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**Rene Girard : a 'fundamental anthropology' of violence and the sacred.
(Invited paper given at St Andrews, Nov. 2007).**

I want to try and sketch out RG's most basic ideas, showing how they fit together to form a kind of fundamental anthropology; an anthropology, I will suggest, which has now found its hour and which is available to us as a framework for the interdisciplinary thinking we still have to do in an evolutionary context, all of us, around this immense and crucial problem of sacralities and violence.

Let me start at the end of the story, by telling you that I've just come back from Paris, from attending a high-profile Girardian colloquium at the Centre Pompidou under the title 'La terreur contre la guerre' ('Terror against war'). You'll see that this title reverses the notion of a 'Guerre contre la Terreur', a War on Terror. Deliberately so: this very reversibility demonstrates what RG would call the mimetic structure linking these two phenomena (war and terror), and these two subjects of violence: warriors and terrorists, currently locked into an imitative and retaliatory tit-for-tat, which is to say, in Girardian terms, a form of bad mimesis.

The conference was set up around Girard's latest, and he tells me, his positively last book (he's now 84!) . It hasn't yet been translated into English. It's called 'Achever Clausewitz' (*Completing Clausewitz / Having done with Clausewitz*). So it's about the 19th c. Prussian military strategist shocked and fascinated by Napoleon Bonaparte; you'll see it made a considerable splash in *Le Monde* a fortnight ago today (*Le Monde*, 22 novembre, 2007).

There is a hidden truth of Clausewitz, RG argues: something Clausewitz glimpsed in terrible longing, but was shy of articulating and which he hid away behind the lesser and perilous half-truth for which everyone remembers him today – namely, that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. Well, no; not really, not any more, says Girard. It's true that the institution of war was originally a way of *regulating and limiting* human violence, thus making it usable as an instrument of policy; and it was so used until recently, in all the wars fought between European nation states. The trouble is that today, violence *isn't any longer containable*; it overflows its supposed constraints, it overtakes and it takes over the soldiers who fight, it overruns the politicians and their political calculations. So that 'war' is more profoundly defined today as violence coinciding with its own intrinsic law of a *montee aux extremes* - an inherent dynamic of crescendo towards extremes.

This character of non-containability is, he thinks, ever clearer in the era of ultimate i.e. global imitations and rivalries, the era of ultimate weapons: smart bombs, and the poor man's mimetic riposte to them in point of 'shock and awe', the suicide bomber; not to mention H-bombs, ever with us. And here's the message of his book – these developments constitute a phase change in the long history of human violence; and one that is properly *apocalyptic*. Not in the sense conceived by a barmy army of fundamentalists i.e. as divine retribution wrought in anger on an errant humankind, but in the sense which claims the most sober authority of the gospels. The apocalypse is human violence escaping its culture-bound containments, dislocating the cosmos in its crescendo - and *destroying humankind itself*.

Now that RG's arrival point. And I start there because I want now to take you on a circular tour, retracing the itinerary which brings him to that point. You'll see that the arrival is more cogent and the figure of sense more resonant for the journey of decipherment made.

RG says he has three or four big ideas. What are they?

1 – 'desire is mimetic'; there's the great multiplier of emulation and rivalry, which is principle of human violence *as such*

2 – mimetic violence, in multiplying, generates the *mimetic crisis* ; which is *resolved via the scapegoat mechanism*.

RG asserts here, shockingly, that *the most basic common principle* of human cultural identities is a collective descent from a 'founding murder'. 'We are' – he asserts - the 'children of sacrifice' i.e. of *ritual blood sacrifice!*

3 – then he shows us the birth of *natural religion* (or 'the sacred') as the enabling condition, inner logic and formative inspiration of the culture thus founded. This moment establishes the ambivalence of 'the sacred': at one and the same time, a control mechanism for limiting violence, but also secretly complicit with the violence it seeks to control; an ambivalence leaving human societies and individuals in a situation of constitutional bad faith, mortgaged to their own semi-conscious double-dealing.

4 – then comes the contrapuntal theme: the singular emergence, from within the culture derived from and founded on the archaic sacred, of a non-sacrificial religious relationality, retraceable in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Here perhaps, if there is one, is the basis of a radical ethic for *transcending* collective violence i.e. a hope of leaving behind our *own founding cultural identity principle...*

And all this is applied increasingly to the modern world. As we can see from this groundplan, RG's theory is 'genetic' (from *genesis*: a coming-to-be), but also 'generative'. The idea is to look back to cultural origins and culture history, but with the intention of understanding how socio-cultural and socio-religious development *is ongoingly* generated or produced in our own world. Ultimately, RG gives us a structural model, a hermeneutical paradigm – and, as I said, a 'fundamental anthropology': his own term, first used in *Things hidden* (1978 in French, 1986 in English translation). He gives us the sketch (at least) of a *grand narrative* in the fullest sense: a 'story which makes sense of things', including our own, contemporary identities and their – our! - human challenges. It's a brilliant, elegant and rigorous narrative at that; something of tremendous sweep, range and cogency.

