loving and generous creator into a rival, that is, when our relationship with the source of being turned from gratitude to competition, and we willed ³ to displace God and become our own creator.

Mimetic Desire (MD) is competitive and in the competition shifts its goal from one item to another, so that the desire to possess the object gradually becomes secondary to the desire to best the rival. There is a saying in Hollywood that "in this town it is not sufficient that I succeed, my best friend has got to fail." At an early stage of the theory's development RG called this a rivalry for "being," a "metaphysical desire." It is the restless discontent Augustine spoke

³ In speaking of "will" I am trying to do justice to the fact that sin as a moral category has to be freely willed. Sin is also a structural fact, but only after it was a moral choice. I cannot here discuss the matter of freedom and mechanism in the generation of the human world. I must bracket it for the time being and insist that while it is a problem for theology it is not and cannot be a problem in (social) science, which is what I understand myself to be doing here.

of in the opening paragraph of the Confessions, with the absence at the center of human satisfaction.

“Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.⁴” St Paul in Romans 1:18 ff in a Midrash on Gen 3 describes this metaphysical nihilism trenchantly as follows: Because we refuse to honor God as God, He abandons us to our own desires that take the form of lusting for each other as if we could gain from each other the substance we lost when we broke our relationship with God. We are now like the stuffed men of TS Eliot, leaning together to make something of ourselves, believing falsely that each one has what the other needs, and achieving the gravitas of a Guy Fawkes dummy⁵.

⁴ tu exitas, ut laudare delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te (Confessions, 1.1).

⁵ We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw, Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar

7 We soon discover that the other does not have what we want, and if the other does not have the being we lack he must be it. So we desire now not only to defeat him in the competition for the object, but also to consume him, not only that he be our inferior but that he cease to be altogether, swallowed up to fulfill our fake plenitude⁶. .

. At this early point in the unfolding of the theory we risk confusing the nature of mimetic desire by making too much of the conscious dimension of its unfolding. According to the theory the lust for being is, like all mimetic activity, preconscious, and societies are to be understood not as the result of social contracts or other conscious moves, but as impersonal social

.....
 This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.
The Hollow Men, 1925. "A penny for the Old Guy."

⁶ This imagined absence of being lies beneath the well-known anthropological phenomenon of "eating the enemy to gain his power." As recently as the 90's of last century in the Liberian civil wars there was a class of functionaries called "heart men" who would cut the heart out of your rival and serve it up for you to eat. See Stephen Ellis, The Mask of Anarchy : The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War, (New York : New York University Press, 1999) pp.221-264; c.f. Galatians 5:15.

systems, of the kind we can understand quite well under the rubrics of systems theory.

u

Stage 2: The Anthropological stage:

sThis “automatic” feature of mimetic desire is a convenient segue to stage two of the unfolding, where the moment of disclosure is the emergence of the surrogate victim or scapegoat. The reciprocal violence of mimetic rivalry (vengeance) deflects from its proper target on to a substitute. The deflection of reciprocal violence is the important insight here. Instead of oscillating between the vengeful parties more and more rapidly to a catastrophic climax, some of the violence swerves inexplicably to a single surrogate that is too weak to retaliate. Thus the oscillation of reciprocal violence is halted temporarily, because the surrogate is ipso facto too weak and undefended to retaliate.. The victim therefore is always innocent, his only crime is to be weak and without a champion.

The major work for this stage of the theory is, La violence et la sacre (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972).

RG calls the scapegoat a “mechanism” and thus underlines the non-conscious functioning of the whole phenomenon of MD, from the level of the human individual through the level of human groups. It is “the surrogate victim mechanism” that halts the mob on its way to anarchy and turns it into society by means of the scapegoat. Society is “the lynch mob” that controls violence by turning the war of all against all into the war of all against one, where the second “all” is the crowd that kills or expels the surrogate victim.

i This stage unfolds The System of the Primitive Sacred, (Religion) which has three moments, of Ritual, Prohibition, and Myth respectively.

