

The Babylonian Captivity of the Gospel

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I would like to suggest an outline for what a North American Protestant Christian theology informed by the mimetic theory might look like.¹ Specifically I hope to validate an observation by Rene Girard that the anthropology of mimetic theory and the orthodox structuring of Christian theology are eminently compatible.² After a brief introduction concerning the relation of the gospel to human culture or what I call “The Babylonian Captivity of the Gospel” there are two sections. The first explores the metaphor of the gospel’s imprisonment and examines the nature of the “guards” which attempt to keep it walled in and impotent. Second, I will sketch a paradigm of what a Christian theology looks like when the problem of violence is addressed honestly and the radical solution of love and forgiveness is taken seriously. In short I am hoping to be able to integrate the two components of this conference, theology and peace, as an example of the theme of this conference, Transforming Christianity.

On the Fall of the Church

There has been a lot of debate on what occurred at the time of Constantine in relation to church/state relations. Some Girardians, e.g., Robert Daly would argue that pre-Constantinian Christians were no less violent than their contemporaries and that the “Constantinian turn” was not a real change at all.³ Others, like myself, would argue that something decisive took place in and around Constantine that would alter the way the church perceived issues of nonviolence.⁴ As I see it, Daly wants to suggest that marginal references to Christians in the military before Constantine amounts to the wholesale rejection of a nonviolent or pacifistic early church. This is to engage in the kind of revisionist history associated with Walter Bauer, who contended that evidence for minority heterodox groups amounted to their suppression as actual majority groups by an

¹ Two recent Protestant theologies that I recommend, although neither uses the mimetic anthropology, are Douglas John Hal, *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in A North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993) and Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

² “Mine is a search for the anthropology of the cross, which turns out to rehabilitate orthodox theology.” *The Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams (New York: Crossroads, 1996), 288. I am not speaking specifically to how mimetic theory would shape a Roman Catholic theology inasmuch as the agency of authorization is different. Roman Catholics must deal with the teaching magisterium and the authority of the papacy while Protestants must wrestle with the authority of Scripture.

³ Robert Daly “Violence and Institution in Christianity”, *Contagion* Vol. 9, Spring 2002, 4-33.

⁴ “Rene Girard: Violence and the Recovery of Early Christian Perspectives” *Brethren Life and Thought* Vol. 37, No 2, 1992; *The Jesus Driven Life* (Lancaster: JDL Press, 2010).

‘orthodox’ minority, a hypothesis that has not been without its critics.⁵ Early Christian history is not a linear movement from pacifism to acceptance of violence as a means to control violence (just war theory). It is a time of travail much like Girard sees Jewish history before Jesus as it struggles to become free from pagan myth.⁶

Whether or not one wants to place the onus of the change on Constantine, Eusebius or Augustine, still one must concur that significant changes took place between 250-450 C.E. that affected the content of the gospel proclamation, one of which was the acceptance by the church of the use of violence/force by the state. Girard shares this view when he says, “Historical Christianity covers the [biblical] texts with a veil of sacrifice. Or, to change the metaphor, it immolates them in the (albeit splendid) tomb of Western culture.”⁷ He observes that here is little difference between historical Christianity and pre-Christian Judaism; they are both communities in travail.⁸ He says, “Beginning with Constantine, Christianity triumphed at the level of the state and soon began to cloak with its authority persecutions similar to those in which early Christians were victims.”⁹ Girard also correctly observes the changes that took place in Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine’s official biographer, who came to accept violence by the state as divinely sanctioned.¹⁰

With Girard and against Daly, I am going to assume that the changes that occurred in the early church before and after Constantine amounted to a tectonic shift, a ‘fall’ of the church as it were. In *The Jesus Driven Life*, I explored some of the consequences of that fall particularly the shift in hermeneutics that took place; here I want to examine some specific hindrances to Christian theology in our own time.

The Warders of the Gospel

I have used the phrase “warders of the gospel” implying that there are many. In the epistles of Paul the terminology is ‘principalities and powers’ which Walter Wink has done so much to elucidate.¹¹ The collective term ‘principalities and powers’ goes by the

⁵ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, edited by Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krobel, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). A trenchant critique of the Bauer hypothesis is Thomas Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988). Some of the effects of the Constantinian turn are documented in Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1990). Peter J. Leithart criticizes Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder’s historiography of the Constantinian era in *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010). Yoder is one of the principal exponents of the Constantinian fall of the church. Leithart wants to argue that the primary issue is not church-state relations and the co-opting of the gospel but rather infant baptism. I think Yoder is more correct to notice that it is the issue of violence/nonviolence that plays a more substantive role in emergent fourth century theology.

⁶ Robert Hamerton-Kelly, ed. *Violent Origins* (Stanford: Stanford, 1987), 141.

⁷ *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, Stanford, 1987), 249.

⁸ *Ibid.* 253.

⁹ *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986), 204.

¹⁰ *Evolution and Conversion* with Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha (New York: Continuum, 2007), 259. See the literature on Eusebius cited in my essay in footnote 4.