I'll try and say just something about each of the 4 moments distinguished.

1 – RG's theory is called 'mimetic'.

Yes, because it refers most fundamentally to the remarkable propensity of human beings to imitate, replicate, copy or mirror any stimulus, pattern or model by way of symmetrical or, at least, reciprocal response. I offer my hand, you put out yours. The first non-animal thing a

child does = what's that? Well, it smiles, replicating and returning the Mother's smile. How does the child, how do we, we learn languages – or, indeed, anything at all? By interiorising patterns and inferring rules, thus allowing us to generate utterances of our own. And what about communication? 'Do you copy that, Red Leader?'; yes, of course he does, we all do, all the time – we make our own duplicate of the message in the very act of receiving and understanding it. What is the phenomenon we call 'fashion' but imitation, a replication of desirable models? And what about the 'fluctuations', as we say, of the stock exchange: I sell, you sell; NY sneezes and London catches cold –that's mimesis, too. Or think how we develop (for better or worse!) as moral agents: by modelling ourselves on attitudes and values, behaviours and persons...

And so on, and so on: look hard enough and you'll see that all education, all communication, all intersubjectivity, all economic and social life – can we agree to just say: all human culture? - turns on the faculty of mimesis. And Girard will say, quite logically, that it is a sudden surge in mimetic potential and mimetic activity that actually drove Darwin's evolutionary process across the threshold separating the higher apes, and then the hominids, from humankind. It's what creates the distinctively human thing, the sphere of social psyche and culture, precisely because it stands in continuity with patterns foreshadowed in the animal world (there is *both* continuity *and* a quantum leap).

And it is mimesis, certainly, that accounts for the phenomenon that holds centre stage in Girardian theory: the triangular figure of human desire

Contrary to Romantic myth, says RG, desire isn't autonomous i.e. *not* auto-generated, not invented and managed by the sovereign individual alone. Our desire for a certain object is always, in some sense, provoked by, modelled on, mediated through the desire of another person or other persons for this same object. It is played out in a social field of overlapping and potentially competing desires,

Most intimately, desire works within the *triangle* formed between (i) myself, the desiring subject (ii) the mediator/model of that desire and (iii) its desired object. This triangular configuration is the form of an ever-present relational truth we mostly don't see.

RG invokes this figure to account for the 'incremental' and 'contagious' dynamic at work in rivalrous desire. Through the object, one is drawn to the mediator/model. The more the model is imitated, the closer we get to invading his space and occupying his subject-position, in fact: indeed, to appropriating his very being – and reciprocally so. Which makes the model henceforth an *obstacle and a rival* to me – *and vice versa*.

As the rivals vie with each other, so progressively they become doubles of each other;

increasingly close, progressively undifferentiated: in their mutual fascination with each other, in their other-mirroring strategies, in their symmetrical behaviours (hence the leitmotif of brothers and twins in folklore and mythology: Romulus and Remus = code for ‘mimetic rivals’). These ‘doubles’, as they become ‘locked into’ mimetic conflict, progressively abandon the original object of their quarrel and pursue *for its own sake* what has by now become a blood-feud; and pursue it *absolutely*, towards its natural extremes, usually the apex of murder. There’s the baleful alchemy of mimetic rivalry : the conflictual charge between adversaries increases exponentially; and as their rage increases, it becomes increasingly *contagious* externally – so it tends to draw more and more other subjects into the field of rivalrous striving and mimetic conflict.

Desire multiplied by mimesis thus carries intrinsically the threat of incremental and generalised violence. Every human grouping is in this way subject to an extreme peril, which can be shown to have torn many modern societies asunder and rendered ancient tribes extinct. Limiting or containing human violence is, if we’re clear-sighted, the prime condition of all human social life. It is, it must be, the no. 1 imperative of all cultures everywhere and at all times.

How does RG know this? The universe of acquisitive and conflictual mimesis is something deciphered by the early Girard in literature; in the novels of Cervantes, [Stendhal](#), [Flaubert](#), [Proust](#); [Dostoevsky](#). Then he re-read Shakespeare’s plays (*Shakespeare - a Theatre of envy*). The figures of sense discerned and retraced by the greatest artistic imaginations are, you see, distilled and truthful images of ourselves, reaching the parts other discourses don’t reach. And then he re-read the founding myth of our own culture in Genesis...

Moment 2. The paroxysm of violence and its resolution in emissary victimisation: we are descended from a ‘founding murder’.

Girard’s second great hypothesis, brilliantly deciphered in La Violence et le sacré (1972) from the attesting documents supplied by world mythologies and by classical tragedy, is that this no 1 condition is in fact met by the very mechanism which historically inaugurated and still, in part, secretly founds all social life, and everything we call ‘culture’. This is the ‘victimary process’ or ‘scapegoat mechanism’.