R

a. Ritual:

: The phenomenon of the deflection onto a surrogate stabilizes society reeling with random violence and with the passage of time becomes the ritual of human sacrifice and the ritual of the scapegoat. In illo

tempore MD became acutely violent in hominid groups and threatened to make community impossible. The violence that MD generated had to be contained if the social system were to survive. Being a self-regulating social system the mob on its way to anarchy stabilizes itself by generating from within, a scapegoat, who polarizes the whole group against itself, and thus unifies it by turning it into a mob, that is, by the mobilization of a single-minded horde. The war of all against all transforms itself into the war of all against one.

^aOne can imagine how, before the emergence of the surrogate victim, reciprocal violence in the give-and-take of individual reciprocity (vengeance) might congeal from time to time as groups form by common hostility against single figures, until the moment when all groups by mutual emulation coalesce against one and “the community of the lynch mob” congeals. That mob is at last human society, which begins its journey to culture by ritualizing the primal murder as human sacrifice, which in turn renews by repetition the

violence-controlling force of the ruse of deflection onto a weak surrogate and thus conducts violence out of the social system and makes time and place for culture to grow. It took a very long time but eventually a ll culture grows out of the victim, first as religion and then in its many ramifications.

† The war of “all against all” becomes the war of “all against one” and the “all” united by violence against the “one” is the first stable human community. Thus a small act of deflected violence stops an escalation to disaster of reciprocal violence and forms a community of killers.

◦ This small violence, the murder of one, brings the mimetically rivalrous individuals together in a community of a common desire, and a common violence. Just as MD can shift effortlessly from the object to the rival so it can shift from one rival to another and especially follow the centripetal desire of the many as it coalesces against the one. MD has a mercurial propensity to attach itself to objects and

persons and transfer its rivalry from one to another to many.

“This “many” of Mimetic desire is “the mob always with us” that is also called “culture,” the cyber-crowd that greets us every morning and compels our desire to imitate it, to want what it wants, to love what it loves, to kill what it hates. The instances and illustrations of MD are legion and there is a growing literature on MD in all its subtlety, in theology, anthropology, literature and recently, the natural sciences⁷.

. The transference to and fixation of group violence upon the surrogate victim is the moment of transformation from disorder to order, from mob to society, but it is only the first moment and with the passing of time it produces the other moments of its integration into a larger structure of control that looks like this:

⁷ See the work of Scott Garrels, Vittorio Gallese and Andrew Meltzoff.

random mimetic violence- the surrogate victim mechanism- religion (sacrifice, prohibition, myth) – society and culture.

s

§ This emergent structure of control, therefore, comprises three phenomena that came together as “religion.” It probably took much time for this to happen, and at the beginning the process was driven by still blind mimetic forces like the ones that caused the surrogate to emerge in the first place. Eventually, however, self-consciousness took place and we might, in retrospect and without premature anthropomorphism, imagine an ideal scene of how things might have developed, as follows: the ur-mob notices that upon the death of the victim violent rivalry paused for a moment of peace. As they stand for a together over against the body of the victim they draw several catastrophically wrong conclusions, comparable to the misunderstanding of God by Eve .

c They tell themselves a great lie that makes themselves innocent of all violence, and violence an

unusual aberration of humanity's essential gentleness. We tell ourselves that we are creatures whose nature is to "desire to know," who are naturally gregarious and co-operative, and who live together because we love each other, and so on. This is the original and persisting myth.

oThe first mistake ("myth-take") in this larger misunderstanding was the idea that because there was violence when the victim was alive and peace when he died, the victim must have been the cause of the violence. This is the myth of the omnipotent victim that accuses the victim of our, that is the mob's, power of violence, Thus we have the origin of that ubiquitously fashionable ploy called "blame the victim." It distorts the act of sacrifice as the deflection of our vengeance onto a surrogate, into a gesture of appeasement of the omnipotent victim-become-god, who left unappeased will return to the community and start the war of all against all, all over again. So, entailed in the myth of the victim's omnipotence is the divinization of the dead victim, the origin of idolatry. If

the omnipotent victim is not appeased he will return to restart the war of all against all. It is believed that he is appeased by new victims continually offered, when what really takes place is the repetition of the deflection of vengeance into the surrogate.