¹¹ See his numerous books on the Powers. *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (1986), *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992), and *When the*

singular ‘satan’ in the Gospels. These two ways of describing that which is hostile to God and the gospel are two sides of a coin. Girard, apparently independently of Wink, has also noted the relation between the satan and the ‘principalities and powers.’ He says, “Though not identical with Satan, the powers are all his tributaries because they are all servants of the false gods that are the offspring of Satan, that is, the offspring of the founding murder... What we are talking about here are rather the social phenomena that the founding murder created.”¹² Now the concept of the satan has changed throughout history.¹³ The satan has gone from being a member of the divine court to a fallen angel, to an accuser of humans. If, following Girard, we recognize that the concept of the satanic is anthropological, that it, it has been demystified, it is possible then to speak of the satan as metonym for the mimetic crisis or has Robert Hamerton-Kelly has put it as the ‘Generative Mimetic Scapegoating Mechanism.’ In a previous essay I noted,

René’s development of mimetic theory has removed Satan from the realms of our mythologizing, from the false transcendence that we have given to evil. Satan is no longer to be perceived as an abstraction, as something akin to God, but as one whose disguise is removed. Satan is an anthropological category. Evil arises from within, not without, the human species. Evil does not exist prior to the generative power of imitated desire. Thus there is no transcendental dualism that has to be posited prior to the advent of humanity’s mythmaking.¹⁴

So how does this ‘evil’ scandalous thinking manifest itself? How has historical Christianity been compromised? Where has the gospel been brought into submission to the Powers? Frederiek Depoortere contends, “When Christianity entered the pagan world, which had, in contrast to the Jews, not been prepared by the ‘demystifying effect’ of the Hebrew Scriptures, a sacrificial Christianity became inevitable. This resulted in a resacralization: God was ‘reinfused with violence.’”¹⁵ This resacralization was accomplished a number of ways. While the list below could be extended I suggest seven key areas that Christian theology has been co-opted by the overarching satanic principle.

Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations (1998) all published by Fortress Press, *Cracking the Gnostic Code: The Powers in Gnosticism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), and *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). See also an engagement of this series in *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice and the Domination System* edited by Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

¹² The principal text that Girard accomplishes the demystification of the satan is *I See Satan Fall as Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), esp. 96f.

¹³ The development of the idea of the satan has been researched in Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil* (1977), *Satan* (1981), *Lucifer* (1984) and *Mephistopheles* (1986) as well as a summary of these books in *The Prince of Darkness* (1988) all published by Cornell University Press. Four other helpful books are Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995); T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth of Satan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Gerald Messadieu, *A History of the Devil* (New York: Kodansha International, 1996). Alan E. Bernstein *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) contains helpful information. Raymond Schwager interprets the devil anthropologically in *Banished from Eden*, 143-165.

¹⁴ “Mimetic Theory and Christian Theology in the Twenty-First Century” *Essays in Friendship and Truth* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 56.

It is important to remember that each of these aspects of the satanic is not isolated but that they are all interconnected. In what follows I will make some brief observations about each area.

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| Philosophically | The Violent Logos of Hellenic Philosophy |
| Epistemologically | Dualism = The Generative Power of the Victim |
| Sociologically | Accusation and Punishment = Scapegoating |
| Psychologically | Individualism = The Romantic Lie |
| Economically | Greed = Rivalry and Competition |
| Spiritually | The Law = Prohibition and Ritual |
| Theologically | The Sacrificial Principle |

1. Philosophically. It is well known that Christian theology, has, since the second century been developed in relation to Greek philosophical categories. One aspect of the work of Brian McLaren, Tony Bartlett and others is to show that this marriage of categories has not always been beneficial. McLaren observes that this relationship altered the narrative structure of the gospel; Bartlett acerbically remarks that the mixture of Platonism and the gospel produces a “cosmic thud of eternal principles...”¹⁶ Girard has argued that the antinomy between philosophy and the gospel can be traced to their use of the term ‘logos.’¹⁷ The nonviolent *logos* of the Fourth Gospel cannot be assimilated to the violent *logos* of Greek philosophy. Girard calls this assimilation of *logoi*, “the strangest and most durable illusion of all Western thought.”¹⁸ He also notes, in a similar vein as McLaren and Bartlett that “you gradually turn away from the Bible as you move in the direction of philosophy.” In *The Jesus Driven Life*, I traced this assimilation of *logoi* to Justin Martyr, the first Christian philosopher. Once this was done any christology oriented to the *logos* of Greek philosophy was doomed to lose its nonviolent character.
2. Epistemologically. Girard has made the case that the originary murder, the first victim, also initiated the process of symbolization and thus, language. The victim is the first binary, the original dualism, demonized then divinized that, in the words of Tony Bartlett, “in her switch from evil to good [that is, the sacralization of the victim]...makes available an on/off switch with astonishing and world-ordering power.”¹⁹ Humans are thus constituted dualistically in their cultural evolution. It is not difficult to make the case that dualism is a problem and where it has permeated Christian doctrine. Philip Lee has conclusively demonstrated how dualism has affected Protestant Christian theology in North America with incredibly debilitating results.²⁰ A few examples will suffice: there is the dualism between spirit and matter, body and soul, objective and subjective, the two-kingdom theory, God’s love and God’s justice, eschatology and ethics, heaven

¹⁶ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, (New York: Harper, 2010), 37ff; Anthony Bartlett, *Virtually Christian*, (Washington: O-Books, 2011), 156.

¹⁷ *Things Hidden*, op. cit, 263ff.

¹⁸ “The Evangelical Subversion of Myth” in *Politics and Apocalypse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 48.

¹⁹ Bartlett, *Virtually Christian*, op cit. 105.

