The Reclamation of Biblical Concepts:
Prophecy & Sacrifice according to René Girard & Walter Brueggemann

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Abstract

This thesis works on the basis of a ‘mutually critical correlation’ of the work of René Girard and Walter Brueggemann’s thought, particularly in relation to the biblical concepts of prophecy and sacrifice.

The introduction sets out the character and scope of the two authors’ work, and considers two other figures that have had a major influence: Raymund Schwager on Girard, and Norman Gottwald on Brueggemann; the influence of Paul Ricoeur on both authors is also explored. Socio-literary and socio-historical methods are also laid out in relation to the work of the authors.

In Part 1, there is an exploration of what biblical concepts are, and how they are founded in patterns of thought which are no longer the dominant ones in Western society. The nature of symbol and myth are investigated, and the thinking of the authors related to these. Then the decay of biblical concepts in the contemporary era is examined and related to the projects of the two authors; Brueggemann’s idea of a ‘dominant version of reality’, which is applicable to the schemes of both is interrogated.

In Part 2, the idea of sacrifice, and the meaning of that term in prehistoric societies, in the Old Testament context, and in the New Testament and the modern era are unpacked and considered in relation to the thinking of Brueggemann and Girard. The idea of atonement and what is understood by that term and by ‘sacrifice’ in contemporary society are developed in the terms of the two authors.

Part 3 is an investigation of prophecy in some detail. Beginning with the ideas of the sacred, the holy and the signified, and moving through the application of these to the ‘here and now’, there is consideration of the alternatives to the divine view: those of Satan, Dionysus and the ‘royal consciousness’. Brueggemann’s suggestion that preaching (and therefore prophecy) constitutes an alternative version of these realities which subverts the status quo, is considered.
Abstract

Part 4 brings together these elements and uses the thinking of the two authors to build up a composite picture, in which intent and action, original sin and original blessing are assembled and counterposed.
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Acknowledgements

This thesis started as an MTh in Practical Theology by research at Aberdeen University, and has continued at Heythrop College, University of London. The length of the journey in geographical terms is matched by a winding route and a focus that has developed from a general interest in language and literature in religion, to a particular one on prophecy and sacrifice, and two writers, Girard and Brueggemann.

My grateful thanks are due principally to my two supervisors at Heythrop College, Dr. Michael Kirwan SJ and Professor Keith Ward, without whose encouragement and wise guidance I would not have reached this point.

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I’d also like to thank Michael Kirwan and, through him, the Jesuit theology faculty in the University of Innsbruck for making available unpublished letters between Girard and Schwager.

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And, finally but not least, thanks are due to my wife, Jane, for all her support since we first journeyed to Aberdeen together in 2005.
**Abbreviations & Terms**

**Negative mimesis.** The mimetic process which, according to Girard, became a pervasive feature of humankind at the point of hominization. It is based on imitative desire and results in rivalry and spirals of violence.

**Positive mimesis.** Imitation which follows the example of God, particularly of God’s requirements for human conduct as described by Jesus and exemplified in his life on earth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DVR</td>
<td>Dominant Version of Reality</td>
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<tr>
<td>NG</td>
<td>Norman K. Gottwald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Paul Ricoeur</td>
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<td>RG</td>
<td>René Girard</td>
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<td>RS</td>
<td>Raymund Schwager</td>
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<td>WB</td>
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INTRODUCTION
1 Thesis Description

This project has a pastoral purpose: to identify forces for a positive energizing of community, freed from the destructive forces which mire the world in its old ways.

Such forces are not contemporary in origin; they are present in voices from biblical times which have often been misheard, unheard, or ignored within Christian ministry. The possibility and the understanding of a process of re-energization is the project of both Brueggemann and Girard, and what is attempted in this thesis is a mutually critical correlation of their thinking; that is to say, using the thinking of one to examine, and even more, to illuminate that of the other.

These two writers are important, original contributors to contemporary theology – and both are controversial. Each is associated with a particular area: Brueggemann with prophecy, and Girard with sacrifice. Both of these terms have fallen into neglect and even disrepute within contemporary British culture, for reasons to do with post-modernism or the post-Christian condition we are supposed to have entered. However, the work of Brueggemann and of Girard does a considerable amount to show, respectively, how prophecy can be an authentic, corrective call to the way of truth; and how sacrifice is a troubled area in which the strategic deflection of conflict and violence onto an innocent third party is used to disguise the underlying truth of relational difficulties and avoid the unacceptable cost of reconciliation, and, at an extreme, a spiral of reciprocal violence leading to catastrophic destruction.

However, the individual focus of these two authors does not amount to compartmentalisation; there are substantial overlaps, though these are not always obvious at first sight. This study examines both authors’ perspectives,

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1 Tracy, 1975, Chapter 2 deals with the methodological implications of ‘mutually critical correlation’, though his position was first delineated in an article entitled ‘What is fundamental religion?’ in Journal of Religion 54 (1974). This was revised as chapter 2 of Blessed Rage for Order (1975).
1 Thesis Description

and identifies the life which each of the writers brings to them and to theology generally. It also examines the implications of the arguments of each for the other, and makes use of the thinking of a few other writers to bridge gaps and enable a combined perspective to be assembled.

The ultimate thrust of both Brueggemann and Girard is towards the truth of understandings of God, and by the same token they seek to root out the dead wood: erroneous and (let it be said) idolatrous concepts of God within the Christian and Old Testament Jewish traditions.

Brueggemann and Girard are both Christians, though from differing backgrounds. Brueggemann is from North American Protestant stock, and Girard, who became an active believer in his adult years, from a French Catholic background. Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar, Girard a historian, literary critic and (latterly) a cultural anthropologist. Each, though individually important, is associated with another scholar who has exercised considerable influence over him. In the case of Brueggemann, it is Norman K. Gottwald\(^2\), author of seminal socio-religious and socio-literary studies of Israel and its formative stages; whilst Girard owes much to the late Raymund Schwager\(^3\), the Jesuit theologian at Innsbruck University, who has provided ‘dramatic theology’ as a framework for Girard’s ideas, and who helped Girard revise his understanding of sacrifice\(^4\). These two thinkers have been useful to Brueggemann and Girard respectively through having a more established place in the mainstream of theological thought than they do themselves, and thus enabling an adjustment of their work to theology; in Girard’s case, this is significant because he himself lacks a background in theology, and in Brueggemann’s, because he sometimes seems to choose to pass over elements of Old Testament theology when they do not seem important to him. This writer has had the benefit of access to unpublished

\(^2\) B. 1923. Former Professor of Old Testament and Biblical at Berkeley Graduate Theological Union, California, now Professor of Old Testament Emeritus at New York Theological Seminary.

\(^3\) 1935 – 2004.

\(^4\) This unfolds in an exchange of letters (unpublished to date), between the years 1975 and 1991, which the author has reviewed. Girard-Schwager, 1975-91.
correspondence between Schwager and Girard between 1975 and 1991, and this has enabled a greater understanding of the developing interaction between the two thinkers. These points of interaction are highlighted in the text.

We are therefore, to some extent, considering two pairs of scholars, and the pairs to a degree tread the common path of socio-literary understanding of religion. Within each pair, there is a strong theological strain, but also a socio-religious and socio-literary interest. The strong and subtle interplay of commentary within the pairings is already notable; considered between the pairings it is symphonic. This is what gives power to the ‘mutually critical correlation’\(^5\) of the theories within the two distinct approaches.

There are several other significant figures in this account, who may be considered as catalysts in the chemistry of the comparison of Brueggemann & Girard, in situations where a straightforward comparison between the two writers bears too little fruit. Their work has not necessarily been explored extensively in all cases, as they are as it were helpers in the project rather than objects of research themselves.

Paul Ricoeur is not grouped specifically with Brueggemann or Girard, though he has had an effect on both, and indeed has exercised a far-reaching influence more generally on contemporary thought. In this account, his insightful views are drawn on at critical points to give an additional dimension or perspective to radical thought.

Margaret Barker is something of a maverick in biblical studies circles. Her research, though definitely an object of keen interest within theology, leads her to conclusions which many of her peers reject as being too extreme and

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\(^5\) Tracy, 1975, chapter 2. In this chapter Tracy discusses a mutually critical correlation of postmodern human experience and the texts of the Christian tradition. He answers his own question, “what is fundamental religion?” by stating that it is a revised correlation method that is “nothing other than a hermeneutically self-conscious clarification and correction of traditional theology. It is hermeneutically self-conscious because it does not so much appeal to the Christian fact as it appeals to mutually critical correlation between two sets of correlations.” Tracy, 1974, pp 13-34. See also Grant, R. and Tracy D., 1984, p170. See also Fiorenza FS & Galvin JP, 2011, pp.42ff.
Insufficiently supported by the available evidence. Nevertheless, her scholarship is impressive for its broad sweep and the links she is able to make, and her observations overlap with Girard’s and particularly with Brueggemann’s in a way that adds perspective to their own schemes. The questions she raises have proved fruitful in the development of the ideas in this thesis.

Tim Gorringe, in his short paper *Numbers: Chapter 11*[^6], has provided an insight of profound importance for this study, which paves the way for a link not only between Brueggemann and Girard, but also on the development of the concept of sacrifice, in the application of a short phrase, “God [who] is only known in the journey from bondage to freedom”.

Others, too, have been important in rounding out the concepts under consideration: Juergen Moltmann, Peter Berger, to mention but two.

1 Thesis Description

The structure of the Thesis is as follows:

Introductory Section

This commences with a description of the Thesis, and a literature review of Brueggemann and Girard. After that, the research method is explained, noting the bearing on theology generally. Then the two pairs of writers, Brueggemann-Gottwald and Girard-Schwager are explored in more detail.

Part 1: Concepts and Versions of Reality

It then moves on to clarify the terms of the thesis title, asking, what is a biblical concept? Then it surveys the nature of expression, the use of symbol, myth and intuition, and the decay of biblical concepts in modern and postmodern thought, and considers the implications for the biblical texts to successfully communicate their intended content under such circumstances. The stage upon which these writers walk, that is, the general nature of the discussion on God, prophecy and sacrifice, within the contemporary context, is thus set out.

At this point, the methodological options take shape: the socio-religious account, in which God is delineated according to the predicament of society of the moment and the needs which flow from that; and, secondly, dramatic theology, in which God and humans meet, or fail to meet, in the savagely testing conditions of mimetic rivalry and the violence which flows from it. From these arenas the ‘mutually critical correlation’ is drawn. It involves exploration of the paradigms involved, their clashes and shifts, and views both ‘above the fray’ and ‘within the fray’. The two approaches, different as they are, offer a kind of binocular vision, and enable an initial exploration and a judgement on the possibilities which each approach offers individually and in combination. This discussion extends over two main sections: The Fading Concept of Sacrifice, and Prophecy; Outdated and Never Outdated.
Part 2: The Fading Concept of Sacrifice

This begins with an extended analysis of Brueggemann/Gottwald, the paradigm involved, in *The Holy and the Here and Now*.

It then moves on to an equivalent analysis of Girard/Schwager, in *Satan and Dionysus: All Against One*. This takes account of the continuing work at Innsbruck of the Dramatic Theology research project, the critical voices raised against Girard's theories, as well as the work of his leading proponents. It considers Girard's prognosis of the future of mankind, which has sometimes had a dark character.

Part 3: Prophecy: Outdated and Never Outdated

Here the ‘mutually critical correlation’ referred to above (an examination of the thinking of one writer under the perspective of the other) is essayed on a number of fronts. The mechanisms through which prophecy and sacrifice operate are opened up for inspection, and the possibilities examined for effectively communicating the concepts with which Girard and Brueggemann are working. These concepts are of course both (on the positive side) the revelation of truth which they nurture in their work, and (on the negative side) the idolatrous, misguided, hypnotising forces ranged against them in the world-view generated by society, which flies in the face of God.

The analysis reveals paradigmatic systems, which although they involve irreconcilable values, use terms which are near-identical, and can smoothly deflect the unwary from one path to another without them being aware of what is happening. The ability to recognize one path from other misleading ones is therefore an attribute of inestimable value, and the contribution of

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7 Such as Charles Davis and Sarah Coakley.
8 Such as Robert Hamerton-Kelly.
1 Thesis Description

Brueggemann and Girard to assembling and defending the skill-set involved is evaluated closely.

The thesis goes on, in *When the Sub-Version Surfaces*, to consider the idea of prophecy as "sub-version". This double-entendre suggests a re-imagination of the world according to alternative criteria, the effect of which is to subvert the status quo. It notes the view of Brueggemann that it is only 'limit situations' when everything seems to have reached a nadir, that permit a new relationship with God to emerge (Brueggemann is following Paul Ricoeur to some extent, and has the support of David Tracy). That relationship is expressed in new terms drawn from the disastrous situation ('limit expressions', to use Ricoeur's term). The rescue is inherent in the disaster; the new covenant is born of the collapse of the age.

Part 4: Synthesis

This section is one of evaluation and conclusion, in which the initial findings of Part 1 are re-examined and the analysis of Parts 2 & 3 critically appraised, to establish if the joint perspective has a synergy and enhanced value. The findings are of course not yet fully known, but it will be the case that they are defined according to the predicament or type of situation in which society finds itself at any time. This aspect has already been examined by Ricoeur and by Tracy, and the 'limit situations' of which they speak, in which times of trauma and collapse in society become opportunities for new paradigms to emerge. There is therefore the possibility of authentic relationship with God to displace what Brueggemann calls ‘the royal consciousness’, in which the controlling hand of human power fixes attitudes and turns them inward upon itself.

Whether such opportunities are likely to lead to a brighter future remains to be assessed, given Girard’s concerns about the likely future of mankind in some of his major books (*Violence and the Sacred, Things Hidden for the*
1 Thesis Description

*Foundation of the World* and *The Scapegoat, for instance*, which tend to be bound to catastrophe and final collapse. However, the double perspective of both Brueggemann and Girard, taken together, may deliver another view.
2 Methodology

This thesis is to be understood as an investigation by a practical theologian. ‘Practical theology’ is a term here connected not just to the implementation in situations of pastoral care of theology arrived elsewhere\(^9\); but as theology developed in the experience of pastoral situations. The developmental process involved is often a kind of dialogue; a conversation, as Pattison & Woodward put it, between the interlocutor’s own ideas, beliefs and assumptions, those arising from the Christian community and tradition, and the experience of the contemporary situation. \(^10\) Such a synthesis is likely to glide over the normal frontiers of academic disciplines, because it is centred on the human situation and guided by needs. This is a point confronted by Chauvet in a review of the boundaries of theology and anthropology \(^11\); he finds something positive in the blurring of boundaries, and asks if theology might not render anthropology a service, as it has the formative experience of dealing not only with interpretation, but also with “the question of the confessing subject in an object that s/he is nevertheless trying to treat with all the resources of critical reasoning.”

The situation described does indeed affect this thesis. To be a practical theologian, under the interpretation of that subject set out by Pattison & Woodward above, involves forging one’s theology in the context of experience. One’s sense of what it is to be church follows suit. To be authentically theological of course also involves measuring both that experience and biblical texts against one another. Such a process is foundational to the method of this piece of work, hence our reliance on David Tracy’s phrase, “mutually critical correlation”. Tracy notes that many theologians (he singles out Hans Kung) hold to a strictly theological understanding of the church, and resist any “strict reduction... to solely sociological terms”. \(^12\) But Tracy urges both those who fear reductionism and

\(^11\) Chauvet, L-M, in Sweeney et al., 2010, p.160.
\(^12\) Tracy, 1981, p.24.
2 Methodology

those who practice it to note Peter Berger's point: “the sociologist must examine the church on functional grounds just as one studies any other social reality.”13 Tracy concludes that as the church is both a sociological and a theological reality, then a correlation model is the appropriate one for relating the two understandings. He refers to the similar process in use between theology and philosophy.

This is very appropriate to the two writers under consideration here. Brueggemann is himself a preacher, and so brings a particular experience to bear on the development of theory, particularly where prophecy is concerned. His interpretation of the Old Testament rests on the socio-literary method, developed significantly by his associate Gottwald.

Girard, though not a practitioner in this sense, as an anthropologist is concerned with the history of experience. He writes on theological matters, but is somewhat reliant on Schwager to act as an interface between his work and the theological mainstream. The extent of this interplay is newly apparent in the unpublished letters we have reviewed.14

Therefore, we might view the secondary pairing of writers, Brueggemann-Gottwald and Girard-Schwager, as already embodying the kind of correlation of which Tracy speaks. Bringing together Girard and Brueggemann naturally brings this dynamic with it, and results in a rich assembly of perspectives around the subjects of prophecy and sacrifice. The view is composite not just in terms of involving multiple scholars, but also because of their stance in relation to several disciplines.

Having recognized and framed this context, the aim has been to let these two writers ‘talk’ to each other, for the thinking of one to interrogate the other. However, the two do not face one another along an even front; there is not a

13 Ibid.
2 Methodology

precise correspondence between the two which enables straight exchanges on all occasions. Where the dialogue has needed to be kick-started, the thinking of a number of other writers has proved valuable. This is explored in the next chapter.

Prophecy and sacrifice represent mental categories which many people will consider passé and mainly of historical interest within today's secularized society. Berger, reviewing the process of secularization, states that it “affects the totality of cultural life and of ideation”\(^{15}\), and the ideation of prophecy and sacrifice are amongst the casualties of this.

In previous ages, a world view applied which looked to the creator as the source of order, and noted that fallen humanity tends to descend into chaos or anomy. Under those circumstances, and within Judaism, sacrifice became a protection against that effect and the catastrophe that tends to flow from it; prophecy the advice on how to avoid it. That scheme was progressively interpreted in different ways within Christianity, and sacrifice became identified with the Mass, in which the supreme sacrifice of Christ is forever perpetuated. As such, the basic scheme held up to the end of the middle ages.

It is not controversial to suggest that an effect of the Enlightenment has been to view biblical texts as purported historical accounts, and test them as such for veracity. Under this perspective, the identification of order with God as ‘designer’ first increased and then, with the advance of science, declined. Science has, for many, replaced the idea of God as the supreme rationalist with its own structure, which often has no place for God, and thus no place for sacrifice as a guarantor of order. Under these circumstances prophecy, as a call to God’s correct service, loses a major part of its justification, too.

The present predicament of prophecy and sacrifice is therefore that they are often not thought of as having much actual usefulness any more. Their

2 Methodology

present reality in terms of the lived experience is doubted, as their link to the causation of the world seems to have withered.

This situation is part of the contemporary dominant version of reality, and forms a natural starting point for this study. Therefore, an objectivist approach, relying on historical method does not seem helpful. Instead, our chosen stance in reviewing these subjects is primarily subjectivist; ontologically, we have been concerned with the nature of these two concepts as found in the lived experience as writers have reported it. This enables us to countenance pre-scientific understandings much more ‘on the level’ than would otherwise be the case: in Brueggemann, analysis of specific situations described in biblical texts (like the Babylonian exile); in Girard, narrative accounts which may not seem to be factually historical at all, but drawn from literature –myths, novels and of course, accounts in the Bible such as the Book of Job.

Method of interpretation and analysis

The idea of a mutually critical correlation of the two writers’ work\(^\text{16}\), of course is intended to give a binocular view of the thinking of Girard and Brueggemann - a sort of inter-subjectivity. But the composite approach to the two writers’ work must involve a relativist perspective, where realities are developed in the form of a variety of mental constructions. This is the case even when the author's project is expressed as a kind of realist constructivism (as Girard’s is).

The realities are socially and experientially based, and in some cases local (for instance, local to contemporary North America, or Israel in the Babylonian exile). They are dependent on the individuals or groups holding

\(^{16}\) Tracy, 1981, pp 24 & 27.
2 Methodology

them. In other cases, large scale speculative reconstruction is involved, for instance in relation to what the process or event of ‘hominization’ might comprise. Considerable challenges exist in bringing together two approaches of such diverse origin, and in using one to comment on, and to extend, the other.

The knowledge claimed in relation to the biblical concepts of prophecy and sacrifice, is of course expressed in the shadow of an absolute, which is felt if not defined by both authors: the central imperatives of the Christian faith. The conjunction of an absolute with questioning enquiry is of course both the predicament and the driving force of theology. Here, that enquiry deals with fallibilistic thinking at various levels and in several eras in human society. The key factor for Girard, Brueggemann and for the present writer is what is transformational; a transformational effect is seen as a sign of prophecy and sacrifice having a reality, at that cultural point, as religious concepts.

What is not possible is any form of positivist validation. Instead, the confluence of inductive approaches is being experimented with, and trustworthiness of conclusions is involved. Where interpretation is involved, the findings are examined as to their probable credibility to each of the two major authors concerned. Where transferability is concerned, only working hypotheses are abstracted, since little if anything can truly be said to be confirmable; much depends on the understanding of cultures and systems, the formative effect of the cultural-linguistic framework, experience and patterns of experience, and that most elusive of skills, the distillation of meaning from text.

The methodology of this thesis therefore involves a basis of qualitative methods and interpretive tools and techniques. The process of interpretation is essentially one that stretches flexible concepts. The aim is to have as an outcome a body of material which will be useful in understanding how processes (sacrifice and prophecy) can be usefully employed in the future to
2 Methodology

produce something which is of benefit in its actual context of time and culture.

Biblical Concepts & Epistemic Territory

In undertaking this project, it has been important to define what a biblical concept is\(^{17}\), and to use the answer, complex as it is, to identify the epistemic territory in which Brueggemann and Girard respectively choose to mount their campaign. The fact that these territories are significantly different hinders direct comparison to a degree, but in a broader sense enhances the comparison. Views can be defined over against one another, and, as it were, throw each other into a perspective. However, the complexity involved puts paid to any idea that the correlation takes place within any circumscribed existing discipline; rather, it overflows the barriers and occupies a territory defined by itself. It is telling that the strap-line to *To Double Business Bound* (1978) is 'Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology', as though mimesis were an academic discipline on a par with others, or that Girard has already made it so.

The personal definition of subject area is not an entirely new one, but is an emerging feature of the present time. As Charles Davis has commented,

> “Take for example, the work of Michel Foucault. Is it philosophy, history, sociology or political science? Again, where would one place the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida? Under the guise of literary theory it has profoundly changed the enterprise of literary criticism, and some think it is finally bringing to an end the hegemony of historical criticism in the theory and practice of biblical interpretation. With a nod towards Thomas Kuhn we could say that across the social sciences and humanities there is a search for new paradigms.”\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) See Chapter 4.

\(^{18}\) Davis, 1989, p.311.
2 Methodology

So, we might accept that theology has a developing scope, and that its conventional limits, as defined in the nineteenth century, have been left behind. The new categories of method such as the historical and socio-literary, which emerged in the twentieth century, are now being surpassed in a general collapse of normal categories in post-modern thought.

Brueggemann shows a mild case of this syndrome, as he defines his own variety of literary analysis. However, he remains a theologian and does not stray much outside that discipline.

Girard, in contrast, shows a much more extreme example of thinking which not only crosses boundaries between disciplines, but seems to mix them and even explode them. Of course, he does not have a formal background in theology, and in a sense conventional theology is not his starting point, though he voyages about in it. His perspective is developed through his background in literature and in history, and this is the underlying influence. He has done some work in anthropology, and his status in that discipline is much the same as it is in theology: he is to some extent a self-educated man, who has carved out his own subject area. The assembly of all these subjects into a complex, Girardian view is conspicuously unique.

The binocular view which we shall assemble from the work of these two writers therefore includes a complex layering of theology and Girardian thinking which crosses and stretches the traditional boundaries of disciplines, theology being only one such.

Socio-Literary and Socio-Religious Approaches in Brueggemann and Girard

Before embarking on an examination of various genres of biblical criticism, it will be worth asking informally, what do Brueggemann and Girard seem to be doing, in relation to religious understandings?
2 Methodology

With Brueggemann, it becomes apparent almost immediately that he is concerned with the formation of literature in historical situations, and the literature produced is found to carry a truth not limited to the historical context. He is writing about ideas of social criticism in a biblical context; hence the uncontroversial application of the socio-literary tag to his work.

Girard, on the other hand, is hardly interested in any supposed historical facts, but only in accounts of human relations, no matter what vehicle is in use to illustrate them in action. Therefore, to him, myth, fiction and religious accounts are all valuable and he does not seem to prioritize one above another or ever apply any sort of evidential test other than to ask, what are the actual effects of various kinds of behaviour, societal structure, law, or emotion?

That old-established standard of biblical criticism, the historical-critical method, seems to be at once taken for granted and dismissed by both writers. They do not spend time criticizing it, but nor do they seem to consider it even worth commenting on its previously pre-eminent position in biblical studies. In the case of Girard, this may at first seem surprising, given his background in history. Apparently, it is assumed by both writers just to represent a previous mode of thinking, not useful for either of their projects.

In fact, it is Norman Gottwald, (notable for his influence upon Brueggemann), who notably sets out the pattern of recent approaches to biblical criticism. He deals firstly with doctrinal approaches, and then with post-renaissance methods which he describes as ‘scientific’; that is, they study and cross-reference source, form, authorship, history and archaeology in a forensic way, sometimes with conclusions synthesised between methods.

He then moves on to new literary and social science approaches, and considers two paradigms:

“Two related sets of methods have emerged...One is the paradigm of the Hebrew Bible as a literary production that creates its own fictive world of meaning and is to be understood first and foremost, if not exclusively, as a
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lit<e>erary medium, that is, as words that conjure up their own imaginative reality. The other is the paradigm of the Hebrew Bible as a social document that reflects the history of changing social structures, functions, and roles in ancient Israel over a thousand years or so, and which provides an integral context in which the literary, historical, and religious features of the Israelite/Jewish people can be reviewed and interconnected." \(^{19}\)

The first of these two methods – literary production - in a way summarises the starting point of both Brueggemann and Girard, different as they are. But Gottwald is of course doing little more than summarising trends which many others have commented on. For instance, Chauvet expresses the service which anthropology can render to theology, requiring theologians "to rethink from scratch a certain number of classical questions within theology". \(^{20}\) Peter Berger, in The Sacred Canopy, and Berger and Luckmann in The Social Construction of Reality demonstrate how these trends help understandings of religion and the delineation of reality itself.

It will be apparent that this type of approach fits well with Girard's project, which looks for truths about society first, and reconciles those to the biblical texts and to theology second. But Brueggemann is not all that interested in the history of social structures, but only in their ability to demonstrate how circumstance impinges on the human ability to interface with God and to articulate understandings of God's will for the world in ways that fly in the face of the status quo of the moment. It is in the sheer radicalism of the moment of prophecy that the reconciliation to social method lies; Brueggemann's focus on prophecy produces an interest in the social structures that are inimical to it, and in contrast, the fertile ground: exile, subversion, the conditions that generate protests and protestors.

There is a subtlety in this, in which an explanation given by Erich Auerbach is helpful. In an essay which draws a contrast between Homer and the Bible, he comments:

\(^{19}\) Gottwald, 2009, p.11. The emphases are original.
\(^{20}\) Chauvet, 2010, p.159.
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"I have said...the Homeric style was 'of the foreground' because, despite much going back and forth, it yet causes what is narrated to give the impression that it is the only present, pure and without perspective. A consideration of the Elohistic\textsuperscript{21} text teaches us that our term is capable of a broader and deeper application. It shows us that even the separate personages can be represented as possessing 'background'. God is always so represented in the Bible, as he is not comprehensible in his presence, as is Zeus. It is always 'something' of him that appears, he always extends into depths.

...Abraham's actions are explained not only by what is happening to him at the moment, nor yet only by his character...but by his previous history; he remembers, he is constantly conscious of, what God has promised him- his soul is torn between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation; his silent obedience is multilayered, has background."\textsuperscript{22}

This gives a powerful clue as to how Brueggemann uses socio-literary method to interpret the content of the Old Testament. Making use of the in-built, internal historical perspective which Auerbach notes, he is able to reference prophecy in terms of cycles of liberty and slavery, prosperity and deprivation, settled existence and journey or exile, and note how these conditions relate to apprehensions of God and his Word: the background protrudes into the present, and provides as it were an index for recalibrating human understandings. This is an index of prophecy’s effectiveness in driving for changed understandings, including understandings of what sacrifice it is that God requires of us.

\textsuperscript{21} A reference to some of the sections of the earlier books of the Old Testament characterised by the naming of God as ‘Elohim’, a plural understanding of God realised in the world as presences in situations in immaterial or in human form. The spirits or angels concerned in these positions had God as ‘background’. God himself (El) is a being who is incomprehensible and so cannot be identified as a totality, but only recognized in ‘aspects’.

\textsuperscript{22} Auerbach, 1953, p.12.
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Research Questions

The overarching question addressed by this thesis is “Are the biblical concepts of prophecy and sacrifice effectively reclaimed by Girard and Brueggemann, considered together, and if so, to what extent and in what form?” This is a statement about the outcomes of these writers’ work, not their intentions.

The question can be related in part to each section of the thesis, as follows:

Part 1: Concepts and versions of reality

Investigate ‘biblical concepts’, the ‘dominant version of reality’, and relate to prophecy and sacrifice.

Part 2: The fading concept of sacrifice

Investigate the Christian concept of sacrifice and place it in its context; examine its effectiveness.

Part 3: Prophecy: outdated and never outdated

Examine the meaning of prophecy, ancient and modern, its relationship to the dominant version of reality, and the meaning that might be found in it.

Part 4: Synthesis

A general conclusion is made in chapter 20: The Reclamation Assessed

Outcomes: the end product; to whom the research will become available.

This thesis will not attempt to become a handbook or manual for practitioners for whom sacrifice and prophecy either are, or might become, part of the religious foreground. It will stop short of that, but provide the basic investigation on which such a handbook might in the future be
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founded. It is the author's intention to embark on this second project at a later stage. Therefore, the success criteria for this piece of work are to use academic method to explore the valency of one writer's thinking for the work of the other, and to attempt a synthesis. The process of carrying out this work, it is anticipated, will throw up insights and perspectives on prophecy and sacrifice which will, in due course, become useful for practitioners in understanding and pursuing the usefulness of these concepts in the present day, within Western culture.
René Girard

René Girard (born 1923), is a French polymath, long resident in the USA. His initial academic work was in medieval history, but by the time he took his PhD in 1950, his interest had broadened into the history of the modern era, and into literature. He taught both subjects at Indiana University, then at Duke University and Bryn Mawr College, then at Johns Hopkins University, where he became professor in 1961. Positions at the State University of New York and Stanford followed; he was professor of French Language, Literature and Civilisation at Stanford until 1995.

Girard’s first book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, came out in 1961 in its initial, French language version. Since then, his thought has led him into other fields. His main achievement, put simply, has been to articulate a radical theory of human behaviour, which many have found to be meaningful, and to give insight into basic problems of society and the function of religion. His ideas involve an understanding of how human behaviour is formed from the earliest stage by a process of imitation, which he calls ‘mimesis’; and of how desire itself is driven very powerfully by imitation, so that what is desired is what another person is seen to already possess. Thus desire tends to develop into a spiral of rivalry, leading to violence. There is, therefore, a pattern of linkages: human behaviour generally and imitation, desire and imitation, desire and violence, and imitation and violence; all are tied together in a continuum, which, according to Girard, is both concealed from its participants and self-generating among them; it is the general condition of humanity. It also tends to generate a distance from God. As Girard puts it, “a natural desire for God exists, and mimesis does not attach itself to this...but (is) immediately deviated towards human models by original sin.”

The mechanism for controlling the tendency to a mounting spiral of imitative violence is scapegoating: this redirects violence away from the rivals and onto a third party, thus exhausting the aggression and enabling

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23 Girard-Schwager 1975-91, p.181 The author is aware that these letters are informal, private documents not intended for publication, the value of which is to give an insight to the development of thought rather than to define final positions.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

reconciliation of the rivals. This is the function of religion. This process by its nature redefines truth and paints an alternative world-view, one in which the basis of blame or hostility is shifted to permit positive relations between either human parties or human parties and God, where previously there had been some perceived problem.

The mimetic process therefore works through violence and depends on it, but also has the parallel effect of limiting violence and securing peace. Religion is the vehicle for this: it brings harmony by enacting this process as the ritual of sacrifice. Religion, in Girard’s view, is fundamentally linked to violence, and cannot be understood without this link. Girard claims that ‘the victimage process is the basis of religion’. Religion plays a double game throughout: the law by prohibiting desire, awakens desire.

Girard also claims that the hidden nature of the mimetic process, which leads to victimage and sacrifice, is essential to its power and effectiveness. When it is exposed, it loses its power, because the participants, made aware of what is happening, can opt out of it; it is the particular achievement of Jesus that he articulates this exposure, and thus paves the way for a new order not basically formed by violence and its mechanisms. However, the final consequences of this move may be apocalyptic, as the restraining power of the victimage process is neutralised along with the hidden tendency. In the absence of the deflection of blame onto a third party, it becomes more possible for violence to develop and become completely uncontrolled and therefore catastrophic.