ᵈThis “myth-understanding” of the process is in fact a reversal of the actual train of events. In myth sacrifices appease the victim-become-god, in fact the sacrifices control by deflection the mob’s reciprocal violence by conducting it out of the system in big enough increments to sustain the system’s viability. Thus the “good violence of sacrifice” controls “the bad violence of anarchy” by conducting increments of violence out of the social system on a regular basis, and sponsoring laws and customs of prohibition and the narratives of myth that justify the ritual and the prohibitions. This phenomenon is the “mechanism” by which violence controls itself through the scapegoat.

ᵂSo the ongoing cohesion of human society depends on the ritual of sacrifice, and the ritual victims are in fact replicas of the first victim who has since become

the god and makes the bogus demand of sacrifice and thus continues to unify the group. The idol is the glue of society. Primitive human groups are sacrificial systems, held together by the regular offering of victims and the practices pertaining thereto. The “slain lamb is the foundation of the human world (Revelation 13:8).

1

1

b) Prohibition:

:

: Prohibition is the second moment of the process of social formation through mimetic violence. Like ritual it is a stage in the unfolding of the control of violence by violence in the system of the religion.

√Some examples of this role are: Mimetic rivalry is exacerbated by proximity; therefore people too closely related by family must be separated from each other. Hence the taboo on incest, the hostility to twins, and the custom of having boys brought up not by their fathers but by their mother’s brothers. There is a fine quotation from the ethnological literature to illustrate

this impulse. When asked if he knew tribe X, the New Guinean answers, “Sure we know them; they are our enemies; we marry them.”

Reciprocity or the famous anthropology of the gift belongs in this section on prohibition. Gift exchange is controlled by custom so as to prevent escalation from the reciprocity of gifts to the reciprocity of blows.

Revenge is the violent form of gift exchange that prohibition seeks to control. For example the prohibition in the Torah, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” is intended to control vengeance by limiting reciprocity to quid pro quo.

Prohibition, which becomes taboo, law, rules of purity and danger, customs of human relations, is thus the second manifestation of the stabilizing energy of the scapegoat.

t

t c) Myth

c

c The third item is myth. Myth is mendacious talk about the founding activities intended to obscure the

true origin and course of violence and thus deceive ourselves and others and gain an advantage over the duped and deceived in society's violent arena⁸. The downside of this strategy is that we deceive ourselves and thus fail to make the right diagnoses and choose the right cures. For example, myth tells the story of the surrogate victim as if the killing of victims is a morally good thing, because the victim is guilty of a crime or eager to give his life for society. This myth enables the mob to deny its own responsibility for the murder and us as individuals to remain above the fray. Thus myth is essentially mendacious and the common usage is correct; a myth is simply a lie, not a poetic Taj Mahal enshrining deep mysteries and proclaiming profound truths, as Joseph Campbell would have had it. If Prohibition avoids violence by ruse becoming custom, myth uses the possibility of

⁸ La parole a ete donnee a l'homme pour deguiser sa pensees.
L'abbé Talleyrand to the Spanish envoy Isquierdo

Men do not seem to have acquired speech in order to conceal their thoughts... but in order to conceal the fact that they have no thoughts.
Søren Kierkegaard, Journal 1844.

symbolism, the discovery from the scapegoat that one thing can stand for another, that one can represent the many, to create a way of talking about that death that conceals violence altogether and turns it into a good energy for driving the social system. Myth in our usage is tantamount to misrepresentation (myth-representation) of violence as gentleness, destruction as construction, and sordidness as heroism. (c.f. “It is expedient that one man die instead of the people,”[John 11:49-50; 18:14]⁹), and murder as martyrdom¹⁰. The myth of good violence is the foundation of all mendacity. John’s Gospel states it clearly in the 8th chapter where he has Jesus say of

⁹A C.f. Wilfred Owen’s heart-breaking verse, Dulce et Decorum Est

....

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling up from his froth-corrupted lungs,
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
 Pro patria mori.

10

^AC.f. “...Thou dost stone my heart
 And makest me call what I intend to do,
 A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.
 A m̄ r dOthello, Act 5, Scene 2.

Satan that he is a murderer and a liar from the beginning (John 8:44).