²⁰ Philip Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

- and hell, time and eternity, election and free will, the natural and the supernatural, Israel and the Church, us and them, male and female and the list could go on and on. It is difficult to find any Christian doctrine that is not located in the matrix of dualism, which means that dualistic Christian doctrine is grounded in violence at some point.
3. Sociologically the satanic can be found in blame, accusation and punishment. When Christian communities, or ecclesiology, submits to the satanic in its formation of social groups it will manifest itself in an us vs. them mentality. “We are this, we are not that.” The inevitable result is the codification of a belief system that eventuates in some form of scapegoating, whether that takes place as real execution as in the Inquisition, witch hunts or the Holocaust or in exile, shunning, displacement or marginalization. Christian history is replete with examples that are sadly all too familiar. One can see this especially in groups where hierarchy is essential to group identity and power tends toward to top of the social pyramid. A corollary aspect to this is the affirmation of revenge as a form of justice. While not specifically Christian, yet indicative of the values of a so-called Christian nation, a recent New York Daily News Poll queried “Do you believe in exacting revenge to get justice?” only 28% said revenge was barbaric; 16% felt it depended on the situation and an astonishing 56% said revenge is the only sure way to achieve justice.²¹
 4. Psychologically. Christian anthropology that constitutes the individual as an atomistic presence has bought into the psychology of the ‘romantic lie’ (Girard). The satanic spirit manifests itself in a Christian anthropology in the affirmation that we are each individually responsible for our own eternal (Platonic) salvation. This can take many forms. In our own time we see this in many Christian self-help books, the turn to mysticism and legalism. In more conservative Protestant circles, doctrines of justification and sanctification are no longer tied to communal identity and transformation but become narcissistic. Doctrine also becomes narcissistic when viewed as the linguistic expression of inner feeling, a view George Lindbeck has termed ‘experiential-expressive’ and is emptied of any possibility of a truth outside the self.²²
 5. Economically. It has been observed that some 40% of Jesus’ teaching uses economic metaphors. Jesus was a severe critic of economics long before Marx. Girardians Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumochel have demonstrated that the modern economy replaces sacred religion in the modern world; both are systems

²¹ New York Daily News, May 14, 2011. A very helpful book on understanding the anthropological dimension of violence is Charles K. Bellinger *The Trinitarian Self: The Key to the Puzzle of Violence* (Eugene: Pickwick Press, 2008).

²² George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); see also Alister McGrath’s positive comments on Lindbeck’s critique of this position in *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 20ff. On reformulating psychology from a mimetic perspective see Jean Michel Oughourlian *The Puppet of Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Eugene Webb *The Self Between* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993); see also Frank C. Richardson, Blaine J. Fowers and Charles B. Guignon *Re-Envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

- of exchange, both have victims.²³ Girard affirms this evaluation: “In our society religion has been completely subsumed by economics, but precisely because economics springs from a religious matrix. It is nothing but the secularized form of religious ritual.”²⁴ Christian theology is tied intimately to the negative effects of economy, the Roman Catholic Church is one of the wealthiest institutions on the planet in terms of its assets while Protestant mega-churches have exploded in the last two decades. Additionally, theology and church also becomes complicit with mammon when they proclaim any form of a prosperity gospel or a Deuteronomic hermeneutic where God blesses good with wealth but rewards evil with poverty.
6. Christian discipleship or spirituality is sadly and badly mangled when it becomes oriented to Law, or the two pillars of culture Girard identifies as prohibition and ritual. When Christian spirituality is oriented to the Law it easily degenerates into ‘holiness codes’, sectarianism, and forms of spiritual practice that are oriented to human effort. Codes of belief and behavior function as both entrance requirements and communal maintenance. One can see this most clearly in fundamentalist Christian groups, but it can be found throughout the various forms of Christianity. In *The Jesus Driven Life* I pointed out that the work of J. Louis Martyn on *Galatians* and Douglas Campbell on *Romans* necessitate not only a new look at Paul and the Jewish Torah but also the role of law in the Christian Life.²⁵
 7. Last in our list, but perhaps of gravest importance, Christian theology is seduced by the satanic when it appropriates a sacrificial hermeneutic, when it makes the God and Father of Jesus to be like the gods of archaic religion who require blood sacrifice to appease divine wrath and achieve divine blessing. In *The Jesus Driven Life* I argued at length against the use of a sacrificial hermeneutic when interpreting biblical texts following the lead of Rene Girard, Raymund Schwager, James Alison and others. Like dualism, it is hard to find any Christian doctrine that has not been subsumed under a sacrificial hermeneutic in the guise of ‘orthodoxy.’ As Girard notes, “The sacrificial reading is unable to conceive of a god that would absolutely be free of violence, which is what the gospel text is really all about.”²⁶

Rendering A Nonsacrificial Theology

²³ Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumochel, *L’Enfer de Choses*. See also Petra Steinmair-Posel “Economy and Mimetic Theory” in Wolfgang Palaver and Petra Steinmair-Posel, Eds. *Passions in Economy, Politics and the Media* (Wein: LIT Verlag, 2005), 67-84; Andre Orlean, “Money and Mimetic Speculation” in Paul Dumochel ed. *Violence and Truth: On the Work of Rene Girard* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 101-112.

²⁴ *Evolution and Conversion*, op cit. 248

²⁵ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

²⁶ “The Evangelical Subversion of Myth” in *Politics and Apocalypse*, op cit. 42.