Girard’s theory of behaviour, with its link to religion, can be seen as a very complete one, though some significant critics dissent from claims made for his thought (mainly by his followers) as a comprehensive analysis, the

24 Girard, 1978, Chapter 1, p.3ff.
25 Girard-Schwager 1975-1991, p.8. Girard quotes Romans 7:7, “I would not have known what is was to covet if the law had not said; you are not to covet.” However, that is not to say that the mimetic tendency and the law have the same origin. They do not, according to Schwager, and thus the Law does not disappear when sacrifice does. Girard-Schwager 1975-91, p.14.
26 Such as Rowan Williams and Sarah Coakley.
27 Such as Robert Hamerton-Kelly.
totalizing effect of which seems to make some other approaches redundant.\textsuperscript{28}

In recent years, Girard has been notably modest in his own claims for his work,\textsuperscript{29} and has backed away from some of his earlier opinions in favour of a less extreme approach which is more accommodating to other scholarship, particularly on the subject of sacrifice.

Outline of Girard’s work

Girard’s thinking emerged from a study of literature, particularly the work of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. It was in these studies that his ideas on mimesis began to emerge. In a second phase of writing, these ideas were further developed into a coherent theoretical scheme; the third phase sees a number of refinements to his major theories, some relatively minor excursions, and, in Evolution and Conversion, a late, and possibly final, ingathering. Overall, the picture might be sketched out briefly like this:

\textbf{Phase 1}

Deceit, Desire and the Novel 1961 (1965)\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Phase 2}

Violence and the Sacred 1972 (1977)
The Scapegoat 1982 (1986)

\textsuperscript{28} For instance, Andrew Lascaris OP, who has expounded Girard’s hypothesis on several occasions in New Blackfriars, states “even I…consider (Girard’s) hypothesis to be less embracing than Girard sometimes seems to think”. New Blackfriars 70 (1989), p.416.

\textsuperscript{29} As in his interview with Rebecca Adams (Adams & Girard, 1993).

\textsuperscript{30} Dates in parentheses here indicate publication dates for English language versions.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

Phase 3
Conversation with René Girard: Interview with Rebecca Adams (1993)
I See Satan Fall Like Lightning  1999 (2001)
Evolution and Conversion (2007)
Battling to the End  (2010)

Of course, the whole picture is more complex and less tidy than this, but nevertheless, this is a fair representation of the general shape of Girard’s output. In addition, *Things Hidden* stands out in this analysis as a watershed; the point at which Girard’s emphasis shifted to the central importance of the Christian Gospels in defining the mimetic problem and its solution.

Definitively human behaviour

Girard is much concerned with a theory of ‘hominization’, establishing a point of development at which humanity takes on a recognizable form. At this stage, according to Girard, the species also begins to display imitative traits, involving desire and violence in a unified pattern. This pattern, ‘mimesis’, is claimed to be universally human and definitive of the species, though it exists in animals to a lesser extent. It feeds into other human phenomena: sacrifice and the scapegoating process are linked and are the salient effects. Girard gives these effects foundational status in the human and social sciences, and he remarks that he is not the first to do so. However, as we shall see, there is now evidence that some of his broader assertions about hominization cannot be sustained, and it seems that some revision, and, to be blunt, dilution of his theory is now very likely.

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31 “With its comparative method and vast accumulation of material on dying or dead religions, ethnological research has hastened the transformation of religion into a scientific problem, without ever resolving that problem. Ethnologists have devoted much of their theorizing to the questions of religious origins and the nature of religions. Roughly from 1860 to 1920, the solution seemed excitingly close. One can detect a common desire to be the first to write an ethnological equivalent to *On the Origin of Species*; an ‘Origin of Religions’ would play the same decisive role in the human and social sciences that Darwin’s great book has played in the life sciences.” Girard, 1987, p.3.
Religion, considered in this way, is the control mechanism for mimetic rivalry, under Girard’s theory. The need for such control arises from the nature of the human brain, which is “an enormous imitating machine”\textsuperscript{32}. That is, there is the physical basis for much greater imitative action than within other species, \textit{and for processing the effects of such action}. He notes that the higher apes display acquisitive mimesis, and observes that these are important traits of behaviour which foreshadow human characteristics\textsuperscript{33}, particularly when the imitator is seen to resist temptation and withdraw. He claims that the purpose of the withdrawal is to prevent conflict (though this point has been contentious within psychology and ethnology\textsuperscript{34}), and takes that as a jumping-off point for his observations on human behaviour. In other words, he identifies hominization with developed mimetic behaviour, but acknowledges antecedent behaviour in the primates. Hominization involves a step-change in which mimesis becomes much more important.

Recently, investigations into animal behaviour have established that animals have more extended imitative patterns of behaviour than Girard seems to assume, and use redirected aggression which, in human terms, we call scapegoating. This has been reported on by David Barash, a psychologist at the University of Washington, Seattle, specialising in the underlying evolutionary factors influencing human behaviour\textsuperscript{35}.

The discovery would seem to undermine a key feature of Girard’s theory of hominization, and therefore a serious diminution of Girard’s scheme, as the criteria he gives for hominization become less distinct. However, the revelation, though serious in itself, would not detract from a less particular but broader claim that mimesis is part of animal socialization. This includes human socialization, in which it is more developed and much more apparent.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.7.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.8.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p.11.
\textsuperscript{35} David Barash gave a paper entitled “Payback: retaliation, redirected aggression and revenge in animals and humans” at the Girard-Darwin conference ‘Surviving our Origins’ Cambridge, May 2011. The paper “suggests that it provides a hitherto unappreciated way of understanding the phenomenon of scapegoating, at the level of societies as well as individuals.” It notes “the catharsis of redirected violence” as a factor operating in animals as well as in humans. Barash, 2011.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

Indeed, abandoning the idea of hominization as an entry point, but retaining it as a developmental point for mimesis may strengthen the theory, and help to avoid some of the criticisms of unsupportable absolute assertions that tend towards Gnosticism\(^\text{36}\).

In any case, Girard’s thinking projects back into human prehistory a theory of culture which, as Paul Dumouchel comments, is astonishing in the comprehensiveness of its derivation, and of its application:

“Beginning from literary criticism, and ending up with a general theory of culture, through an explanation of the role of religion in primitive societies and a radical reinterpretation of Christianity, René Girard has completely modified the landscape of the social sciences. Ethnology, history of religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology and literary criticism are explicitly mobilized in this enterprise. Theology, economics and political sciences history and sociology – in short, all the social sciences, and those that used to be called moral sciences – are influenced by it.”\(^\text{37}\)

The Involuntary Nature of Mimesis

Jean-Michel Oughourlian, a psychiatrist and collaborator of Girard’s, is also his interlocutor in *Things Hidden*. He puts the point:

“We are at the point of asking just how far back in human or pre-human history the victimage mechanism should be situated. If this mechanism is the foundation for everything that is human in man, for humanity’s most ancient institutions, such as hunting or the incest prohibition, the question then becomes the process of hominization, or in other words the transition from animal to man.”\(^\text{38}\)

Oughourlian has pursued this matter in his own, more recent, book *The Genesis of Desire*\(^\text{39}\). Drawing upon the work of the neuroscientist V.S.

\(^{36}\) Coakley, 2009, amongst others, makes this accusation.

\(^{37}\) Dumouchel, 1988, p.23.

\(^{38}\) Girard, 1978, p.84.

\(^{39}\) Oughourlian, 2010., p.12. Oughourlian describes the meaning for him of mimetic theory as follows:
Ramanandran, he refers to scientific evidence that mimetic behaviour comes from the existence of 'mirror neurons' in the brain. These mirror neurons developed only about 40,000 years ago, although the brain achieved its full modern size about a million years before that. But it is the emergence of mirror neurons which truly marks the point of hominization, when imitative behaviour greatly expanded the possibilities for learning, and the pace at which it could proceed. Reviewing the work of Ramachandran, he describes how humans might be termed the "Machiavellian Primate". This refers to their ability to "read minds", or predict the behaviour of other people, and steal a march on them. He then enquires as to how this ability came about, and whether a special 'circuit' in the brain is involved.

The solution, Ramachandran finds, comes from a study of single neurons in monkeys by Giacomo Rizzolati, in which experimental evidence was found to support the idea of mimetic mechanisms being at work. He claimed that 'mirror neurons' and the behaviour they support represent a large, significant area of biology which previously has proved mysterious and inaccessible, but which can now be seen to account for certain mental abilities. Ramachandran interprets Rizzolati's findings as follows: certain neurons fire when specific actions are undertaken, but also fire when the same action is observed.

"Over the years, my clinical practice as a psychiatrist has enabled me to assess the great therapeutic value of the mimetic theory. Every day I find myself amazed by its power to elucidate complex situations that might at first seem simply irrational. And I still feel surprised to see how many troubled couples are really prisoners of that mimetic mechanism working on them without their awareness. Jealousy, lust, rivalry, indifference can work their way into the heart of a relationship by way of the very force of desire that brought them there in the first place. How can we understand such a strange paradox? The true nature of desire, its mimetic character, along with our denial of the truth, leads us ceaselessly to copy within ourselves the desires of everyone we encounter, subjecting ourselves to their influence, and by that very act of imitation, making them into rivals and obstacles to what we think are our own desires."

40 Ramachandran, 2000. Ramachandran refers to Giacomo Rizzolati’s discovery of mirror neurons in the ventral premotor area of monkeys. Rizzolati noted the importance of these neurons to language evolution, and Ramachandran extends this thinking.
41 1.5 litres.
"With knowledge of these neurons, you have the basis for understanding a host of very enigmatic aspects of the human mind: "mind reading" empathy, imitation learning, and even the evolution of language. Anytime you watch someone else doing something (or even starting to do something), the corresponding mirror neuron might fire in your brain, thereby allowing you to "read" and understand another's intentions...Mirror neurons can also enable you to imitate the movements of others ...(and)...these neurons may also enable you to mime — and possibly understand — the lip and tongue movements of others which, in turn, could provide the opportunity for language to evolve. (This is why, when you stick your tongue out at a newborn baby it will reciprocate!) Once you have these two abilities in place the ability to read someone's intentions and the ability to mime their vocalizations then you have set in motion the evolution of language." 45

Overall, this brief summary of Ramachandran's thinking seems to support the foundations of Girard's theory, even if it rather complicates the idea of hominization.

However, that discovery was still in the future in 1978 when Oughourlian put the question to Girard, who answered in anthropological terms, and claimed that

"The advantage of our hypothesis over psychoanalysis or Marxism lies in the elimination of false specificities of the human being. If you begin with the incest prohibition, the economic motive, or socio-political oppression, you can never really pose the problem of hominization and the origin of symbolic systems on the basis of human nature, whereas precisely this needs to be done if we are to renounce once and for all providing ourselves with answers in advance of every problem we confront. The notion of the father does not exist among apes. Subdominant animals will let themselves die of hunger rather than challenge dominant animals for their food. If we can manage to think through the process of hominization, beginning with acquisitive mimesis, and the conflicts it provokes, we will escape the legitimate objection of using a vicious circle to determine an origin..."46

45 Ibid.
46 Girard, 1978, p.89.
This stance takes on a new importance and profundity in the light of the recent discoveries which Ramachandran describes. Mimesis is a defining attribute of human nature (which is therefore determined by it\textsuperscript{47}), and, under the scientific perspective, mimetic behaviour is free of any moral value or association, characterized only by evolutionary value. However, Girard, closely involved as he is with the idea of moral outcomes from human behaviour, is inclined in his earlier work to talk of mimesis as though its essence involves morally negative tendencies (though he later corrects and moderates his previously expressed opinions\textsuperscript{48}). From this point on, we shall therefore speak of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ mimesis.

That leaves us with something of a philosophical gap between the observed existence of mirror neurons, which give humans the propensity to copy, and learn by copying, and Girard’s anthropological hypothesis: the idea of mimetic copying. Girard’s idea is well-developed and logically argued at length from an anthropological and historical standpoint\textsuperscript{49}, but requires acceptance of a starting point: that the propensity to copy leads to desire and rivalry, and that human evil largely springs from that linkage. That point is the essence of Girardian thought. However, Girard, while recognizing mirror neurons as a fact about humanity, shows little interest in getting involved in the detail. In an interview published in *Mimesis and Science* (2011), Girard comments:

“...we know that what mirror neurons demonstrate is true, even if we don’t have a precise explanation for it.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} Oughourlian, as a practicing psychiatrist, certainly believes it is a determining factor: “It is through research, practice and clinical observation that I have come to understand that all human relations are governed by one and the same principle: a ‘universal mimesis’ from which no-one can extricate himself and which operates within us inexorably. It is the nature itself of our desire that makes us imitate one another ceaselessly and remain always under the influence of those around us.” Oughourlian, 2010, p.13.

\textsuperscript{48} Girard, ed. Williams, 1996. Ch. 5, (an extract from an interview of René Girard by Rebecca Adams) deals with the idea of the goodness of mimetic desire. Girard says (p.63), “Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father. So the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense. It is true, however, that occasionally I say ‘mimetic desire’, when I really mean only the type of mimetic desire that generates mimetic rivalry and, in turn, is generated by it.”

\textsuperscript{49} Girard, 1977 *Violence and the Sacred* carries this argument throughout.

\textsuperscript{50} Garrels (ed), 2011, p.242.
Girard is here finding affirmation in this recent discovery of assumptions made at an earlier stage. It is a sort of “I told you so”. Girard’s intuition is distinguished from scientific thought by its engagement with moral and ethical value and the underpinning ideas of good and evil. The strong claims of his earlier work, later moderated, as we have seen, propose that to live under Satan is a natural consequence simply of being human, because hominization, to Girard, is marked by the new, governing importance in human behaviour of mimesis and the victimage process. To be called away from that state is to reject human nature in one of its defining aspects, and to refer to a pre-human state, before the advent of mirror neurons and the vastly more dominant mimetic behaviour they engender (if we are to follow Ramachandran and Oughourlian). It is, therefore, to reject what is built into humans both genetically and through social experience, bearing in mind that the human inheritance in this regard is almost universal, despite cultural variations.

Coakley has used this point to criticise Girard’s thinking in its fit with Christianity:

“Gone, in effect, is the story of the Fall from a state of primary innocence; the Fall here is the foundational state of the human – a sort of debased Calvinism strangely married to the Freudian id.”

It is, in a very real sense, original sin. That makes the consequences of mimetic desire and rivalry as a journey away from God, with no past before that journey to remember, and the voice of prophecy as a call back along that road, or a call to a change of direction towards a destination which can only be imagined. That tends to suggest that if the word ‘exile’ can be used meaningfully to describe the human state when it stands in need of correction. It is an exile in which the memory of the pre-exilic state is

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51 In his later thinking, Girard acknowledges that as all human behaviour is mimetic, and not all behaviour is evil, then good mimesis must exist.
52 Girard deals with the universality of mimetic effects in several of his books, notably *Violence and the Sacred*, and *The Scapegoat*, noting its demonstration in every kind of literature and in the myths and customs of primitive peoples.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

mystical. This will have considerable implications for this study at a later stage.

Mimetics and Memetics

Richard Dawkins has proclaimed a new science of ‘memetics’\(^54\), a term he coined in 1976 to define a view of how habits, skills and behaviours are passed from person to person by imitation\(^55\). The term ‘meme’ which he uses to describe the causality is analogous to ‘gene’. Examples of this in action, according to Blackmore, are “words and stories, TV and radio programmes, famous symphonies or mindless jingles, game and sports, religions, cults and scientific theories”. Dawkins singles out religions (to which he is hostile) as ‘viruses of the mind’, a term which suggests that they use memetics in a particularly effective (and, he would say, pernicious) way.

Although Dawkins’s theory is effective as an analogue of how ideas gain currency, once looked at closely it contains some unsubstantiated claims as to entities such as ‘units of imitation’, which may or may not have much substance of meaning. René Girard’s parallel theory of ‘mimesis’\(^56\), which is based upon human relations rather than the replication of ideas arguably offers a more helpful insight into human culture\(^57\), but Dawkins’s analogue is thought by some to provide a useful basis for looking at phases of growth and decline in ideas and their expression.

Above all, and perhaps ironically, Dawkins’s memetics offer a graphic way of understanding ‘groupthink’, which is nowhere seen in more voracious form than it is in the sacrificial and scapegoating process which Girard considers so central to social formation. Similarly, groupthink is a feature of the times against which prophecy ranges itself.

\(^{54}\) in *The Selfish Gene*, 1976.
\(^{55}\) Blackmore, Susan, in *The new science of memetics: the case for*, in *Think*, issue 5 Autumn 2003
\(^{56}\) Mimetics and memetics both refer to a mechanism which can be ‘viral’, and over which humans have little control. The two terms have a common derivation from the Greek μίμησις (mimesis).
Mimetic Desire & the Sense of Being Individual

'Desire as the first seed of the mind'\textsuperscript{58} is an ancient piece of wisdom, and one with which Girard would concur; it has been a foundation of his thinking since his first book, \textit{Deceit, Desire and the Novel}. Children imitate their parents and each other unthinkingly, but with adults, there is the additional factor that they may wish to \textit{appear} as original thinkers, not imitators, and to set fashions rather than follow them:

"The adult likes to assert his independence and offer himself as a model to others; he invariably falls back on the formula 'Imitate me!' in order to conceal his own lack of originality."\textsuperscript{59}

However, despite this, desire is essentially mimetic and we are all imitators. Whilst similarity in a general way might make for harmony, the danger inherent in the convergence of desires is rivalry. Imitation is a primary impulse, but it is also resisted when the imitation is perceived as a kind of theft or impersonation. Girard says the primary injunction is “imitate me”, and the secondary, “do not appropriate my object!” \textsuperscript{60}

That means that the mediation of desires\textsuperscript{61} is a societal process of some delicacy. It is developed to a high level by the market economy and particularly by the fashion industry in the contemporary West, which, as Kirwan points out, is adept at suggesting that acquiring the object of mimetic desire involves a sort of expiation or release. Desire is a source of torment, and a number of novelists, particularly Dostoevsky\textsuperscript{62}, have developed their plots around this idea.

\textsuperscript{58} Antonello & de Castro Rocha in Girard, 2007, p.5; they credit this quotation to the Sanskrit: Rig-Veda 10.129.4.
\textsuperscript{59} Girard, 1977, p.146.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, p.147.
\textsuperscript{61} Kirwan, 2004, p.19.
\textsuperscript{62} For instance, in \textit{The Eternal Husband}. 
In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Girard develops the idea of mimetic contagion, and the biblical injunction against it. He takes the example of the stoning of a supposedly guilty (but actually innocent) victim, and notes that the imitative action of an initially reluctant crowd to join in the grisly process is due to the fact that they are given a model to follow: someone casts the first stone, and a threshold has been passed and after that, it becomes easier to join in with the brutal execution and to find ways of justifying it. For identical reasons, Jesus is successful in protecting the woman taken in adultery, by insisting, “let he who is without sin cast the first stone”. That is, Jesus challenges the confidence of any first-mover present, and by deterring the ones who might become the prime movers and models, removes the power of the remainder of the crowd to act.

The contagion of violence is automatic and can only be forestalled when seeded with understanding of the automatic process. It is this understanding which enables voluntary action, ‘good’ or ‘positive’ mimesis.

**Girard and Positive Mimesis**

In recent years, both Girard and Oughourlian have argued against the idea that mimetic impulses are irresistible. Oughourlian claims that although mimesis is a universal mechanism, desire can be rejected. Girard said, in an interview with Rebecca Adams, that mimetic control of behaviour, though natural and compelling, is something that can be modified:

“RA:  So are you saying that mimesis, imitation and the violence it engenders is extremely powerful like a current in a river, but it is not as if a person cannot resist it?

RG:  Even if persons cannot resist it, they can convert away from it.

RA:  But again, that’s the idea of the renunciation of the will, isn’t it?”

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64 Oughourlian, 2010, p.27.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

RG: ...as to whether I am advocating ‘renunciation’ of mimetic desire, yes and no. Not the renunciation of mimetic desire itself, because what Jesus advocates is mimetic desire. Imitate me, and imitate the Father through me, he says, so it’s twice mimetic. Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father. So the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense.”

‘Good mimesis’ appears as early as 1978 in ‘Things Hidden’; later, Girard further formalized and rebalanced the extension of his thinking on mimesis to include positive aspects. But Robert Hamerton-Kelly, in a summary of mimetic theory arrived at jointly with Girard, but perhaps mainly indicative of what might be termed the conservative Girardian view, has commented on the revisions:

“There have been recent discussions in Girardian circles about the possibility of "good mimesis" and the focus of discussion has at times wavered from imitation as violence to imitation as compassion. On this definition mimesis is necessarily violent, and benign mimesis is the result of meliorative factors in culture, but the first of even these meliorative factors remains violence, the good violence that controls the bad via the ritual of religion.”

“...when mimetic desire is operating it is necessarily competitive and necessarily violent, to be controlled only by the violent mechanism of the surrogate victim.”

The possibility of these linkages is an important one. Primary mimesis, then, according to a leading member of the Girard camp, is imitation as violence, and any positive variant, in which imitation leads away from violence, is secondary and relies on the primary process that automatically leads to violence for its mechanism. This is perhaps distilled selectively from some of Girard’s earlier books. However, it is not the perspective of all Girardians,

66 For instance in Evolution and Conversion: Girard, 2007. See page 430, for instance.
68 Ibid.
and is clearly not the whole story so far as Girard himself is concerned. For instance, Rebecca Adams, following the interview with Girard referred to above, went on to produce a developed theory of loving mimesis or creative mimesis\textsuperscript{69}. Therefore, Girard’s followers pull in two opposite directions.

However, an avenue of theological thought opens up if two propositions are accepted and synthesized: the first comes from Girard, and is that primary, violent mimesis is identified with the process of hominization; the second follows Barker’s suggestions, based on her particular understanding of a number of biblical texts\textsuperscript{70}:

1. There is something hidden about the reality of God and the world which only a particular theological insight can penetrate.

2. Jesus had this insight, and before him the early temple priests had it, according to Barker\textsuperscript{71}. Putting the two together, the insights of Jesus based on those of the early priests (including Moses) expose violent mimesis for what it is, and allow an alternative world view which includes a mimetic cycle of another sort.

3. This scenario is capable of some generalisation: might not all education and training depend upon the setting of positive examples by teachers, mentors and those in positions of leadership? Hauerwas comments:

   “each of the major offices in Israel – king, priest and prophet – also drew its substance from the need for Israel to have a visible exemplar to show how to follow the Lord. What was needed was people who embodied in their lives and work the vocation of Israel

\textsuperscript{69} In Swartley, Willard M. (ed) 2000, Ch.13. Having adapted Girard’s thinking to remove his tendency to scapegoat positive mimetic desire, Adams suggests that Girard’s “mimetic theory becomes much more convincing as a general theory, one on which we might build a common ethic, understanding of human beings, and practice of peacemaking.” (p. 298).

\textsuperscript{70} Barker, 2004, Introduction p1ff.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid,Ch.4 p.75ff.
to ‘walk’ in the ‘way’ of the Lord. The king, the prophet and the priest were judged by how well they dedicated their lives to being suitable models for the people to imitate. As a result there was a clear tendency for the three functions to coalesce in one figure – for example, Moses or the servant in the ‘Servant’ songs of Isaiah.”

Let us now examine a number of key points in this synthesis. At a later stage, it will become clear how they fit together.

Israel’s Understanding of God and Satan, in Opposition to the Natural State of Mankind

If the thinking of Girard is married up with that of Barker and Hauerwas, Israel, particularly in the pre-monarchical period demonstrates itself as a special case which illuminates the abstract issue, because the history of Israel embodies a unique relationship with God and some sort of awareness of the role of active evil, personified in other gods and idols. The special relationship is defined in the Ten Commandments; Girard argues that the tenth commandment is an injunction against desire and acquisitive mimesis:

“Since the objects we should not desire and nevertheless do desire always belong to the neighbour, it is clearly the neighbour who renders them

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73 In discussions about the pre-monarchic period, the only safely authentic texts of the period are the Elohistic ones which survived the redactions of the Deuteronomists. These do not refer to Satan, but are much concerned with other gods who personify opposition to Elohim (as in the first of the Ten Commandments, at Ex. 20:1-17. Barker stresses this aspect, but draws on the book of Revelation for a supporting reference to Satan:

“There is only One God, and to worship anything else is idolatry. An idol is anything man-made - not just a statue. It can be an economic or political system. Idolatry gives a false centre to the Creation, which warps and distorts the whole system. The second of the ten commandments warns that idolatry results in iniquity [a word meaning ‘distortion’], which affects several generations. In his great vision of the day of Judgement in the Book of Revelation, St John heard heavenly voices proclaiming the Kingdom of God on earth, ‘the time for destroying the destroyers of the earth’. Then he saw St Michael and his angels fighting Satan, ‘the deceiver of the whole world’ . The battle against those who destroyed the earth was a battle against those who deceived with false knowledge.” Barker, 2005. Accessed 3 April 2013.

74 Girard, 2001, p.7ff.
desirable...What the tenth commandment sketches, without defining it specifically, is a fundamental revolution in the understanding of desire. „our neighbour is the model for our desires. This is what I call mimetic desire”

The commandment ‘love thy neighbour’ is anti-mimetic in nature; it forbids individuals from engagement in mimetic rivalry. Jesus makes it his particular focus, and re-interprets it in terms of positive action, rather than prohibition.

That being the case, there is an indication at the time of Moses of an exception or counter-process to the mimesis which is normal to humans: as the mimetic process causes a blindness in those who are involved to what is actually happening\(^75\), then the Mosaic prohibition indicates an insight, or lack of blindness. This in itself shows that either mimesis is limited: not operating, or is not operating with its usual totalising power.

Mimesis and the Neighbour Principle

Oughourlian has expanded Girard’s arguments in this area, to the extent that he claims that

1. the self is defined by desire\(^76\), desire being a process which is relational.

2. the self is defined over against God as a consequence of mimetically inferring God’s desires from his actions.

Humanity is an incomplete project until choice is implanted\(^77\). Desire then has the two-stage consequence of firstly creating a sense of self, and secondly of tailoring God’s manifest character to a comparison of some sort with the self. Such a process naturally puts the self at the centre of any picture; man becomes the frame of reference for defining God. However, God

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\(^75\) Ibid., p.15.
\(^76\) Oughourlian, 2010, p.32-35.
\(^77\) Ibid., 64-80. Oughourlian suggests that humanity was completed by the onset of the mimetic process (which is described biblically by the Fall), and by an entry into time, which is an entry into a finite episode within the infinite.
may be put at the centre of an alternative understanding of reality. This will become important in this study when we come to Brueggemann’s idea of prophetic ‘counter-imaginations of reality’.

For this reason, the précis given by Jesus and by Paul of the commandments working on the basis of the principle of ‘you shall love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength’, is ‘love your neighbour as yourself’\(^78\). In other words, put God and your neighbour at the centre of the picture, and do not allow the self to displace them. This could be translated into the terminology of Girard as, “recognize and reject mimetic desire.” Here we might again experiment with the idea of exile: “exile yourself from desire”, or “allow yourself to be removed from the psychological home territory which puts self at the centre”. So the exile from God which tends to be the result of inherent mimetic characteristics active in human behaviour is countered by another exile: the recognition of mimetic desire and rivalry for what it is, and its rejection. This is an exile from the present state of behaviour controlled by mimesis of the negative kind, which defines normal human behaviour and thus inevitably defines society and the standards by which it operates. This idea, too finds a resonance in Brueggemann’s thought.

Renunciation of mimetic desire in the normal sense (in which the self is the beneficiary), by means of its re-direction towards God, is the anti-Satanic principle, and re-direction can only be achieved if desire is renounced. Therefore, the pre-monarchical history of Israel is the key exception to the rule of Satan, which is seen as the principle by which kingdoms generally

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\(^78\) “Love one another even as I have loved you.” [1]

"The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” [2]

"He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” [3]

That is not to say that mimesis was absent from it, or that it was anything like perfect, but that it was not constituted on the basis of mimetic principles, which Girard maintains are also Satanic principles, but constituted against those principles. It therefore represents an intermediate position which, despite many problems, is not ruled by and blinded by the mimetic process, and has a chance of having an authentic aspiration to the kingdom of God, and a willingness, at least from time to time “to take on the yoke of God’s kingship.”

So, making use of Girard’s thinking, we may conclude that the Law handed down to Israel embodies a form of opposition to the mimetic principle. This is something which Jesus interprets and builds upon. His understanding of what the Kingdom of God means is fundamentally bound to that structure.

Importantly for this study, where the idea of kingdom is current, the idea of exile hovers close.

Mimesis Disempowered: Satan overcome by the Cross, anonymously

In their introduction to *Evolution and Conversion*, Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha comment on the centrality to Western culture and ethics of the protection of victims:

"The entire ideological perspective of contemporary culture is, in fact, built on the victimage principle, i.e. on the centrality of victims in all our ethical concerns: the victims of the Shoah, the victims of capitalism, the victims of social injustice, of war, of political persecution, or ecological disasters, of racial, sexual, religious discrimination...the ultimately unattainable goal of Nietzsche's intellectual project, namely, the desire to free the West from its obsession with victims is, according to Girard, one of the proofs of the ineluctability of Christian ethics in Western culture. For this, we all know, is Partly because it was not a kingdom but a theocracy.

According to Schwager, a formula of the rabbinic tradition. Schwager, 1999, p.29.

based on inclusion rather than on exclusion, on universalism rather than on local and partisan allegiances, on forgiveness rather than on retribution."\textsuperscript{82}

Inclusion (the counter-move to the scapegoat process) has triumphed, even at the moment when religion seems to be exhausted:

"The Cross destroys the power of Satan as the 'king of this world', meaning the power to unleash violence through the scapegoat mechanism...Indirectly, therefore, because of our inability to live without scapegoats, Christianity is a source of disruption in our world. Christianity constantly suggests that our scapegoats are nothing but innocent victims."\textsuperscript{83}

"Nietzsche aimed at a deconstruction of Christianity, which he understood correctly as the defence of victims. Our modern nihilists want to deconstruct everything except the defence of victims, which they espouse. Thus, they are a very special form of nihilist: they deny everything except the defence of the victim. In other words, they could not be more Christian than they are, against Christianity of course, but their self-contradiction is becoming obvious."\textsuperscript{84}

The points laid out above are drawn from Girard, and used to arrive at a conclusion which flows naturally from those points but it is not altogether Girard’s own conclusion. He does not say that Israel is the exception to his rule that the mimetic principle is unavoidable within human society and is part of hominization. Rather, he suggests that the rule is universal, but the tendency to follow it is powerfully countermanded by Jesus. There is not necessarily a contradiction here, provided that one allows that the handing down of the Law on Mount Sinai and its acceptance marked appoint of conversion, in which Israel was called away from its naturally hominized state, and prepared as fertile ground for the seed which would be sown by the ministry of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{83} Girard, 2007, p.262.
\textsuperscript{84} Girard, 2007, p.258.
Girard on the New Puritanism of Meaning

In the concluding chapter of Things Hidden, Girard reflects on how dependent people now are on the foundational work of the gospel texts in detecting the scapegoat mechanism. Without it, there would be no starting point. But now, history acts as an intermediary, so that the detection process does not any longer need to refer to the gospels; the disintegration of sacrificial Christianity leaves the “authentic reading of the gospel text” with an increasing prominence. That is to say, the culture of Christendom and its successor, the secular state, through a process of internal reference, connect with the essence of the message of the gospels in relation to the scapegoat mechanism:

“All the data of fundamental anthropology as it relates to the Judaeo-Christian scriptures are from now on at humanity's disposal...Just one last push has to be given, and everything will tip over onto the non-sacrificial side.”

The historical process is “accelerating and leading toward an increasing revelation of the truth”. The sacrificial forms have been “analysed, dismembered and devoured...judgements come full circle and inevitably turn against their authors in the end...the spectacle makes us think that critical thinking is never anything more than an attempt at personal justification.”

Meaning is the casualty here. Where meaning is absent, the basis of distinctions and so an increasing homogenization of culture and society arises: “the death of all cultures”. Girard observes that this death of meaning is a new form of Puritanism, not based as the old one was, on “depriving mankind of sexuality”, but –much worse - on depriving it of meaning:

“Man cannot live on bread and sexuality. Present-day thought is the worst form of castration, since it is the castration of the signified. People are always on the lookout to catch their neighbours red-handed in believing something or other. We struggled against the Puritanism of our parents only

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87 Ibid., p.436-7.
to fall into a Puritanism far worse than theirs – a Puritanism of meaning that kills all it touches.”