We recognise the phenomenon of scapegoating elementarily from the many vestigial forms it still takes in the modern world: ‘taking it out on’ the dog or the

wife after a stressful day in the office; sacking the manager because the press are 'howling for blood' after a run of poor performances by the national team. At the extreme limit of its virulence, we may even dare to recognise the instance- in- principal of this phenomenon which is supplied by 'civilised' 20th century Europe: namely, the Holocaust of European Jews during World War 2

Girard, however, asks us to attend to scapegoat violence in its archaic form. Where the adversaries originally wanted diverse things - to appropriate the same woman, to seize the first place, to exact retributive justice, and so on - they end up polarised quite irrationally upon a single adversary, arbitrarily designated to the common fury by a single rage-modelling leader. In other words, any gathering crisis of generalised violence tends to simplify, at its apex, into a polarised and unanimous antagonism of the type 'all-against-one'. The collective blood-rage is at this point deflected outwards and discharged against a single, arbitrarily chosen - and consequently 'innocent' - victim.

The scapegoat, in fact, acts as a sort of lightning conductor to all the violently destructive energies gathered within the community. The mechanism of emissary victimage may be compared to the disjunctive switch that breaks the circuit and prevents that perillous electricity of mimetic desire from consuming the human house. It also sets up the first, suspect, equation of collective identity bonding: all are one...against, and by virtue of, the scapegoated Other.

What then? RG asks us to imagine the victim lying inert before the hushed group of hominids or primitive men. He or she appears simultaneously and contradictorily as (i) the guilty origin of the crisis : he must have been guilty or we wouldn't have killed him (ii) as the beneficent provider of the miracle of renewed peace and social harmony. This moment of conflicting persuasions and surpassing awe is the beginning of a process of sacralisation ; the dead victim will come to be seen as the potent bearer of a power of life and death, as the Power capable of reversing the current of life-energies from negative to positive: such terrible wrath, such amazing beneficence! The first perception will suggest in retrospect that the sacrificial victim must surely have willed his own death; the second, once the corpse has been disposed of, will come to suggest that this exceptional and departed Visitor must indeed have been a god in disguise. At which point, the god becomes the centre and focus –indeed, the attributed

origin- of all social and moral codes developed against crisis and catastrophe. Do you see that brilliant leap of insightful imagination?

No-one, even belonging to our own 'evolved' here-and-now, easily admits responsibility; least of all for acts of collective murder committed in hallucinatory states and belied, to all seeming, by the beneficial effects they appear to procure for the community. Primitive man did, and we still do, offload guilt and shift the blame, disguising the inadmissible violence committed. This is well known in the language of the tribe (or at least our Western tribes): it's called 'maquiller le cadavre' (putting make-up on the corpse), 'passing the buck' (cf. Fr: le bouc émissaire). The Sacred, with its entire logic of ambivalence and its transferred blame, its disguises and delegations – its sacrificial logic - starts here.

Moment 3 The birth of natural religion and the order of culture out of a logic of scapegoating.

The obscure knot of mimetic crisis and emissary victimage having been clearly described, a hermeneutical master-key exists. The Girardian third moment is the turning of this key: in an extraordinary campaign of sustained and consequent exegesis, all the doors of all the great enigmas of origin swing open, henceforth cogently intelligible. What Girard has in fact described under the name of the mimetic crisis and its resolution in the mechanism of emissary victimage is shown to be the generative nerve-point commanding the entire system of archaic or natural religion – and hence of all culture.

*From Frazer and Robertson Smith to Freud and Levi-Strauss, says the author of *La Violence et le Sacre* (1972), modern rationalist ethnographers have refused to take seriously the extent and significance of the quasi-total symbiosis of culture and religion. Girard, who develops in this respect out of Durkheim, sees in this rationalist and modern refusal to engage with the 'religious dimension' the single greatest impediment to ethnological and anthropological understanding. All other times and places have acknowledged the very considerable fact that humankind was born out of and nurtured within 'religion'; here, an ideologically vectored aversion and a rivalrous and programmatic 'we know better' intervenes.*

The golden key is used first to prosecute decisively the 'stalled' decipherments of 19th-20th century ethnography. Using it, Girard deciphers, in and through the panoply of its diverse forms, the intentional logic of the principal components of the entire system of primitive religion-and-culture, namely: prohibition (taboo,

interdict); ritual (in particular, ritual sacrifice); and myth.

Prohibition tends essentially to deny access to all the objects at the origin of the rivalries that originally degenerated into the traumatizing-and-unnamed founding crisis. Basically, the entire system of taboos and interdicts prolongs the original movement of expelling the scapegoat, in the – illusory and ever-vain -- hope of closing down all recurrences of the founding crisis.