In *Things Hidden* Girard averred, “I feel that the non-sacrificial reading brings all the great canonical dogmas back into play, making them intelligible by articulating them more coherently than has been possible up to now.”²⁷ In 1994 he concluded an interview with James Williams saying, “Mine is a search for the anthropology of the cross, which turns out to rehabilitate orthodox theology.”²⁸ He also remarked, “Far from contradicting the traditional formulations of the Christian faith, the mimetic interpretation vindicates them.”²⁹ The final section of this essay is a vindication of this insight of Girard that, in fact, a wonderfully beneficial Christian theology can be rendered when it is grounded in the revelation of scapegoating.

My own journey began in 1987 when I discovered Girard through reading Raymund Schwager’s *Must There Be Scapegoats?* I spent the next fifteen years pondering what a theology without violence might look like. In the process two things happened: first as I began preaching and teaching the implications of this new thinking I angered my mostly conservative Evangelical congregation and eventually crashed and burned in the ministry. Second, I was compelled to see my own negative mimesis and the way I had become rivalrous and scapegoating. I mention these two things at the outset because I believe that if we are faithful to the revelation of the innocent victim seen in the cross of Christ we will be persecuted. But more important, we will also have to face the challenge of how we too are entwined in negative mimesis, rivalry and scapegoating and how we can be liberated from all this to follow Jesus who imitated God.

At the end of that journey I wrote *The Jesus Driven Life*, an attempt to show how I integrated insights from the historical-critical method with the mimetic theory. This was an important component of Raymund Schwager’s exegetical practice that I adopted.³⁰ Prior to writing *The Jesus Driven Life* I had written and presented over a dozen essays on mimetic theory and had exegeted virtually all the gospel lectionary texts from this hermeneutic vantage point on my website.³¹ So for the past quarter century I am been absorbed with this business of how to develop a Christian systematic theology, grounded in good historical-critical exegesis, informed by the mimetic theory, congruent with insights found in the scientific disciplines which would lead to deep spirituality, healthy community formation and the witness of a prophetic stance calling us to follow Jesus exclusively.

One key thinker that mimetic theorists can advantageously turn to is theologian F. LeRon Shults who has shown the importance of the shift in philosophy from metaphysics to relationality.³² Shults’ program to ‘reform’ Christian doctrine

²⁷ *Things Hidden* op cit., 224.

²⁸ *The Girard Reader*, op cit. 288.

²⁹ Forward to Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), x.

³⁰ *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* (New York: Crossroads, 1999).

³¹ www.preachingpeace.org

³² *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); *Reforming Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); with Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); *Christology and*

comports well with the views of Rene Girard. Shults is a recent reader of Girard and has begun critically appropriating mimetic theory into his worldview. His post-foundationalist critical-realist stance allows him to see fruitful areas of scientific compatibility from the theological perspective in the same way Girard saw theological compatibility with the Christian tradition from the scientific perspective.

For better or worse I think I have achieved my goal of envisioning a theology that is orthodox, evangelical, Anabaptist and scientifically compatible.³³ This foray can be found in structural form in the chart found on the last page of this essay and in prose form in *The Jesus Driven Life*. What does a gospel freed from violence look like? It looks like really good news, real *evangel*. I will briefly describe the main points of the construction of some doctrines, offering a map, which is not to be confused with the territory. I emphasize that I will not be exhaustive but directive.

Doctrine of God

There are two crucial components to a Christian doctrine of God. The first is a congruent orthodox understanding of the Trinity. The second is the form that understanding derives from, a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). A Christian doctrine of God begins with Jesus' death. This is why one has to get atonement right before one can discern *who* and *what* is being revealed, that is, *who* is this God who comes to us in Jesus' death, One who is reconciling the world to God's self (II Cor 5:16-21). One theologian to perceive this was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who began his 1933 lectures on Christology by noting it is not the abstract metaphysical *How?* questions we should be asking when it comes to Jesus, but the much more personal and existential *Who?* Question.³⁴ This *Who?* is Christ crucified. It is the passion of Jesus that renders all other textual meaning for Christian theology.

Girard focuses on the Passion of Jesus as the revelatory texts by which all other texts are to be read. This is exactly right for several reasons. First, this is, to reference Martin Luther, to have a hermeneutic *theologia crucis*. It is the explicit acknowledgement of that which is out of the box, that which is revealed or made known about God and humanity. In the biblical canon, the outer shell are the two Testaments, within that the New Testament, within that The Gospels and within that the Passion. Canonicity is about how texts read texts; canon involves both the texts read and the hermeneutic deployed. The biblical canon generates its own internal hermeneutic, the way by which it is to be read. Protestant Christian hermeneutics presupposes the question (and solution), i.e., the *regula fidei*; it does not, should not, nor cannot begin with a theory of inspiration.³⁵ Reading biblical texts in this light has plenty of support from the Girardian community: Schwager, Alison, Hamerton-Kelly,

Science (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); with Brent Walters, ed. *Christology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

³³ Influential thinkers on scientific compatibility, particularly physics, with Christian theology have been F. LeRon Shults, Thomas Torrance, John Polkinghorne, Diarmuid O'Murchu and Alister McGrath.

³⁴ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Volume 12* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 299ff.

³⁵ This is also Karl Barth's starting point in *Church Dogmatics I/1* (London: T&T Clark, 1957).