This train of thought links the authenticity of the gospel message mediated through society and its systems, which are very often non-religious and particularly non-sacrificial, with a loss of meaning. Why should these two things occur together? The conjunction invites the question, is the loss of meaning a consequence of the failure of the scapegoating process, or might it in some way be brought on by the abandonment of religion? Girard suggests that the outlook is bleak because there is “no pharmakon any more, not even a Marxist or psychoanalytic one” but distances himself from this situation, by claiming that “truth is not an empty word”. However, it is apparent from the way he expresses himself that he is conscious he is fighting a rearguard action, as a lonely voice in the wilderness, crying in the hope that others will join him, and that God will turn the tide.

Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann (b. 1933) is American, a reformed Christian, a minister of the United Churches of Christ, and, indeed, the son of a minister. He is an Old Testament scholar, and a theologian noted particularly for his work on prophecy and for his use of rhetorical criticism.

Brueggemann has been extraordinarily prolific throughout his long career. He has published more than fifty-eight books, several commentaries and many articles. His energy seems inexhaustible.

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88 Ibid., p.442.
89 Ibid., p.446.
Brueggemann's higher education has been in theology throughout. He took his ThD\textsuperscript{90} from Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1961, and PhD\textsuperscript{91} from St Louis University in 1974, and went on to serve as William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary from 1986 up to his retirement a few years ago.

It has been said, “He is first and foremost an exegete”\textsuperscript{92}, and it is true that his primary focus is on texts. However, he is more than just an exegete. His considerable scholarship and use of socio-literary method has enabled him to assemble a sociological perspective and an insight into the situations and states of mind that either lead to interactions with God, or not. This makes him an interesting theological commentator on contemporary matters, and a writer of prayers which strike a chord with many of his contemporaries.

To give an example of this, his comments on the controversies over homosexuality in the Church take account of the forces for and against change:

“...I propose that the discussion of homosexuality, for the most part, is not about sexuality but is about the reordering of social power, the fearful effort to maintain conventional forms of power that carry less and less conviction, and the awareness that the old centre ‘will not hold’.”\textsuperscript{93}

He goes on, “The great centres of socioeconomic, political and military power depend upon the great temple liturgies that enacted deeply rooted myths to create and manage social reality.”\textsuperscript{94} There is an implicit reference here to the inertia of what Brueggemann refers to as ‘the dominant version of reality’; he takes the status quo, and the forces defending it, as generally inimical to hearing the word of God. This important concept is examined in more detail in a later chapter: \textit{The Dominant Version of Reality}.

\textsuperscript{90} ‘A form-critical study of the cultic material in Deuteronomy: an analysis of the cultic encounter in the Mosaic tradition’.
\textsuperscript{91} ‘The history of Eden Theological Seminary 1925 – 1975’.
\textsuperscript{92} Miller, Patrick D., in foreword to Brueggemann, 1999.
\textsuperscript{93} Brueggemann, 1993, p.19.
\textsuperscript{94} Brueggemann, 2009, p.2. In a footnote, Brueggemann refers to Hooke, S.H., 1933 & 1948, which he describes as ‘defining essays’.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

Brueggemann has a preoccupation with prophecy in the Hebrew Bible as a re-description or ‘re-imagination’ of reality. He takes as a starting point the idea that a ‘world’ (understanding of the world or world-view) is built up as a ‘network of symbols’, which is “always a carefully constructed social fabric that intends to shape and exhibit social reality in one way rather than in many other ways that are available. Thus a dominant ‘world’ is an intentional advocacy that establishes assumptions, procedures, and goals for the management of social power.”95

Brueggemann is sensitive to articulations of a desire for transformation, coming from a motivation either to move away from a present state, or towards a future vision, or both. He has been influential in promoting this view, and though he does not have disciples in the way Girard does, there is a seeping influence apparent in theological dialogue. For instance, Don Cupitt, using a near-synonym of ‘the dominant version of reality’, in relation to the supposedly value-free status of the physical world, has suggested that

“For centuries the dominant traditions of thought have been implicitly nihilistic because they have been unable to affirm the primacy of value in constitution of the natural world”. 96

Cupitt goes on to say, “We assert that valuation comes first, is omnipresent and creates everything.” In other words, he takes a religious view of the primacy of value and detects the hand of the dominant version of reality in dumbing down new expressions of value when not identical with its own parameters.

In a number of areas of his work, but particularly in Deep Memory, Brueggemann focuses on right public ethics and the scriptural call to behave in a way that is independent of orthodoxies. This way may buck normal expectations and challenge presumptions about what it means to be righteous or religious. It is often outrageous, and therefore its aims need to

96 Cupitt, 1987, p.50.
be clearly expressed. Brueggemann refers to the alternative paths indicated by the prophets as “the causes of God”\(^\text{97}\); he quotes Isaiah 58:6:

“Is not this the fast that I choose;  
To undo the bonds of injustice  
To undo the thongs of the yoke,  
To let the oppressed go free...”

The ethical measure is reinforced and takes a new turn at Isaiah 61:1-2, where the keynote is the reversal of the fortunes of ‘captives’ and the oppressed. Of course, the captives Isaiah had in mind were specific, as to identity and to the place of their captivity. But the message is of course easily applied to others, captive in a literal or metaphorical sense in other times and other places. The reading which is put forward by Brueggemann is that this is primarily about social transformation. God’s people are called to live in God’s way, and adopt God’s standard of righteousness in all situations. This involves freeing the oppressed, binding up the broken-hearted, & proclaiming liberty to captives; in this scenario, God’s vengeance is on the oppressors and the culture of oppression, on those who persecute or ignore the broken-hearted, withhold liberty, etc. He undoes the system they work to.

The Lord’s favour lies in such policies and actions, which cut across the natural grain of human institutions. God wants society to change, and it is with this in mind that Luke uses Isaiah’s words to “launch his evangel”.\(^\text{98}\)

We see here a good example of the general pattern of Brueggemann’s thinking, which is teleological as much as enquiringly analytical: his scholarship has a mission which is founded on faith. Unlike Girard, he does not seem to have come to faith through looking at the world and coming to understand its systems. Instead, he appears to bring an agenda to bear on the world, focussed through biblical study. He is very clear in his approach; he makes claims which are often straightforward in themselves, and

\(^{97}\) Brueggemann, 2000, p.38.  
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

develops these through the Bible texts. It is a feature of his scholarship that he clarifies deeply troublesome aspects of the Bible and the human predicament, and does this for a broad readership, neither predominantly theologically expert nor naive; the span of his appeal is truly remarkable.

However, he has been criticised for an inclination to ignore traditional aspects of biblical criticism that either do not interest him, or seem unnecessary.\textsuperscript{99} He tends to be dismissive of such criticism, and not much interested in exploring how his work relates to that of others in the field or engaging in dialogue\textsuperscript{100}. He is a master elucidator, but one who likes autonomously to define his own territory within the bounds of the discipline of theology. This has provoked some criticism from other scholars; for instance, John Goldingay, whose concern is to start with the Old Testament and use it as a lens to examine the New Testament and the present age. He criticises Brueggemann’s approach as being the reverse of his own, applying a liberal, post-modern mentality and working through relentless deconstruction and application of the perspective of liberal Protestantism. As Noonan has put it,

“Brueggemann is a strong reader. From his tower of power (the liberal Protestant metanarrative), he surveys the theological landscape of the texts found in the Tanakh / Old Testament, picks and chooses from its landmarks, and builds a reading of selected landmarks into a theory accommodated to, and critical of, trends within liberal Protestantism, the American way of life, and geopolitics.”\textsuperscript{101}

The conjunction in Brueggemann’s method of post-modern deconstruction and ‘liberal Protestant metanarrative’ is an intriguing one, as contradiction, or more exactly, selective deconstruction, seems to be involved. This is how Brueggemann indirectly responds:

\textsuperscript{99} Interview of Professor Walter Moberly, October 2009.\textsuperscript{100} Despite this, Brueggemann has been known to make claims to the contrary, as at Linafelt & Beal, 1998, pp307ff.\textsuperscript{101} \url{http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient_hebrew_poetry/2010/01/john-goldingay-versus-walter-brueggemann-in-old-testament-theology.html} accessed 23 December 2011.
“No-one can doubt that theological interpretation of the Bible – most especially in the context of a Christian reading – is in a quite new, quite different and quite demanding interpretive situation. It does not matter to me if that new circumstance is termed ‘postmodern’, though I have used that term to describe it. What counts is a pluralistic interpretive community that permits us to see the polyphonic character of the text, and the deprivileged circumstance whereby theological interpretation in a Christian context is no longer allied with or supported by dominant epistemological or political-ideological forces... Learning to do biblical ideology outside Western hegemony is demanding work...hermeneutical problematic and possibilities have now displaced positivistic claims – historical or theological – as the matrix of theological reflection.”

The post-modern approach in Brueggemann, then, has a strong focus on the deconstruction of social power forms in Western Christianity, through pluralism and ‘deprivileged circumstance’ and is therefore a concerted revision of the Western theological standpoint - but still contained within its bounds. Brueggemann goes on to sketch out his continuing project in six categories:

1. The theology of the Old Testament cannot appeal to history, because the Old Testament frequently asserts a memory which runs counter to recorded history.

2. The consequence of adopting this approach is to appeal to ‘the practice of rhetoric’.

3. The focus is not on substantive themes but on verbal processes, interactive process (God found in relationship) being central both to the idea of God in the Old Testament, and to the “pluralized, deprivileged context of our own work”.

4. The focus on “juridical language of testimony” is intended not as a theme but as a process.

5. The “juridical language” is important for another reason: “the process of litigation that gives great manoeuvrability allows for a pragmatic juxtaposition of core testimony and countertextimony”; the

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3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

countertestimony being evidence of Israel's determination to tell the truth about itself.

6. “Everything said about Yahweh is said about Yahweh in relation.”

God ‘in relation’ and Girard

The essential common ground with Girard, it is suggested here, lies in the idea of religion as a relational subject. This is a point of which Girard makes much, speaking of ‘interdividuality’ and ‘intersubjectivity’. It starts with God conceived in relational terms. Brueggemann looks back in the Reformed tradition through the work of Eichrodt to John Calvin, and declares “the God of Israel was primarily a God in relation”. To be in relation with God, according to Brueggemann, means divesting oneself of the dominant version of reality. For Girard, to be in relationship with God lies in renouncing the default mode of humanity, which is in a way aligned with Satan rather than God. It is to be shown, and then adopt, a perspective on behaviour in relationship to ones fellows which is not the automatic one for humans; in other words, it is to reject the dominant version of reality.

Brueggemann and Girard on Myths and the ‘Otherness of Reality’

Both of these authors are concerned with the importance and role of myth. In Brueggemann’s case, that they define reality, and in Girard’s, that they hide it by creating something to stand in its place. In both cases, the ‘social construction of reality’ is in operation. In Brueggemann’s case, the issue of truth is suspended for the time being as he observes the construction process in action; in Girard’s, it is always in the foreground as he constantly maps the patterns by which myth conceals the essence of human behaviour.

103 Ibid, pp.312-313.
105 Walther Eichrodt, 1980-1978, a German OT scholar and protestant theologian
106 Brueggemann, in Linafelt and Beal (eds), 1998, p.308.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

and legitimates the processes of violence. Girard is therefore tending to assume that truth exists as a standard independent of human behaviour, whilst Brueggemann tends not to use the term since his concern is the disparity between world-views. Amongst these world-views, all propounded by religious people, some are prophetic (when they are revolutionary) and others are non-prophetic, when they represent an established view. If prophecy is the voice of truth or the voice of God (the two being more or less interchangeable terms in this discussion), it follows that truth is often not found in the statements of established human institutions. On this basis, there is something implied in this discussion which is common to Girard and Brueggemann: established institutions have a dynamism away from God and true understandings of the world. Brueggemann would go on to say that it sometimes takes radical changes of fortune (like exile) to show up the inadequacy of the established world-view and open the door to new understandings of the truth.

Whilst Girard looks to find truths that apply fundamentally to all societies, at one of three stages, the earliest stage of ‘hominization’, the developed pre-Christ stage, and the post-Christ stage, Brueggemann applies a different perspective, sticking to the religion of Israel and its extension into contemporary times. He is concerned with ‘the otherness of reality’\textsuperscript{108}, and in his consideration of the ‘God-talk of Israel’ (which he differentiates from talk about the religion of Israel), he states that “God-speech...offers that this Other is provisionally identifiable...the otherness of reality given to us on the lips of Israel makes our deciding always penultimate and provisional, always yet again unsettled by new disclosings”.\textsuperscript{109} Brueggemann understands perceptions of God, and therefore the relationship with God, as being provisional at every juncture. However, his own observations are not so cautious as to be described as ‘provisional’.

Girard puts forward experimental, provisional arguments, and suggests to others that they are internally coherent and also consistent with the texts

\textsuperscript{108} Brueggemann, 2000, p.115-117.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, p.117.
3 Brueggemann & Gottwald, Girard & Schwager

themselves and with other scholarship. He considers himself to be a realist rather than a relativist or antirealist, and thus tends to avoid post-modern styles of thought\textsuperscript{110}. At each of these points, there is a clear contrast in this with Brueggemann’s method and approach.

However, these differences of stance and method create opportunities for a binocular view on certain issues. There is a possibly useful complementarity between the two approaches, if they can be seen in action in relation to a similar problem or topic, in cases where there is sufficient common ground or overlap.

However, the differences should not be minimised, as they sometimes preclude a direct comparison. As a scholar working within the conventional academic frontier of theology, Brueggemann seems much less totalising than Girard, whose comprehensive scheme comes from working across academic boundaries; Girard, unlike Brueggemann, is quick to show how his theories are consistent with other scholarship. Although in recent interchanges\textsuperscript{111} Girard has shown himself to be minded to refrain from universal, exclusivist claims for his thinking, one or two of his followers are much more robust in their claims\textsuperscript{112}, and the reputation of Girardianism tends to be of a scheme which makes other approaches unnecessary.

So, although Girard is often thought of as a figure of great controversy, Brueggemann is not; however, he is certainly important in Old Testament criticism and in the definition of faith within the Reformed tradition, and to some extent beyond it. He proposes, on the basis of his scholarship, radical views of life, but not anything so provocative as a re-explanation of human behaviour generally; for this reason, there is no band of ‘Brueggemannists’, in the way that there is an academic body of Girardians. Although many

\textsuperscript{110} Kirwan (2009) cites Loughlin (1997, pp. 96-103) in support of an argument that Girard’s whole work is a plea for a voice excluded by modernity. To this extent he is a postmodernist. (p.136).

\textsuperscript{111} Such as the video interview presented at the Girard-Darwin Conference, Cambridge, UK, 2009, the notable interview with Rebecca Adams, and a number of his own books, which have a dialogue format.

\textsuperscript{112} An example of someone who takes such a position habitually would be Robert Hamerton-Kelly.
books cite him, and some (like Goldingay's) criticise his approach, it would be surprising to hear anything damning or vitriolic – a scholar renouncing Brueggemann for falsifying the basis of reality, or unjustifiably displacing other theological explanations113 - in the way that Girard is criticised by his detractors.

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113 This criticism was made of Girard by Rowan Williams and Sarah Coakley at the Girard-Darwin Conference, Cambridge, 2009. However, Williams is more well-disposed towards Girard than Coakley.
PART 1: CONCEPTS & VERSIONS OF REALITY
4 What is a Biblical Concept?

"...sacrifice appears to be much more an activity than a concept, and as such it may not easily be identified within, much less be removed from, a religious system."114

The meaning of this is not altogether clear, though the suggestion that sacrifice is just an activity within a culture and not much else has some currency. But all activities which are at all considered must involve concepts, and concepts and activities may not be distinct from one another. To that extent, there is the basis for comparison of sacrifice across cultures. What Chilton seems to be saying here is the activity of sacrifice may not be attended by much thought, but be little more than a visceral or instinctive action. However, even to give a simple account of an instinctive action involves ideas, because without ideas or concepts no speech is possible. Therefore, from the earliest stages of the development of society, sacrifice is undeniably a matter involving concepts, though those concepts may be teleological. That is to say, if sacrifice is a means to an end, and is seen to be efficacious in itself, then its conceptual structure may be built into the present circumstances which sacrifice is deemed to be effective to change, and into the future state which is desired. Similarly, the concept may be submerged in the idea of the deity, whose power makes the sacrifice effective. What Chilton seems to be saying is that sacrifice is not an idea that stands alone, but lies at the level of implementation of relationships with higher powers. For that reason, (and despite what Chilton says), it is hard to remove from a religious system, as a part of the machinery would no longer be present and effective, and therefore the system would cease to function completely.

Michael Fishbane, in a study of the transformation of sacrifice in Judaism115, argues that sacrifice and ritual gifts are “omnipresent” and important in

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115 Fishbane, M., in Astell and Goodhart (eds) 2011, pp 114-139.
4 What is a Biblical Concept?

*ancient Israel, and occur at “every turn and every cultural stage”116. Though the nature and form of the sacrifice changed as time progressed, the idea of something foregone in order to heal the rupture between God and mankind remained, though this might be subtly understood. So, to take the later perspective, reading the Torah might be considered as a sacrifice, because to do so involves a suppression of the personal will. He quotes from the Babylonian Talmud:

“Study of the Torah atones for all the sins of the sinful soul, as (the sages) of blessed memory (have said in) their teaching...’Why (does Scripture) say, this is the Torah for the burnt-offering, for the meal-offering, for the sin-offering, etc? – and concludes that whoever studies Torah has no need of the burnt-, meal-, sin-, or guilt-offerings.”117

He goes on to quote Hosea, who in response to poor peoples' pleas that they cannot afford (animal) sacrifices, replies, “It is words that I want, and I shall forgive all your sins”118 the meaning of ‘words', according to Fishbane, and evidenced by him in some quotations of uncertain origin, “is Torah”.119 And in Tanhuma Va-yaquel, he states, Torah “bears (or carries off) all Israel's sins”120.

It may be concluded that Fishbane is more making a point about the supremacy of the Torah than about sacrifice here. The ritual activity involved in reading the Torah may indeed involve an act of submission, but the activity itself may hardly be observable. The strength of the concept in action therefore must be all the greater, and indeed this must be the pattern whenever public ceremony is replaced by private acts of commitment. And this is where the other half of Fishbane's argument comes into play: it is the Torah which has the power to counter and cancel sin, and as the Torah is

116 Ibid., p.114.
118 Hosea 14 is referred to by Fishbane, but this does not seem to be a direct quotation from Hosea. Fishbane, p.135.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
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part of the Bible, we may say, it is the concept embodied in the Bible which does the work.

Countering sin may mean more than just cancelling it. Take an explanation of Girard's thinking on violence and religion like the following, by Vanessa Avery-Wall:

“Religious rituals are phenomena manifesting the stories of religious tradition. One purpose of religious ritual, according to Girard, is to contain violence and provide a nexus for communal reconciliation.”\(^1\)\(^\text{121}\)

What Fishbane is saying is that within the religion of Israel, the “nexus for communal reconciliation” has shifted (at least in Israel's more advanced thinking) to the divinely-ordained ethical rules of the religious state, and that this reconciliation is affirmed by a positive benefit, a blessing:

“A blessing is effective language-blessings create reality and carve out a future for the one being blessed.”\(^1\)\(^\text{122}\)

Avery-Wall goes on to add in a footnote to this statement, “After the destruction of the second temple, and the death of the priesthood in Judaism, the religious traditions changed to accommodate the Jews’ new circumstances. One change is that parents became *kohanim* (priests), and, as such, direct transmitters of divine blessings.”\(^1\)\(^\text{123}\)

Avery-Wall speculates that the sacrifice of our evil inclination, taken together with the efficacy of the parental blessing, might lead to “a gradual overcoming of mimetic desire”.\(^1\)\(^\text{123}\)

She agrees with Girard that the tendency to rivalry is fundamental to human nature and also suggests that the Jewish writings call us away from our natural desires and therefore in time will upset the forces which ‘make the world go round’:

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\(^{121}\) Avery-Wall, 2011, p.1.  
^{122}\) Avery-Wall, 2011, p.2.  
^{123}\) Avery-Wall, 2011, p.6.
4 What is a Biblical Concept?

"The evil inclination is considered a part of creation, and thus ‘good’; it is said in Genesis Rabbah that the evil inclination is what compels us to marry, build a house and trade (with one another). But the evil inclination is part of humanity’s base nature, and the inclination that drives us towards rivalry, lust and envy. According to the early rabbis, the evil inclination is part of the self and must die in each and every one of us...the slaughtering of the evil inclination is ‘as if one had sacrificed all the sacrifices together’.”

Sacrifice as Approach

Let us now turn to the early, more ‘primitive’ condition of human societies, and think of how they might use sacrifice as a form of approach to God. We are aware that the approach manifested in biblical times had a variety of purposes: for thanksgiving, praise and worship; for dealing with sin; for communion or fellowship with the deity; for preserving the world in a safe and stable state.

As we noted at the start of this chapter, some Girardians suggest that this kind of analysis, which describes belief and ritual in relation to concepts, is both inappropriate and inadequate. This is because it suggests that there is a voluntary, discretionary quality to religion, that it religion is built intellectually and culturally as an assembly of ideas. Indeed, the words ‘concept’ and ‘idea’ are themselves in dispute because they are seen as not foundational, but belonging to a later phase of religion when discourse emerges, not to the initial, visceral stage. Girard’s doubts come out of an anthropological method, though he also uses literary and philosophical methods in important ways.

He portrays religion in its earliest stages as amounting mainly to sacrifice, which, no matter what its form, is “a reaction to the unseen power hidden in

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124 Avery-Wall, 2011, p.4.
126 Notably Robert Hamerton-Kelly, who is a powerful figure in studies of Girard and a key figure in Imitatio, which promotes Giradian studies. He is presumed to have a following.
127 “Mine is a search for the anthropology of the Cross, which turns out to rehabilitate orthodox theology” Williams (ed), 1996, p. 288).
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the world about us.”¹²⁸ It is an unthinking, visceral move to confront or
deflect the forces of violence which otherwise threaten existence itself. What
is happening is not explained (since the process predates explanation), but
the victim is hinted at in myth as a fragment of text might become visible in a
palimpsest.

That is the claim made by some¹²⁹ who see in Girard’s theories a penetration
into the core of human society’s systems, and a step beyond the reach of
most writers on religion. That particular claim has truth in it. However, it
may be that their stance, with its anthropological emphasis and dismissal of
conventional categories fails to distinguish post-fact description from
thinking process. This can be illustrated in two ways. First, ‘concept’ and
‘idea’ are terms most often used analytically in retrospect. Prophets may say
“God has spoken”, and priests “I must sacrifice to God”, but do not articulate
what is happening as an idea, but as a fact about the world or as an
imperative. They describe something felt, that may be viscerally provoked,
not a product of abstract thinking. Nevertheless, ideas are involved, and
conceptual categories may be applied, so these words cannot be discounted.
Further, when symbols are used, as they are in mythological accounts, then
by definition the name of one thing is being used to refer to another, and it is
inescapable that ideas are part of the system of communication. Ideas and
concepts are thus an inherent part of the mythological and religious
communication system at a formative level. This will be discussed further in
the next chapter.

On the other hand, one might say with Girard, and others such as Ricoeur
and Barker, that applying the thinking and the categories of a rational mind
to pre-rational behaviour as recorded in myth simply deprives the myth of
its meaning, and leaves only the shell or husk behind, that is, a non-rational
story, to which it would be hard to allocate any truth-value. Girard writes

¹²⁸ Young, 1975, p.111. Young was not writing about Girard, but here her understanding
coincides with that of Girard.
¹²⁹ For instance, James Alison, Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Michael Kirwan, in their various
summaries of Girard’s thought; for instance, Kirwan, 2009, pp20ff.
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about this at length; but some other writers also take the same view. For instance, Margaret Barker comments on how the priests of the Second Temple (c.516 BCE -70CE) wrote Genesis 1, “and were silent about the angels of Day One. They turned the myths of the Temple into history, and thus the myths lost their power”. Barker is here referring to the myths of the First Temple (c.950-586 BCE), which had a different theological scheme to that of the Second, being polytheistic and holding that sacred ritual was causal in the world; for instance, in believing that the priestly ministry of atonement was necessary “to maintain the stability and harmony of creation.” The centrality of this issue in the view of scholars who give emphasis to the symbolic aspects stands in stark contrast to Brueggemann, as we shall see. Barker holds that the Deuteronomists substituted historical occasions for ongoing situations, for instance portraying the everlasting covenant made by God with Noah as the guarantee of stability, rather than the ongoing process of atonement.

This brings us to the second point. Might one argue that the tie between the stability of the world and the iterative process of atonement depends on something which might, with the perspective of the 21st century, be described as a ‘concept’? Now, Girard insists that the sacrificial process has a pre-rational nature and that the myths that incorporate it into culture derive from a pre-rational state. But within human society, which by definition has speech, words are involved and where there are words there are ideas. Therefore, as Girard himself states, sacrifice if pre-rational is a product of ‘hominization’, of the process which leads to the emergence of human kind as a species, and in the view of such Girardians as Alison, Hamerton-Kelly & Kirwan, this would tend to exclude categories of thought.

This is open to question, not just as a matter of scientific anthropology, but also as a matter of the exclusive possession by developed, social humans of

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130 For instance, throughout Violence and the Sacred (Girard, 1977).
132 Ibid.
133 See also the discussion in relation to Gans (footnote 123 below) and Ricoeur (p.187).
134 For instance, “German scholar Markwart Herzog has criticized Girard for drawing the Totalität der Geschichte from a single event-type. While he concedes that Girard has assembled
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categories of thought, or speech. Simple points will serve to illustrate this. Whales communicate by sonic signals, though we do not know what messages they transmit; cows have awareness of the normal pattern of events in time, and know what time they are normally milked, for instance, so might be said to have a concept of ‘milking time’. They know the meaning of the time, the process associated with it, and the desired outcome. So, even if the possibility of concepts is limited to this very basic, pre-human level, it would be fair enough to talk about ‘biblical concepts’ as something involving process or ritual, a situation to be resolved, a desired outcome (a state of being blessed), and place-specific and time-specific elements. This can be done without invalidating the descriptive attempt through hopeless anachronism, even if an established, narrow, epistemological definition of ‘concept’ is not met at this stage.

For that reason, it seems to be acceptable to take prophecy and sacrifice in particular as events in society which might be represented in language (and thus consist of ideas) at a very early stage in the development of human

much empirical material from mythology to support his “Kultopfer”-theory, Herzog remains skeptical whether the same material is capable of validating the assumption of an “Uropfer” the historicity of which cannot be validated. He also argues that Girard’s system is scientifically unsound in that is not open to critical evaluation and cannot be falsified by empirically grounded objections. This immunity comes at the price of being unscientific.” Stork, P at http://pavinggattentiontothesky.com/2011/01/13/an-introduction-to-the-work-of-René-girard-by-peter-stork/ accessed 10 Feb. 2011.

But sympathisers of Girard have modified his theory in this regard. For instance, “According to Gans, language is thus the condition of the emergence of man and of religion – not the other way around, as Girard thinks. This theory addresses critical issues in the theory of human origins as an ‘event,’ a sudden (not gradual) emergence. When Gans’ theory of the origin of signs as the definingly human trait is fleshed out, it leads to a novel defense of modernity against its post-modernist critics.” Gardner, Stephen L., in www.thedaviesgrouppublishers.com/katz_originary_hypothesis.htm. This is a review of Gans’s work in Katz (2011). Accessed 10 Feb. 2011.

Sarah Coakley speaks of “a new accord between the particular energies of religious practice (sacrifice, as positively considered) and the ratiocination of an appropriately justified belief (in a sense to be duly clarified). In short, I seek to cleanse the notion of sacrifice from that of a mandated (Girardian) violence, and identify in the new notion of evolutionary sacrifice a principle of divine reason.” Norris Hulse Inaugural Lecture, http://scripturalreasoning.org/faculty/coakley_inaugural.pdf, accessed 10 February 2011. This thinking is more fully discussed in Chapter 2, The Fading Concept of Sacrifice.
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society. Thus it is fair to describe them as ‘biblical concepts’ in this discussion without implying that an advanced rational process or discourse is involved. However, the method of analysis of traits in society, such as the predisposition to rely on sacrifice and associated activities such as scapegoating, will need to engage with the mode of thought that generated them. This is symbolic, rather than rational. If Girard is to be followed, then the conceptual-symbolic thought processes may be naturally insulated from the mechanism actually operational (the mimetic process), so that there can be talk of sacrifice, constructed according to a conceptual and symbolic framework, which is incapable of actually voicing the causation which is in operation.

We are therefore dealing with mental realities at two levels, explicit and concealed. Furthermore, the realities which are explicit may not be ordered according to philosophical categories, but instead follow other patterns, and of these, symbolism is perhaps the identifiable mode so far as modern minds are concerned. This emphasis may be seen as a conscious choice in the case of nascent Israel, as it left the comparatively systematised society of Egypt behind, and made an exodus from a certain sort of physical and mental organisation. This is foundational to the culture which gave birth to the Hebrew Scriptures.

But the situation of the contemporary commentator will seem odd to some: rationalist thinking and method is to be used to describe something which operates by other rules. So, one has to expect differently ordered outcomes, for instance; under the old mind-set, which saw sacrifice as effective practice, the desired outcome is a blessing; under the more developed mind-set, it is justice and righteousness. The tendency has been towards the ethical for millennia now.

However, the dislocations cannot be avoided. We can only start from where we are. We live with reason as the accepted definer of the public realm and the lingua franca of discourse in the general forum of debate. In

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135 Tracy, 1994 p.9.
addition, we have a fundamental problem in approaching symbolic thinking on its own terms: as we encounter it in mythology, it does not have its own key provided with it; either one is privy to it through participation in its governing culture, or one is not\textsuperscript{136}. If one has no key, then it is only by literary analysis, archaeology, psychology and possibly through identifying parallels that progress can be made in working towards an understanding of the meaning of mythological material. That, at least, is the position argued by Girard and others\textsuperscript{137}. However, there is the methodology defined in Paul Ricoeur’s \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}\textsuperscript{138}, in which he argues that there is a linguistic imagination that "generates and regenerates meaning through the living power of metaphoricity." Symbolic systems “make and remake reality”.\textsuperscript{139} He compares aesthetical grasping of the world in the literary narrative to the epistemological grasping of the world by scientific models. Ricoeur argues that both can be perceived as “sustained metaphors aiming at redescription of reality.” The relationship between \textit{mythos} and \textit{mimesis} is equal to the relationship between heuristic fiction and redescription.\textsuperscript{140} This exploration of relationships and methods is pursued in Chapter 8.

Turning aside now from Girard to Brueggemann, one immediately finds that the example of sacrifice is less fruitful. In his case, prophecy is the particular focus. Once again approach to God, or the convergence of God and mankind is involved, and it would be possible to claim that the need for God and the need to hear God speak is primordial for humanity and counts among basic instincts. Indeed, Brueggemann shows a great deal of interest in the relational nature of God, and in theology as ‘speech about God”\textsuperscript{141}, but much less in the origins of the relationship. In particular, he seems to avoid the subject of atonement through sacrifice in a postmodern approach that tends

\textsuperscript{137} Such as Fawcett (1970) and Langer (1960).
\textsuperscript{138} Ricoeur, 1977.
\textsuperscript{139} The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality in Ricoeur, 1991, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{140} Ricoeur draws both terms from Aristotle’s Poetics. Ivic, 2009.
\textsuperscript{141} Brueggemann, 2000, p.115.
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to reduce religion to ethics\textsuperscript{142}, and the background to the ethics is left untraced. Such an approach has little engagement with symbolic or mythological modes of expression and tends to draw a fairly simple, generalised conclusion from them.

Therefore, in Brueggemann’s work, we see not only a tacit acceptance of rational, post-Enlightenment analysis as adequate for the purpose, but also a lack of interest in what one might term anthropological aspects. That is not to say, though, that Brueggemann discounts the Hebrew mind-set, as he is a noted Hebrew scholar and has written about the process of reversing ‘the process of modernity’ in order to achieve a postmodern view which is more contextual, local and pluralistic.\textsuperscript{143} So, it is not that Brueggemann lacks the basis for examining the origins of relationships with God, but that he seems to leave that set of issues to one side and focus on an area of more interest to him. It is also the case that in following a socio-literary approach, he is much influenced by Gottwald, one of whose particular achievements is to work back to the Elohist and Yahwist sources, but not to try and get back beyond 1250 BCE, to sources of Israel which he describes as ‘baffling’\textsuperscript{144}. Gottwald does refer to ‘humanistic’ studies, but the sources of religion beyond recorded sources are not something which he pursues.