*The set of ritual behaviours and practices instituted by early man follows an inverse path, albeit one which is also pre-sketched in the inaugural crisis - this time in the identity-defining unanimity of the all-against-one by which the original crisis had found its resolution. Ritual sacrifice installs at the heart of the common life a re-enactment or replay of the founding murder itself. The ritual slaughter of a surrogate victim replicates as exactly as possible – here's another brilliant Girardian leap - the original scapegoat murder: of course, with the *arrière-pensée* of recreating its pacifying, reconciling, identity-bonding outcome. The victim is chosen – often from a purpose-specific reserve (as in the case of the Aztecs)- from among the marginal, the weak or the vulnerable (e.g. children, the sick, prisoners of war). This rite is triggered by the incipient signs of returning mimetic crisis; these are indeed laid out - provoked and prepared - by the institution of 'festival', which significantly frames the sacrifice.; the sacrificial climax of the festival 'exorcises' and 'resolves' this staged renaissance of contagion once more, this time ritually, which is to say, repeatably.*

The rite's collective, strongly participatory and essentially theatrical character comes to be ceremonially regulated, and aesthetically enhanced over time - delivering a no doubt spell-binding potency of emotional charge; such as we readily still understand from the later homologues of theme and its affective echoes it finds in Greek tragedy. (We understand here, perhaps, how Greek tragedy became for Girard an echo-locating Ear to the hearing of lost human origins. In the path of this discovery, he has had of course to lay, if not slay, the ghosts of both Nietzsche and Freud).

Myth, finally, is the telling of the Story – the story or collection of stories that fashions and undergirds the identity of the group or tribe by representing its own founding events, its provenance, traditions and special character. What characterises myth for Girard – and gives this concept a rather singular inflection or signature proper to Girardian hermeneutics - is that the mythological story told indefinitely rehearses the founding mimetic crisis and scapegoat murder; and it

does so, crucially, in an disguised, allusive, artlessly-artful way (it is, as French says 'mystifie' - 'mystifiant' in its very pertinence!). The brief formula of thus deceptiveness is - 'the story as seen from the perspective of the victimisers'. For example: one S. Sea island myth says: 'the god flew away over the cliff towards the islands he had come from'; we have to learn to decipher the real sub-text 'we advanced towards the scapegoat, cudgels in hand, no-one daring to strike the first blow; but his distress was such that he threw himself over the cliff to his death on the rocks below'.

If archaic culture can be deciphered thus – and the structural patterns G adduces from mythologies all over the world bring impressive confirmation - another, strategic point of 'anthropological' insight, much coveted and hugely seminal in its implications, then lies within reach. Is not the victimary process also the *missing link* which gives us access to the 'lost' and forever invisible interface between the animal world and the human world : the principle that explains the 'humanization' of the primates – and, more generally, the process of hominisation (i.e. the development of self-cognisant human culture and civilisation) as such?

Mimetic theory allows us to understand the need for sacrificial victims, which in turn explains the hunting of animals – something RG sees as primitively ritual (before being alimentary) and their domestication which (before becoming an economic activity) is a ancilliary result of the provision of a reserve of sacrificial victims; the invention of agriculture is explainable on the same basis. RG then shows that, buried even further back in time, the secret of the quantum leap from animal to human must be a function of the two-way reciprocity between brain size (enhancing mimetic capacity) and intensified mimetic activity (which stimulates brain development. '[He speaks of: 'la mimesis se greffant sur les montages instinctuels pour les suractiver', Choses cachees, p. 133].

Vectored by this process, the hominid becomes capable of permanent sexual excitability, symbolicity and language, lengthy childhood apprenticeship; and hence all the inventions of culture. And he does so at exactly at the point when his perilously supercharged capacity for self-destruction- multiplied by the invention of his artefact-weapons (replacing animal teeth and claws) - outstrips all possible control by instinctual mechanisms. The critical threshold is reached when the dominance patterns and submission rituals still serviceable for the purpose of controlling violence in the higher apes no longer contain the intra-group violence of the hominids. Rg even shows - it's a supreme elegance of his theory - that the

blank form of the scapegoat mechanism is already present on the animal side of the line : there's a bonding mechanism, to which attention is drawn by Karl Lorenz, known as the mock 'charge', deflected at the last moment {CC 136-7}

Hey! Wow! Gee! – Ain't that *neat* ...ain't that *awesome!*?! I do think that RG will be there (in spirit anyway) when, one day, an adequate hermeneutical Judgment brings together the 'new atheist' Darwinians and the fundamentalist Creationists, so that they strive no more to murder each other; having observed together that the founding murder has already happened (and likewise, as we shall see, its redemptive counterpart!).