Bailie, Goodhart, Williams, Heim, Bartlett, Neuchterlein, Swartley, others and myself. I especially commend the volume edited by Willard Swartley, *Violence Renounced*; it is a cornucopia of essays reading biblical texts from both Testaments in the light of mimetic theory.³⁶

A Christian doctrine of God also confesses that Jesus is the full, final and complete revelation of the character of God, or if you like, who God is. It was not just part of God in Jesus, as though God (supposedly the Father) could act differently and be of a different character than Jesus. It is God's fullness (*pleroma*) that becomes incarnate in Jesus (Col 2:9). The *logos* is face to face with God and God at the same time (John 1:1-5), but it is not an abstract *logos* but the specific particular person of Jesus (John 1:14), the nonviolent *logos*. Incarnation does not belong under anthropology but in the doctrine of God; we cannot separate our Christology from our understanding of God.

A Christian doctrine of God is able to show how the God and father of Jesus is to be differentiated from the gods of religion. Here one cannot say enough for Girard's groundbreaking work in *Things Hidden* and Schwager's *Must There Be Scapegoats?*³⁷ What they are able to show through a mimetic reading of the biblical text is that, unlike the gods of archaic religion, Israel's God is not Janus-faced. I tried to drive this point home in *The Jesus Driven Life*. James Alison has also made a significant contribution to this topic in *Raising Abel*. The theological axioms that 'God is love' and 'God is light' and 'in God there is no shadow of turning' ground the discussion of God's character.³⁸

One crucial element in a doctrine of God concerns the divine dance, the playful joyous dance of Pure Love. This notion often goes by the rubric *perichoresis*. This beatific vision has come to the forefront of modern conversations about the Trinity. Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna, John Zizioulas, and others have made significant contributions to this theme that validates the axiomatic statements of Scripture and clearly shows that God is at heart, compassionate and loving.³⁹ This accords with the character of God as nonviolent or non-retributive found in Girard's theology.

Finally, with Karl Barth, a Christian doctrine of God understands God's love in freedom. The emphasis on the freedom of God in Christian theology cannot be that

³⁶ (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000).

³⁷ On Schwager's groundbreaking role in coordinating mimetic theory with Christian theology see Michael Kirwan *Girard and Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 33-44. Jim Williams also has a chapter on Schwager in his forthcoming history of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion.

³⁸ Eberhard Jungel *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Dietrich Ritschl *The Logic of Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

³⁹ A discussion of these and other thinkers on the Trinity can be found in Veli-Matti Karkkainen *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., *The Christian Trinity in History* (Still River: St Bede's Publications, 1975); Ted Peters *God as Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993).

God is free from humanity but instead, in the light of Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension, God is free to be for us (*pro nobis*).⁴⁰

Christology (Who Jesus Is)

Here I would bring together several complimentary strands of research, exegetical, theological and mimetic theoretical. The *Who?* question answered in the doctrine of God now takes form by asking the *How?* question. However, the *How?* question no longer need be asked first within Greek philosophical categories but from within the research over the past century in the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.⁴¹ Jesus' favorite self-designation 'the son of the man' (*bar e'nesha, ho huios tou anthropou*) can now be understood as The True Human as Walter Wink has shown.⁴² How Jesus acts as a human is an imitation of his Abba. This is the language of the christology of the Fourth Gospel. The Synoptics bear witness to this divine imitation in their narratives of Jesus. The *Who?* question of Jesus' identity in the Fourth Gospel can then be understood with reference to the *How?* question of his mission and activity in the Synoptics. The *Emmanuel* of Matthew is the *Logos* of the Fourth Gospel. This was my starting point in *The Jesus Driven Life*.

If we locate God's self-revelation in Jesus and we are willing to acknowledge that the best Jesus scholarship understands Jesus to be nonviolent, then we must also understand Jesus' identity to be a revelation of God's identity. Here the language of Nicaea comes into play. If we confess the Nicene Creed and we also affirm the non-retaliatory character of Jesus, if we confess that Jesus is *homoousias* with the Father, then we are also making a statement about the character of the Father. We are asserting that God is nonviolent. The Nicene Creed read in terms of the mimetic theory and the theme of imitation in the Fourth Gospel renders a metaphysical reading obsolete and proffers a reading that is *evangel*.

Incarnation is revelation. Barth was correct to tie revelation so closely to the figure of Jesus. I part company here with those who need a theory of inspiration. My current project *Dying God, Living Word* shows how to construct a truly evangelical theology apart from a theory of inspiration. Revelation comes not as text but as human. Girard's exegetical instincts are correct when he makes this theological assertion about God's character in *Things Hidden*.

Who Jesus is interprets what he does; what he does actualizes who he is. There can be no separation of form and content in christology, the medium is the message (McLuhan). Christology then has three navigational points: historical (the historical Jesus), textual (the four canonical Gospels) and ecclesiological (the *Christus Praesens*). The Christ whom we worship is the Jesus of the apostolic communities

⁴⁰ *Church Dogmatics II/1* (London: T&T Clark, 1957), 297ff. On the Christological character of the freedom of God *pro nobis* see William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God* (Louisville: WJKP, 1997), 69ff. On the importance of *pro nobis* see Hall, *Professing the Faith*, op. cit. 463ff.

⁴¹ This is affirmed by Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith*, op. cit. 484ff.