Within the self-limitation of the socio-literary frame which he to a large degree shares with Gottwald, Brueggemann uses the language of concepts freely, and it is apparent even from the titles of some of his books and papers\textsuperscript{145} that he is comfortable with working in the world of ideas and does not feel them inapplicable to the biblical context.

In conclusion, it is apparent that Brueggemann and Girard are each preoccupied with different levels of human development, and make quite different starting assumptions about what conceptualisation lies behind

\textsuperscript{143} Brueggemann, 1993, pp 8-9.
\textsuperscript{144} Gottwald, 1979, p.3.
\textsuperscript{145} For instance, Covenant as a Subversive Paradigm, and Rethinking Church Models through Scripture.
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biblical concepts as we inherit them. Both express their understandings relative to contemporary society and contemporary religion, but their differing perspectives on the source conditions mean that their views are more complementary than directly comparable.
5 Symbol, Myth & Intuition

Heaven and earth did sing my Creator’s praises, and
could not make more melody to Adam, than to me

Thomas Traherne

Brueggemann and Girard, though their work apparently has limited overlap, each acknowledge that they owe something to Paul Ricoeur.¹⁴⁶ Ricoeur’s work The Symbolism of Evil seems to have been particularly influential. A little unpacking of the issues which emerge in it, and in some of Ricoeur’s other books¹⁴⁷, which surface again in Brueggemann’s and Girard’s work will be a useful starting point for a study of how they both relate to the world of expression that lies outside rational language and historically-based accounts.

Ricoeur claims that “myth is a dimension of modern thought”¹⁴⁸, once it has been demythologised through contact with scientific history and “elevated to the dignity of a symbol.” This is an arresting statement in a time when the often-heard view is that symbolic or mythological constructs are based upon assumptions about the world which have expired, and are simply no longer acceptable or relevant in a rational age. As Iris Murdoch has one of her fictional characters say, “It’s better not to tinker with a dying mythology. All those stories are simply false, and the oftener that is said in plain terms, the better.”¹⁴⁹ But Ricoeur defines his usage of the word ‘myth’ as

¹⁴⁶ For instance, Brueggemann tells in the preface of Redescribing Reality how Ricoeur permitted him to “think again about reality”, and how he “supplied phrasing for what has been operative in [his] nurture”. [Brueggemann, 2009, p. xx-xxi. Girard in Things Hidden refers to Ricoeur’s championing of the view that Christianity both demonstrates continuity with previous traditions and a divergence from them, and that both positions are necessary. This is a point which Girard himself relies on. Ricoeur, too, has expressed his indebtedness to Girard’s insights [Kirwan, 2004, p.95, referring to a speech at the 1998 Colloquium on Violence and Religion, which is an annual academic conference concerned with the thinking of Girard] Contagion, Vol. 6 Spring 1999, p.1ff.
¹⁴⁷ Particularly Interpretation Theory (Ricoeur, 1976).
¹⁴⁸ Ricoeur, 1967, p.5.
5 Symbol, Myth & Intuition

“not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today, and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in his world.”

This is a substantial claim, with which Girard concurs, as we shall see. Following Ricoeur, we shall not in this section use the term in its pejorative sense, to dismiss texts and beliefs now thought to be unjustifiable, as mere stories incapable of substantiation. Instead, we shall look for the meaning which myths carry, even when they will not stand up to the truth-tests of empirical science and analytical history. This exercise has to face the fact that any meaning they do carry may not immediately be accessible to the modern mind, but may be found to be expressed according to a pre-Enlightenment, non-scientific system. That system has an operating vocabulary of symbols. Therefore, let us begin by reviewing what is involved in the use of such a vocabulary, and at how metaphor, as a system for employing symbols, abridges comparisons, and in its rhetorical use, makes the probable more attractive. Metaphor, unlike myth, is capable of translation and therefore where an account is both mythological and metaphorical, a degree of dual analysis may be possible.

Symbols and their Assembly into Myths

Some symbols are universal or almost so; they tend to be the ones which life experience itself most powerfully suggests. For instance, the sun is taken as a

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150 Ricoeur, 1967, p.5.
151 Of course, Girard does sometimes use the word ‘myth’ in a sense which has a negative association: myth in his view conceals violence, whereas the gospel reveals it. Myths are tacitly based upon a system which goes back to the ‘foundi...’
152 An observation of Cicero and Quintillian to which Ricoeur makes reference. Ricoeur, 1976, p.48.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid, p.49: “We can translate a metaphor, i.e. replace the literal meaning for which the figurative word is a substitute. In effect, substitution plus restitution equals zero.”
5 Symbol, Myth & Intuition

symbol of creative power in areas as disparate as Greece, Egypt and pre-
Columbian America. Symbols therefore may come out of man’s common
experience, and exhibit similar thinking patterns across cultures, as J.
Danielou has noted; C.G. Jung commented on the universal nature of
symbolic motifs in ancient and modern times.\footnote{155} However, other symbols are
far from universal, and it is therefore possible to be completely misled by a
symbol taken out of context. For instance, water may be a symbol of fertility
and creation in one set of circumstances, and a threat in another (in a storm
or flood for instance). In such instances, metaphorical usage (such as, ‘a well-
spring of truth’, or ‘drowning in debt’) may provide an essential clue.

Symbols are also very frequently bound up with animistic concepts. Fawcett
has commented that there is now a presupposition that primitive people
made distinctions as we do between animate and inanimate matter, but not
so: the gods were

"invariably the result of animistic attitudes which saw everything in the
world as imbued with personal life."\footnote{156}

The idea of spirit and personal life outside biology is a defining characteristic
of religion. To talk of God without a concept of the presence of God is to put
the proposition in the spheres of philosophy or science or even history, but
not religion. Conversely, there is no space within science for the idea of a God
who intervenes in the world or who suffers.

In the early forms of Greek mythology, gods in some cases were the great
entities of nature, such as mountains, of which a number were called
‘Olympus’\footnote{157}. These were held to be divine entities having a personal life.
Later, the god in question was represented as a being in space and time
(Olympian Zeus), and stories were told as elements of the life-story of him or

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{155} Fawcett, 1970, p.27.\textsuperscript{148} Fawcett, 1970, p.104.\textsuperscript{157} Langer, 1960, p.186.}
5 Symbol, Myth & Intuition

her to explain the personal nature of the god in human terms. Such traits in mythological tales tend usually to distance the tale from the contemporary reader, and to disconnect her from any sense of meaning within the tale. At least, that will be the case if the reader is firmly in the grip of a modernist, factual way of thinking, and much less so if they are sympathetic to religious panentheism in nature, or to the idea of Gaia, and derive a sense of animism from that.

But anthropologically speaking, symbols often precede theology (the study of God, or perhaps of gods) in the expression of a worldview, and the symbolic rendering may later become incorporated into a theological account. Therefore, theology may make a mistake if it does not allow for this, and speaks of its texts only in a factual way. Where there is any divergence between symbols and theology, it is possible that the symbols may tell the more closely delineated story about the worldview\(^{158}\) which gave rise to the account.

However, even when symbols have a universal quality, and therefore are comprehensible from outside a particular culture as having meaning in their own right, their assembly into greater units of meaning (myths) frequently gives rise to problems. These problems are rooted in concepts, and in the nature of metaphor which is fundamentally not so much linguistic as conceptual. Ricoeur states that metaphor, founded in the imagination, in a sustained form aims to redescribe reality\(^{159}\). This expanded version of reality naturally has effects on the conceptual structure of the individual and community concerned. As we shall see, this term ‘redescribe’ is much used by Brueggemann in connection with prophecy. As an avowed postmodernist, he is at ease with the idea of multiple meanings and therefore with the possible reality of a redescriptions of the world, as we shall see.

\(^{158}\) Wright, 1992, p.127.
\(^{159}\) Ricoeur, 1991, p.117.
However, the facility of redescription available within a metaphorical account, and its capability of adjusting one conceptual system to another in small units of usage, may not be available in longer accounts. A metaphor may be "a poem in miniature"\(^{160}\), but a myth attempts description on a broader front, by a more extensive method. In such circumstances, when the resulting conceptual base is disconnected from that of the reader, the process by which meaning is demonstrated is short-circuited and earthed-out before it can become effective\(^{161}\). Then, a myth tends to become an island of meaning, apart from the mainstream of thought, and may not relate to or lie parallel to other myths. Outside their temporal and cultural context, myths are not readily understood in any depth because the code on which their meaning depends lacks any sort of key, and therefore tends to be elusive. As Ricoeur puts it, we cannot connect either to the time of the myth’s creation, nor can we connect mythical locations with our geographical space.\(^{162}\) It is the disconnection which tends to trigger the use of ‘myth’ as a category, and which makes it difficult to treat a myth as an explanation of the issues which the reader experiences in her own life.

The difficulty of connection can be put in other ways. Like all languages, myths have their own grammar and syntax,\(^{163}\) according to which the symbols are assembled, but these are never recorded. To make matters worse, myths have sometimes come down to us in transcriptions made when the myths were already in decline\(^{164}\), and had hardened into mere works of fiction, their previous connection with conceptual ways of thinking having been lost. So, from the outside, when myths look like fantastic stories which

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\(^{160}\) Monroe Beardsley, quoted in Ricoeur, 1976, p.46.
\(^{161}\) To put it metaphorically, that is. The power and transparency of metaphor in such an instance is considerable.
\(^{162}\) Ricoeur, 1967, p.5.
\(^{163}\) Langer, 1960, p.94.
\(^{164}\) Fawcett, 1970, p.95.
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are expressions of magic, their value in expressing concepts central to life may be going by unrecognized\(^{165}\).

Even when serious analyses of texts are made within faith contexts, the conservative reaction against any evaluation of them as having mythological aspects has often been visceral.\(^{166}\) To religious conservatives in particular the very idea of truth being compromised by being reduced to ‘mythology’ is abhorrent. They characteristically seem to operate on the basis of a single, absolute standard of truth and reporting in religious texts. This standard is analogous to, though differently based from, the claims made by science. Complete rejection of any mention of mythology results, and it then becomes difficult to discuss any meaning concealed within the text.

But the dislocation would tend to happen not just within cultures where the normal test of veracity is verifiable truth (as it usually is in the post-Enlightenment West). There, it happens because the two systems (mythological demonstration and rational description) are overtly incompatible. But it also happens in settings where it is customary to mediate value through a mythology which is not identical to the mythology under examination. The fact that a similar problem emerges under such widely divergent conditions is because there is usually little or no possibility of understanding the ‘code’ of one mythology on the basis of another mythology or another conceptual system, and an invalid mythology may be worse than incomprehensible: it may seem to depend on alien, evil understandings and appeal to dark forces. Mythology which is alien is therefore either meaningless, or a threat.

\(^{165}\) “Because the symbolic forms stand forth so clearly as pure articulations of fantasy, we see them only as fictions, not as the supreme concepts of life which they really represent, and by which men orient themselves religiously in the cosmos.” Langer, 1960, p.200.

\(^{166}\) An early example would be the work of D.F. Strauss (1808-1874), whose Life of Jesus Critically Examined (1835) claimed that the gospel stories were mythological & drawn from those of the Old Testament. He was pilloried by both the Catholic and the Lutheran establishments.
So, on several fronts, there seems to be a severe obstacle to the continued acceptance of mythology (or mythological elements) in any religious text, once the mythology is no longer current. This is an understood problem in some areas, and may be the reason why Islam prohibits the reading of the Koran in translation. Translation might unavoidably involve interpretation, and thus might undermine the continuance of its base as active communication within the original, intended, mode. That is the usual line within Islam. But the continuing base may still be described by an outsider in terms of a symbolic system, without disputing its truth-value.¹⁶⁷

Ricoeur says that the position is then recouped by demythologization, which he contrasts with demythization¹⁶⁸. In demythologization, what is lost is “the false logos” by which the myth explains causation. By losing the myth as immediate logos, it is regained as myth, that is to say, we regain the opportunity of capturing the message which the myth carries.¹⁶⁹ This is the route to the rehabilitation of myths as texts carrying meaning, once the myth has become separated from the cultural environment that gave birth to it.

And the capture of the message (but not the rehabilitation of the myth) is precisely Girard’s project: the exposure of truths which have been for ages concealed, even “things hidden since the foundation of the world”¹⁷⁰. By this resonant phrase, he means universal patterns of behaviour which go by unrecognized because they are understood as something other than what

¹⁶⁷ Langer (1960) comments on this phenomenon (without any reference to the Koran, which is my illustration of the general point). [p.201]: “The meanings given through language are successively understood, and gathered into the whole by the process called discourse; the meanings of all other symbolic elements that compose a larger, articulate model are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations within the total structure. Their very functioning as symbols depends on the fact that they are involved in a simultaneous, integral presentation.” Langer, 1960, p.96.
¹⁶⁸ The separation of myth from history.
¹⁷⁰ The title of Girard’s 1987 book.
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they actually are. They are dislocated from their original function in terms of time and culture, and indeed, they may have developed a function of obscuring their own origins, as we shall see.

The key example is imitative (mimetic) violence, which tends to escalate, and if left unchecked would eventually result in calamitous destruction. The parties to this do not understand themselves as being involved in imitation or even rivalry, but in a mission with right on their side, variously to defend their country, extend the rule of law, protect trade, obtain the necessary land for living-space, bring salvation to the heathen, etc. There is in fact a tradition of imitative violence which stretches right back to the original ‘founding murder’\footnote{Girard, 1978, p.105ff.}, which Girard describes as ‘invisible’; that is to say, these things are referred to in myths but in a way which conceals the real violence between humans in acts of persecution, by dressing the account up, typically as the struggles of the gods. Mythology therefore has a function not only of explaining a branch of human society to its members, but simultaneously of concealing how society and its interactions work. It is telling that there is a link etymologically between the words ‘myth’ and ‘mute’\footnote{Kirwan, 2004, p.68.}.\footnote{Girard, 1978, p.105ff.\footnote{Kirwan, 2004, p.68.}}

One of the main functions of religion is to channel this tendency to respond to violence with violence, and to deflect it onto a third party. Whilst the control process has a useful function in addressing the problem, the claimed achievement of Jesus is to expose the problem and the process for what they are, and refuse to engage in either of them. By this means, the problem is removed, and human interaction is considerably changed providing that people stick to Jesus’s message. Of course, they very often don’t, even when they claim to be committed followers of Jesus, so it has to be acknowledged that the message is widely misunderstood. However, it might be said by a
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Girardian that Jesus's message seeks to destroy the old logos of mythology and to replace it with another insight which, although spiritual in character, is overt, and does not have a hidden process as the mythological system does.

Put another way, mimesis is deeply rooted in human behaviour world-wide, and always has been. The project of Jesus is to expose it by unveiling the process of its vehicle within society. It is the way of the world. Girard sees mythology as a literature extending back to the beginnings of human interaction, which narrates mimetic desire and mimetic violence. He analyses this in considerable detail\textsuperscript{173} but his work is far from being universally accepted, particularly where it seems to make other scholarly approaches redundant.

Symbolism and Myth at Work in Redefining Truth

It is in this area of study that Brueggemann and Girard draw upon Ricoeur significantly. Brueggemann takes his insights as a starting point and uses them theologically in his own way, whilst Girard, as a historian-anthropologist, is much closer to the continuum of study which has developed since Fraser published *The Golden Bough*, was significantly advanced by Ricoeur in the 1960s, and has had a flourishing recently in the understanding of sacral kingship.\textsuperscript{174}

If Brueggemann's scheme centres on creative (prophetic) talk of God as a counter-imagination of the world, communicated through the media of

\textsuperscript{173} See particularly *Violence and the Sacred*, and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*.

\textsuperscript{174} See Quigley (ed), 2005.
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symbol and metaphor, then Girard’s scheme, which is constructed around concealment of the truth by myth and the killing of the prophets\(^\text{175}\) (speakers of truth), is a dissimilar exercise where similar methods might nevertheless be appropriate. We shall return to this point later. But Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* and *Cadences of Home* describes situations in which both the prophetic message and arguments ranged against it (such as the Solomonic ‘paganization of Israel’\(^\text{176}\)) would both logically make use of symbol, metaphor and myth to carry their message. So in Brueggemann we see symbol and metaphor understood as a general, universally-available method, and little attention paid to myth specifically; whereas Girard tends to focus his attention on the *function* of myth in its application to the human tendency to conceal violence and its causes. Does this simply reflect Girard’s area of interest? He does not positively say that there is something about myth and symbol which means that it can only be used in this way; but he does say that myth has existed as a servant of the mimetic process. He makes the major claim that Jesus calls time on the mimetic process and exposes it. In other words, he reveals the process of which myth forms a part; Girard generalises from this, without exploring what else myth might be used for, if anything.

This takes us back to Ricoeur’s statement that myth, once stripped of its aetiological intention and explanatory pretensions, becomes a symbol and can be a dimension of modern thought. For Girard, myth is certainly a symbol, and he ascribes to Jesus the groundbreaking stripping of misleading causal accounts of the mythological. By exposing the process, Jesus neutralised it as a viable process, because once understood, it loses its power to feed upon the human character. The nature of sin is exposed, and the account thus exposed becomes a symbol which is useful within modern thought (or indeed, thought of any period). There seems, therefore to be a

\(^{175}\) Girard, 1978, p.165.  
\(^{176}\) Brueggemann, 1978, p.31.
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broad coherence between Girard and Ricoeur here, and Girard has taken Ricoeur’s insights to another level, in a Christian context at least.

Brueggemann’s focus on myth comes a distant second to his theory of the re-description of reality, a process involving symbols and metaphor. He is much less inclined to enquire into myth as a process formative of established description. He suggests that the Bible is read as a network of symbols, and that the system by which these symbols interrelate is invested in readers, or, as he puts it, in “the social, cultural context of Bible reading”.\textsuperscript{177} It might therefore be said that he simply does not attempt to penetrate as far back into human systems as does Girard, but is content to stay within the limits of theology, and not make links into other disciplines. Some of Girard’s critics, like Sarah Coakley, might well say that Brueggemann’s approach is the more reliable here, and carries much less risk of ‘category mistakes’\textsuperscript{178}.

Brueggemann’s interest is in the dynamics of symbolism, as an area in which meaning is added, lost or modified by change. This is an approach which tends to accommodate post-modern relativism fairly easily, as it does not deal in absolute referents, but only in God’s commentary, through prophecy, on a moving target. God’s view is therefore by no means static, and revelation is only ever the part of God’s word which is relevant to a particular situation in time.

This invites another question, which is how God’s recorded word is understood as human situations change. Prophetic words spoken to Israel in exile cannot have the same meaning when read in contemporary Britain.

\textsuperscript{177} Brueggemann, 2009, pp.1-2.
\textsuperscript{178} A point made against Girard, as in footnote 28 above.
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Girard is working with very different concepts from Brueggemann here. His mimetic theory depends on the insights of Jesus which blow apart the invisible but usually unavoidable mimetic process being everlastingly durable and everlastingly relevant. He is a realist about truth, and not inclined to the view that any fundamental dilemma in human behaviour is transitory.

The Ousting of Old Mythology by Myth and Prophecy

It may be wondered, are Brueggemann and Girard myth makers? Is their talk of myth actually the start of a new mythology? The question depends on whether there is any possibility of mythology in contemporary culture, or whether the succession of myth supplanting myth, time out of mind, as cultures unfold and overtake one another, has come to an end. That succession was possible because the outgoing and the incoming mythologies were incompatible; one had to replace another. However, they were both symbolic-mythological systems in a similar sense.

With the Enlightenment this changed, to the extent that science claims to be completely free of myth. Science substitutes for mythological vehicles its own unique system of coherence, in which all its claims are to be shown to correspond to facts. Exclusivity in this regard was asserted, and claims made on other bases than science were progressively rejected as science advanced. Indeed, its tremendous advantages of provable veracity for its claims independent of culture give it a formidable internal synergy. It is a universal system for measuring reality and accrediting facts. But recently, there has been doubt expressed as to whether any human system can avoid selection and arrangement, and neutral and objective approaches may just be a...
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figment of the post-Enlightenment imagination. A sceptic might ask, what is the difference between this situation and one in which one mythology ousts another? Is not science a sort of super-mythology, which, like Girard’s theory, tends to universalize its claims?

In answering this point, it may be useful first to note some recent raggedness which has started to appear in the advance of science. In advanced science it has become apparent that the bases, for instance, of conventional physics and quantum mechanics are incompatible. Increasingly, specialists in this field are happy to go on record with such statements as, “There is no deep reality. There is no quantum world. There is only an abstract description” (Neils Bohr), and “The doctrine that the world is made up of objects whose existence is independent of human consciousness turns out to be in conflict with quantum mechanics and with facts established by experience.” (Bernard d’Espagnat). This is particularly remarkable, because it disputes the traditional basis of empirical science. And yet the credentials of quantum mechanics are now well established, regardless of this clash. Quantum methods can now be verified by their output; they are used in some forms of manufacturing, for instance, that of liquid crystal displays.

Since both quantum mechanics and conventional physics can be demonstrated to carry truth-value, the processes of neither can be sufficient in itself for understanding the universe. An incomplete or over-extended system is one that has no choice but to operate symbolically, and to use such symbolic combinations as it has to bridge the gaps in understanding. Is this not precisely what mythology does?

So far as symbolism is concerned, there is of course nothing new about the claim that science is dependent upon it. If, as Langer says,

179 Wright, 1992, p.15. He was referring to the history of the emergence of Christianity, but the point is transferable.
180 Bradley, R.D. *How to Lose your Grip on Reality? An Attack on Anti-Realism in Quantum Theory* Simon Fraser University, 2000 p.1. The point being made by d’Espagnat is that Quantum Mechanics theories involve the arrangement of particles being dependent on the number of observers.
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"A sentence is a symbol for a state of affairs...A temporal order of words stands for a rational order of things." 181

Then what is an equation or a chemical formula? And what is mathematics in its entirety? It may seem odd to refer to science and mythology in the same breath, but so long as knowledge is incomplete the expression of ideas that run ahead of knowledge must depend on the assembling of symbols using to metaphors similes and analogies. This is how myths are made.

Therefore, let us note that

(a) Symbolism is arguably the basis of expression in all times and cultures, and that generalisation includes the present scientific age.
(b) Symbols are assembled into mythologies, because that is how their meaning is given eloquence.

Therefore, it would not be illogical to claim that science is a mythology amongst other mythologies. We could logically add to this account that history depends, like science, on the mutual proofs of facts, or “justified true belief”, in which the ‘justification’ and the ‘truth’ are dependent on a form of cross-referencing. Therefore, history is ultimately subject to the same limitations as science.

Some writers, notably Langer, have claimed that in the present time we are in a fallow period following the death of religious and mythological communication, and waiting for a new mythology to emerge182. Here, we shall consider counter-proposals: that mythology is still active, and that a mythology is not apparently such to those who operate within that mythology’s home culture. If that is the case, then there is perhaps little

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181 Langer (1960), p.73.
182 “Religion rests on a young and provisional form of thought to which science must succeed if thinking is to go on; when that is exhausted, there will be another vision, a new mythology.” Langer, 1960, p.201.
scope for a fallow period, and it may be possible analytically to discern the areas covered by present-day mythologies, by making use of previous examples as analytical tools.

This brings us to the point: is the writing of Brueggemann and Girard respectively one and another form of mythology?

In Girard’s work, it is temptingly easy to say that he has written a myth about Satan, and Satan’s violent mode of behaviour. The old myths are revealed in their workings by another myth of Girard’s invention.

But in Brueggemann’s scheme, each new revelation modifies the old, and all revelation is time and culture-specific, and therefore incompletely relevant to the understanding of other reality. Therefore all religious accounts share with mythology a nature and a truth-value which are incompatible with, and unacceptable to, science-history.
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“Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life. For ‘consciousness of sin’ is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it.”

How durable are biblical concepts? In fact, how durable are subtle abstract concepts of any sort? They may seem to persist through centuries, but do they actually persist in a way which is identical with their original definition? And, in some cases, even when a concept remains recognizable, does its content of meaning seem to change or waste away? Does, for instance, what happened to Bunyan relate to the Bible in way that we, four hundred years later, would recognize, and find truth in?

In many cases a simple phenomenon is apparent: the decay of biblical concepts is related to their replacement by others which carry a scientific warrant. With others, no such simple explanation is possible. The second of these is the general situation of interest to us here: concepts which used to carry weight, but now seem to have lost their coherence or importance.

To take an extreme example of a concept which has lost its importance, the dietary and hygiene regulations laid down in Leviticus have been eclipsed by public health and other rules, and although the same guiding principle might be discerned, ‘avoid contamination’, that is no longer a religious injunction (except in a metaphorical sense) but has become a practical and a legal one. Similarly, the idea of ‘uncleanness’ has vanished and been replaced by a

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number of others, chiefly medical; for instance, infection and contagion in diseases, and correspondingly, in public health measures.

In *The Symbolic Language of Religion* Thomas Fawcett reviews the symbolism in biblical texts and religious language, and concludes that the rise of rationalism, the development of machines and particularly computers have progressively altered patterns of thought away from the symbolic and towards rational modes relying on verification of empirical evidence. In his view, the symbolic mode of thought, which sees communicating signs in many aspects of life and the physical world, has been depopulated of those signs and left them blank.

The old symbolic way of thinking declined; Greek thought turned the old awareness of symbols into philosophy, and Hebrew thought turned it into history within ancient times. The Mediaeval cast of mind withdrew from this trend to some extent, even though that era’s greatest thinkers, like Aquinas, progressed with it. But what has finally killed it is the iconoclasm which began with the Reformation. It could be argued that this iconoclasm was destructive of something on which knowledge of God depended, possibly mediated by symbolic means; the representations which were destroyed in that period, Fawcett says, may be called angels, because ‘angel’ is a word for a communicating sign of any sort. The inability to recognize symbols for God is to be without ‘angels’, and the lack of those symbols makes God incognito in nature and history. So, God slowly expires through simply not being recognized in his creation.

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184 Fawcett, 1970.
185 Ibid., p.272.
186 ibid., p.273.
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Fawcett ends his well-developed argument – almost – on this gloomy note, noting that expired symbolism is more or less inaccessible to the age that inherits it. The pavilion of meaning once so active in providing a means of understanding ultimate realities, can degenerate into a sort of museum of terms which are desiccated and have lost their vital power:

“When the church becomes a preserver of obscure symbols, it tends to appear as an institution doggedly maintaining irrelevancies.” ¹⁸⁷

Amongst the ideas that have lost their coherence are sacrifice and prophecy. The concepts are still live, but the perception of meaning contained in them has shifted. Sacrifice has lost its primitive, propitiatory aspect, but retained the idea of personal sacrifice, the giving of oneself for others’ benefit; its third aspect, that of the deflection onto a third party of a responsibility or blame (scapegoating), which is the particular aspect of interest to Girard, is something we will look at in detail in Part 2.

When we turn to the idea of prophecy, as a generalisation it seems that most people, these days, have little expectation that any prophet will emerge in the contemporary world. The possibility of an individual having access to the mind of God seems to be something that belongs to the past. People do now talk of visionaries or forward-thinkers, who correctly anticipate the future, but that is a lesser category of prophet, if a prophet at all. The possibility of being at one mind with God is something which contemporary thinking in general does not readily admit, even amongst religious people. This is in strong contrast to previous ages, even in Britain since the Reformation. ¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ ibid., p.281.
¹⁸⁸ Part of the fascination with William Blake in contemporary times may stem from the fact that he did show signs of having such an insight, or believing that he had it.
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Modern Thought & the Post-Modern Revolution

For more than five hundred years, ever since the Enlightenment, rationalism (or modernism) has been the dominant mode of thinking in the West. Its collapse in the last half century into postmodernism perhaps marks the end of a worn-out system, but nevertheless, rationalism is the mode in which nearly all of our language is constructed\(^{189}\). That means that the conceptual structure that is in use at this point of time is for the most part rationally derived, as the ambiguous, chicken-and-egg relationship between concepts and language is slow to adapt to the new order. The problems of postmodernism are related partly to the fact that postmodern concepts are still expressed using a conceptual structure which is essentially modernist.

This rational structure has space for God, because there is nothing about it which dictates that rational thought excludes thought of God. Biblical concepts therefore have at least an entrée into rational thought, even if reason often seems to reject them in the end. So it is not any sort of contradiction for the scientists Hawking and Einstein to refer to an entity, called ‘God’ or ‘spirit’, which antecedes the Universe. They are using a biblical concept to refer to an object of interest which science can identify vaguely as a necessary entity but has no means to quantify or assess. However, where the boundary line comes between the provinces of scientific explanation and those of religious explanation has shifted drastically since the Enlightenment.

There has been a decay in the idea of absolutes under postmodernism; instead of making its main concern with principles (for example, unity, identity, and certainty), postmodernism fixes itself on other matters:

\(^{189}\) Drane, John, 2005, p.25.
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difference, plurality, textuality, and scepticism. The whole idea of concepts, as reliable categories which can be agreed upon, is therefore subject to question.

However, Girard is chary of these categories, and refuses to sign up to modernism or postmodernism, insisting on defining them as it were from an external standpoint, according to his own terminology:

“The only way modernity can be defined is the universalization of internal mediation\(^{190}\), for one doesn’t have areas of life that would keep people apart from one another and that would mean that the construction of our beliefs and identity cannot but have strong mimetic components.”\(^{191}\)

In other words, for Girard modernity is a situation in which internal mediation is dominant. That means that modernity can manifest itself at any juncture in time. However, he accepts that modernity, thus defined, emerges in the Renaissance\(^{192}\).

When invited to comment on the progressive abandonment of reading the Bible in the last two centuries, which many would see as the culmination of modernism and the starting point of postmodern thought, Girard responds that the withdrawal of all Gods is the first transreligious phenomenon. Christianity can be identified as the cause, because it has dealt the old pagan order a death blow:

\(^{190}\) Girard explains imitation in terms of external mediation, in which the subject is in a different domain from his model, and internal mediation, in which in which they belong to the same domain, and the model’s objects are accessible. “Therefore, rivalry will eventually erupt.” Girard et al., 2007, p.57.

\(^{191}\) Girard et al, 2007, p.240.

\(^{192}\) Ibid, p.239.
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“It is ironic: Christianity seems to be dying together with the religions it extinguishes, because, in sacrificial terms, it is perceived as one mythical religion among others. Christianity is not one of the destroyed religions but it is the destroyer of all religions. The death of God is a Christian phenomenon. In its modern sense, atheism is a Christian invention. There is no atheism in the ancient world... The disappearance of religion is a Christian phenomenon par excellence. Of course, and let me clarify that I am referring to the disappearance of religion in so far as we see religion as aligned with a sacrificial order.”\(^{193}\)

That is, of course, not entirely the common definition of religion. Girard’s interlocutor then asks him if he thinks that the world is becoming more and more Christian, despite appearances, and Girard’s reply commences:

“Yes. This fact makes the phenomenon much more paradoxical, because it is much easier to recover biblical principles if one doesn’t know they are biblical.”

So, Girard is denying the reality of the postmodern understanding, by saying that biblical principles (which are not identical with concepts, but closely related to them) are in abeyance in terms of their recognition within contemporary culture, but the reality of those principles and their attendant concepts is being instantiated by other means. That is how the world is becoming more and more Christian, but does not realise it; when things are expressed as ‘Christian’ or ‘biblical’, this process may be interrupted by an adverse reaction.

The important example from Girard’s point of view is the loss of the concept of sacrifice (through a sort of new ignorance or cultural blindness). The

\(^{193}\) Girard et al, 2007, pp.256-257.
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custom concept is replaced by the principle of the innocence of victims. There is a movement exhibited here,

1. from the concept of sacrifice, only half-understood (if understood at all) by the cultures which allowed it to control their world,
2. through understanding (as laid out in the message of Jesus), to
3. a new mode of behaviour derived from the new understanding. The new stance is arrived at without any explicit acknowledgement of what has occurred.

Therefore, Girard, as a realist about mimesis\textsuperscript{194}, is claiming that the cultural shift which has cast aside the possibility of an absolute truth about sacrifice is nevertheless bound to a sort of recognition of that truth, through having espoused the principle which defends victims against persecution. Considered at its highest level, the biblical principle is intact, but has lost its derivation. It therefore has an altered appearance.

It might be said here that Girard is revealing a process, and those who accept his revelation will have had the biblical principle restored within them. However, one could go further, and say that Girard is revealing the underlying reality of the biblical concept of sacrifice, through what one might call the overarching concepts of mimesis and the scapegoat mechanism. In other words, it is Girard’s achievement to have identified the over-arching, high-level concept from which the superficially apparent biblical concepts derive.