The theory of natural selection and the evolution of species offers to explain unitarily the immense diversity of forms of life. In just the same way, the hypothesis of mimetic crisis and victimary process elucidates the logic of the sameness in diversity running through all *cultural forms*. The analogy with Darwin also extends to the scientific status to be given to mimetic theory: here are two hypotheses, neither capable of being quite proven experimentally, given the abyss of lost and unobservable time necessary to the production of the phenomena in question, but each having *great authority* by virtue of its tremendous explanatory power in relation to the phenomena concerned, the data we do have and the constant patterns of interrelation implicit in their appearing. If Girard's theory is true, then, it is likely to become increasingly 'verifiable' in these same terms. One day, it may, in some form, come be studied in schools as 'human science'... At all events, from now on, if we wish to invoke Darwin, and lots of quite outspoken folks do - the name Richard Dawkins springs readily to mind - we can't legitimately avoid reckoning also with out Rene Girard. *Achever Darwin...*

Moment 4 = The emergence from within the culture derived from and founded on the archaic sacred of a non-sacrificial religious relationality retraceable in the strikingly *anti-sacrificial* inspiration of the Judaeo–christian scriptures

Now here's a surprise, at least equal to the one we got when the victim of the founding murder *re-appeared* as a mythical god! Giradian theory, you see, as pre-sketched in *La Violence et le sacre* was read by the intellectual establishment in France as a decisive breakthrough in the *atheistic understanding of religion*. Very reasonably so: RG's theory explains, as never before, how 'religion' arises purely and simply as a function of psycho-social need and of culture-creation. It's a product of the human mind, under evolutionary pressures. But what Girard hadn't yet explained, what we are now about to hear, is why Judaeo-christianity cannot be a myth among myths and a religion among religions; why it is, on the contrary, the exact and perfectly adapted corrective of those first human things – and, in fact, the saving grace of them. It makes us begin to see the 'fit' between 'religion' and 'revelation' – and to attend, rather better than we mostly do, to those terms.

I'm going to have to skim through this section, alas. But just some pointers.

Yes, of course: the beginnings of the Jewish Bible (and the Christian Old Testament) confront us with a horizon of primitive religious-cultural practice entirely recognizable from other mythologies. Echoes of disorder run through all the major stories of Genesis and Exodus:

temptation and fall; the tower of Babel; Sodom and Gomorrah; the 10 plagues of Egypt. Noah's flood itself is a metaphor of crisis (plague and flood usually are in mythologies). The founding murder re-echoes in these texts: fatefully committed by one warring brother against another (Cain and Abel); then there's the victimization of Joseph by his brothers; the humano-divine struggle between Jacob and the Angel. As echo-located by all these multiple traces, the generative matrix of the archaic sacred is entirely recognizable as a conditioning context of emergence.

Far from being embarrassed by the residual presence in the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures of this matrix of the archaic sacred, and of mythological elements shared with world religions, RG goes out of his way to underline these things: such shared beginnings serve, precisely, to measure an original and far more remarkable pattern of textual and historical emergence, which, as he demonstrates with impressive rigour of exegesis, asserts itself increasingly as the scriptural story unfolds.

Elementarily, what we observe is that the editors of the first books of the Bible reshape their material, setting up a new perspective, a new pattern.

Temptation and Fall? They give the very formula of the mimetic triangle: here is rivalry, yes, but it is, for the first time, with rivalry with God, here presented explicitly as the fact and the fault of blame-shifting, mimetically suggestible humankind. Accursedness and exile are presented in a logic of the archaic sacred, as divine initiatives; but they're also shown clearly enough to be self-inflicted wounds, instituting a prohibition placed on the greatest Object of sacralising and rivalrous desire... Could humanity, after all, be its own victimizer and sacraliser- the real violator, the real generating agent of violence?

Cain, though he founds a culture, is not presented as justified in killing his brother – unlike Romulus, founder of Rome. Where is his murdered brother, whose blood 'cries out from the ground' to God? It cries not for vengeance, but for room to declare the truth of the founding murder, acknowledging explicitly what archaic ritual practice asserts implicitly, that a limit must be set to the corrupting contagion of violence; such is the mark of Cain. Here is a prohibition on violent reprisal pointing towards the development of the Law itself, with its more radical commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'.

Critical clarity, moral truthfulness, subversive re-writing also fashion the Bible's equivalent of the Oedipus story. If he had been presented in the mythological framework of the archaic sacred, Joseph would have been depicted as a hubristic, and patricidal power-plotter, justly punished by his righteous brothers (his dreams in fact suggest how the alternative version would have started; and the possibility of a fully sacrificial account is further hinted at in the Biblical story by Joseph's bloodied coat, presented to the father to explain his 'disappearance'). To say here, with Max Weber, that Jewish writings 'always side with victims', Jews having so often found themselves battered and bruised by history, is a woefully prejudicial half-truth, inadequately responding to this powerful novelty. What careful cross-cultural comparison reveals is that the tangled threads of the archaic sacred are here being partially unraveled, that responsibility for violence is being tentatively laid at the

right address - and that archaic sacrifices cannot any more serve as universal symbolic expedient for patching up potentially violent religious, political or socio-economic crises.

From the beginning, in short, Biblical texts are engaged in *demystifying the archaic sacred* : deciphering its dubious credit transfer operations, discrediting its declared villains, vindicating its vilified victims, and even, little by little, contradicting its self-generated theology of sacred violence.

And this process gathers pace throughout the Old Testament.