⁴² *The Human Being* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

borne witness to in the Gospels. Each of these points is necessary for a healthy christology.⁴³

Atonement (What Messiah Has Wrought)

Mimetic theory has permeated the conversation around the atonement more than anywhere else. Girard started this rethinking of atonement in *Things Hidden* in 1978. The earliest challenge, in English, to traditional atonement theories utilizing Girard is that of Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde who had only read Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*⁴⁴ when he wrote his article on 'Atonement' in the 1984 publication *Christian Dogmatics*.⁴⁵ A spate of works have since come out that utilize the mimetic theory in their interpretation of atonement, I note particularly Tony Bartlett's *Cross Purposes*, Mark Heim's *Saved from Sacrifice, Stricken by God?* by Brad Jersak and myself and Raymund Schwager's *Der Wunderbare Tausch*.

There are five points I would make about a radical evangelical doctrine of the atonement:

1. There has been a complete and total deconstruction of the penal satisfaction theory. The other two classic theories *Christus Victor* (Irenaeus) and *Exemplary Theory* (Abelard) can be seen as dealing with the two aspects of mimesis, negative and positive. Christ overcame the satan in the Synoptics in his personal life, in his ministry and on the cross. In the words of Christoph Blumhardt 'Jesus is Victor!'⁴⁶ The Fourth Gospel makes explicit Jesus conquering of the satan in his death, as does Paul (John 12, I Cor 1-2). But Jesus not only overcomes the satan he also becomes a lived model of his message of forgiveness and reconciliation (Luke 23:32). LeRon Schults has made a compelling case for rehabilitating Abelard's theory in the light of the social sciences, including mimetic theory.⁴⁷
2. A Christian doctrine of atonement is a direct challenge to sacrificial theories of Jesus' death that make God responsible or complicit in the murder of the Son. The current debate about the atonement is a crucial watershed in the history of the Gospel. The deconstruction of the Anselmic theory and the further deconstruction of a penal atonement associated with John Calvin has provoked some intense and

⁴³ On *Christus Praesens* see the very important work by Dietrich Ritschl, *Memory and Hope* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

⁴⁴ (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1972).

⁴⁵ Edited by Robert Jensen and Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Of course the same could be said of Schwager who published *Must There Be Scapegoats?* in German in 1978.

⁴⁶ Dieter Ising *Johann Christoph Blumhardt: A New Biography* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 173.

⁴⁷ "I have focused on the ways in which developments within the new sciences of morality can contribute toward a theological reconceptualization of the dynamics that make love real, that make us at-one, binding us in healthy ways to proximate others and to the ultimate sacred Other beyond our control, which Christians experience as divine grace. Is the violence of divine warfare or legalized torture the only way for us to experience reconciliation? For God's sake, I hope not. For goodness sake, I hope we can participate in the prosocial emotional contagion empathically manifested in the salubrious exemplarity of Jesus of Nazareth, among others." *"Ethics, Exemplarity and Atonement"* (forthcoming).

- serious controversy this past twenty years. One can no longer discuss atonement or the death of Jesus without factoring in Rene Girard and those who utilize the mimetic theory when interpreting Jesus' death. So far, while it might be said that Girard has not received a good hearing in the American academy, his work has been a boon for theologians. He has helped us to place the Gospels in relation to the sacred literature of Judaism while also contexting the Hebrew Scriptures in the context of religion or myth, whether textual or ritual. The mimetic theory shows how Jesus' death is *sui generis*.
3. Jesus' death is a complete renunciation of the sacrificial understanding of penal atonement. I cannot say enough here about the work of Raymund Schwager, Tony Bartlett, Mark Heim, Robert-Hamerton Kelly or James Alison on this point. The view that God was pouring out wrath as Jesus died is exactly the opposite of what was really occurring which was a manifestation of true love. One cannot have both a sacrificial and a non-sacrificial understanding of Jesus' death, they are mutually exclusive.⁴⁸ Holding them together is what creates a Janus-faced God, the god of sacrificial Christianity. This is why, as mentioned earlier, discussion about the character of God must begin with the death of Jesus.
 4. The death of Jesus is the space where God is revealed as Trinity. In the cross, the Father was reconciling the world (II Cor 5:16-21), the Son modeled this reconciliation in the forgiveness of his persecutors (Luke 23:32) and the Spirit, sent from the Father through the Son is the Spirit of reconciliation (John 7:37-39).⁴⁹ Our experience of God is cruciform and not otherwise. This explains why understanding the Generative Mimetic Scapegoating Mechanism is so important. That which flows from our experience of God as Spirit poured out in the cross of Jesus, our ethics, our self-understanding, our vision of God, our relation to others is that which God as Trinity has shown God's self to be like. This God is merciful, forgiving, compassionate and loving. This God is one, yet might we say, interdividual?
 5. Finally, recognizing that in America we live 'under the rule of law', it is important to consider that both prohibition and ritual have their origins in the mimetic. If the cross liberates us from the satanic and reconciles us to God it also brings us life and that life is not abstract but how we might live this life, and so being the mimetic creatures that we are, we are given a model, Jesus, whom we are called to follow. We are not given a list of do's and don'ts, for the Law has been abolished (Col 2:13-15). Pauline studies have vindicated this insight by recognizing the apocalyptic element in Paul's thought and the problem encountered in Torah. J. Louis Martyn in his Anchor Bible commentary on *Galatians*⁵⁰ and Douglas Campbell in his magisterial reading of Romans in *The Deliverance of God*⁵¹ combined with Hamerton-Kelly's Girardian reading of

⁴⁸ See my essay "Out Of The Fog: New Horizons for Atonement Theory" in *Stricken by God: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Jesus* edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁴⁹ Exegesis of this last claim about the Spirit can be found in *The Jesus Driven Life*, op. cit. 263-268.