↳ So ritual (deflection ruse misinterpreted as offering), prohibition (deflection ruse misinterpreted as threat) and myth (deflection ruse misrepresented as justified) are the structuring forces of the human world as the system of Sacred Violence or the house of culture built by Religion, and the structure as a whole is founded on the ruse of the surrogate victim, which by regularly deflecting small increments out of the oscillation of reciprocal violence, enables the system to avoid overload and to remain viable.

t

Stage 3: The Theological Stage:

↳ The third stage of the unfolding begins with the arrival of our sacrificial reflection at the threshold of the Gospel and the revelation of the violence of the Sacred by the Crucifixion of Jesus. The important books are Des choses cachees depuis la fondation du monde; recherches avec J.M. Oughourlian et Guy

Lefort (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1978), Le bouc émissaire (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1982) and Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelles, 1999), and the central category is “Gospel vs. Myth” (Truth vs. Lie).

òThe Crucifixion of Jesus is the central historical event of the Gospels. Traditional theology includes explanations of why Jesus died. They are the “theories of the Atonement,” of which there are several, but none that is authoritative above all others. There is no need to rehearse them here, beyond observing that each of the major ones includes important aspects of the truth, but none the whole truth. MT is its own explanation of why Jesus died, but it might not rise to the dignity of a theory of the Atonement. We prefer to call it the Anthropology of the Cross and to read it as a matter-of fact disclosure of the Truth about the human world, not theology but social science.

¸In this usage “Cross” stands for the message of the Passion Narratives of the Gospels in particular and

the NT understanding of the work of Jesus in his dying and rising in general. Thus we see that the work of Jesus has an anthropological (Cross) and a theological (Resurrection) dimension, but MT confines itself to the former. MT sees itself as the Anthropology of the Cross.

oThe Anthropology of the Cross is the disclosure of the violence of the Sacred (Religion). It discloses the structure of the world as constructed by the Prince of this world who is a murderer and a liar from the beginning. The biblical figure of the “Prince of this World,” is for MT simply the mythic symbol of the surrogate victim mechanism, part of the universal self-deception about our own gentleness. “The devil made me do it,” puts the situation in a nutshell; “I am not responsible for the murder and lies at the foundation of this world, the Devil is!”

I cannot pause to specify chapter and verse but if you have any knowledge of the language of the Gospel of John you will recognize its themes here. The cross is primarily revelatory – this is the first part of MT’s

theory of the Atonement. It sees the death of Jesus, neither as a sacrifice for sin, nor as an appeasement of God, nor as a satisfaction of God's impeached honor, nor as a moral example, but as a disclosure of who we are as individuals and societies, namely the mob behind the mechanism._

So far in the first part of the exposition we have been in the realm of scientific anthropology. The Cross is a symbol of universal violence against innocent surrogates. The second part of the exposition is theological.

Theologically speaking the crucifixion is the divine intervention in the surrogate victim mechanism, to stop sacrifice and to remove violence from the human world. God becomes a human being to have a body by which to humble himself to death ("kenosis" in Trinitarian doctrine). He inserts himself into the real oscillation of vengeful violence and thus absorbs it and bears it out of this world by his divine suffering in human flesh. Here is the main point: by inserting himself into the real thing God exposes and thus ends

the ruse of temporary deflection onto victims and brings the need and the justification for sacrifice to an end. Christ's is the last sacrifice because it is the first real sacrifice, and it is one not of other-giving but of self-giving. Thus the divine intervention in the reality of our violence exposes the phoniness of deflective sacrifice and makes us face the fact of our own violence, which is, "either you forgive one another or you destroy one another." The rationale of forgiveness is simply the refusal to retaliate in the "back and forth" of vengeance, making it a "forth" with no "back" and so taking it out of the exchange altogether rather than merely deflecting it onto a surrogate.