Ritual sacrifice is mitigated by animal substitutions, then replaced by the Covenant. . 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'. Prohibition becomes Law; which, remarkably, begins to transcend the fearful barrier of differentiation, raised against returning violence; in place of the scrupulous minutiae of ritual purity, it produces the magisterial simplicity of the 'Decalogue'. This sovereign codification of the 'words of God' identifies exactly and without remainder *all proximate objects of mimetic rivalry* between men; supplying in addition a corrective to the self-deceiving untruth that founds the world of the Sacred ('Thou shalt not bear false witness'); and naming (at least) the all-sufficient antidote-in-principal to all conflictual mimesis – divine ' words' nos. 1 and 2 , indeed, make love of neighbour reciprocal to the love of God ...

The Book of Job gives voice to the Victim. It stages in dialogue with him the entire ambivalence of the archaic sacred. Ultimately, it 'wrests the deity out of the process of persecution' to envision him instead as the God of the oppressed and the downtrodden. The Victim, for the first time, can say: ' I know that my redeemer liveth'.

Via the troubled rule of the sacral Kings of Israel, the unfolding pattern of Biblical originality produces at length the post-exilic prophets, who focus the potential of Israel's vocation to specificity among the nations in the figure of the Suffering Servant. Against the background of intense political threat, failing theocratic institutions and renewed internal crisis, this recapitulative figure develops in counterpoint to the first (sacral and this-worldly) Messaianic hypothesis, derived from the archaic sacred (that of the triumphant military Ruler).

The suffering Servant is the pure embodiment of the victim- figure as saviour: receptacle of all violence, discharging the community, strikingly recapitulative in his complete innocence, his otherness in relation to all the crimes offloaded onto him. He *thematizes* , for the first time explicitly and comprehensively, the covert transfer operation implied in the founding murder.

In all these texts, the ferment of subversive novelty, challenging, reworking and replacing elements of the archaic sacred, is in principle clear. Yet, not even in the conception of the Suffering Servant (described, in this text's single lapse into archaism, as the expiatory victim *of God*) can the process be said to have been carried through to its logical term. The sacrificial Temple survives; and with it, the legal prohibitions, and the mythical stories, and the theocratic state.

Above all, a monstrous Double survives: the God of the archaic sacrificial system - the wrathful , retributive and often bloodthirsty Jehovah of Hebrew tribal imagining - *and, naturally enough, of ours...*

That's already a demonstration of extraordinary pertinence. RG's reading prepares us to understand that the immense place accorded to represented violence in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, in excess even of that accorded it in Greek tragedy, is part of the unfolding pattern of originality and is a mark, not so much of a special affiliation to violence, as of an acute anthropological awareness, and a singular honesty about sacred violence per se. The Bible doesn't simply ask us to pity victims; its originality lies rather in the way it addresses and grapples with the deep-laid and obscure foundational link between violence and the human, mind-generated order of religion-and-society.

This is a quite crucial demonstration: both for the adversaries of 'religion' [cf. C. Hitchens signing his book in Redwood City, 24 May, 2007: *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*] and for believers. All the books I was reading at that time [*Terror in the mind of God, Sacred Violence, The Ambivalence of the Sacred, Dieu en Guerre*, etc], are, like Hitchens' book, founded on some sort of entirely natural confusion or non-distinction between senses of that –decidedly unserviceable – word 'religion'. Do we mean (i) the archaic sacred secreted by men and which the tribe foundationally elaborates in pursuit of its own cultural identity; or (ii) the relationality of grace from above which, despite-and-beyond the anthropomorphisms and secret knots of our own, violence-mortgaged sacralities, realizes a true human Godlikeness, making us sons and daughters of the living God?

What divides these different senses of 'religion', as the hour demands, and with the radical severity it requires – the necessary 'sword of distinction', so to speak – is, however, the Christian gospel, as expounded in the text by RG - i.e. as the completion of OT 'emergence'. 'Achever le serviteur souffrant', as one might say...

The gospel texts, alert us to something new and quite startling: for the first time, the 'founding murder', with its process of emissary victimization, its constitutive logic of concealed untruth and its irradiating consequences of renewed murder and cyclical crisis is entirely grasped and explicitly proclaimed by Jesus.

The evidence of this understanding lies just where we were too embarrassed to seek it; in the so-called 'cursing of the Scribes and Pharisees' (to politically correct modern ears, this reads spontaneously like early Christian sectarian polemic, even inflamed anti-semitism – i.e. a precursor form of religious violence!). Not so, says RG. Addressing the representatives of the Law, Jesus challenges them with the consistent record of murder by which the religious leaders of Israel have dealt with the accusing prophets, in a continuous series reaching back to the slaughter of Abel – he challenges them with the memory of things hidden 'from the foundation of the world' (Matt 13: 35). They are addressed, that is, as spokesmen for the archaic sacred within the Jewish – but it could be any other – religious tradition. Apo. kataboles kosmou must in all rigour of sense and logic be taken to mean 'from the

inauguration of the socio-religious order of culture, opening the world of human affairs, i.e. 'this world' – and not 'from the first creation of the cosmos(i.e not the en arche of the Prologue of John).