⁵⁰ *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

⁵¹ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

Paul⁵² offer a new view of Paul that is congruent with a mimetic reading and historical-critical exegesis. This shift from law to human model has significant consequences for ecclesiology, ethics and spirituality. Backed by recent research on the phenomenon of ‘mirror neurons’ in the human brain, an air tight case can be made for faith apart from law.

Eschatology

Girard’s personal eschatology is rather bleak. Rene does not see a wholesale repentance of humanity, a complete and total renunciation of violence. *Battling to the End* is not an easy read. All Girardians do not share Rene’s pessimistic outlook. Apocalypse might be the penultimate word, but the Final Word is Jesus who comes to us a Friend from the Future. If we can make a case that there is no violence in God and that Jesus’ death was not a penal transaction but a revelation of the character of God, it seems that we should also be able to say the same thing about the God to whom we are coming and who is coming to us.

The bugaboo in this is two fold. First a sacrificial eschatology is oriented to law. It reckons judgment to be based upon obedience or disobedience. So, just as being a good citizen by obeying the laws of the land keeps you in good standing with the civil authorities, so also keeping God’s rules and rituals will keep one in good standing with divine authority. This is not the Gospel. If the apostle Paul were here there would be a major league chastising. Second, sacrificial eschatology has a penal doctrine of hell. Has anyone ever argued that while God was compassionate in Jesus and because Jesus was nonviolent so we too are called to live nonviolently, yet we could do so knowing that, at the end of things, people who hurt us will get their comeuppance? Renowned theologian Miroslav Volf did in his award-winning *Exclusion and Embrace*.⁵³ Yet, recent exegeses of the book of Revelation, historical-critical and mimetic, have shown that the God who is in Christ at the end is nonviolent.⁵⁴

What might Compassionate *Eschatology* look like?⁵⁵ It would be very different from a sacrificial one. First, there would be no need for victims. The kingdom of God has no sacrificial apparatus. Thus there need be no fear of punishment. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear stems from punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (I John 3:18).

⁵² *Sacred Violence: Paul’s Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992).

⁵³ (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). I would note that Volf has ameliorated this position somewhat in his later work, especially *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in A Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) and *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁵⁴ See the essays in *Compassionate Eschatology*, edited by Michael Hardin and Ted Grimsrud (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

⁵⁵ The phrase “compassionate eschatology” was coined by Lorri Hardin and subsequently became the title for both the conference sponsored by Preaching Peace and the book *Compassionate Eschatology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

Second, recognizing that we are interindividual and no longer affirm an atomistic understanding of the human, eschatology would have as much to do with our relationships as anything. It has to do with the redemption of the entire project of creation not just humans (Rom 5:12-21; Col 1:15-20). Our eschatology cannot look different than our doctrine of creation or atonement. As we are created *imago Dei* which as Bonhoeffer and Barth have concluded means “being-in-relationship”, so we are also reconciled and redeemed as “beings-in-relationship.” Again this dovetails back into our understanding of the Trinity as “being-in-communion” (Zizzioulas).

Third, this universal redemption includes “all things” including that from which we are made, the *adama* (Gen 2:7), the earth. Our eschatology thus informs our relationship to the creation itself and has profound implications for our discipleship and spirituality. Recent trends in Christian ecological awareness, in reaction to the human as dominator and rival with the earth, have had a salutary benefit in some circles of Christian life but have yet to permeate those Christian traditions that see the earth as a resource to be exploited (grounded in the dualism of matter and spirit where matter is adjudged as less than spirit). My own interest in this area has been informed by learning and participating in North American Native shamanic traditions, specifically that of the Apache which I find to be extraordinarily congruent with both Scripture and the mimetic theory.⁵⁶

Pneumatology

In a sense each of the last three categories might well be discussed under the category of *pneumatology* for they all reflect in one way or another the experience of the Triune God lived in life. Indeed a truly Protestant theology might well begin with *ethics*. James McClendon Jr. has offered such a starting point noting that foundations, doctrine and ethics are all intertwined and that a rejection of an ideal Platonic universe of ideas necessitates a fresh starting point, particularly as the foundations of modernism have crumbled.⁵⁷ I would concur with one caveat: one’s ethics is determined by two important considerations, what one believes Jesus taught and the role of Jesus in relation to the ‘ethic(s)’ of the Jewish Scriptures. These two points are highly contested in Christendom today which is why I have argued that our reflections on God in the 21st century must begin with the revelation of the Trinitarian God revealed in the cross of Christ. One’s Christology determines one’s ethics; an ethic not congruent with the life, teaching and example of Jesus cannot be called a *Christian* ethic no matter how many Bible verses one racks up.

Inasmuch as the work of the Spirit is part of God’s ongoing activity in the life of the churches these last three areas can only be provisionally directive. Brian McLaren has given us much food for thought on these topics in his recent publications *A New Kind*

⁵⁶ See my essays *Ecospirituality* at <http://www.preachingpeace.org/2010/04/06/ecospirit/> and “Is the Apocalypse Inevitable? Native American Prophecy and the Mimetic Theory” in *Compassionate Eschatology*, op. cit.