In doing this, Girard is following the pattern set by Jesus, whose ministry revolved around identifying over-arching concepts\textsuperscript{195} within the texts of the

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, p.26.
\textsuperscript{195} He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second
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Hebrew Bible. The suggestion here is not that Jesus talked about ‘concepts’ or any synonym of that word, but that he identified the ideas behind the words used in religion and in the Law. We are referring to thinking at the highest level, which is communicated via an assembly of lower-level expressions which can be interpreted in terms of actions. An example of this would be sacrifice as ritual slaughter of animals. Therefore, it might be said that one of the chief projects of the New Testament is the communication of these high-level concepts, and that therefore Girard’s work is directly related to that project.

However, that is the macro-view, and a closer focus will enable us to examine how these high-level concepts become apparent, remain concealed, or slip from being apparent into a sort of invisibility. Girard’s thinking, of course has as one of its central points the invisible nature of the scapegoat mechanism and of the mimetic principle generally. This could be interpreted as an epistemological claim about the possibilities for knowledge, and the codification of knowledge into a system of concepts, that system being impermanent and potentially evanescent; but the high-level concepts from which the concepts are derived being flexible, durable and capable of being instantiated by alternatives to the lower-level concepts first used.

Girard’s view of where the limits of biblical concepts are set is therefore not anything like a typical one. High on his list will be items to be expected, particularly sacrifice, but also others like the deflection of violence, the role of desire and rivalry. This is because, in his view, these are aspects of high-level concepts, and central to the understanding of the world put forward in the Bible. Indeed, it is the unique importance of the Bible that it grasps the elusive, hidden meaning of these concepts and exposes them for what they are. Therefore, it is part of Girard’s argument that biblical concepts are not

is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Mt 22:37-40.

196 Including blessing, redemption and the fulfilment of prophecy.
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what they probably at first appear to be, and it is only through an enlarged understanding of the nature and extent of biblical concepts that the Bible itself can be appreciated and used for the understanding of the world which it embodies.

Girard’s thinking is notable for the way it links many concepts together into an integrated scheme. For instance, he thinks that apocalypse is a biblical concept which has fallen out of use:

“The apocalyptic feelings of early Christians were not pure fantasy. These texts should be discussed: they are just as relevant today as they were at the time of their writing, and I find it disconcerting that many churches have stopped preaching on them”\textsuperscript{197}.

But he goes on,

“Any great Christian experience is apocalyptic because what one realises is that after the decomposition of the sacrificial order there is nothing standing between us and possible destruction.”\textsuperscript{198}

So a link is made between two concepts, one of which has failed to regain much currency (apocalypse) and one that has regained some currency (sacrifice), partly thanks to Girard. But it is interesting that according to Girard, one is bound up with the other, and that the neglected concept, apocalypse, is essential in order to make sense of the end of the sacrificial order.

However, although Girard stresses his apocalyptical stance on a number of occasions, and although it is important to his scheme of thought, he does not seem to be anything like as influential in this as he is in the other aspects of his work, such as mimetic desire and scapegoating. So, one might say that

\textsuperscript{197} But others have not.
\textsuperscript{198} Girard, 2007, p.235.
either Girard has failed so far to reclaim the biblical concept of the coming apocalypse, or that contemporary thought has failed to embrace a concept which is essential.

One might generalise from this point, and say that although Girard’s overall scheme has made an impact and his thinking has many admirers, it remains in a niche of thought and has not yet brought about any general adjustment of biblical concepts, even though in specific cases (the concepts of sacrifice and violence, in particular) Girard’s thinking is well-enough established to merit a mention in any summary of the subjects.

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Brueggemann is actively concerned with the categorization of concepts, particularly the concept of theology itself199. Beneath this umbrella, he is constantly probing into what is truly meant by familiar concepts which are

199 For instance,
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often simply taken at face value. For instance, in his commentary on Genesis, he queries what is meant in that book by the idea of God's call. A substantial part of his work is directed at the idea of prophecy, and establishing what exactly that might be, and under what circumstances it tends to be produced and find fertile ground in its hearers. In other words, he looks at prophecy's essential timeliness.

He distinguishes between ‘core testimony’ (Israel’s characteristic and habituated speech) and ‘Israel’s counter testimony’, consisting of “themes and texts (e.g. divine hiddenness, the lament) that that challenge or protest the more ‘normative’ speech.” Fretheim, reflecting on Brueggemann’s God, comments that “the line between these two testimonies becomes blurred. For example, violence ‘belongs to the very fabric of this faith’, and ‘savageness ...belongs to the core claims of Yahweh.”

The dividing line between conventional religion (testimony) and prophecy (counter testimony) may be difficult to discern on occasions, but what is coming across clearly here is that violence belongs to both. A ‘core claim’ of religion in either department, let alone both, takes us firmly into the area of biblical concepts. It also brings us up against another term which Brueggemann is inclined to use, ‘the common theology’. This refers to a theory, derived from Gottwald, which is explored in Chapter 9, and for now it will suffice to say that this is a reference to the general theology found in the several related regions of the Near East, in which the theology of Israel originated, and from which it later became differentiated. A developmental process can be traced from the common theology to what Brueggemann calls

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203 Ibid.
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the ‘core testimony’, to prophecy or ‘countertestimony’. The role of violence changes in this developmental process, as we shall see.

Brueggemann & Girard on the Biblical Concept of Violence

Although there is clearly common ground between Brueggemann and Girard in recognizing the changing role of violence within the conceptual structure of the Bible, their treatment of the subject is by no means identical.

Girard is famously quoted in his axiom, “Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred”\(^{204}\). This claim is of course about religion, not specifically about Christianity, though Christianity’s part in changing the role of violence is unique. His study begins with a strong anthropological interest, drawing upon the work of Frazer, Durkheim\(^{205}\) and others. He embraces a vast sweep of cultural history, from the earliest moments of society to the present day and beyond.

Brueggemann has no such wide constituency. His interest is biblical and regional, and looks no further back than the ‘common theology’. He makes no claims about the origin of religion or of concepts, but focuses on their development within his subject area. Although his approach, following Gottwald to some extent, is firmly socio-literary and is opposed to the older historical-critical method, his remit is effectively defined by historical and

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\(^{204}\) Girard, 1977, p.31.
\(^{205}\) Though he claimed not to have been influenced by Durkheim. See footnote 292.
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geographical boundaries, though he does consider the issues of biblical episodes in their relevance to the present day.

Brueggemann contends that the shape of Old Testament Theology is defined by the “embrace of pain”\(^\text{206}\). He explains,

\[\text{“By embrace of pain is meant the full acknowledgement and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel’s faith-conversation with its God. Such an act of embrace means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God’s reception of the speech and the pain, and to wait hopefully for God’s resolution. The term ‘pain’ here refers to any dysfunction in the relationship with God and to any derivative dysfunction in the order of creation or society.”}\(^\text{207}\)

This is a wide and rather vague definition, but one anchored to a term indicating a hurt received. So, the dragging off into exile of Israel or the long detention of the Israelites in Egypt would be ‘pain’, if it arose as part of God’s plan; God’s plan therefore works partly through a mechanism involving violence, which is the counterpart to pain: the infliction of a hurt.

Brueggemann has written extensively on the ‘Psalms of Lament’ and on the biblical idea of lament, which he sees as a protest against the common theology\(^\text{208}\), and as a key part of a process by which power is transferred from God. This happens when God’s legitimacy is protested against, because it is seen as not taking into account the “suffering reality of the partner”\(^\text{209}\).

\(^\text{206}\) Brueggemann, 1992, pp. 22-44.
\(^\text{207}\) Brueggemann, 1992, p.25.
\(^\text{208}\) Brueggemann, 1992, p.27.
\(^\text{209}\) Brueggemann, 1992, p.28. At pp. 35-36, Brueggemann considers Genesis 18:16-33, which he describes as a counter-narrative, introduced to shift the balance of the older narrative of Genesis 19:1:29, in which God holds all the initiative. He refers to a correction of the text in 18:22, which places Abraham standing before God; the uncorrected version has the positions reversed: God stands before Abraham, who is holding him to account.
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He sees the laments as “Israel’s primary and distinctive departure from the common theology”\(^{210}\), which make Yahweh “no longer a trouble-free God”, as Israel refuses to accept God being “positioned above the fray”:

“The lament is a dramatic, rhetorical, liturgical act of speech that is irreversible. It makes clear that Israel will no longer be a submissive, subservient recipient of decrees from the throne… the conventional distribution of power is called into question…Pain speaks against legitimacy, which is now for the first time questioned as being illegitimate.”\(^{211}\)

Brueggemann gives the example of Rosa Parks, who declared her pain in public in 1955 by refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger, and move to the back of the bus where the rules said black persons must sit; this expression of pain was also a release of energy, that enabled a great change to begin, and a wrong to be righted.

Tolstoy, in *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence*\(^{212}\) proclaimed a sort of Christian pacifist anarchism (in the sense of a Christian duty to refrain from domination of others) and illustrated his point with an imaginative episode in which a young man is imprisoned for refusing on Christian grounds to take part in military service. His pain is not expressed in any retaliatory aggression, but in a non-violent and forgiving approach and peaceful manner which infuriates his oppressors, who pile more and more punishment on him; but his message is infectious and others in the prison join him (a release of energy is demonstrated in this). H.G Wells, quoted by Tolstoy’s translator, is in agreement with Tolstoy, but unlike him believes the development of the world to date to have followed an inevitable course:

\(^{211}\) Ibid, p.27.
\(^{212}\) Tolstoy, 1948.
In other words, domination of others through methods which involve violence is the only mechanism through which society could reach its present state of development.

These reflections on pain and the essential human state bring us very close to Girard, but not to any real overlap, as they remain unconnected to any over-arching theory of behaviour over and above, on the one hand, the existence of mutual violence, possibly as a necessary tool of human development, and, on the other, the moral desirability (or religious imperative) of avoiding it. The main difference is that Girard sees the divine position as one deeply opposed to violence, but violence as a fundamental part of religion; Jesus reveals this situation for what it is. Brueggemann, on the other hand, sees violence as a feature of both human and divine behaviour, and draws upon the ample evidence in the Old Testament in his discussion. Because his focus is mainly on the pre-Christian, the revolution brought about by Jesus specifically in attitudes to violence and retaliation does not surface in the mainstream of his work.

However, there is another fundamental difference between the two writers, which lies in the degree to which they accept or reject existing conceptual structures as a starting point. On that basis, it appears that Brueggemann, though far from straightforward, is the more straightforward of the two writers, in that his understanding of concepts is directed more at exploring recognized categories than Girard’s, and less at re-engineering the whole edifice of concepts. His work is therefore more capable of being integrated

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into an existing conceptual scheme; he rarely can be said to stand alone, or be claimed to have an integrated system for which claims of exclusiveness are made, or to have a theory which demands a revolution in the reader’s conceptual structure.

However, despite this, he is concerned both to explore how the mind of the Hebrew writer worked in its structuring of texts, and to expose concepts to perspectives of analysis which were unknown in previous ages. In this enterprise he continues the work of Norman K. Gottwald, who continues to be a towering figure in the field of Old Testament interpretation.

Therefore, a survey of biblical concepts, where these two writers are concerned, has to cope with a number of aspects of the term ‘biblical concepts’, and knocks at the foundation of what a biblical concept might be, and to what it owes its origins.

Prophecy in Brueggemann & Girard

The position of Girard

Girard refers to the biblical prophets who preceded Jesus only occasionally, and the general subject of prophecy is not a topic that he addresses directly, though he does acknowledge the contribution of the prophets as witnesses to the gradual decline of the sacrificial system:

“the pre-exilic prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah denounce in vehement terms the impotence of the sacrificial process and ritual in general. In the most explicit manner they link the decay of religious practices to the
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deterioration of contemporary behaviour. Inevitably, the decay of the sacrificial system seems to result in reciprocal violence. Neighbours who had previously discharged their mutual aggressions on a third party, joining together in the sacrifice of an ‘outside’ victim, now turn to sacrificing one another.”

However, it is noteworthy that the prophets are seen here as standing in opposition to the decline of the system, and calling people back to the old standards. Jonah, an unwilling prophet, is made the subject of a symbolic episode in which the calling out of the sailors each to his own god symbolises the breakdown of the religious order, and the foundering of the ship the impending destruction of the city of Nineveh, unless it repents. When the ship’s passengers look around for a sacrificial victim to take responsibility for the crisis, Jonah puts himself forward, saying, “for I know for my sake this great tempest is upon you.” Having continued without success to try and save the ship by their own efforts, since they wish to save Jonah’s life, the sailors finally address themselves to the Lord (that is, Jonah’s Lord, not their own), and ask for indemnity of Jonah’s innocent blood, on the basis that the Lord demanded it of them. They cast Jonah overboard, the sea ceased its raging, and the sacrificial crisis is resolved.

Thus, in Girard’s view, the prophets who preceded Christ (with the notable exception of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant) stand within the old tradition of religion which has violence at its core. However, in parallel with this is the trend which increasingly has concern for the victim. This begins in Egypt when God tells Moses that the Egyptians who will not at that time let the

214 Girard, 1977, p.43.
215 Jonah 1:12.
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people of Israel go, will in the end expel them as scapegoats in sacrificial crisis when Egypt is ravaged by plagues.\textsuperscript{217}

“Genesis and Exodus are only the beginning. In the other books of the Law and particularly in those of the Prophets, a reader who has been alerted to the role of the scapegoat cannot fail to notice an increasing tendency for the victim to be brought to light. This tendency goes hand in hand with an increasing subversion of the three great pillars of primitive religion: first, mythology, then the sacrificial cult (explicitly rejected by the prophets before the exile), finally the primitive conception of the law as a form of obsessive differentiation, a refusal of mixed states that looks upon indifferentiation with horror.”\textsuperscript{218}

On both counts, the prophets are creatures of their time and unlike Jesus, do not have insight into the divine wish, which Jesus recognized, to unmask the mimetic process and the violence involved in it. Again, the clear exception to this time-bound succession is the Suffering Servant.

Let us therefore look at Girard’s observations on the Suffering Servant. He sees this episode as

“the great transformation for which the prophet paradoxically paves the way, a decisive manifestation of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{219}

This epiphany... is evidently realised twelve chapters further on, in the collective murder that ends the crisis, the murder of the Suffering Servant. In spite of his kindness and his love for others, the Servant is not loved by his own people, and in the fourth and last song, he dies at the hands of a

\textsuperscript{217} Exodus 11:1 “Then the Lord said to Moses, I will send only one more punishment on the king of Egypt and his people. After that, he will let you leave. In fact, he will drive all of you out of here.”

\textsuperscript{218} Girard, 1978, p.154.

\textsuperscript{219} Isaiah 40:5.
Girard goes on to claim that the collective lynching of the prophet, in this episode and in the Gospels, and the revelation of Yahweh “make up one and the same event”. He also refers to this as “the occasion of a new and supreme revelation”\(^{221}\), or epiphany. Within the thinking of Girard, therefore, but also within much established theology, the two episodes speak of the same account, one foretelling the other, but despite the way Girard puts it, the words of Isaiah do not relate to an event that has already taken place\(^{222}\). The epiphany of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant was of course many hundreds of years in the past by the time of Jesus’s persecution and the epiphany which that constituted, but the event Isaiah foretold had not previously taken place.

‘The Messiah’ is of course the usual concept grouping Isaiah’s Servant and Jesus together, one the prophecy, and the other the fulfilment of that prophecy. We know from the gospels that Jesus was, by the time of his final few days in Jerusalem, a great disappointment to the populace who had had such high expectations of him. They had expected him to throw the Roman yoke off, and make Israel free and great. In that respect, their expectations of the Messiah (a leader anointed by God who would unite the tribes of Israel and usher in an age of peace\(^{223}\)) were simply incompatible with those of Jesus, who used the same ideas in a contrary way.”\(^{224}\)

It might be said that Jesus connected the concept of the Messiah to the prophecy of Isaiah but the Jerusalem crowds did not, and looked only for a

\(^{221}\) Ibid, p.31.
\(^{222}\) Ibid. “it is to announce that the life and death of Jesus will be similar to the life and death of the former prophet.”
\(^{223}\) Brueggemann, 2002, pp127-129.
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great leader in the conventional terms of this world. Under a Girardian perspective, the dichotomy is a classic one, a microcosm of the conflict between God and Satan. One might therefore say of Girard's position (though he does not say it himself explicitly), that the multiple understandings of the term 'Messiah' are a symptom of the interweaving of mimetic thinking and anti-mimetic thinking throughout the Bible. Another example lies in Genesis 18, where the Lord and Abraham argue about retribution against the city of Sodom on account of the sinfulness of some of its inhabitants.

But if Girard sees prophecy as relevant under the two headings of defending the sacrificial system and decisively closing off that system through a supreme revelation, Brueggemann tends to see it as a sporadic activity related to moments of need and opportunity. There is a dichotomy between the two writers on this point, and it is not one that can be reconciled readily.
The loss of the power to speak of God symbolically

The loss of the capacity and the habit of speaking of God symbolically and metaphorically has an effect on biblical concepts. Take the story of the creation in Genesis, for instance, and the huge controversies that persist on whether it is a true account or not. The proponents and opponents of creationism rarely seem to pause and say, “what if it is true at a symbolic level?”, because within our culture, to say that something is a symbolic statement is judged as being a low grade of affirmation not actually involving a truth-test. The symbol as a viable parallel to truth, important because it brings the issue within the human conceptual range, is understood intellectually, but given little weight.

The claim that symbolic thinking has declined is not, I think, a controversial one, and is seen by many as an effect of modernism and a legacy of the Enlightenment. In this, symbolism is defined objectively when put into a historical perspective, as background. It may not be noticed in the present or recent times, when it is, as it were, within the foreground. Postmodernism, despite its rejection of modernistic modes of thought, has not seen any notable return to patterns of symbolic thinking, though it may be playing host to an interest in symbolism (again, as something distanced from present-day culture). Since, in the absence of a consensual approach, symbolism is bound to remain an object of study, tackled with reference book in hand, rather than an active mode of exchange of ideas, symbolism still seems to be stuck largely in a sort of museum status. This is very different from the active life of analogical and symbolic forms when they are current:
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“"for analogy to speak not merely to the mind of man but also to his heart, it must be subordinated within symbolic models which have for him the quality of revelation."\textsuperscript{225}

“The medium is the message”, to quote Marshall McLuhan\textsuperscript{226}, and this is possibly an unchanging fact about humanity. However, the perception of symbols is often confined to a historical perspective. One might conjecture that this situation can be viewed under a number of headings:

1. It applies to old patterns of symbolic thought, on the one hand, which are legitimately the subject of academic study.

2. It applies also to categories of thought which are incapable of expression in any form of direct factual terminology, since language and the conceptual structure currently in place do not permit it.

3. Following Girard, one might claim that certain concepts are hidden, and that they are described only tangentially by myths, rituals and interdictions.

Point (3) is something which will be explored in detail in later chapters. Point (1) is an observation that is simply something to bear in mind – patterns of old symbolic thought go out of date; but point (2) is one that is useful in a consideration of Brueggemann's approach.

Brueggemann does not refer to symbolism much, but is greatly concerned with interpretation, and sees this as a principal task of the church\textsuperscript{227}. He makes it clear that this process, for him, is not just the ordinary business of interpreting propositions, but something more involved. Quoting David Tracy, he suggests that “for a classic document that is timeless to be timely, it

\textsuperscript{225} Fawcett, 1970, p.67.
\textsuperscript{226} Title of a radio lecture given on ABC Radio National Network on 27 June 1979.
\textsuperscript{227} Brueggemann, 2009, pp12ff.
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must be interpreted.” 228 Of course, this tacitly places him in the camp of those who believe that the Bible speaks metaphorically and symbolically, not just historically or factually; simple propositional truths, taken as such, require little or no interpretation, whilst symbols and metaphors by definition always require interpretation. Indeed, it is the standpoint of fundamentalists such as creationists that attempts at interpretation are intrinsically a sign of being in error, because they knock at the foundation of the idea of the text as a factual statement which is always true and always to be received in the same sense.

It would also be true to say that Brueggemann reveals a postmodern standpoint in his attitude to interpretation. Addressing those who work within the church on Bible study, he states,

“This...is a bid that such a reader of these essays recognize himself/herself as an interpreter, as one with a responsibility to decide, yet again, what the church may be saying to the church as God’s live word, and as one with enormous freedom in that act of interpretation. That freedom means that the interpreter has wide latitude in ‘discovering’ a voice in the text and in ‘assigning’ a voice in the text. As a consequence the interpreter is inescapably ‘making’ meaning and not just ‘finding’ meaning, so that interpretation is an imaginative act of construction. 229 Any thought that we may present ‘biblical truth’ without interpretation is an illusion and indicates an unfortunate deficit of self-knowledge on that part of the interpreter.” 230

229 “The term poesis from which we derive ‘poetry’ means to ‘make’ or ‘perform’. Thus interpretation is a ‘making’ as well as a receiving” [Brueggemann’s footnote].
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Brueggemann identifies ‘meta-issues’ of which a church interpreter needs to be aware. These are enumerated as follows:

1. Two tyrannies
   i. Confessionalism: under this heading, he traces the medieval tendency to make the Bible the servant of the church’s dogma, the tendency following the Reformation to free the Bible from interpretative monopoly, and regard it as its own testimony, the rise of historical criticism as an attempt to thaw the text from church authoritarianism.
   ii. Reductionism: he also refers to this as ‘the tyranny of the academy’, and it is directed against historical criticism which has “functioned to overcome the intellectual scandal of the text that attested the unfettered freedom of God, the stunning energy of God’s miraculous presence in the world, and the revolutionary ethic that is an embarrassment to a managed world.
   
   He sums up. “Both ‘literalists’ and ‘liberals’ are beset by these tyrannies, in both cases seeking to reduce the power and elusiveness of the text to a controllable dimension.”

2. Two temptations
   i. Privatisation: the reduction of the Bible to a personal guide, devoid of the “powerful communal dimensions of the text”, a “resource for one’s comfort and well-being”.

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231 Brueggemann, 2009, p.15.
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In the hands of the religious right, it becomes “‘family values’, personal virtues, and moral norms”. The result is that the discourse of the church “withers to safe personal, interpersonal subjects that align the Bible in a vote for the status quo.”

ii. Politicization: this temptation “makes an easy and uncritical move from the text to contemporary issues, while hiding or denying the complex interpretive manoeuvre that makes the connection possible. The politicization of the text “runs the risk of denying the transcendent mystery of God and the eschatological claims of the text. Thus the core biblical metaphor ‘Kingdom of God’ cannot be immediately equated with any social construct we may have devised. The temptation moves in the direction of idolatry that wants to regard one’s own political advocacy as an ultimate expression of biblical intentionality.

3. Two tendencies

i. Equilibrium: this is to do with the legitimation of structure, which “generates rationales for the maintenance of the way things are”.

ii. Transformation; this propensity “emphasizes liberation, distributive justice, and the gift of freedom out beyond conventional social habits. I have termed thus inclination ‘the embrace of pain’, by which I suggest that these texts reflect a deep awareness of the suffering caused by present arrangements, and the conviction that God wills other for the world.”
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The two Tendencies are in a way opposites, and Brueggemann apparently disapproves of the first and approves the second, but the same is not true in the other sections, which simply enumerate undesirable aspects. From the point of view of our present concern, symbolism, it can be seen that problems occur in biblical interpretation both when the symbolic nature of biblical writing is ignored or denied, and the texts are treated as straightforward propositions to be tested on a historical basis; or when the biblical symbolic method is ignored and the symbolism of the present authority (be it church or state) is followed instead. What Brueggemann is seemingly working towards is the message that interpretation is required because the texts are not amenable to an immediate understanding, and that application of the texts to the present moment and time, whatever that may be, require understanding of the texts’ underlying agenda. In both cases, a loss of the power to speak of God symbolically is involved.

This brings us back to biblical concepts and the vehicle that carries them, the texts, stand in need of interpretation out of the literary, historic and cultural capsule of their writers and into that of present readers: “our appropriation of biblical texts is always and inescapably contextual and contested. Faithful reading requires a full recognition of the complexity of the text and an equally full recognition of the complexity of social reality in the midst of which we do our interpretation”. 232

Brueggemann does not explore what the effects on concepts might be of faithful (or unfaithful) reading, but it seems to be a matter of simple deduction that there must be an effect, and he himself alludes to that effect in action in the failure to comprehend eschatological issues of ‘the Kingdom of God’ noted in the temptation of politicization, above.

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Therefore, to Brueggemann, the failure of concepts lies largely in a failure to adopt an adequate approach. He seems to view culture as a cyclical process, and for the present time to be at a low point when it comes to its capacity for interpretative understanding. The response indicated is better discipline. Girard, on the other hand, is inclined to see development as progressive in a more linear way, leading finally to apocalypse. He therefore tends to note that certain important concepts can become extinguished or can become newly apparent through a non-cyclical shift in understanding. At an extreme, this can result in the appearance of atheism, which he claims comes out of the rise of Christianity.

Girard sees the mimetic system as essentially hidden, but capable of exposure, and seminally exposed by Jesus, though several times since lost again. His work is one of explanation of the truths which Jesus identified. In other words, Girard puts in contemporary explanatory terms what Jesus and some others have explained in other ways. To that extent, Girard is not only explaining prophecy, he is doing a prophet’s work.

However, there is more to the reclamation of biblical concepts than their explanation. The central importance of symbols is strikingly put by Ricoeur: “symbols give rise to thought,” a maxim which he describes as the principle by which a solution will be found to the problem of how to re-integrate imagination with reflection.

Fawcett pauses to consider the mythology of modern man in the last few pages of his important study. However, his approach is largely a preservationist one; he seeks to point out ways in which old symbols can be

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234 See page 91 for a statement by Girard on this, and footnote 193 on that page.
236 Fawcett, 1970.
brought into creative life, and also allow new symbols to be formulated and brought into use.

Ernst Cassirer observed

"In every work of art, says Carlyle, we discern eternity looking through time, the godlike rendered visible."237

What the project of reclaiming biblical concepts needs is not just penetrating understanding and explanation, but also an element of this artistic ability to inject the concept into the soul, by rendering the godlike visible. Girard understands the role of literature in achieving this, and Brueggemann the specific role of prophetic texts.

237 Cassirer, 1979, p.155.
7 The Dominant Version of Reality

Brueggemann sees the meaning of the biblical texts (and, indeed, of all texts) as being inextricably bound up with the world-view of their creators. Accessing the meaning therefore depends upon understanding the normative concepts which assembled themselves into a world-view. So, although Girard is concerned with areas of behaviour which may be judged to be pre-conceptual, in the sense of not being articulated as ideas in their own time, but only in ritual and myth, Brueggemann focuses on analysing texts and uses his analysis to build up a world-picture of the people by whom and for whom those texts were composed.

Brueggemann refers to this as the ‘Dominant Version of Reality’$^{238}$ of the culture, place and time. Girard does not have such a neat term, but perhaps would not disagree with Brueggemann’s. The construct, according to Brueggemann, is found within societies generally (though it varies in type) and is very powerful in its effect in shaping understanding. It obscures, denies or makes invisible other versions of reality, which then seem not to pass the test of truth or reason. Prophets, therefore, may be seen as cranks babbling or wailing nonsense in the wilderness until and unless their version gains sufficient currency to challenge the Dominant Version of Reality. At that point, they cease to be perceived as mere cranks and instead become either a threat or a salvation.

The dominant version of reality amongst us (meaning in present-day western society) is a narrative of violence, according to Brueggemann in Deep Memory$^{239}$. This is a comment about violence not only as the default method of authority, but also as a motif or constituent feature imbuing a society configured in God’s absence:

"The dominant version of reality among us is a narrative of violence. This can run all the way from sexual abuse and racial abuse to the strategy of the wholesale imprisonment of “deviants” to military macho that passes for policy. It eventuates in road rage and in endless TV violence piped in our

$^{238}$ Abbreviated here as ‘DVR’.
$^{239}$ Brueggemann, 2000, p.6.
The idea of violence as the underlying force in human society is of course not new, and occurs in the myth-based schemes of antiquity, particularly where a golden age at the beginning of history gave way to a human scheme based upon ‘plots and violence and the wicked lust for possession’.\textsuperscript{242} This is also the analysis of Girard, and one of the foundations of his theory. The history of the Exodus may be seen as the configuration of a society to avoid that trap, and indeed to avoid the process exhibited in the myths, the ‘sacred universe’\textsuperscript{243} in which violence became enshrined.\textsuperscript{244}

Brueggemann speaks of prophecy as the sub-version of reality\textsuperscript{245}, a deliberate \textit{double-entendre} referring to the paradigm-shift\textsuperscript{246} involved in it, since it articulates an alternative to the DVR; and also to its subversive effect. In considering this, the first thing to be done is to examine the relationship of the sub-version of reality (the essential stuff of the incipient paradigm shift) to the everyday world and established attitudes, and see how and when it successfully changes perceptions of reality.

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{241} Brueggemann, 1997, p.8.
\textsuperscript{242} Cohn quotes Ovid: “Punishment and fear did not exist, nor were threatening phrases to be read from fixed bronze tablets...(but then) shame and truth and good faith fled away; and in their place came deceit and guilt and plots and violence” Cohn, 1957, p.187.
\textsuperscript{243} Ricoeur, 1995, p.57.
\textsuperscript{244} Girard, 1972, deals with this matter at length. Ricoeur also has provided some important insights (Ricoeur, 1967, p.5ff) It is explored in detail in Chapter 12.
\textsuperscript{245} Brueggemann, 2000, p.1ff.
\textsuperscript{246} This concept was developed by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal book \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}, first published 1962 (Kuhn, 1970).
7 The Dominant Version of Reality

The Dominant Version of Reality and the Contemporary World

Brueggemann views the contemporary state of the church in America as ‘enculturated’ into consumerism247, and he looks to the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament, and particularly to Moses, for a way out of this predicament. In other words, his Old Testament study is to some extent teleological and its object is the problems of our own time. However, this part of his project gets relatively little of his attention and is not complete. As we shall see, in considering his work alongside Girard’s, it is on Girard that we rely mainly for a direct commentary on how things are in the contemporary age248. Girard’s understanding has a single, linear track to it; Brueggemann’s commentary is much more based on historic parallels. That is not to say that Brueggemann does not have a vision on how things will turn out; he does, and it could be argued that his vision is a fuller one than Girard’s. This situation has a bearing on where, in these texts themselves, commentary ends and prophecy may begin.

In The Prophetic Imagination, he explores the hypothesis “the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”249 ‘Prophecy’ is not simply defined, but is made the subject of an extended discussion on ‘what prophets do.’ The key word, he says, is ‘alternative’, and he drives at finding a realisation of this which is durably alternative, that is, will not become domesticated, but reliably hold together the twin qualities of criticism and energizing – qualities which he goes on to explore in the ministry of Jesus. The state of perpetual revolution which they suggest, with its dual basis, has to avoid the two traps of liberalism and conservatism250. Moses is an appropriate example to use of

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248 Though Brueggemann does include in The Prophetic Imagination chapters on Jesus and concludes with A Note on the Practice of Ministry.
250 “…between liberals who imagine God to be irrelevant to sociology and conservatives who unwittingly use a model of God for social reasons because they do not see how the two belong together, there is little to choose.” (Brueggemann, 1978, p.16) ‘belong together’ here refers to the essential relationship which is often one of opposition, if prophecy is to be alive and do its work.
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dthis in action, since he stands at the point of formation of the nation, and because that formation was internal in the sense that no external human agency or existing organisational model was involved. Its effect in essence was the evocation of an alternative consciousness to that of royal Egypt, and its means was prophecy: “prophecy is born precisely at that moment when the emergence of social reality is so radical and inexplicable that it has nothing less than a theological cause.”

Brueggemann characterizes the imperial aspect which ran through religion and society in Egypt as ‘the royal consciousness’, the consciousness which ‘undergirded’ the regime of ancient Egypt and made that regime possible. The counter-community called into existence by Moses is polarly opposed to it. More generally, this relationship equates to the status quo versus prophecy. The royal consciousness makes God domestic, and therefore not a challenge to the status quo. God is dissociated from risk, and instead is associated with the stability achieved by the regime.

Brueggemann asserts that “it seems probable that the radicalness of the Mosaic phenomenon cannot be separated from the social setting of the Hapiru”. That is to say, its radical politics tend to go with that irregular form of society, and by the same token, very different standards hold in settled circumstances. Brueggemann is apparently thinking thoughts like those of Hosea, when he says on God’s behalf, “I will make you live in tents again”.