This view is lucidly summed up in the Letter to the Hebrews 10:5-7, 10:

"Wherefore coming into the world he says: 'You have not desired sacrifice and offering, but you have fashioned for me a body; you do not delight in burnt offerings for sin.' And then he said, 'Behold I come; at the top of the page it has been written of me, I come to do your will O God'... 'According to this purpose we

are purified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once and for all.” This is the final sacrifice; once for all the death of Jesus in the heart of the oscillation substitutes the real acceptance of violence for the ruse of deflection onto a defenseless surrogate. Christ could have defended himself but did not, he was strong, and in his strength he chose to forgive rather than retaliate; he opted for suffering rather than revenge. The surrogate on the other hand is defenseless, weak, and without option. Thus God acted to end sacrifice and its fraudulent deflection-ruse, and restored to us the possibility of real self-understanding again.

uHere I want to tell a story of my visit to Creina Alcock, someone whom Wayne Cristaudo appreciates and to whom he asked me to take a copy of his latest book on my visit to South Africa last September. On my original visit in 1991 I was escorted to her domicile deep in the Msinga district of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, a very violent place, where her husband had been recently murdered, and where her chance reading of Girard’s

Violence and the Sacred, restored her will to live because it interpreted with uncanny precision the sacrificial crisis in which her husband had died, by my late cousin who taught at the University of Zululand, his wife, and a huge Zulu policeman named Mr. Shange. I asked Mr. Shange why there was so much violence. He said that the chiefs had lost their authority over the young men. I asked him if he ever spoke with the young men and he said, “frequently.” “I go up into the mountains and they come to me and I speak to them.” “What do you say to them?” I ask. “I tell them of the two bloods,” he says. “Two bloods? Which are they?” I ask. He replies, “The blood of Abel that cries from the ground for vengeance, and the blood of Jesus that whispers to us all, ‘Peace be unto you’.” I say to him that I think he has the whole Christian message in that statement.

∁Vengeance, the reciprocal violence of Mimetic Rivalry, is the world of Cain; Forgiveness, the unilateral renunciation of the right to revenge, is the world of Jesus. The young men of Msinga live in the

Cainite world, where violence never stops. The Cross discloses the nature of this world: its emblem is the absolutely innocent young man slowly dying under torture; (Last Lenten season I gave talks entitled, “From Golgotha to Guantanamo; Torture as the Truth of our Time, and every Time”). The first truth of the Passion is that we are creatures who enjoy the relentless, ubiquitous, torturing to death of innocent victims. Thus it reveals our moral and spiritual need.

The second and greater truth of the Passion tells us who God is (“If you must kill someone kill me, I can take it!”), and the depth of the divine mercy that reveals us to ourselves so that we might consciously at last enter into our true selves, which moment will be the moment of entry into heaven through the gates of hell, through the hell of my part in the world of Cain to the heaven of my true heritage in the peace of Christ, beyond vengeance and beyond myth.

cThe anthropology of the Cross is the truth that Myth obscures. Myth, the third moment in the cultural emergence of the world of Sacred Violence, tells the

story of the victim as if he deserved to die because he was guilty of a capital crime. The Gospel exposes this founding myth for the founding lie that it is; the victim is innocent, the violence is random and unjustified, and in any case it is not necessary for someone to die in order that others might live. Society does not have to be founded on murder tricked out as sacrifice, and the Cross is beautiful only in the sense that the truth, however ugly, is adorable beyond words.

Mimetic atonement theory, a phrase RG would never use, and which I do not propose as an ongoing usage either, is, therefore, as follows: Christ died to disclose the underworld of violence that undergirds every institution in this world. This disclosure contains as of first importance the stripping off of the disguise of myth under which the devil appears as an angel, a murderer a magistrate, a predator as a priest, and together they drive God out of His world and on to a Cross. The Anthropology of the Cross is the antidote to the Mythology of Force.

If we might call the first part of an atonement theory in MT “analytic,” that is, disclosing the components of the problem, the second part is synthetic, bringing everything back to harmony. In Jesus, God the creator intervenes in his creation to recreate it. He intervenes at the heart of the lying murder, taking a stand in the cross fire of rival gangs and reciprocal politicians and having exposed the fraud of sacrifice as a deflection ruse in our analytic part one, he deals with it in part two. This of course takes the form of divine action in the human world and so is theology and not anthropology; but the link between the two spheres is very tight. After all, God did take a body to do this divine work in our human world! “He bore our sins in his body on the tree.” He absorbed our violence, he endured our hatred, he bore our rage against God, and he bore it away. He ended sacrifice once and for all, and if we want to continue to use that word, which I do not recommend, we must understand it forever more to mean “self-sacrifice” after the example of Christ in his kenosis (self-abasement).