⁵⁷ *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol I*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986).

of *Christianity and Naked Spirituality*. In any case, I will only note some important theological considerations for each locus offering resources for thought.

1. *Ecclesiology* Egalitarian Community of Service

- Community gathered intentionally round a victim
- Death and Life in Baptism & the Eucharist (reframing ritual, Eucharist not sacrificial in the archaic religious sense)
- Mission in Service (Phil 2:5-11 “have this mind in you”)⁵⁸
- Mimetic Theory and Community: Challenge to Hierarchy, Bureaucracy

2. *Ethics* Imitation as Formation

- The Didache and early Christian catechism
- Studies in Cognitive and Developmental Psychology, Mirror Neurons and Imitation Theory
- Francis
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Discipleship*)
- Dorothy Day
- M.L. King Jr.
- Gandhi & The Ethics of Nonviolence (Stanley Hauerwas/John Howard Yoder)

3. *Spirituality* The Holy Spirit as Defender, Teacher and Presence of Christ

- Paraclete* (opposite of the satan) cf. Andrew Sung Park *Triune Atonement on atonement and the Paraclete*⁵⁹
- Didaskolos* (John 15:25ff; I John 2:26-28)
- Christus Praesens* (Matt 28:18-20, FG *allos parakletos*, II Cor 3 *kurios = pneuma*)
- *The Ecology of the Spirit* (Mark Wallace: *Finding God in the Singing River*)⁶⁰
- Worship in ‘spirit and truth’* (John 4, no sacred places, everywhere and everyone belongs to God)

I hope that these considerations are enough to get us moving in a direction of discerning that which is the *novum* in Jesus and so reformulate all of the great Christian doctrines in accordance with the insights we have gained from the mimetic theory and critical biblical and theological studies. As *Theology and Peace* moves into the future I see part of its task to be generating studies that open up areas where we might reframe and reformulate Christian doctrine so that it is Jesus who is front and center, beginning and end, the living and truthful way who brings us and all our peers to new life lived in love, joy and forgiveness. The time is ripe for such a conversation, “Come, let us reason together.”

God’s No!
Negative Mimesis
‘Human Culture’

(I Cor 1:19-22)

God’s Yes!
Positive Mimesis
‘Divine Culture’

⁵⁸ See a mimetic exegesis of this passage by Steven E. Berry and myself, “Grasping God: Philippians 2: 1-11 in the Light of Mimetic Theory” at http://www.preachingpeace.org/documents/Phil_2_COVR_2005.pdf.

⁵⁹ (Louisville: WJKP, 2009).

⁶⁰ (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

1. *Desire* (James 1:13, 4:1ff)
 - triangular nature of
 - imitated (I-Thou-I)
 - object oriented

Desire
 -trinitarian nature of; *perichoresis*
 -God as Subject (I-Thou) Jn 5:16-30
 -Desiring God's desire; the will of God

2. *Rivalry ----- Model/Obstacle*
 - volatile nature of (Gen 2-4)
 - escalation of imitated actions Gen 2-3
 - Other oriented (subject as enemy)

Self-Giving (Non Rivalrous)
 -*humilitas* Phil 2:5-11 hymn
 -surrender/trust (πιστις Χριστου)
 -Subject oriented (subject beloved)

3. *Undifferentiation* (Romans 1:17-32)

Undifferentiated Differentiation
 (God as Trinity)

[-----the point of no return-----]

(All imitate all; need for differentiation)

Son imitates Father
 (cross)
 (priest)

Father Glorifies Son
 (resurrection)
 (king)

Hebrews
12:24

Violence
 Revenge
 Logos of Heraclitus
 The Cover-Up

Love
 Forgiveness
 Logos of the Fourth Gospel
 The Truth

----- Adam (Romans 5:12-21)
 Atonement: Christus Victor (Col 1:15-20)

Christ -----
 Exemplary Model ▼

Scapegoat (differentiated victim)
 -all against one
 -the 'lie' of individuality
 -'j'accuse' The Satan
 -*Meconnaissance*
 -Phantom Community
 -(religious) addiction (Rom 7)

Spirit in One = Body of Christ
 (ascension) one for all Col 3:1-4
 (prophet) truth of oneness/interdividual
 The Paraclete (*pro nobis*) Jn 16:12-15
Anamnesis (memory & hope)
 Voice of the Good Shepherd
 Brain transformation (mirror neurons)

Sacralization
 -victim agent of chaos/order
 -victim as binary symbol
 -origins of dualism (Zoroaster, Plato)

Resurrection as Vindication
 -vindicated victim agent of new order
 -victim (Jesus) as unitary symbol
 -demise of dualism (Barth, Quantum Theo.)

Job (Exile – Return) 2nd *Isaiah*

Pillars of Culture

1. Prohibition (Law)
2. Ritual (Religion)
 - do ut des; lex talionis*
3. Myth (Discourse, Literature)
 - theology of glory [Luther]
 - hermeneutics from above [Bonhoeffer]

Prophetic Critique of Culture

1. New Covenant (Jer 31.31ff)
2. Self-Giving as Eucharist
 - phero/anaphero* and cognates
3. Gospel (the story of Jesus)
 - theology of the cross
 - hermeneutics from below