This world is –in the self-intimate shorthand of Jesus –the domain of his true adversary, the 'prince of this world', simply and etymologically known as 'the Accuser' i.e. 'Satan': a name exactly translated in the conceptual language of Girardian anthropology as the principle or 'subject' of the system of the archaic sacred. So: in the Temptations, 'Satan' offers the rewards of this-worldly glory, if Jesus will seek power and adore him (thus realizing the 'other' - conquering, worldly and self-sacralising - figure of the Messiah). When John's gospel describes Satan as a 'murderer from the beginning', as well as a 'liar', we see stirring - under the appearances of heavy-hitting, but obscure religious polemic - the suddenly transparent and luminously apposite sense: what indeed attracts those qualifiers is symbolic matrix of all violent significations realized in all 'religions' – i.e. the founding murder, camouflaged and consecrated as something divinely ordained, protecting its own lie, mendaciously, by means of ongoing, serial murder. 'Things hidden from the beginning of the world': exactly so, this is an insight of BMW precision engineering! Mimetic theory, as we have observed it in operation, is a perfected machine for 'unpacking' just this figure of sense.

The exposing of the lie at the root of the archaic sacred, this challenge in principle to his sacred violence of course causes Satan's house to become divided against itself. This opens up to real understanding the sense of the apocalyptic theme of the gospels

Girard insists: the apocalyptic warnings of the gospels refer not to divine, but to human - this-worldly - violence; more precisely, to a version of the mimetic crisis discernable in the storm clouds once more gathering within and around Israel, a crisis no longer containable by its worn-out and increasingly exposed mechanisms of ritual control. Beware, he sees Jesus saying, the paroxysm of Satan challenged: 'Deprived of its founding [control-] mechanism, the principle of violence which dominates humanity will know a formidable recrudescence when it enters its death throws'(CC 287).

True, Old Testament images are called upon, and pertinently so; and yes, they do carry echoes of a certain language of divine retribution; but the stylistic use of the connector 'as...' sufficiently signals to the attentive hearer/reader the logic of analogy, simile and metaphor. Substantively: 'the idea of divine violence has no place in the world of the gospels' (CC 279).

The parables often help us see this: the parable of the wicked husbandmen providing the most searching test-case. In Matthew's account, Jesus is observed inviting his hearers to imagine the likely response of God to the perpetual recalcitrance and revolt of the tenant farmers; so that the supposed reaction of retributive fury on the part of the owner of the Vineyard is supplied from their own substance. In the versions of Mark and Luke, however, this framing, which respects the observable pattern of Jesus's teaching practice, is editorially forgotten: the fearful hearer-response is recorded as having been uttered by the author of the parable. What there is truly to fear, however, is a final paroxysm of self-harming human violence, to be suffered by those refractory to the saving truth and call of divine Love. 'The refusal of the Kingdom ...is [i e equates to] the total destruction which imminently threatens Judaism as a religious and cultural entity' (CC 299).

What John's gospel calls 'the judgment of this world' is, indeed, a theme with profound cosmic and metaphysical resonance: it is true that humankind is always under divine judgment; and here, it stands crucially addressed, in an 'earth-shaking' hour. But the 'powers of heaven' that are said in apocalyptic discourse to be 'shaken' are not Jesus' own, nor those of his heavenly Father; they are those of the sacralised authorities and institutions, values and energies, of this world - insofar as they have been induced, imprudently from their own perspective, to commit an act which exposes once-for-always, - and thereby also breaks in principle and forever - their hold over the mimetically suggestible desires of men.

These same 'powers' are said by Jesus to be a spent force, by virtue of the very exposure that points to, desacralises and disarms their occult malignancy. They are a 'busted flush'. St Paul, picking up the great theme of the slavery to sin under the Law, and its reworking into a freedom of grace, wrought by the victory of the Cross, will speak of 'captivity led captive'. The metaphor is pointedly, drawn from the Roman practice of the 'triumph' i.e. the returning general's victory parade, with its captured slaves (Col 2: 14-15). Paul understands - it's perhaps his innermost reading of the mind of Jesus - that if 'the powers' had known the wisdom of God, they 'would not have crucified the King of Glory'.

The Christian gospel, on this account, is 'the complete elimination, for the first time, of the sacrificial, the end of divine violence' (CC 293). Who is Jesus? The One who sees 'Satan fall like lightning'; and accomplishes that fall. RG considers that this is only given to a quite unique 'son' of God to accomplish. It implies the divinity of Christ..

This perspective allows RG to read the gospel story in algebraic simplification. The more the world of the archaic sacred, challenged by Jesus, declares its secret and concealed principle of founding murder; the more violently it resists exposure; and the more it resists exposure, the more radically the truly divine counter-logic of Love is called forth and declared in reply.