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251 Brueggemann, 1978, p.16.
254 ‘Hapiru’ refers to a nomadic people living in the Fertile Crescent (that is, from present day Iran to Egypt) roughly between 2000 and 1200 BCE. From various sources, it is apparent that they are regarded as not only nomads but also invaders, outlaws and migrant labourers.
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The Common Religion of the Near East, prevailing dominant Versions of Reality and the Power of God

Before we move on, it will be worth dwelling for a moment on how Israel and the Old Testament tradition generally both fit within and differ from their own larger cultural setting, which one might describe as the owner of the Dominant Version of Reality on a regional scale. This has considerable implications for ideas of the power of God, and will also help set the fugitive community of Israel in the wilderness in its two important contexts: first, its self-definition over against the royal consciousness of Egypt, and second, its self-definition over against general pattern of religion in the Near East at that time.

Brueggemann quotes\(^{256}\) Gottwald’s revision of the views of Morton Smith\(^{257}\) on the ‘common theology’ of the Near East in Old Testament times. Smith had argued that religious belief all over the Near East then had a similar structure, differing only in detail between individual cultures\(^ {258}\). Gottwald, in his seminal study of the socio-religious make up of Israel, observed that “We immediately detect points where the Israelite religion stands out as a highly idiosyncratic version of the common theological pattern.”\(^ {259}\)

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\(^{256}\) Brueggemann, 1992, p.6. He acknowledges a debt to Patrick D. Miller (1973) pp 37-62, who has “most helpfully explored this issue”.

\(^{257}\) Smith, 1952, 35-47.

\(^{258}\) Brueggemann summarises points made by Morton Smith as characteristics of the common theology:

- a. The god believed in is addressed in exaggerated and flattering prayer and praise, and is claimed to be the only God, even if it is a minor god in a pantheon.
- b. This god is claimed to be effective in all realms of history, nature and morality.
- c. This god is regularly characterized as both just and merciful, as the object of both fear and love.
- d. This god, in any culture, is one who punishes those who offend him and rewards those who please him or her: that is, it is a theology of strict retribution. Smith calls this ‘essentially contractual’.
- e. Prophets are important in such a system and are everywhere honoured, because they know of the god’s will and so can speak about the prospects for rewards and punishments. Indeed, the prophets are human agents who know what actions can lead to life or death. (Brueggemann, 1992, pp 5-6).

\(^ {259}\) Gottwald, 1979, p.679. Brueggemann quotes this in Old Testament Theology p.8., and uses it as a starting point for his own thesis on the matter.
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Gottwald’s Scheme

Gottwald’s revision of Morton Smith in respect of the religion of Israel (not of the region generally) marks the entrance of sociological analysis into what had previously been the domain of a religio-historical approach. His scheme contains various points:

a. The sole high God usurps the sacred domain;
b. The sole high God is conceived by egalitarian socio-political analogies;
c. The sole high God is coherently manifest in power, justice, and mercy; and
d. The sole high God is interpreted by egalitarian functionaries.

Gottwald lays considerable stress on the ‘mutations’ of faith in Israel away from the common form: “...one must say that the Old Testament itself is a mighty struggle between the common theology that has great strength in Israel and the mutations that seek to transform that theology.”

Brueggemann seizes upon these and focuses on the aspect of power: “statements about God are also understood as statements about misuses of human power and the proper use of human power.” In other words, Gottwald and Brueggemann are making claims for the religion of Israel as having a combined theological and social dimension related to power which is not found in other Near-East religions of ancient times.

Therefore, it is Brueggemann’s claim that the new social reality of Israel was radically discontinuous with that of the region and with the state religion Egypt. The differences are rooted in social reasons – the experience of oppression in Egypt, and because of the perceived effectiveness of its theological mandate. That began with the discrediting of the gods of Egypt, who were powerless to act in response to the third plague summoned up

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264 Exodus 8:17.
by Aaron. At that moment, the imperial religion and the politics of oppression collapsed in the face of the ‘new free God’. The new formula then endured from the 13th century to the year 1000 BC as a ‘viable social reality’, before the idiosyncratic reign of David, followed by the process of abandonment of the Mosaic scheme and its radicalism which set in under Solomon from 962 onwards.

Other scholars would uphold some of this, but not its particular emphasis, which comes of the socio-literary approach in which Brueggemann follows Gottwald. This has overturned many of the conclusions of previous approaches, particularly the historical-critical method. Therefore, it would be fair to say that Brueggemann is proceeding on the basis of a particular understanding of the nature of the formation of the nation of Israel, and this understanding is not universally accepted.

Despite this, what is of particular interest to us is how it fits with the thinking of Girard. In a Chapter entitled Job as a Failed Scapegoat in The Voice from the Whirlwind, Girard lays out a critique from which one can distil a drama related to a DVR and God perceived as part of it. Job, who is loath to protest until driven to it, is a tacit prophet; he stands for an incorruptibility which the DVR cannot countenance. Supposedly prophetic advice is given by Satan and by Job’s ‘friends’, who claim to discern reality and the transfer to God is made on the basis of vox populi vox dei. God goes along with the DVR for a long time, during which Job submits to suffering he believes he does not deserve. But God has a greater game imperceptible to man, within which the scapegoat carries suffering and by doing so facilitates a process of change, in which not only the ideas of the DVR but those of God himself are

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265 Brueggemann, 1987, p.16.
266 Brueggemann is very concerned with social reality, and credits Berger and Luckmann with developing thinking in this area. He also refers to “Israel’s powerful discernment that Yahweh’s presence is always intensely related to social experience and social reality.” [Brueggemann, 1992, p.143].
267 In making these claims Brueggemann refers to George Mendenhall, who described the achievement of Solomon as ‘the paganization of Israel’ (Mendenhall, 1963, chs. 7-8)
268 The historical-critical method is scientific in nature, “tries to establish the actual origins of the text and to evaluate the probability that things happened in the way described”. [Gottwald, 2009, p.5].
270 Ibid., p.186.
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adjusted. The DVR is understood as an expression of the territory of God’s favour; the preconceptions upon which any DVR are founded (the essential corruptibility of human nature in this case) are also held to be God’s expectations, and with the change in these expectations a new era dawns. The new dawn occurs after a nadir in which ‘limit situations’, referred to by Ricoeur, are found. In the book of Job, the nadir is one embodied in the condition of Job himself.

This is not Girard’s analysis, but the present writer’s. It is however consistent with Girard’s thinking.

One might go further and find an analogy for Gottwald-Brueggemann’s ideas on the profile of Israel in the region and its common religion, as an ethical coalition, defined over against its neighbours by its ethical stance. The adjustment of the concept of the human capacity for justice and God’s emerging support for the just as newly defined is a process of change in which scapegoats play an important part at a personal cost.

Review

Our research question, Part 1: Concepts and versions of reality, was to investigate ‘biblical concepts’, the ‘dominant version of reality’, and relate to prophecy and sacrifice. The outcome may be summarized as follows:

‘Concepts’ turns out to be all too approximate a term for something both related in some way to ideas, but simultaneously non-cerebral, a category of instinctive behaviour, containing elements which Girard says are part of ‘hominization’. This is particularly the case with sacrifice.

271 See page 14 for a summary of this.
Prophecy, Brueggemann argues powerfully, is a voice raised against the DVR, but sacrifice may be either this or a mode of procedure within the DVR – or both. When concepts exist both within and outwith the DVR, a confusing unresolved hybrid may result – and this has been the case with Christian sacrifice since the time on earth of Jesus, and remains a besetting problem even now, adding a shroud of misunderstanding to a subject which, according to Girard, is already rendered deeply mystifying by traits in human behaviour which have a quality of invisibility about them.
PART 2:

THE FADING CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE
“In the Bible the victims, not the persecutors, have the last word, and for that reason the scapegoat mechanism is unmasked and rendered inoperative. That is why the death of Christ is not a sacrifice even though as an event it would seem to have re-enacted the primal violence. The gospel writers describe how the violence against Jesus became unanimous through mimesis. At the end, Jesus was rejected by the entire society: by the Jewish leaders, by the Romans and even by his own disciples...He was killed as the innocent victim who renounced violence and turned the other cheek. The sacrificial reinterpretation of Jesus' death, from the epistle to the Hebrews onwards, marks the failure of human beings to follow Jesus in embracing total nonviolence.”

Girard’s Evolving Views on Sacrifice

Girard’s best-known works on sacrifice – Violence and the Sacred (1977) and Things Hidden (1987) are amongst his earlier publications. However, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning (2001) and other more recent work have seen some withdrawal from the extreme claims of his earlier position. Particularly notable are the views expressed in his 1993 discussion with Rebecca Adams. For the most part, it is this later, modified argument that is considered in this chapter. However, the earlier view cannot simply be ignored as superseded, as the later view is only articulated as a modification of the earlier view, and in any case is not completely documented in its own right. A synthesis of early and late writing is therefore inevitable. The position is further complicated by the fact that, despite Girard’s modification of his position on sacrifice, it is his earlier view which tends to be remembered and quoted by many other writers, particularly by those who are inclined to put a contrasting view. For instance, Chauvet comments as follows:

“...the success twenty years or so ago within Christian circles of the non-sacrificial reading of Jesus’ death by René Girard should also be noted. It was

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indeed tempting to make use of the author’s general theory in order to denounce a theological interpretation of Christ’s death and the Eucharist that laid excessive stress on sacrifice and expiation...But there are also good reasons to beware of Girardian theory: first of all, is he not in the process of burning the sacrifice that the Church so much ‘adored’ in the past? Then, ‘how can one not be a Christian’ if one follows Girard to the letter; that is to say, in saying that the heart of Jesus’ message is to denounce the victimizing sacrificial process in the way that he understands it? Finally, if theologians turn anthropologist, it is a truism to say that they run the serious risk of levelling out the cultural and religious particularities of sacrifices.”

In summary, Girard’s critics acknowledge the breadth and significance of his claims but tend to resist two things:

1. The exclusiveness of his theory in general, which seems to be asserted in the early work, and in the work of some of his followers.
2. The correctness of some of his forays into disciplines outside his own, such as anthropology. His view is therefore often that of an outsider to a particular academic area, and inconsistent with the general consensus within it. However, this aspect is not necessarily judged a weakness. For instance, Andrew Lascaris applauds this aspect of Girard’s project: “I myself feel closer to those attempts, which, like Girard’s, try to dismantle the boundary fences between the

275 Reference has previously been made to the Girard-Darwin conference in Cambridge, October 2009, when Rowan Williams and Sarah Coakley expressed reservations about Girardian thinking. The point here is that they emphasized their opposition to any idea that Girard’s thinking was an adequate and sufficient substitute for other competing theories of human behaviour at a general level.
276 Particularly in Violence and the Sacred (Girard, 1977).
277 The most powerful and outspoken of whom may be Robert Hamerton-Kelly, whose work for instance on the Gospel of Mark, subject the whole account to a mimetic interpretation. (Hamerton-Kelly, 1994).
278 For instance, the Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch contributed a strongly critical article to Le Monde (le Monde, 25 June 1982, p.19), entitled “L’Evangile selon Saint-Girard”.
279 Indeed, the impression that Girard is by nature an outsider not only as an academic but in his personal life is explored by his interlocutors Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha in Evolution and Conversion (Girard, 2007, pp26ff.).
8 Prehistory & Girard

various disciplines, constituting a parallel movement to postmodernism.”

Criticisms of Girard: Gnosticism

Charles Davis made some strong criticisms of Girard on the basis that his faith in the Christian gospels is not scientifically grounded, and he lists problems which he says add up to “multiple questionableness.” These criticisms are directed at Girard’s earlier work, and were published in 1989.

Davis admits to being tempted by the aspect of Girard’s theory that interprets the gospels as a call to the total renunciation of violence. However, he is unhappy about the claim being exclusive to Christianity, as he says that exclusive claims tend to end up in violence, as history demonstrates. Therefore, a narrow view of the gospels, focussing on their command to renounce violence in fact leads to the promotion of violence. He is also chary of what he sees as Girard’s straightforward acceptance of gospel texts at face value, in a way which renders them into “persecution texts” directed against the Jews.

Davis also makes a point about the involuntary nature of sin, according to Girard. According to his analysis, mankind has no option but to sin until eyes are opened to the possibilities of avoiding such sin by exposing the trap of mimesis; mimesis is “structurally necessary to human beings because otherwise desire has no object”.

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281 Davis, 1989, p.327. Davis is saying that Girard takes insufficient account of the analytical work of biblical scholars.
284 Davis, 1989,p.325.
8 Prehistory & Girard

“what he outlines is a gnostic anthropology. Human nature is structurally evil. It is not a question of sin, but of being trapped in a structurally necessary, but destructive mimesis.”

The talk of things structural does not end there. “Religion would not retain its structuring power in the formation of society if it did not hide the generative violence at its origin.” Religion works on the basis of taking the murder of an innocent victim, and camouflaging the murder as sacrifice. The camouflage is what is meant by religion:

“Myths are composed from the point of view of the murderers. Behind the sacralization of the victim, it is easy enough to discern the accusations of which the victim is the object. The victim is made responsible for the disaster, the catastrophes, which are afflicting the community. While present and alive in the community, the victim is considered as a cause of death; when dead as a source of life.”

Davis’s commentary is pungent and acerbic; he is a harsh and unforgiving judge. However, he is taken to task by Andrew Lascaris, in a milder and more measured, but nevertheless telling way:

“Contrary to Davis, it seems to me to be difficult to deny that mimesis (imitation) is a fundamental law of human existence...Satan is the mimetic principle in so far as he perverts human relationships and creates rivalry”

He goes on,

“we do not have to escape from mimetic desire as such, but only from the possibility of its destructive consequences”

Lascaris’s understanding of Girard is therefore much less harsh than Davis’s. He disputes the conclusion that Girard’s view of human nature is inescapably pessimistic, and disputes Davis’s suggestion that, under Girard’s view, human nature is “structurally evil”, which he says is Davis’s interpretation.

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285 Davis, 1989, p.321..
289 Lascaris, 1989, p.419.
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only and not what Girard actually said. He then floats the idea that original sin is preceded by “original blessing”. He is referring to the sequence in which mimesis precedes the scapegoat mechanism and its consequent violence, and he makes a point which Girard stresses in his later work: mimesis is not necessarily bad. To be human is to be mimetic, and to have our existence standing at the centre of a network of relationships. To have that place is the ‘original blessing’. To violate the network is, in Lascaris’s view, to be violent.

“However... as a matter of fact we order our relationships on the basis of violence, for we reject the place allotted to us and want to be like God. Stories such as that of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood and the tower of Babel, are all attempts, based on ordinary human experience, to show how this can happen. By appealing to the ‘original blessing’, by remembering the discovery of being free when Israel was expelled from Egypt, and by referring to Christ, our violence is slowly revealed and new ways are opened.”

Lascaris goes on to question Davis’s view (drawn from that of Burton L. Mack, and admittedly showing some signs of stepping back from Mack’s position), that the gospels were written to incriminate the Jews. Lascaris says, the gospels were written to show that “we Christians were persecutors before we became converted.”

Lascaris is therefore inclined to see mimeticism as both a fundamental human ability and as the cause of a dilemma between the ‘original blessing’ vested in humans, and the temptation vested in possibilities for self-promotion over others and rivalry with God, which is how he interprets original sin. This is an interesting and persuasive argument, but it is an interpretation and in some ways extension of Girard’s theory, just as much as Davis’s arguments are. He does not delve into Girard’s theory of the founding murder, nor make any critique of Davis’s characteristically raw statement.

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291 Ibid.
292 Lascaris, 1989, p.419.
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that Girard considers scapegoating to be “the murderous deceit which lies behind official religion.”\textsuperscript{294} but he does address Davis’s question, “is God for Girard limited to the New Testament and Christ?”\textsuperscript{295} For Lascaris, as for Girard, Christ is God’s response to a mechanism which is Satanic in its operation, and in almost all cases, draws people away from God. One might add to that viewpoint that Christ shows how to secure a blessing granted much earlier, which human nature unaided had proved itself rarely able to secure.

The Pre-Biblical Stage: Sacral Kingship as Expressed in Myths and Rituals

In Girard’s view, the Hebrew Bible as we have inherited it commences with the end of the period of sacral kingship\textsuperscript{296} and the start of a new order. That is not to say that there is no overlap: Girard places much emphasis on how the earlier biblical texts refer to and base themselves on the need to address the following:

1. Dissolution in conflict, removal of differences and hierarchies which constitute the community in its wholeness.
2. The all against one of collective violence.
3. The development of interdictions and rituals.\textsuperscript{297}

The first point involves episodes of destruction through which order in the world is imposed or restored (such as the Flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). In the second case, Girard stresses the use of doubles (Esau

\textsuperscript{294} Davis, 1989, p.324.
\textsuperscript{295} Davis, 1989, p.322.
\textsuperscript{296} Kingship in early developing societies often cannot be separated from religion and response to external, cosmic forces. “Kingship is a unique principle of political organisation in that it straddles societies of every type part from the very simplest hunter-gatherer communities...even a superficial study of kingship reveals certain core themes that marked the emergence of the academic discipline of social anthropology and the comparative study of mankind – in particular, the understanding of sacrifice, ritual and scapegoating.” Quigley, 2005, pp.1-11.
\textsuperscript{297} Girard, 1987, p.142.
8 Prehistory & Girard

and Jacob, Jacob and the angel at Jabbok) to demonstrate that the crisis of ‘warring brothers’ is only resolved by expulsion. In the third, effective practice (circumcision, sacrifice and blessing), for instance) is a practical means of understanding and processing the will of God.

In these foundational passages, the stage is set for God’s intervention, and alteration of the existing understandings. So, in the episode of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, we see God rescinding his perceived command to sacrifice the child, and in the substitution of animal sacrifice; when God intervenes after Cain’s murder of Abel to protect Cain, and forbid more murder, we see the emergence of an explicit law interdicting an important type of mimetic violence. Girard observes (in relation to the story of Joseph and his brothers),

"The authors of Genesis have recast a pre-existent mythology, adapting it in the spirit of their special concerns. This involves inverting the relationship between the victim and the persecuting community."298

Girard, referring to Max Weber’s conclusions, opines in relation to his comments on the Cain and Abel episode that the biblical writers “have an undeniable tendency to take the side of the victim on moral grounds and spring to the victim’s defence”299. Cain, is of course, only newly become the victim, having previously been the aggressor, but it is the present situation which is of interest here, the situation after the mythological account closes.

In an account written much later, in Isaiah 52-53, we see God going further and identifying with the victim – the Suffering Servant.

These points serve to illustrate how far Davis, who asks “is God for Girard limited to the New Testament and Christ?”300 is labouring under a misunderstanding of the scope of Girard’s concern with the Hebrew Bible.

Indeed. It tends to support Lascaris’s comment that the gospels were written

300 Davis, 1989, p.322.
8 Prehistory & Girard

to show that Christians were persecutors before being converted to another role\textsuperscript{301}.

Girard’s Societal Theories

Girard is knowingly operating in the wake of seminal anthropologists and authors on primitive kingship, particularly Emile Durkheim\textsuperscript{302} and James George Frazer\textsuperscript{303}, to whom he frequently refers. His theory is therefore not a rejection of all existing thinking, though he claims in several places that the influence was not direct, or that his analysis has fundamental differences from the earlier models. For instance, he distances himself from Durkheim, stating that “contrary to what many people believe, I was never directly influenced by Durkheim”\textsuperscript{304}, though he had found reading his work a “marvellous experience”, and after doing so he “added a few relevant quotes” to his book. True influence came from English writers, and Radcliffe-Brown’s Structure and Function in Primitive Society “was really important to me”\textsuperscript{305}.

However, a greater degree of influence is apparent in Frazer: “some of Frazer’s descriptions were really inspirational” to him, though he has not directly continued Frazer’s thought:

“Some critics have said that Frazer had already recognized the scapegoat mechanism in its mimetic sense. This is wrong, because there is no scapegoat mechanism in Frazer. For him, the scapegoat is mainly a materialized metaphor...he does not see, as I do, that the scapegoat is more than a metaphor...”\textsuperscript{306}

Girard claims that scapegoating precedes kingship. Writing specifically about sacred kingship and central power, he states:

\textsuperscript{301} Lascaris, 1989, p.420.
\textsuperscript{302} Author of The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912).
\textsuperscript{303} Author of The Golden Bough (1890).
\textsuperscript{304} Girard, 2007, p.140.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{306} Girard, 2007, p.138.
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“At first there is neither kingship nor any institution. There is only the spontaneous reconciliation over and against a victim who is a ‘true scapegoat’, precisely because no one can identify the victim as that and only that. Like any human institution, monarchy is at first nothing but the will to reproduce the reconciliatory mechanism.”

The statement here that monarchy is “the will to reproduce the reconciliatory mechanism”, amounts to a declaration that it is linked to sacrifice and scapegoating and shares part of the same purpose. In *Evolution and Conversion* (2007), Girard claims that it is sacrifice that defines human development. Whist Eric Gans “proposed a theory of human origins in which language acts as a stand-in for actual sacrifice”, Girard claims that Gans’s presupposition that a “higher form of rationality” was present at this stage, is incorrect as “that can only follow after a crucial event, like, in my view, the victimary mechanism and the scapegoat resolution. It can never precede the event itself.”

Therefore, Girard is claiming that there is a sequence which commences with the initial event that sets up a chain of reciprocal violence (‘the founding murder’), and from this effect and the danger which it represents to society flows a mechanism for controlling it: victimage, sacrifice and the scapegoat mechanism. These are intuitive rather than rational, and expressed in rituals and myths, and only later is any form of idea distilled from what is perceived as an effective process, sufficient in its own right. In the case of mythology, an account which speaks truth about the reality of the world, it both gives guidance as to the effects of the process but simultaneously disguises its origins.

Out of this develops kingship – sacral kingship – in which the good of the community is secured through the offices of the king. When bad times come, and crops fail, or there is a defeat at the hands of an enemy, the king takes on his own person the evil and as it were sucks it out of the community and into

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307 Girard, 1987, p.51
308 Girard, 2007, p.122
309 Girard, 2007, p.123
310 Girard, 1987, p.105ff
8 Prehistory & Girard

himself. His ritualised death or expulsion sets the community to rights. As Girard puts it, “the conditions of ‘royal enthronement’ are those of sacrifice”.

This is of course not the way most people would seek to explain the entire phenomenon of monarchy, be they ethnologists, anthropologists, or social scientists – and in the difference is an insight into the totalising effect of Girard’s thinking. He feels free to leave aspects out, and say little to explain or include general human needs including that for stability, for a single point of authority, policy or direction and an expression of group identity, though of course he focuses on and develops the important matter of peace-making and reconciliation to divine powers. The dynamic aspect of kingship, which has a bias for action which group decisions sometimes lack, is not referred to, though these are important matters referred to in Israel’s decision to be ruled by a king.

One may therefore speculate whether Israel’s monarchy was a step towards reconciliation with the world-view of the region. Let us then look at monarchy, and then at the state which in Israel may have preceded it.

God as a Monarch

It seems ironic that the Jewish religion, having begun by at the point at which sacral kingship was abandoned, went on to adopt kingship as its mode of rule, and further developed its concept of God, to the extent that many passages of the Hebrew Bible now describe God in terms of monarchy. How, then does the idea of God as monarch fit into the wider context? – that is, the legacy of sacral kingship and the developed form in which (as in Isaiah and the New Testament) God takes on the suffering of the community.

It is of course not insignificant here that the Hebrew Bible was first put into written form in the time of Israel’s monarchy, and it would seem only natural

312 1 Samuel 8ff.
8 Prehistory & Girard

for parallels to be drawn between divine and secular leaders and links between the two to be stressed. The possibility therefore has to be considered that the books of the Hebrew Bible written during the period of the monarchy reflect an image of God influenced by the experience of earthly kingship, and that some other model of God preceded this.

Alternatives to Monarchy

Buried within the Hebrew Bible’s earlier books are sections defined as ‘Elohist’, which preserve a possibly earlier, orally-transmitted form of the religious concepts of at least some of the people who later made up Israel\textsuperscript{313}. This is not a matter to which Girard gives attention, but it is very significant in the work of Norman Gottwald, who in turn has been influential on Brueggemann. Therefore, the phenomenon is interesting from the point of view of this study, as it represents a point where the thinking of Girard and Brueggemann may begin to overlap.

Thomas Fawcett, following Philip Berger\textsuperscript{314} has suggested that when Israel “made a radical break with the cosmic order as seen in the myths represented by the fleshpots of Egypt”, and with symbolic emphasis walked out of Egypt to spend a prolonged period in the wilderness, a new model of God was in the process of being forged: “the appearance of an entirely new point of view”. As part of this, the Passover was the ritual event for

\textsuperscript{313} Gottwald refers to the biblical history of the exodus in this connection. However, there are a number of views current in academic thought, including ones which place the Elohist later in history, and deny that there was any extended period of wandering in the wilderness in which Israelites might have developed a nomadic tradition and corresponding social structures. Gottwald considers that the Elohist sections were composed in the Northern Kingdom 90-850 BCE, some 30-80 years after the first Yahwist accounts were composed at Jerusalem under Solomon. Gottwald, 2009, p.82.

remembering the birth of the nation at the hand of God. This meant the end of sacral kingship, defined through mythology, though echoes of it remained. Fawcett concludes that the sacral monarchy had been displaced but not eliminated, and symbolic language took a new turn as a result, with the language previously applied to the king and formulated for his role now being reserved for Yahweh exclusively. This perhaps describes a situation in which part of the identity of the sacral king has been transferred to God.

El, Elohim & Yahweh

These sections are immediately distinguished by the different term used for God: Elohim, rather than Yahweh. There is much dispute about the precise meaning of this title. It is undoubtedly derived from or is a form of the name of the Canaanite god El, and indeed, there is amongst other forms ‘El YHWH’ or ‘El Yahweh’, apparently meaning the ‘El who truly exists’, or ‘the El who is present’. There is evidence that there was fluctuation in the understandings and rivalries as to the precise identity of the supreme God, from the time of the earliest archaeological relics down to the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century. Yahweh is a name not known before the time of Moses, and seems to emerge with the development of the sense of nationhood of Israel. However, the redactions of the Deuteronomists have blurred the picture to a considerable extent, and references to Yahweh can be found in the text of Genesis as early as Chapter 4. The commentary that follows is therefore heavily dependent on the reconstructive work of scholars and must be regarded as provisional synthesis.

However, within the Hebrew Bible, there is an apparent difference of usage. Amongst scholars, there seems to be some reticence about reconciling ‘El’ and ‘Elohim’, but also some consensus that the plural noun ‘Elohim’ refers not to a single, named, defined individual (as Yahweh tends to), but to God in a more general sense, "He (or they) after whom one strives", "Who is the goal

315 ibid., p.211.
of all human aspiration and endeavour", "to whom one has recourse in
distress or when one is in need of guidance", "to whom one attaches oneself
closely". Some scholars have found a plurality of spiritual entities to be
implied by the term, but others describe the plural usage as a mere device
of speech, like the royal ‘we’. Either way, Elohim is, or are, powerful as a
protective and ethical force, and a presence in the world which can be
sensed. (There is perhaps a parallel here with the later concept of the Holy
Spirit). It is Elohim that called from out of the burning bush, that provided
the Ten Commandments, and Elohim that wrestled with Jacob, and Elohim
who instructed Abraham first to sacrifice his son, and then told him not to.

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318 Dillman, cited in Catholic Encyclopedia on line version at
319 As in Gen 6:2
320 As in Gen 6:2

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These sections are thought by some to have their origins in the pre-monarchical era\(^{322}\), when peoples later integrated into 'Israel' existed in a confederation of small units of population\(^{323}\). According to Gottwald\(^{324}\), this confederation represented a coalition on ethical matters. It was this ethical stance that distinguished them from other, neighbouring tribes, not a dissimilarity of ethnicity or of culture in a more general way.

Therefore, it may be that the Elohist concept of God resists the personal identity which stands at the heart of Yahwism, or else marks a definite move away from the personal aspect of sacral kingship in favour of a more diffuse but spiritual understanding. Referring back to Gottwald’s ‘ethical coalition’ and the idea that Israel was in some sense a movement of peasants (this

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Source: [http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/PART1/PT1_TBB.HTM](http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/PART1/PT1_TBB.HTM) accessed March, 2008

\(^{321}\) But Genesis 22:14 states that Abraham called the place of sacrifice ‘the Lord (Yahweh) will provide’.

\(^{322}\) Though others date their inclusion in the biblical books as quite late, and regard their early origin as unproven.

\(^{323}\) Gottwald states, “My hypothesized dividing line between fully formed Israel and the Mosaic and patriarchal prehistories is an admittedly arbitrary one. It is arbitrary, in the first place, because Israel emerged as a social system in Canaan by stages. It is impossible to point to a single date when Israel came fully into being, and it is necessary to conceive its course as a social system in terms of decades which continued up to the verge of the monarchy under Saul...this aspects of proto-Israelite life reflected in the patriarchal stories, for instance, may have been contemporary with the early stages of the social system of Israel”. Gottwald, 1972, p.33.

\(^{324}\) Gottwald, Norman K. *The Tribes of Yahweh* Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1979, Ch.5.
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seems to mean, an egalitarian social structure lacking a ruling class) strongly defined by their ethics, then it can be seen that they would tend to reject a model of understanding of God which fed upon alien types of social structure, and indeed that a diffuse understanding of God might appeal when their own social pattern lacked any core structure or personification of power.

This view is consistent with the scheme put forward by Gorringe325, in a piece about chapter 11 of the Book of Numbers. This chapter comments on difficulties on the journey across the desert, after the exodus from Egypt. Gorringe points out that the way through the wilderness, of making sense out of chaos, is indicated by God “who is only known in the journey from bondage to freedom”. That freedom is found in the uncomfortable circumstances of the desert journey, whose uncertainties and lack of comfort and choice are quickly resented by some of the group of fugitives. They preferred the limitations on fundamental liberty, but plentiful supply and choice of material goods which life in Egypt had meant. This there was at this stage a split within the travelling community between those who had found God in the experience, and those with more material priorities.

What Elohim is offering here is a form of fundamental liberty, but under a different appreciation of what is desirable in life to that which is normally understood by ‘living well’. To some of those fugitives, it did not seem to have the desirable attributes of liberty at all, but a new set of restrictions which make it less attractive than their former slavery. In particular, choice was taken away from them: for instance, instead of having a range of foods available to them, they had only manna to eat, and it quickly became

boring. The dilemma they faced is not one that can conveniently be categorized according to the terms of Utilitarian theory, since it hinges on the relative value of the opportunities concerned; God was presenting them with a radically different view of what it is to be free and happy, of what ‘the good life’ truly contains. By extension, one might speculate on what constitutes the ‘kingdom of heaven’ and certainly one might redefine what is involved in appropriate sacrifice. The point is that the exodus itself is a metaphorical as well as a historical account, relating what God asks one to leave behind and the difficulty of doing so.

Similarly, Elohim steps outside normal perceptions of goodness by calling Abraham to a new kind of ethical imperative. This involves submission to the divine source of all goodness, even when this is in conflict with ethics as normally understood, and even human love itself. As Kierkegaard famously described it, God (Elohim) calls Abraham outside ethics to a higher duty, which Kierkegaard terms ‘the teleological suspension of the ethical’. Under this view, a duty to ethics is suspended by a higher duty to God. A revision of Kierkegaard’s view which might be proposed, consistent with the general thrust of the Elohist texts, is that a superior or more complete form of ethics is imposed, and the focus on good within it is only partly discernible to humans. It is key that the form of the sacrifice is not to be a matter of convention, but emerges out of a seemingly illogical modification of it.

In the eighth century BCE, the prophet Hosea provides an interesting insight and memory of how life was different when the temptations of a settled life and economic self-promotion did not exist:

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326 This point is of course easily transferable to criticism of consumerism, and what J. K. Galbraith has called ‘the culture of contentment’.
327 This kind of approach of course surfaces again in the New Testament, where following the Way defined by Jesus is defined as the route to blessedness, and to the knowledge of God.
328 Of course, some suggest that it is not a historical account at all.
329 But some say that child-sacrifice would not have been considered unethical, in the context of the period (Jane Mather: A Jewish Reading of Kierkegaard’s Fear & Trembling: MA dissertation, Heythrop College, London University, 2006).
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"The people of Israel are as dishonest as the Canaanites; they love to cheat their customers with false scales. "We are rich", they say, "We've made a fortune. And no-one can accuse us of getting rich dishonestly. But I, the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt, I will make you live in tents again, as you did when I came to you in the desert."\(^{331}\)

What Common Ground?