4. The Historical Stage:

The RG's latest major book, Achever Clausewitz : Entretiens avec Benoit Chantre (Paris: Carnets Nord, 2007) represents the emergence of a fourth stage of MT, in which it deploys its resources to interpret history. It might, however, have come too late to be a theory of history; now it must be a theory of Apocalypse, a theory not of history but of the end of history, as the structure of Sacred Violence, which is the current world, crumbles, initially under the weight of the Gospel's demythifying power lodged against the fraud of sacrifice, and subsequently in the acid of skeptical secularism which is also the Gospel's salubrious gift, a form of its evangelical overthrow of myth and rout of religion. Once the cat is out of the bag and the mechanism out of the shadow of myth its effectiveness diminishes progressively and cannot be restored. Thus the Gospel's disclosure that the alleged guilt of the victim is a myth, that is , a lie, destroys the mythic edifice of sacred violence.

3RG is also currently interested in the debate between Francois Furet and Ernst Nolte over the historical interpretation of Fascism and Communism ¹¹ We have discussed these two authors in our biweekly seminars at Stanford, especially at the time that RG was writing on Clausewitz¹².

. This fourth stage is, I believe, where RG's thinking is now focused and our Stanford seminar contemplates the Apocalypse more and more¹³ 1

□□ ****

A Systematic Account

That has been a whirlwind tour through the narrative of the emergence and interpretative power of Mimetic

¹¹ Fascism and Communism: Francois Furet and Ernst Nolte, trans. Katherine Golsan., Preface by Tzvetan Todorov (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2001 (orig. 1918)

¹² Rene Girard, Achever Clausewitz: Entretiens avec Benoit Chantre (Paris: Carnets Nord, 2007).

¹³ Robert Hamerton-Kelly ed. Politics and Apocalypse (East Lansing: Michigan State University 2007).

Theory. Let me try now to present the same insight systematically. I do not care much for definitions; perhaps because I am so inept at composing them, so let me call what follows a description (as distinct from the narrative of MT's emergence, which has preceded this).

p

p1. MT has the characteristics of "Grand Theory."

.

a) It is a theory in the sense of a paradigm as described by people like Kuhn and Lakatos. That means that it is a grand and overarching orientation to the whole that directs us to what is important and stimulates hypotheses that engender research. In this sense a theory is judged by its fecundity for further research.

A Russian theoretical physicist who attended an exposition of the theory that I gave in the Stanford Center for International Security and Arms Control in about 1990, rather perceptively called it "Deep Theory." I brought this up to RG very recently and he

suggested that we adopt this usage and refer to MT as deep theory.

a) It is parsimonious, being a short explanation of a wide field. Immodestly but realistically I claim that it is a theory of everything (TOE), a terminology not strange in the world of deep physics theory.

s3) Elegance is a corollary of parsimony and MT can be deployed with admirable elegance, especially in the correlation of evidence with explanation. It gives a tight explanation of the evidence of violence in the world. One has only to stop deceiving oneself and start to pay attention.

Description/Definition of the Mimetic Theory:

dMT is a Theory of human Violence. Violence is spontaneous and reciprocal in the human (social) world. Its characteristic form is vengeance because all human relations are reciprocal and all are therefore rivalrous. Thus MT explains where violence comes from and how violence works.

3In Christian terms MT is a theory of Original Sin, and of the Cross of Christ as God's antidote to that sin.

Parsing the definition

ρDesire is the energy that moves individuals and groups in the pursuit of life's goals

gDesire imitates desire and therefore is competitive.

ρBecause it is competitive Desire is violent, i.e.

Mimetic Desire is Violent Desire or rather Desire as Violence and Violence as Desire.

√Mimetic Desire is therefore different from all non-violent forms of imitation, like simple imitation and Aristotelian mimesis, whose definitions lack the element of violence.

εViolence generates the scapegoat as a mechanism for controlling itself by deflecting itself onto another random victim and conducting violence out of the vengeance-structured social system.