In particular, the apocalyptic warnings of Jesus link the preaching of the Kingdom on the one hand, and the Cross, on the other; in one continuous weave.

In the end, Love must itself suffer in full the most extreme worldly consequences of violence, in order that the lie at the heart of the archaic sacred be ultimately 'nailed'; only so can the spring of violence be reworked into a triumph of Love. Beyond a critical point, the Son of Man resolves to enter into the Founding Murder - as Victim. Not unawares: he recognises, assumes, re-enacts this archaic role in fullest lucidity, in order to re-write its meaning for the world.

From the Girardian perspective, the most grotesquely prejudicial confusion that can be made here, therefore, is to thrust the Passion of Christ back into the world of archaic gravity from which, by a creative Singularity of Grace, it has in fact escaped This disaster happens whenever, inattentively or preventively, we theorize the death of Jesus and its reconciling virtue in 'sacrificial' terms' - i.e. construing it as an *archaic sacrifice* required by the wrathful Father and consented to submissively by the constrained Son, in a logic of

ritual expiation or propitiation. This is, precisely, to *recycle the archaic-sacral lie* so searchingly designated as such and so deliberately refused by Jesus. It is to declare the Re-founding Event a banal, secretly violent *replay* (or first-degree repetition) of the 'founding murder' itself; thus traducing the new, capital, 'abyssally different' sense enacted (CC316).

Here, indeed, is the Event which both (i) exposes the first, violent foundation of all human culture- and-religion, *deconstructing and destroying-in-principle* the archaic system itself and (ii) declares in so doing, the unviolent super-transcendence of Love. So here also is the 'revelation' which gives a new mimetic model to human desire, recreating the human subject and the human community as such; renewing the entire field of human possibility as such, for the whole world and for all time.

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Again, Wow! This has the required radicality! Looking over RG's shoulder, we can see pretty well why Jesus the peacemaker, proposes a gospel that cleaves and 'decides' *sword-like*.

But there's a concern here, a rigorous care taken, to add no extraneous 'scandal' to the *skandalon* of the gospel – that's clear at every turn. RG's position is *not* that the theological truth of the gospels should or could be 'reduced' to an anthropological content; it is that the originality of their *theological* content becomes *fully and actively revelatory* when the anthropological content is first specified in a Girardian sense.

The 'problems' of this approach, it seems to me, are largely those of negotiating the interface terminologically and conceptually. 'Algebraic simplifications' - are apt to leave gaps, undeclared deficits, airpockets of misunderstanding, however talented and patient the hermeneutics...The use of the word 'sacrifice' is a case in point...

But, at the end of the balance-sheet, I still want to say: what *awesome pertinence*. We're now 2000 years down the line, bearing with us a potent evolutionary inheritance, hugely fraught, and of still largely hidden or undeciphered significance. The primary frame of reference here is the contemporary crisis of unbelief; and the contemporary apocalypse of threatening violence: exactly as analysed in the latest book and the Paris colloquium.

In which respect, the exegesis just considered is beyond praise. It isn't just that RG makes Christian gospels fascinatingly re-readable and the gospel message itself absolutely re-thinkable even by the most determinedly adverse of modern minds. Nor is it just that 'Christian truth claims' are brought within conceiving-range of the modern imagination; anthropologically speaking, and without sacrifice - *c'est le cas de le dire!* - of the great credal

affirmations of the faith (what a considerable feat that is!).

Nor is it even simply, in apologetic terms, that the theory absorbs the entire weight of post-Enlightenment 'suspicion' and 'ressentiment', the weight of advanced 20th century (French) deconstructionist hyper-aversion (or allergy) surrounding 'religion', before *pivoting* decisively on the distinction between the archaic sacred and the super-transcendent faith of Agape; thus converting all that kinetic energy of *despite* and *critique* into a motivating dynamic for revisiting faith and thinking again...

No, what's so very remarkable and so ultimately valuable in the RG reading is that the pivotal distinction archaic Sacred/faith of Agape is the basis of a much wider dialogue between those who look with fascinated horror on the violence of 'religion' *as such*; and those who see, *in a sense now defined.*, a re-founding and healing super-transcendence beyond 'religion'. In short, RG begins to tell us - at last someone who can and will! - *how and why* 'religion' is BOTH the worst AND the best of humanity; how it is *both* its ancestral Curse *and* its Kingdom-of-Heaven Blessing...

This is a pretty good reason for thinking that RG's own hour has come. Another is given in *Achever Clausewitz*: it's the advent of the age of unlimited violence, initiated by the end of war as a thinkable instrument of policy, the age, potentially, of globalised terror and of violence unlimited.

A further reason still - and with this opening I must conclude - is that Girard's fundamental anthropology beckons to the contributions of many disciplines and specialisms of the human sciences; it needs and invites their concrete applications, just as it gives them in return their combinability, and their larger perspectives of new understanding and added value.

Better still: this anthropology itself is rooted in the hard sciences, now declaring their support for RG's founding intuition about the importance of mimesis and the centrality of desire...