It would be easy to conclude that the arguments of Girard and those of Gottwald-Brueggemann are at best parallel tracks and that there is no real overlap. However, the work of Raymund Schwager, who has extended the application of Girard’s thought within theology, is helpful here. Schwager by no means seeks to avoid the problems of God as a violent, sometimes apparently irrational, judge of those who either keep his commandments or not.

"The notion of retribution and vengeance permeates virtually all the Old Testament books. Note carefully that God never appears as a cool judge who, with utter detachment, would guide the people in the strict observance of the laws. Yahweh turns out to be a god who is directly affected by the deeds of men and women and correspondingly reacts to them...divine violence is always an immediate consequence of evil human deeds."\(^{332}\)

However, Schwager observes that it is humans who incite God’s anger, and humans who carry out the violent deeds which are seen to be his judgement\(^{333}\). God applies punishment through withdrawal; when he retires from the scene, people begin to destroy one another, and when they are left to their own devices, nothing good results. This is the fall from grace:

"Because Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the privilege of being in God’s presence...God did not himself punish the transgression of the law by

\(^{331}\) Hosea 12:7-9.
\(^{333}\) Ibid., p,.67.
Within human behaviour, violence follows jealousy and rivalry, and sacred ideas originate in the scapegoat mechanism\(^{335}\), says Schwager with Girard.\(^{336}\) Sacrificial regulations do not originate from Yahweh’s wishes, but are a human invention. The criticisms of sacrifice by the prophets are because right knowledge of God cannot come from a cult, but “of historical experience. For Yahweh is not a cult God, but ‘God because of Egypt,’ that is, because of a historical and historically effective situation.”\(^{337}\)

Here we do have a clear link to the general idea of the Elohist model of God, in so far as this is, as Gorringe puts it, the “God who is only known in the journey from bondage to freedom\(^{338}\)”.

At this point, we have on the one hand,

1. **God known through a certain type of experience, in which priorities are adjusted away from those of human society as it defines itself in God’s absence, and towards another standard in which God’s commandments are the only authority.** Within God’s scheme, sacrifice is not wanted.

And on the other,

2. **Human nature asserts itself in God’s absence, and under these circumstances violence becomes salient.** Sacrifice and scapegoating are part of this situation, and may be generated by it automatically and inescapably.

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\(^{334}\) Ibid., p.69.  
\(^{335}\) Ibid., 76-91.  
\(^{336}\) And with the coming of Jesus, “the house of the sacred collapses”. Schwager in Girard-Schwager 1975-91, p.54.  
\(^{337}\) Ibid, p.84. Schwager is quoting Schungel’s *Gottesbild*, p.94 here.  
\(^{338}\) Gorringe, 2005.
The work of Jesus is to attempt a new gathering\textsuperscript{339}, in which (1) is operative and (2) is not. Therefore, we may anticipate the new order to resist the dominance of human nature, with all that that implies; and to a new scheme in which God’s will or law, is the only standard. Sacrifice will, under this regime, depend upon an appropriate state of mind, and the human ploys that go with achieving dominance will be foregone\textsuperscript{340}. However, first we must consider the Old Testament base; recalling as we do so Fishbane’s arguments that sacrifice could, from an early stage, be commuted to study of the law.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid, p.180ff.
\textsuperscript{340} See interview with James Williams in Williams (ed) 1996, pp.272-274: sacrifice is only efficacious depending on state of mind. Chilton comments that in the episode at the Mount of Olives, in which Jesus undoes the slicing off of an ear of one of the temple staff, he does this as the mutilation would have prevented that person taking part in ritual; the message is that Jesus’s concept of sacrifice is essentially restorative of harm done. (Luke 22:51). Chilton, 1997, in Religion (1997) 27, p.227.
\textsuperscript{341} See pages 55-56.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

The Lord says, “I hate your religious festivals, I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a river, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry”342

If sacrifice is a biblical concept, then it should be reasonably possible to find a standard definition of what the term normally includes. Brueggemann provides such a summary, in *Reverberations of Faith*343, ‘a theological handbook of Old Testament Themes’, including some comments on what the New Testament has done with the Old Testament practice and the concepts that lie behind it.

Of course, as Brueggemann sets out to define the subject of sacrifice, and not simply to expound his own views on the matter, an inclusive mode of description is in order. There is the opportunity for him to state what others have suggested, but which he does not concur with. However, no such observations are made. With the exception of some cautionary remarks about the interpretative approaches of liberal Protestantism, Brueggemann sets out his survey with the implication that it is both uncontroversial and complete, including the following main points:

1. Sacrifice is a sign of the defining importance of God for the life of the community. The particulars are largely borrowed from surrounding cultures, but adapted to reflect the particular character of Israel’s God.

2. Sacrificial practices are vehicles and instruments designed to celebrate, affirm, enhance and repair the defining relationship.

3. Israel’s linkage to God was probably given expression ‘from the outset’ by the dedication of one’s best produce to God.

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4. Over time, random and spontaneous gestures of this sort were systematized and made into a coherent system.

5. Sacrifice makes concretely visible what is otherwise a hidden relationship.

6. Some sacrifices are ‘sacrifices of well-being’, some are restorative, some acknowledge God’s ownership of the land and entitlement to its produce; some acknowledge God’s generosity.

7. The most extreme sacrifice is that of one’s child.

8. Leviticus 16 prescribes special sacrificial measures for the Day of Atonement, including forgiveness and reconciliation.

9. The ‘interpretative stance’ of liberal Protestantism in relation to sacrifice (which involves a denial of its effectiveness as a practice, and substitution of indirect aims and effects) will never permit one to appropriate either of two things: the wonder or the gravity of the claim that God has provided concrete mechanisms for sustaining the relationship of God and his people. ‘Suspicion’ of the act only serves to position the commentator ‘outside the wonder of the act’.

10. Psalm 51:16-17 and Micah 6:6-8 indicate that sometimes material sacrifice becomes metaphysical and relational. This is not a development from ‘material to metaphorical’, but a different order of

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344 The hiddenness of key parts of Israel’s faith is something which Margaret Barker discusses at length in Temple Theology (Barker, 2004). Her contention is that the Deuteronomists in their revision of the texts and practices of the First Temple suppressed a number of key concepts and their revisions had the effect of abolishing much of this sense of hiddenness. For instance, they had no creation theology, and the lack of this removed any need for a reference to the ‘keys’ of creation. They “forbade the secrets of the holy of holies.(and) based their religion on the visible material creation”. (p.36). Barker makes reference to Deuteronomy 29:29: “There are things hidden, and they belong to the Lord our God, but what is revealed belongs to us and our children for ever; it is for us to observe all that is prescribed in this law.” In other words, Deuteronomy turns its back on the hidden things.

345 Compare Levenson, 1993, p.3ff. Levenson draws on Exodus 22:29-30 to suggest that sacrifice of the first-born son was a standard requirement in ancient Israel, but that animal sacrifice could be (and usually was) substituted for the human sacrifice. But Levenson also suggests that this text be held in balance with others, such as Jeremiah 19:5-6, which abhor human sacrifice: “Jeremiah wanted child sacrifice to be considered idolatrous in every instance, and, as the majority opinion of scholars shows, history has abundantly granted him his wish.” (p.5).
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

reality, in which 'the practice of sacrifice is a deeply symbolic gesture that invites interpretation in a rich variety of directions'\textsuperscript{346}. In other words, material sacrifice can simultaneously be an act of communication by ‘bodied creatures’ with their unbodied creator, an act which is effective in bridging that gap in orders of being.

11. Prophetic critique of sacrificial practice is recurrent in the Old Testament.

12. Jesus replaced an obsolete form of Jewish sacrifice, a ‘failed system’.

13. Christian sacrifice is essentially appropriated from the Old Testament, in that the gesture of sacrifice is deemed to be efficacious: Christ died for my sins, therefore my sins are taken away.

We shall unpack these issues in detail later, but for the moment the key point is that Brueggemann does not see the matter of sacrifice in either Old Testament or New Testament as either foundational, complex in conceptual terms, or key to understanding biblical texts or society itself. Sacrifice is in essence a sign, an outward manifestation, of the defining importance of God. In this, he differs profoundly from Girard, as we shall see. However, Brueggemann does make the important point that sacrifice is:

- firstly in its essence a practice, or a process enacted;
- secondly, a practice which can be interpreted into metaphysical and relational terms:
- thirdly efficacious practice, which can therefore be described as ‘concrete mechanism’\textsuperscript{347} (Brueggemann’s term) or method for achieving an objective.

This analysis is unlikely to be faulted by the other writers we consider here, though it might be added to. For instance, Chauvet notes the parties to sacrifice:

\textsuperscript{346} Brueggemann, 2002, p.183.
\textsuperscript{347} Brueggemann, 2002, p.183.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

“...Sacrifices, in their extreme diversity, seem to be structured by a link between four agents: a sacrificer, who is in charge of the operation; the person on behalf of whom the sacrifice is made, who is its beneficiary (and who is sometime, as an agent, the same person as the sacrificer); a sacrificed object, which is alive, or something that symbolically represents life; and finally a recipient, who belongs to a category of beings superior to humans...”

He goes on to analyse what might be happening at a symbolic level in sacrifice, and identifies some drivers not found in either Brueggemann’s or Girard’s thinking:

“...sacrifices...can be interpreted as a symbolic exchange structured by a series of opposed couples of which the most all-embracing is without doubt that of conjunction/disjunction, a couplet that itself mixes with fundamental oppositions like death/life, debt/repayment, sacred/sacrilegious, without mentioning elsewhere their links with social structures (like the opposition man/woman), cultural paradigms (like the one that exists between nature and culture) or economic conditions (like that between prodigality and penury, or between the excessive and the derisory), which come symbolically into play in this global negotiation.”

As a further point, Brueggemann points out that sacrifice within the traditions of Israel makes apparent, or ‘concretely visible’ a relationship which is otherwise hidden. In this, he perhaps comes close to a part of Girard’s mimetic theory, in which sacrifice is identified as the visible aspect of an otherwise hidden process. Although there are clear and substantial differences of opinion on what it is that is hidden, the fact that both writers identify sacrifice as a visible representation or marker of something hidden is interesting, though perhaps not unusual within theology these days.

Brueggemann describes sacrifice as a malleable concept and process, and identifies the adaptation of both these aspects within Christianity. He would

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349 Ibid., p.157.
350 Brueggemann, 202, p.182.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

certainly accept that development took place in earlier centuries, too, and this is illustrated by the ending of child sacrifice and the criticisms of the prophets. However, defining the practice of earlier periods requires penetration behind the redactions of the Deuteronomists, and is a subject of theological controversy, as Gottwald points out. His use of ‘priestly redaction’ is synonymous with the ‘Deuteronomistic redaction’ referred to by other scholars:

“The final redaction of the Torah, decisively influenced by the Priestly viewpoint, assumed that the worship practices of the postexilic community had been received from Moses and had continued unchanged over the centuries. Once it is recognized that the cult of ancient Israel underwent development over time, the question arises: Is it possible to determine the actual worship forms of Moses, or at least of the first Israelites who developed the Moses tradition?”

Earlier Patterns

The assumption that the worship practices of the post-exilic community remained unchanged since Moses therefore needs adjustment into recognition of a plateau in those practices during the Deuteronomistic period (the period of ascendancy of the priesthood), with periods of change either side. We know what came after that period; what came before is not fully evidenced, but may be possible to determine.

That possibility of course hinges on the method of research and interpretation employed. In the case of Gottwald & Brueggemann, it is a socio-literary method, with an eye on the parallel socio-religious method. Girard, by contrast, has a method of his own which is often described as anthropological, but in fact is more complex than that. It is anthropological-

\[351\] Gottwald, 2009, p. 120-121.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

literary-psychological-theological\textsuperscript{352}, and if its strength is in transcending normal categories, its weakness is in often failing to satisfy the peer groups of experts within normal categories\textsuperscript{353}. However, in this case it is notable that Girard’s complex approach enables him to look further back in time than Brueggemann, to the foundations of human society, and to develop his theory of sacrifice in that direction\textsuperscript{354}. Brueggemann looks no further than the regional milieu out of which Israel developed.

Sacrifice as a Phenomenon with Regional Characteristics

Sacrifice, in its normal sense in the Old Testament, is of course a physical matter, though it may have hidden, non-physical elements to it, and it may be transcended completely by a new concept, such as that which Fishbane articulates\textsuperscript{355}. As a ritual usually involving killing animals and the burning of their meat\textsuperscript{356} (analogous to the preparation of a meal), it was of course common to the whole Mediterranean region and beyond in prehistoric and ancient times. There are signs that the practice of ancient Israel in this regard was very similar to that of other nations in the region\textsuperscript{357}. The sheer scale of it is surprising: at Carthage, excavations have revealed a total of 20,000 urn burials of the remains of child sacrifices. This equates to two a week for 200 years, in the period 400 – 200 BCE.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{352} This is how Girard describes his own situation: “Many people see literary criticism as my original field, but, in an academic sense, literary criticism is no more ‘my’ academic field than anthropology, or psychology, or religious studies. If our ‘real’ field is the one in which we are not self-taught, my ‘real’ field is history. In everything that truly matters to me, however, I am self-taught.” Adams and Girard, 1993, p.11.

\textsuperscript{353} Coakley is an example of this, referring to the discussion being taken to “the borderlands between the sciences, philosophy and theology”. Coakley, 2009, p.16.

\textsuperscript{354} In an interview with James Williams, Girard stated that from the moment of his discovery of the scapegoat system “I was convinced that archaic cultures, far from being simply lost in superstition or having no constancy or stability, represented a great human achievement”. Williams (ed.) 1996, p.262.

\textsuperscript{355} See page 60.

\textsuperscript{356} Though it could involve other sorts of produce instead. However, “slain animals were usually regarded as richer and better offerings” Young, 1975, p.22.

\textsuperscript{357} Gottwald, 1979, pp 670-671.

\textsuperscript{358} Levenson, 1993, p.20.
Eusebius\textsuperscript{359} quotes Philo\textsuperscript{360} on Saturn’s sacrifice:

“It was a custom of the ancients in great crises of danger for the rulers of a city or nation, in order to avert the common ruin, to give up the most beloved of their children for sacrifice as a ransom to the avenging daemons; and those who were thus given up were sacrificed with mystic rites. Kronos then, whom the Phoenicians call Elus, who was king in the country, and subsequently, after his decease, was deified as the star Saturn, had by a nymph of the country named Anobret an only begotten son, whom they on this account named Iedoud, the only begotten being still so called among the Phoenicians; and when very great dangers from war had beset the country, he arrayed his son in royal apparel, and prepared an altar, and sacrificed him.”\textsuperscript{361}

However, Israel progressively grew away from child sacrifice, and forgot the religious imperatives which seem to have been previously attached to it:

“They have built shrines to Baal, where they burnt their sons as whole-offerings to Baal. It was no command of mine; I never spoke of it\textsuperscript{362}, it never entered my thought.”\textsuperscript{363}

Tertullian\textsuperscript{364}, a Christian historian writing at Carthage, regarded child sacrifices as plain murder. Child sacrifices were still going on in his time, though ‘in secret’\textsuperscript{365}. However, Christian texts on the sonship of Jesus and on his being given up as a sacrifice, would have been resonant for many in the Mediterranean world. For instance, John 3:16, “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him might not die but have eternal life”\textsuperscript{366} Levenson comments that, to a person familiar with the Phoenician tradition, there would be a resonance; they “would recall not only the sacrificial death of ledoud/leoud at the hands of Kronos/El, but

\textsuperscript{359} Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, 263-339 CE.
\textsuperscript{360} Philo, Jewish writer at Alexandria, 20 BCE-50 CE.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., p.26 Eusebius lived 263-339 CE, and Philo 20 BCE-50 CE.
\textsuperscript{362} But Exodus 22.28 does speak of it.
\textsuperscript{363} Jeremiah 19:5.
\textsuperscript{364} 160-220CE.
\textsuperscript{365} Levenson, 1993, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{366} New English Bible.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

perhaps also Philo of Byblos’s account of the children ‘given up...with mystic rites’”

Norman Gottwald, taking a parallel socio-literary approach to Levenson’s, comments on sacrifice as defined within biblical sources:

“The P source gives an elaborate description of sacrifices, presided over by an Aaronic priesthood with Levitical assistants, and conducted at a moveable shrine (tabernacle) housing a wooden chest (ark) that stood in the centre of the Israelite wilderness camp.”

“The sacrificial system according to P included the following types of offerings:

1. Animal offerings burnt on the altar (whole burnt offerings or holocausts).
2. Animal offerings partly burnt and partly consumed by priests and worshippers (peace or communion offerings).
3. Animal offerings to atone for sins, not consumed by the guilty parties (sin and guilt/reparation offerings).
4. Grain or cereal offerings.
5. Offerings of incense or spices.
6. A display of loaves of bread on a tabernacle table (showbread or bread of the presence).”

There is, of course, in this procedural guide, no mention of other types of offering, the ‘offerings of the heart’, though the principle of substitution could apply. Gottwald goes on to comment:

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368 Gottwald, 2009, pp. 105-164.
369 The Priestly source of the Pentateuch, dated in the 5th – 6th century BCE.
370 i.e. immolated.
"The socio-religious element in the traditions most often judged to be authentic for that period is the introduction of a new deity called Yahweh and of a new cult that may have included an ark and/or tent and sacrifice. To this horizon may also belong a covenant instrument and very likely also basic provisions such as the brief Decalogue for the internal ordering of the community ... on the other hand, it is evident that the fullest statement of the cult, laws, and regulations belong to the socio-historical horizon of priestly practice at Jerusalem many centuries later, during the late monarchy, exile and Judahite restoration."  

Gottwald perhaps controversially links the introduction of a new deity with possible new cultic arrangements including sacrifice. That implies that the idea of sacrifice, and its delineated limits, flows from the idea of God. To that might be added that the definition is bound to be mutual: the ritual and the concept feed upon one another. For identical reasons, they may be impossible to disentangle.

Jon Levenson, a Jewish academic, in *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, examines the development of human and animal sacrifice within Israel, and comments,

"Animal sacrifice did not replace child sacrifice: the animal substituted for the child."

In other words, the sacrifice offered is truly the child who is one’s dearest possession, and this remained the actual object of commitment; God’s claim upon the child was ‘realized’ through the death of the animal stand-in. Levenson argues that understanding of biblical (and indeed in other foundational stories in ancient literature) depend on this understanding. This is because of Israel’s status as God (Yahweh’s) first born son. He quotes Exodus 4:22-23, in which God instructs Moses:

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372 Meaning the period of the Exodus and the leadership of Moses.
373 Gottwald, 2009, p.126.
374 Ibid., p.36.
375 Levenson also argues that circumcision is a substitution ritual: “you are a bridegroom of blood to me because of the circumcision” Exod. 4:26  Ibid., p.49.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord: Israel is my first-born son. I have said to you, "Let my son go, that he may worship Me", yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son."

Levenson produces other material in support of his view, from Hosea and Jeremiah\textsuperscript{376}. He suggests that the description is not purely figurative, because it was the habit in ancient times to see close relationships (as in father-son) as not dictated merely by biological links. Therefore, to call the sonship of Israel a mere figure of speech is “to fail to reckon with the import of the biblical story”.\textsuperscript{377} In other words, a metaphorical interpretation cannot do justice to the concepts of the original text, in that the term ‘son’ as applied to Israel by God, is not merely metaphorical (drawing an illustrative parallel between human sonship and Israel’s relationship with God), but is intended to carry with it statement which is substantial in itself and makes a truth-claim – whilst remaining a metaphor.

However, it might be argued that even if this was the principle, in time, the practice perhaps gradually usurped it: the price of reconciliation shifted to animal, rather than human, currency, and this seems to have involved a shift in value. It is perhaps this that Jesus attempted to address by gathering and synthesising former prophetic voices who called for knowledge of God and ‘a sacrifice of the heart’, that leaves the interests of the self behind\textsuperscript{378}.

Here, and not for the first time, we encounter a real difficulty in reconciling modern patterns of thought to those of the Old Testament. The idea of God (Yahweh) as directly involved in the fatherhood of the nation, and the flexibility in the application of the term ‘firstborn’ (neither Jacob nor Isaac was actually the firstborn of their father)\textsuperscript{379} represents counter-intuitive thought for the modern mind, though the ideas, once tackled, allow insight into biblical accounts, in which the first-born, or true heir, is recognized: for instance,

\textsuperscript{376} Hosea 11:1-6 & Jeremiah 31:7-9.  
\textsuperscript{377} Levenson, 1993, p.41.  
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

“You are my son; I have fathered you this day”\(^{380}\)

Levenson goes to some lengths to explain attitudes of substitution. Quoting Nils Dahl, he explores the idea of the ram caught in the thicket in the story of Abraham and Isaac being equivalent to Jesus: “the ram, rather than Isaac is seen as a type of Christ”\(^{381}\). But Levenson goes on to suggest that Paul’s Jesus supersedes Isaac, and that this was the understanding within early Christian literature\(^{382}\).

The Idea of the Temple & Sacrifice

We have already commented on how the Temple ritual centred on animal sacrifice, as was normal within the cultures in the region. The ritual put across the significance of sacrifice not only with spilt blood, but inspired with a more general appeal to the senses: the gorgeous materials of the building, the robes, the music, the all-pervading smell of burning flesh. The mystery and splendour of the ceremonies and their intoxicating effect spoke powerfully to people unaccustomed to anything on such a scale. As Malina & Rohrbaugh have commented\(^{383}\), the Temple was the locus of divine presence, a cosmic centre understood to be the navel of the world. It “articulated structured social relations”, that is to say, it affirmed an order of society in which the monarchy and the people were assembled in a sacred hierarchy under God, as his own people, ahead of all other peoples in his favour. Divinely ordained kingship had brought it into existence, and, tellingly, the Hebrew word for ‘temple’ is the same word as for ‘palace’. God was deemed

\(^{380}\) Ps. 2:7.
\(^{381}\) Levenson, 1993, p.213.
\(^{382}\) Levenson quotes Galatians 3:13-14, and also Romans 11:11-29 to support his description of the early Christian claim that the relationship between Abraham and God was transferred to Jesus and away from the Jewish nation.
to be resident in his temple, and next door in the palace, the king was in a parallel state, and authorized by a divine warrant. The Temple therefore spanned the concepts of divinity, authority and nationhood, and could even be viewed as a moral person, capable of being honoured or dishonoured. Any such honour or dishonour would affect all involved in it, from the king down.

The Temple was, therefore, in itself symbolic: it revealed a divinely sanctioned order. And as the Temple, its people and its processes were all assembled to display aspects of God and his plan, his commitment to his chosen people and their reciprocal commitment to him, so it sought to mediate, systematize and regulate that relationship into an orderly scheme integrated with the national life.

The Temple was a machine for sacrifice. It was designed for the purpose, on the basis that “the material gesture” was efficacious. Robert Hamerton-Kelly has described graphically and explicitly its blood-soaked character. The importance of blood and its connotations, in biblical times, can hardly be overstressed. The lack of ready transferability to modern thought is similarly very important and a substantial barrier to the understanding of biblical practices and to Jesus’s comments on the bread and wine as body and blood at the Last Supper.

Brueggemann believes that “the entire argument made for Jesus, as priest and as sacrifice, is cast in and dependent upon the categories of Israel’s sacrificial practice.” Therefore, to say, “Christ died for my sins...depends completely on the efficaciousness of the material gesture.” Brueggemann is very much aware of the problems this creates for the modern mind, and

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384 “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in 3 days”, said Jesus in relation to his own body. [Jn. 2:19]. The statement dishonoured the Temple in the eyes of its officials, and consequently dishonoured them, too. Jesus seemed to knock at the foundations of that symbol of God and state by suggesting that there were now superior symbols of God’s presence and action, and a higher order of understanding at work.
387 Hamerton-Kelly 1994, Chapter 1.
9 Brueggemann & the Old Testament Base

refers to the unfortunate associations of bribery, bargaining and manipulation which sometimes occur.

Conclusion

We commented earlier that Brueggemann does not set out to advance the thinking on sacrifice. Though his analysis is helpful, it only provides a partial catalogue of contemporary thinking, and in particular does not either include or refute the points made by Girard and by others in his sphere of influence. In so far as these involve anthropological insights into primitive societies, and societies in any age, they may be regarded as supplementary to Brueggemann's thinking.

However, it must be remembered that Brueggemann's focus is for the most part on the Old Testament, and it would be unfair to suggest that his self-imposed remit should invariably include developments that occurred after the Old Testament period came to an end, though he himself does attempt this in *Finally Comes the Poet*. Therefore, in the summary below, which draws upon points made in *Reverberations of Faith*, we note later developments without implying incompleteness on Brueggemann's part.

1. *Sacrifice is a sign of the defining importance of God for the life of the community.* Yes, but this is only one possible aspect. It may be rooted deep in human behaviour and have an evolutionary importance, as Coakley suggests. It may therefore be a sign of hominization itself, as Girard puts it.

2. *Sacrificial practices are vehicles and instruments designed to celebrate, affirm, enhance and repair the defining relationship.* Yes, but they may be instinctive, rather than designed, and may be found effective for that purpose and for the purpose of repairing human relationships and avoid dangerous crises. Where the nature of the practice depends on priestly interventions, a new description is needed for New Testament times, if the message of Jesus is to be accepted.
3. *Israel’s linkage to God was probably given expression ‘from the outset’ by the dedication of one’s best produce to God.* Yes, it probably was, and probably long before that. In other words, the linkage to gods was found through sacrifice not just in Israel, but in the region generally and beyond, before and after the emergence of Israel.

4. *Over time, random and spontaneous gestures of this sort were systematized and made into a coherent system.* Perhaps. Increasing organisation and standardisation seem likely, and the requirements in Leviticus may be taken as a sign of this. But again, we have seen that standard practices existed in the region beyond Israel, and the system changed fundamentally during the Old Testament period and after it. It is possible to argue as Brueggemann and Keenan do variously that Old Testament sacrifice simply wore out as a practice, became a failed system and was itself sacrificed, but it is also possible to argue that the concept itself has evolved to a degree that the term itself becomes confused, since some of the major purposes of sacrifice change fundamentally.

5. *Sacrifice makes concretely visible what is otherwise a hidden relationship.* Yes, it can, though aspects of sacrifice itself may themselves be ‘hidden’, so the revelation may not be simple, and in some cases revelation is not the point.

6. *Some sacrifices are ‘sacrifices of well-being’, some are restorative, some acknowledge God’s ownership of the land and entitlement to its produce; some acknowledge God’s generosity.* Yes. This enlarges Girard’s point that sacrifice is violence. Chauvet adds a useful additional perspective here.

7. *The most extreme sacrifice is that of one’s child.* Yes

8. *Leviticus 16 prescribes special sacrificial measures for the Day of Atonement, including forgiveness and reconciliation.* This point accords well with Avery-Wall’s idea of the Jewish system having a ‘vaccine’ built into it.
9. Interpretative approaches to sacrifice (as in liberal Protestantism) will never permit one to appropriate either the wonder or the gravity of the claim that God has provided concrete mechanisms for sustaining the relationship of God and his people. Yes. There is a good deal in the whole subject that is hard for modern understanding to penetrate.

10. Prophetic critique of sacrificial practice is recurrent in the Old Testament. Yes, but lasting effect is hard to find, except in the understanding of Jesus provided by Girard and others.

11. Psalm 51:16-17 and Micah 6:6-8 indicate that sometimes material sacrifice becomes metaphysical and relational. Yes, but this shift, once again, does not seem to have taken place at a general level until the intervention of Jesus and his followers. But all sacrifice may now have made this leap in Western society, and not exclusively within Christianity; there may have been a cultural shift against material sacrifice on an almost world-wide basis.

12. Jesus replaced an obsolete form of Jewish sacrifice, a ‘failed system’. A worn-out system, perhaps, but the underlying causes which the old system addressed may still be present and may resurface.

13. Christian sacrifice is essentially appropriated from the Old Testament, in that the gesture of sacrifice is deemed to be efficacious: Christ died for my sins, therefore my sins are taken away. And Old Testament ideas of sacrifice, according to Girard, are themselves drawn from a lower base. The claim that efficacious practice is involved within developed Christian practice would not be accepted by all, though it is recognized within Avery-Wall’s thinking and is present in Coakley’s talk of “the particular energies of religious practice (sacrifice, as positively considered)”.

Finally, one might note with J.G. Williams,

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"From the standpoint of mimetic anthropology, there is a profound continuity between the prophetic critique of violence and sacrifice and the Gospels’ story of Jesus’ death and resurrection as the exposure of the scapegoat mechanism. The very matrix of the Christian message is a combination of the importance of sacrifice and a prophetic witness that calls it into question."\(^{390}\)

In other words, the prophets have as a major part of their role, their stand as witnesses against the scapegoat system. Priests, in Brueggemann’s view, both enable the curative system which worship and sacrifice constitute, and perform a necessary function of communication between God and people, resolving the distance between them. Priest and prophet, sacrifice and prophecy, together constitute a double system which has overlaps. Girard would say that the voice of prophecy ultimately means the end for the priestly system, and dooms sacrifice in the traditional sense and its capacity for peace-making to extinction. However, Girard, moving away from the more extreme position taken in Things Hidden on the end of sacrifice, in Apocalyptic Thinking After 9/11 dwells upon the self-sacrifice of Jesus as an act of atonement.\(^{391}\)

\(^{390}\) Williams, J.G., 1997, p.221.  
10 The New Testament and Beyond

"The thought that sacrifice is not an 'ancient' or 'primitive' mistake, but an irreducible aspect of social living, invites us to reflect on how we might conceive of it."

New Testament and the End of Sacrifice

There is claim of long standing – found in Hebrews 9 and set out by theologians since Augustine if not before - that Jesus put an end to sacrifice in the sense in which it applied in the Second Temple. The claim has been the subject of dispute over centuries, but some would say the discussion has been greatly advanced by Girard’s thinking. Nevertheless, it contains, as Kirwan comments, an ‘irreducible ambiguity’ - the sacrifice of sacrifice.

However, more widespread is the view that sacrifice has not disappeared but has mutated; the older form depended on the immolation of material; that evolved into non-material forms of sacrifice, in which personal well-being and desire become the subject sacrificed.

Within that orthodox Christian view, drawing upon Hebrews 4:14-16, Jesus is the ‘Great High Priest’ who offers sacrifice:

"Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray as he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people.

No-one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ did not take upon himself the glory of becoming high priest. But God said to him,

“You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”

393 Augustine’s understanding of Christian sacrifice remains foundational. For instance, speaking of the eucharist, “the visible sacrifice is the sacrament, i.e. the sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice.” Augustine of Hippo, City of God, Vol 34, p.440.
394 Kirwan, 2009, p.78.
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And he says in another place,

"You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."^{395}

So, Jesus earned his place in the highest order of priesthood through his obedience to God as a son, and he makes a sacrifice for himself and for all to atone for sin. The language of sacrifice is carried over from the Old Testament, but, according to Schwager, the continuity “does not appear in the name of sacrifice...but of faith”. ^{396} Faith and the close reflection of God made possible by it lie at the heart of Jesus's 'sonship'.

The idea of 'sonship' means that God is involved in the giving, and is not merely the recipient of the gift. The sacrifice made is of the self, and indeed of a life dedicated to God's service:

"First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, here I am. I have come to do your will."^{397}

Therefore, as a practical matter, true sacrifice is effective in helping to carry forward God's project. It also turns the person who makes the personal sacrifice in the direction of salvation. It may also be effective as ritual or cultic practice, in a setting where ritual is deemed to have an effect in itself. This point will be explored further later.

In this modification of sacrifice away from the traditional use of animals and indeed of a third party of any sort, interiorization has taken place^{398}. This has generated a problem, in that the term 'sacrifice' tends to be used in an apparently similar way in both cases, and confusion results between two activities which are conceptually distinct.

However, the move from material to non-material sacrifice, both within Christianity and Judaism, may be seen alternatively as an attempt to focus on the meaning which, from the start, sacrifice had been meant to contain This

^{395} Hebrews 5:1-11. The two quotations are from Psalm 27 & Psalm 110 [NIV].
^{396} Girard-Schwager 1975-91, p.49.
^{397} Hebrews 10:8 [NIV].
^{398} Daly, 1978, p.7.
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had been lost when focus shifted, myopically, to its mere outward forms. By
discarding the outward forms, only the concept was left and thus became
inescapable. Keenan does not go so far, though he agrees the basic point:

"The progressive interiorization of sacrifice did not, however, represent a
repudiation of sacrifice, rather the necessity of the proper interior
disposition accompanying the outward act." 399

"Sacrifice becomes an ethical, as well as a cultic category. The true sacrifice
is an invisible sacrifice that is visible to God, and that reflects the proper
interior disposition of the ethical agent. The true sacrifice is mercy." 400

Note how close the second quotation is to the definition provided by
Augustine in footnote 393. However, this transformation of sacrifice was a
long time a-coming, and may have had a number of false starts. Psalm 51:16-
17, which according to the superscription is a psalm of David (1061-971
BCE) 401, states

You do not want sacrifices
You are not pleased with burnt offerings.
My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God
You will not reject a humble and contrite heart"

There are of course other examples, but it was the work of Jesus and his
followers to make this view the mainstream, as it is found, for instance, in
Hebrews 13:15-16:

"let us, then, always offer praise to God as our sacrifice through Jesus, which
is the offering presented by lips that confess him as Lord. Do not forget to do
good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please
God."