√Religion (The Sacred) -in its three modes of sacrifice, prohibition and myth- is the house that

violence built to dwell in, stable and secure. Society is organized as Religion (French: Le Sacre) by Religion.

Religion therefore is not the cause of violence but rather the effect. Religion is “organized violence”, that is, violence controlled and directed.

In the system of Religion, “the surrogate deflection ruse,” keeps operating through the devices of ritual and prohibition and under the cover of myth.

When the system fails, as it is currently failing, religion becomes the cause rather than the container of violence, rather like a melting glacier calves lethal bergs and threatens to break up everything in the path of its own collapsing. In these post religious times control is failing fast and we are facing great bergs of uncontrolled violence¹⁴.

.4 □ g s *****

¹⁴ On the day that I write the NYT 5/4/09 carries on the front page the news that the Muslim extremist forces are within striking distance of the Pakistani nuclear weapons storage facilities!

Faith and Reason from the point of view of Mimetic Theory

In conclusion let me try to speak to the theme of this conference. I understand, accurately I hope, that this is an historically oriented conference - on transformations in philosophy during three centuries. How should we classify MT in terms of this trajectory? HRG says that the philosophic mode closest to him is phenomenology. He was once influenced by Husserl, Sartre, and the early Heidegger, and still speaks appreciatively of Heidegger and Sartre. However, paradoxically, the Heidegger he most recently defended is the later Heidegger whose emphasis was on the Pre-Socratics, that is, on philosophic thought "before philosophy." Girard has moved beyond these influences to a non-philosophic stance.

• Girard's discussions of MT are scientific in the matter-of-fact sense. MT is science rather than philosophy, specifically social science. On the historical trajectory of transformations it is a stage

where social science replaces philosophy as the useful framework of interpretation..

uMT has no place or need for faith. It is supported entirely by empirical observation and a simplified phenomenological description. The behavior of desire according to novels; ethnology; the history of the crucifixion of Jesus; the observation of patterns in history; these can all be and in fact are, modes of disclosure for MT. How these might be more sophisticatedly classified in the context of philosophy, I must leave to competent actors.

ı MT might or might not be a transformation in the philosophic interpretation of the Gospel. It is, however, clearly a new take on the old story, a new reading and a new insight, and its implication, I think, is that philosophy in the sense the canon from Parmenides and Pythagoras through Plato and Aristotle to current philosophic theology is passé and in any case unnecessary to the task of founding the Gospel truth (faith) in the human world (reason). Mimetic Theory as an anthropology of the Cross gives

an empirical account of why the historical fact of the torturing to death of a young man is the moment of discovery of the truth about humankind. It is a necessary but not a sufficient account. For sufficiency one would have to include what RG calls, “The Miracle of Peter,” the astonishing fact that this fisherman identified this young Jew as the one revelatory victim among the many whom the Romans were torturing to death every day.

¶ I suggest that in its recourse to philosophy in the days of its birth, Christian thought was making the best of an inadequate toolbox. Platonic philosophy in various stages was the tool that lay to hand and Christian thinkers used it faute de mieux. Because of that exigency they were unable to penetrate to the truth of violence and therefore could not do justice to the Cross. Because there is no adequate place for violence in their philosophy, the Fathers could not understand the intellectual disclosure made by the Cross. “No anthropology of the Cross, no theory of Atonement,” is why to this day there is no single

accepted theory of Atonement, and several grotesque or ludicrous ones. To this day Christianity has labored without a clear, adequate intellectual understanding of the Cross. Reason failed faith in that task, because theologians put their faith in a wrong-headed exercise of reason. We are now in a position to demonstrate that a right reason, namely empirical science in the form of anthropology, can demonstrate the accuracy of the Gospel as a description of the human world.

Having done that, the task of fundamental theology is complete, for whatever else there is, - Resurrection, Trinity and the Apocalypse - are matters not of reason at all, but of grace communicating to faith, and in articulating these facts of revelation for the sake of the world, faith should use only the essential practical reason necessary for the propagation of the possibility of transformation and new creation by the acceptance of these opportunities. The proper mode of communication for the revealed truths is prayer, liturgy and praxis.

08/13/2009

0

0

08