399 Keenan, 2003, p.189.
401 For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after
David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. (NIV).
Brueggemann’s Reconciliation of Temple Sacrifice with the Christian Concept

The reference to ‘the Great High Priest’ neatly takes us to a surprising turn in Brueggemann’s work in this area; surprising, that is, for a Protestant theologian. He is convinced that the subject of sacrifice, as delineated within the Old Testament, is efficacious practice in which the intermediary of the priest resolves the distance between god and man. The means for this are delineated in Leviticus 6:1-7 as acts of worship. 402 Brueggemann comments:

“The linkage of violation of God and violation of neighbour is found not only in Amos 403 but also in Leviticus, not only in the rage of prophets but in the ache of priests.” 404

Therefore, he is at the minimum implying that an important aspect of the Old Testament can only be understood if the concept of priesthood is accepted as having an important instrumental role within that relationship. What is not said, but may be implied, is that this intermediary relationship is superseded by Jesus, who fundamentally shifts the concept of sacrifice.

However, Brueggemann’s particular understanding of priesthood is very much bound up with the message of prophecy, and he sees an overlap in the agendas of sacrifice and prophecy, and also tends to discern Christian understandings of God’s part in sacrifice in earlier practices:

“The animal is the means for sacrament. The animal given is the sign of the self-giving of God, whose self-giving is required for a new beginning...the priests in the Leviticus text know that finally guilt requires a sacrifice ‘from the other side’ from the very person of God who alone has enough self to give to answer the guilt.” 405

403 Amos 5:21.
405 Ibid., p.27 & 30.
This statement is open to question; no substantial evidence is produced to support the idea that the animal ‘is the sign of the self-giving of God’ as anything but Brueggemann’s own idea, though Brueggemann insists that Leviticus 6, having dealt with human reparation, describes “God’s sacramental activity.” The text seems to refer to the awesome, even dangerous holiness of offerings made, and the response of forgiveness.

The role of a priest is that of a doctor, authorized in the community to work healing; healing, that is, of a holy kind, which is the enactment of atonement. Here, there may seem at first sight to be an echo of Girard’s anthropological views on sacral kingship, in which the king guarantees the community’s health, and dies when that guarantee is found wanting; but in fact the similarity is fleeting and insubstantial. Brueggemann is not at all concerned with ritual and myth, but only with the developed relationship with God exhibited in the Bible.

For Brueggemann, the role of the priest is set in a context, in which “the panoply of God’s rage, hurt, ache and love is an awesome dramatic reality in the life of faith.” Therefore, sacrifice is a dramatic gesture made as part of a drama: the life of faith. As part of that drama, the priest has iterative duties. This is not the same idea as Schwager’s ‘dramatic theology’, which sees events unfold progressively through the biblical accounts. Rather than looking for the pattern on that grand scale, according to Brueggemann, it instead looks for a cycle within a ‘life of faith’, in which ‘new life with God’ is found in a promise ‘to be free for life in the world’.

This interpretation of Old Testament theology in the post-exilic community comes in a book which moves fairly freely between Old and New Testaments, and is much more concerned to find a continuum than to observe any shifts in culture that may have come about in the first century. Brueggemann quotes the Epistle to the Hebrews, and finds in it a ‘preaching point’ about the hope involved in sacrifice, that God will provide a suitable

406 Ibid., p.33.
407 Ibid., p.34.
408 Brueggemann, 1989: Finally Comes the Poet.
10 The New Testament and Beyond

object a of sacrifice, a ram without blemish in a world where everything we are and have is blemished. The ‘clean heart\(^{409}\), the heart without blemish, is the gift of God, which God provides for sacrifice, and the process for cleansing of the heart is the process of sacrifice. This process of healing, as described in Hebrew 10, is accomplished by Jesus, the priest anticipated in Leviticus 6, who “does what we cannot do for ourselves”\(^{410}\). The priest’s self-giving is a gesture of God’s self-giving.

The considerable amount of induction means that Brueggemann is more a preacher than a scholar at this point. His model of God is intensely personal; the character is apparently drawn substantially from understandings of Christ, but is also based on a close familiarity with the unfolding character of Yahweh. And it is Yahweh that Brueggemann seems to focus on, though he is inclined to read into passages like Leviticus 6 an element of the character of that other model of God, Elohim, the presence in the world which can be sensed and (again referring to Leviticus 6 as an example) detected even in prescribed ritual and in the actions of priests, in which God’s own act of giving may be apparent.

Anti-Ritual & Girard

Kirwan, taking up this point in his summary of the discussion between various writers\(^{411}\), quotes Louis-Marie Chauvet: the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus were exercised “existentially and not ritually”\(^{412}\); this amounts to “anti-sacrifice”, a concept which Kirwan believes aligns with Girard’s revised concept of sacrifice, but not his earlier view. Girard’s developed position aligns with that of a number of other writers (Keenan, Daly, Chauvet) and is

\(^{409}\) Psalm 51:10.
\(^{410}\) Ibid., p.35. The reference to the text is obscure, as Leviticus 6 gives instructions for the actions in sacrificial ritual of ‘an Aaronite priest’, but does not seem to anticipate any particular priest.
\(^{411}\) Kirwan, 2009, pp.76-80.
\(^{412}\) Chauvet, 1995, p.299.
characterized as ‘the exodus from sacrifice’, “an ‘exodus’ from the hellish process of pious victimisation.”

This is some of the support given for the Girardian view, and exemplifies the body of thought which is being built around his thinking. But not all the work resulting from this is a straightforward development or extension of Girard's thought. Some writers including Coakley and Keenan are cautious and not inclined to accept that the ‘exodus’ described by Girard is really beneficial; they have expressed fears that by closing off the old tradition of animal sacrifice, a door is opened to new and worse forms of sacrifice, and also more dangerous situations in which violence spirals out of control.

However, Coakley develops her polemic without taking into account Girard’s explanation of why this should not be the case: the mimetic system can only operate in its natural, hidden state; once exposed, it loses its power, and therefore would not re-emerge unless in ways which are secret and not exposed by Jesus. Coakley’s argument and dismissal of Girard’s explanation is therefore incomplete in this particular aspect.

However, within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, if not elsewhere, animal sacrifice came to an end at roughly the same time. Christians may give Jesus the credit for this, but Jews would not attribute to him the fact that the Second Temple and its practices came to an end in 70 CE and have not been reinstated. There is scope for a new temple, for which Ezekiel provides a specification. Jews pray daily,

“may it be your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that the Temple shall be speedily rebuilt in our days, and grant us our share in your Torah. And may we serve you there in reverence, as in the days of old and as in former years.”

This comes at the end of a section which lays out in detail the prescribed arrangements for daily animal sacrifice, and which begins,

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413 Kirwan, 2009, p.80.
414 Coakley, 2009, p.10. Keenan, according to Kirwan, states “sacrifice of sacrifice, which could…then return (relatively unchanged) in far more subtle and pernicious forms.” Kirwan, 2009, p.78.
The Lord said to Moses, ‘Command the Israelites and tell them: be careful to offer Me at the appointed time My food-offering consumed by fire, as an aroma pleasing to me. Tell them: This is the fire-offering you shall offer to the Lord: two lambs…” 416 etc.

It could therefore be assumed that the wish to rebuild the Temple implies an intention to recommence the programme of sacrifices. But there are differences between various branches of Judaism on this point: Orthodox Jews explicitly affirm the intention to resume sacrifice, but other Jews instead replace the references to sacrifice with passages from the Talmud which teach that atonement for sin is now achieved by acts of loving-kindness. They, therefore, look to the restoration of the Temple, but not the resumption of sacrifice. This move away from sacrifice is of very long standing: Maimonides referred to it in the 12th century. 417

However, remarkably, neither the reconstruction of the Temple, nor the resumption of animal sacrifice has ever been enacted either in the state of Israel or elsewhere within Judaism. Perhaps the question of sacrifice has proved too difficult to resolve, and the restoration of the Temple has been deferred for that reason and others418. This is easy to account for in secular terms: society has developed in the centuries that have elapsed since the year 70, and blood sacrifice has become simply obsolete and unacceptable, not just within Judaism and Christianity, but almost everywhere. The Jewish prayer formulas simply do not reflect present day Jewish attitudes, which have matured with other faiths in a process of development which Kirwan describes as ‘the religious history of mankind’419.

416 Ibid., pp 25-27.
417 Maimonides (1135-1204) in his early work A Guide for the Perplexed states “God deliberately has moved Jews away from sacrifices towards prayer, as prayer is a higher form of worship.” However, in Mishnah Torah, which is widely thought to be his later, defining view, he states that sacrifice will take place in the yet-to-be-built Third Temple. He gives a description of how sacrifice will proceed, in detail.
418 Including the fact that the site is occupied by a mosque.
This common-sense approach should not blind us to the possibility of a religious, not merely a cultural, development. Vanessa Avery-Wall, providing a Jewish perspective, quotes Sandor Goodhart:

“In opposing the Old Testament to the New, in reading the old God as the sacrificial God of vengeance and anger and the new as the anti-sacrificial God of love, have we not unwittingly slipped into the very structure we have wished to displace, believing in a new law or ‘part two’ which it has already been by definition, as it were, the goal of the Old Testament to reveal to us, and Old Testament which is thus that much richer by virtue of having foreseen our sacrificial misunderstanding of it.”

That is, it is only a misunderstanding of the Old Testament that enables the New Testament to be seen as a departure. To other eyes, it is a logical continuation of an unbroken tradition. Although Avery-Wall’s comments are specific to Judaism, she hopes that they will ‘find resonance’ in other faiths. In other words, she hopes to have identified a general truth about religion: that changing ideas on the nature of God are built into religion, and these involve the control of mimetic desire and its outlet in sacrifice.

She traces this from the identification of the first Messiah, the ‘Messiah ben Joseph’, Ephraim, who with his brother Manasseh, having received a blessing from their grandfather Jacob, were made paradigms: Jacob said, “in this way shall Israel bless: ‘may God bless you like Ephraim and Manasseh’.” They therefore represent peaceful fraternal relations instituted for the first time in Israel, breaking the cycle of violence. This base of peace enables a focus on other things. That is to say, a step taken towards overcoming mimetic rivalry is a foundation for the development of the nation, but one could generalise this into a foundation for human development. The second Messiah, the ‘Messiah ben David’, is to come later. The Messiah must die “for the advent of deliverance”, and for “the sacrifice of the evil inclination”; a total break...

422 Avery-Wall, 2010, p.3.
423 The ‘evil inclination’, Avery-Wall explains, as a part of God’s creation, is a good thing, and enables human activities such as trade, marriage and building; but it is “part of...
with the nature of man as it has unfolded through the dimension of history”. It is not clear whether the death of the Messiah ben Joseph is spoken of literally (a death in battle), or allegorically as the death of the evil inclination.

She refers to this process as the ‘Jewish vaccine against mimetic desire’. This phrase seems to be drawn from Girard himself, who uses the analogy of inoculation to describe the protective effects of ritualised violence within religion:

“The physician inoculates the patient with a minute amount of the disease, just as, in the course of the rites, the community is injected with a minute amount of violence, enabling it to ward off an attack of full-scale violence.”

At both macro- and micro-levels (the nation and the person), this inoculation is underpinned by ritual blessing, which is effective language, changing people and the world.

The metaphor of vaccine is a useful one, and hints at development in itself, because vaccines are not available to us from the first, but are a matter of discovery and invention. On the basis of the very long-term creeping effects, promoted by ‘booster-shots’ of blessing every week, Avery-Wall speculates that we witness “a continuous thread revealing the gradual overcoming of mimetic desire”.

Here, it might be noted that blessing has been identified as preceding original sin and the Fall. This is a point made by Lascaris:

humanity's base nature, and the inclination that drives humanity towards rivalry” Avery-Wall, 2010, p.4. It seems that the evil inclination is generally consistent with Girard’s good and bad varieties of mimesis.

Ibid., p.4.


Ibid., p.6.
"From a Christian point of view, we cannot do very well without the term ‘original sin’...however...‘original sin’ is preceded by ‘original blessing’. This ‘original blessing’ is not taken away as such by ‘original sin’, but remains present in our world and makes itself felt. It is not necessary to assume, as Girard does, an almost unmediated divine origin of the Gospel and to make such a quick assertion of Christ’s divinity. Jesus is first and foremost the embodiment of the ‘original blessing’.”

However, ‘original blessing’ does not seem to form any part of Girard’s scheme. Rather, humanity has the opposite of blessing – the curse of mimetic behaviour - built in from the start. Sarah Coakley has commented on the basic lack of hope in Girard’s scheme:

"If violence is primary and without it we have no social stability, how can that function be sublated by a saviour who merely announces its end but then becomes another victim of it? This theory of sacrifice surely merely re-establishes what is purportedly seeks to critique."

Having said this, Coakley immediately concedes that Girard has taken steps to deal with the problem in his later work, so the criticism is to some extent counterbalanced. However, it is also an unfair criticism; under Girard’s theory, violence is an effect or a fact about the world rather than ‘primary’. The saviour does not announce the end of violence: he exposes the victimage mechanism, one of the key means by which violence has been given meaning, and thus deprives it of efficacy. That does not mean the end of violence, though. And, though Coakley does not mention it, Girard is not completely without hope, as the closing pages of Things Hidden make clear:

“ All issues of ‘psychological health’ seem to me to take second place to a much greater issue – that of meaning which is being lost or threatened on all sides, but simply awaits the breath of the Spirit to be reborn. Now all that is

needed is this breath to recreate stage by stage Ezekiel's experience in the valley of the dead."

Therefore, it may be questioned whether Coakley has truly addressed the key points Girard is making.

However, alongside Avery-Wall's thinking, we might place another strand of thought which also refers to a continuum of thought and tradition, relating to the theology and practice of the First Temple. These had been replaced by different theology by the Deuteronomic redactors, and different practice within the Second Temple.

First Temple concepts, generally thought to be eclipsed and in abeyance in the first century, were in fact not forgotten, and were taken up by Jesus and his followers and reinstated. This, at least, is the contention of Margaret Barker, in her deeply controversial book *Temple Theology*.\(^430\) It is widely thought that Barker’s work is interesting but goes some way beyond the limits of reasonable deduction. However, the point to be taken up here is shared with Avery-Wall: there is in reality only one continuing tradition, not a second tradition overthrowing the first, though correction was involved.

Barker describes First Temple practices as frequently hidden within "a secret priestly tradition"\(^431\). The function of the royal High Priest was to "carry away the sin and uncleanness of the people so that they could be restored within the bonds of the covenant."\(^432\)

The main thrust of temple ritual, then, was to restore the relationship with God. The Royal High Priest, according to Barker, was

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\(^430\) Barker, 2004.
\(^431\) Barker, 2004, p. 10.
\(^432\) Ibid.
“the great angel in human form, the Man, who passed between heaven and earth...born as son of God in the Holy of Holies...the two temple rituals originally exclusive to the high priests were carrying blood into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and eating the most holy Showbread on the Sabbath. These were combined to become the Christian Eucharist”

Of course, the main anchor of this argument is ‘the bonds of the covenant’, and it may not be entirely clear which covenant is referred to, as there are several possibilities. (This matter is further considered in the next chapter & in chapter 18). Barker suggests that the covenant in question is not to be found in any part of the present Old Testament canon, as no covenant there refers to ‘the remission of sins’, which is a key part of the Christian concept. Instead, she suggests that it refers to the high priestly function of making atonement for sin, a function in which we may see some resemblances to sacral kingship.

Since it is ‘sin and uncleanness’ that outrage the covenant, if there is a necessary relationship between sin and uncleanness and the mimetic process, then there may be a fit with Girardian thought. But Girard is preoccupied with violence, and tends not to define the limits of that term, and consider where violence begins and ends, though he identifies its origins as frequently lying in imitative desire. In other words, one might provide a definition for Girard thus:

“Violence is the harmful outcome which attends frustration from being shown something, which you come to want from being shown it in others’ possession, and not getting it for yourself. It is frustration vented on others. Desire is imitative and begets violence, theft and covetousness. Violence is also imitative, and likewise begets more violence, in an ascending spiral of destruction. Religion from the first has forbidden access to the objects of mimetic desire, and thereby seeks to contain this process which is endemic in mankind.”

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433 Ibid.
434 Ibid., p.34.
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Violence attends desire and the forbidden emotions of envy and covetousness. The definition does not cover all aspects of the Ten Commandments (or any other of Israel's covenants) but it does cover the commandments from six to ten. Violence, defined as relative to the mimetic process, therefore outrages the bonds of the covenant, or some of them. Therefore, a partial fit with Girardian thought can be found.

At this stage, we therefore have a measure of consensus between Girard, Avery-Wall and Barker that the religious history of Israel

1. Exists in the context of maintaining a relationship with God
2. That maintaining that relationship involves conflict with the 'evil inclination' embodied in human nature.
3. Atonement for sin necessarily involves sacrifice in a developing variety of forms.
4. Sacrifice has not come to an end, and will only do so when human behaviour has changed and operates on a new basis which is inherently acceptable to God.

Christian Adaptation of the Ideas of Sacrifice and Temple

The contemporary Catholic writer Dennis King Keenan, in The Sacrifice of the Eucharist describes the Christian imperative as to 'sacrifice sacrifice', and move on to a new concept. However, in making this recommendation, he is cautious as to whether sacrifice might make a covert return. We take up this point again later.

Kenneth Slack, writing in the SCM Press Lent Book for 1966 on the theme of Is Sacrifice Outmoded?, observed that the role of sacrifice in present day life, was to give up pleasures and gains in order to better society. This has the

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436 Young, 1975, p.12. To 'better society' is of course a similar expression to 'bring closed the kingdom of God'.
authority of Hebrews 13:16, “Do not forget to do good and help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God.” The passage quoted, however, follows immediately one which refer to the essential “sacrifice of praise”, confessing Jesus as Lord; in other words, stating the distinctive claim of Christianity as a religion rather than a way of living or ethical system, and (by implication) commitment to the Way which Jesus indicated, the New Covenant. The religious statement is followed by and gives rise to the ethical one, and adopting a new attitude is involved in the process. The lesson of Psalm 51 is that the change of attitude precedes acceptable sacrifice of what was then the conventional kind: without the humble and contrite heart achieved in advance, the burnt offering is ineffective. The Christian position, articulated by Slack and others, focuses on the preparedness of the heart, and simply disposes of the sacrifice previously associated with it. The term has therefore taken on a new meaning, and Slack, (who unlike Keenan, was writing before Girard) does not refer in a cautionary way to the possibility that the mimetic process and sacrifice might re-disguise itself and become effective again.

R J Daly, writing on the origins of the Christian doctrine of sacrifice, claimed that “living the Christian life has taken over the atoning function of the sacrificial cult”437. This argument short-circuits ideas that it is possible for the believer who sins to take advantage of a perpetual cycle of forgiveness. It hangs on Hebrews 10:26ff, which states that no longer is any sacrifice effective in taking away sin once the sinner realises the position she is in. In the face of the very explicit explanation delivered through Jesus, sin committed once the sinner is aware of the error of her position (that is, sin consciously committed) cannot be atoned for with sacrifice of the traditional sort, because the new covenant has been flouted, and the ‘Spirit of Grace’ insulted, and the ‘blood of God’s covenant’ (referring to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice) held cheap by the rejection of standards which are already understood. This is a controversial area, and many would find Daly’s view too simple an understanding of the nature of forgiveness and the position of

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backsliders. However, it takes the unveiling of the mimetic process by Jesus plus his directions on acceptable living as an imperative against mimetic behaviour, which itself makes sacrifice in the traditional sense both obsolete and unacceptable.

The Continuing Importance of Sacrifice

In her inaugural lecture as Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, Sarah Coakley argued contra Girard for sacrifice as being neither dead, nor irrational nor obsolete. She observed that

“the latter part of the twentieth century in the West has been marked by a strongly negative approach to the topic, seeing it as essentially violent and irrational. Such assumptions have of course been shored up by the recent outbreak of suicide bombings, on the one hand, and by a fashionable secular atheism, on the other, which calls on evolutionary biology to show that all religion, in general, is irrational, and all sacrificial religion, in particular, debased and bloody.”

In her view, the late modern period is defined both by a negative view of sacrifice and also by a retreat from confidence in the rationality of Christianity. The situation (she says it is not a coincidence) is that Christianity “now has little if any apologetic force in relation to the dominating secular worldview.”

As Coakley speculates on how a re-evaluation of Christian faith as sacrificial might proceed, noting that the battleground in such a debate, involving making a ‘public case’ for the rationality of Christian belief, would not be the

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439 Ibid.

440 Ibid., p.5.
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‘flat plane’ which atheists take to be a given. That is, the issue is much more complex and multi-dimensional than merely arguing over the so-called facts of belief. She believes that we have lost the shared ‘flat plane’ of universal reason, and looks to Alasdair MacIntyre for support, with his notion of tradition-based rationality: ‘there are no tradition-independent standards of argument’.

She comments,

“why human motivations to sacrificial behaviours could possibly occur then become pressing, and lead to a final speculation on how ritual practice and scientific endeavour could be significantly related – and indeed, might have to be so related, if our current worldwide ecological crisis is to be alleviated.”

In other words, Coakley, homing in on the urgent need to find a new, committed, responsible human attitude to the ecological plight of the planet, suggests that Christian belief linked with the practice of sacrifice, might be the only efficacious route left open. She quotes E O Wilson, the Harvard biologist:

“only the power of a sacrificial religious motivation can sufficiently redirect human will to undertake the changes we need to save us from ecological disaster.”

Therefore, the suggestion is that the concept of sacrifice be harnessed to achieve an otherwise impossible change in human aspirations and behaviour.

Coakley disputes the definition of sacrifice as violence, suggesting that it is much more than that, with the ritual actor moving from “evocations of blood” to “cleansed expressions of moral altruism”. She wishes to consider the philosophical significance of (now unfashionable) theories about the “mobilization of psychic energy in relation to sacrificial rites”. All of this is

442 Ibid., p.6.
444 Ibid., p.7.
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to be achieved under a philosophical understanding of rational religion. She disputes the view of Kant:

"...according to Kant... 'the superstitious illusion contains the means, available to many an individual', which enables him to 'transform' the contingent into something reasonable and moral. But according to Kant such historically contingent materials such as (sic) sacrifice are necessarily inferior to the 'religion of reason' and are ultimately destined to be supplanted by it. Modern 'man', it is presumed, will eventually grow out of ritual."\footnote{Ibid., p.9.}

Coakley thinks Kant 'squeamish', and takes the contrary view that ritual is an indispensable part of a comprehensive, efficacious human method, an "organic unity of ritual practice and reason".\footnote{Ibid.}

Coakley also comments that sacrifice is not merely a primitive characteristic of human society which is something to be wished away as part of societal development. Rather, it is something which has a function in the natural development of humanity:

"I seek to cleanse the notion of sacrifice from that of mandated (Girardian) violence, and identify in the new notion of evolutionary sacrifice a principle of divine reason."\footnote{Coakley, 2009, p.19.}

Therefore, she is changing the meaning of the term again, from the diffuse and hazily defined Christian idea, which is itself a change from the Old Testament notion. This is the third generation of the term.

She quotes Darwin:

"There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience courage and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to

\footnote{Ibid., p.9.}
sacrifice themselves for the common good would be victorious over most other tribes, and this would be natural selection.”

Conclusion

Let us now refer back to the synthesis of the view from Schwager and Gottwald, with some input from Gorringe, at the end of Chapter 8:

3. God is known through a certain type of experience, in which priorities are adjusted away from those of human society as it defines itself in God’s absence, and towards another standard in which God’s commandments are the only authority. Within God’s scheme, sacrifice is not wanted.

And on the other,

4. Human nature asserts itself in God’s absence, and under these circumstances violence becomes salient. Sacrifice and scapegoating are part of this situation, and may be generated by it automatically and inescapably.

If a reconciliation of these points with Coakley’s opinion, and Darwin’s, above is to be attempted, then God must be seen as an apparently perverse, but actually developmental, force within evolution, and sacrifice, in all its forms, a developing mechanism which is self-configuring to the needs of a particular society at the time. Not asserting self, not setting out to promote one’s own interests, but following divine reason, is effective in protecting the longer-term interests of the community. God is the smoothing force which planes off errors and digressions in behaviour and enables society to maintain a true direction. Other voices echo this in their own terms: Chilton sees sacrifice as building community; Taylor sees Eve’s rivalry with God.

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449 Chilton, 1992, p.32.
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(that is, with true direction) as the actual fall. Divine providence may seem to attend on those who hear the voice of God; God attends to those who follow his commandments, and ignores the others; only the pure in heart get God's attention. Under Coakley-Darwin, this would amount to God's evolutionary voice falling out of ear-shot as one departs from the profitable path.

These combined observations fit with all and so are hardly contentious; but the agreement is only on the effect of God. The means by which the system works is a wholly different matter.

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11 Atonement and Contemporary Sacrifice

The Common Ground

In the previous chapter, we saw how

1. According to Brueggemann, sacrifice is part of a priestly phenomenon in which ritual is effective in itself. God participates in the process and is found to be giving of himself in the act of sacrifice.

2. This is consistent with Barker’s affirmation of the traditional understanding\(^\text{452}\) that an important part of the High Priestly function was to make atonement for sin. This seems to have something in common with sacral kingship as Girard, Frazer, Hocart and others describe it.

3. Barker also points out that restoration of the ‘the bonds of the covenant’ is a troublesome description of the function of sacrifice, since no covenant is to be found in the Old Testament referring to the remission of sins; therefore, she speculates that this is in fact an allusion to ‘the older faith’, which she explains in terms of an Elohist reference\(^\text{453}\). Barker speculates that correct translation of the Hebrew in this text refers to the invocation of God: ‘thus I am to be invoked throughout all generations”. The older faith accomplished this through priestly action, and this tradition was revived and re-expressed by Jesus.

Let us now generalise that concept of ‘priestly action’, so as not to get sidetracked too much into a discussion on priesthood, and consider the practical function and outcome. Brueggemann is concerned with healing and how this is to be achieved. He speaks of the condition of people and societies as ‘numbness and ache’ and ‘the strangeness of healing’\(^\text{454}\), and states

“We cannot alone work our own healing. It requires a priest, someone who is authorized in the community, who is recognized as having the capacity to bear and holiness among us, holiness that outruns our technical control and

\(^{452}\) For instance, in Leviticus and in Hebrews.


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understanding...Healing is an act of atonement...so that the poison of the affront is forever contained and removed as a threat...The act of putting the poison away is an act not done by ourselves but on our behalf by the priest who bears holiness. This act done for us leads to forgiveness, reconciliation, and the capacity to start again with a new life and a restored relation." \(^{455}\)

So, it is the treatment of the condition arising from sin that leads to forgiveness of the sin. The doctor-priest who heals you is also the agent of God who delivers forgiveness for sinful behaviour. This description accords with Catholic understandings, but hardly with Protestant ones, so, coming from Brueggemann in particular, this is a surprising stance. However, Brueggemann’s other themes: rebalancing, readjustment to God from a position of alienation and the removal of pain are of course also the aims of the sacral kingship system. Therefore, in Brueggemann’s summarized position we see a traditional Judaeo-Christian understanding of the workings of the process of sacrifice, and a basis for understanding its roots in sacral kingship.

Although common ground is found in the function of sacral kingship, beyond that, we have a gulf between Brueggemann-Barker and Darwin-Girard-Coakley. However, in chapter 2a, we saw that there is a link between Brueggemann’s sphere of influence and that of Girard through the work of Gottwald and Schwager, and to some extent of that of Gorringe. In Gorringe’s memorable words, it is the model of God “only known in the journey from bondage to freedom” \(^{456}\). The meaning of this phrase of course depends entirely upon how ‘bondage’ and ‘freedom’ are construed, but comparison of the way these terms might be discerned in the work of the various authors shows a degree of commonality:

\(^{455}\) Brueggemann, 1989, p.29.
\(^{456}\) Gorringe, 200, p.13.
### Atonement and Contemporary Sacrifice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gorringe</th>
<th>Brueggemann</th>
<th>Gottwald</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bondage</strong></td>
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<td>The idea of human freedom to choose, independent of God's will: 'well-fed slavery', which may seem like freedom, but in fact it disqualifies us from knowing God, and is a spiritual wilderness and spiritual death.</td>
<td>The glory of the world, seen in Egypt. This story of death has implications in the present day, for ecology.</td>
<td>Yahweh, deemed to be so named by Moses, brings about the escape from bondage in Egypt and self-rule in Canaan. The Elohist tradition is corrective of the Yahwist, and presents criteria for Israel which transcend kingly models.</td>
<td>Sacrificial ideas do not originate from Yahweh's wishes, but are a human invention.</td>
<td>Commitment to sacrifice therefore means enslavement to a human, not a divine system.</td>
<td>The mimetic system and the victimage/scapegoat practices (inc. sacrifice) arising from it enslaved human societies because of their satanic aspects and hidden nature, until they were exposed.</td>
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<td><strong>Freedom</strong></td>
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<td>Finding God in narrowed choices; the Torah is the bread of life; manna, though monotonous, is God's prescribed food. Jesus is the bread of life because he embodies God's word.</td>
<td>The glory of Yahweh, seen in the desert. Jesus reveals that scarcity is a myth and that there is a freedom of plenty: &quot;the world is filled with abundance and freighted with gratitude, and that his is a commitment to 'God because of Egypt', that is, the converse of the benchmarks of worldly power and the co-identification of religion with state objectives.</td>
<td>Keep the law; turn to the Lord, and everything will be made new. In this, the self-revelation of God is identical with the overcoming of violence. Freedom is freedom from human</td>
<td>Exposure takes away the power of the mimetic system, and divinely-inspired priorities, or good religion, is enabled to displace bad religion. This is the achievement of Jesus. Girard sees Ezekiel's valley of dry bones revived when the Spirit is revived within society and it ceases to think self-destructively.</td>
<td>Self-sacrificial religious motivation may be in line with and disclosive of the divine reason of evolution. It is likely to lead to better decisions for the planet, and forestall ecological destruction.</td>
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457 Gorringe quoted J K Galbraith’s ‘culture of contentment’. Well-fed slavery destroys people because it condemns them to “unsustainable lifestyles and the ecological destruction which flows from that”. Gorringe, 2005, p.13.

458 Brueggemann, 2000, p.71ff.

459 Gottwald, 2009, p.82.

460 Schwager, 1987, p.43ff.


Indeed, the common themes are striking: spiritual death occurs in an indulgent life, which is seen analytically as a life of bondage to personal aspiration and well-being, and spiritual life in acceptance of narrowed choices and an understanding of where the long-term good lies. Bondage is associated with violence and human systems, and God is found in the escape from violence and bondage. Human systems often include violence, and may decay towards violence, as preoccupation with self has the effect that relationship with God is left further and further behind.

Of course, the agreement is by no means complete, and successive writers tend to define their own thinking over against that of others (for instance, Coakley’s understanding of the possibility of decoupling sacrifice and violence is an explicit reaction to Girard). It would, though, be possible to develop and synthesize Girard’s later thinking and Coakley’s, in much the same way as Lascaris took Girard’s early thinking on mimesis and sacrifice, and Davis’s objections to it, and proposed a third way.

Having established that there is common ground, let us examine a religiously motivated approach, orientated in opposition to mimetic violence and scapegoating, and indeed, human violence generally, and configured to work on principles of self-sacrifice. In order to fulfil God’s purposes, might this work to develop the community sustainably and to safeguard the planet? We shall see what sort of shape this attempt might have, if (a) Girardian theory is to be involved and (b) there is a ‘sacramental re-ordering of public reality’ as Brueggemann defines the process he envisions.
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Girard and Spiritual Death

In the final chapter of Things Hidden (1987), Girard lays out the current position of humanity, in which he sees the revelation of the mimetic system and victimage process made by Jesus as a necessarily divine intervention\(^{465}\) which has allowed people to detect the scapegoat mechanism. But nevertheless he states,

> the notion that the victimage process is a universal one remains hidden from view...The victims are always there... The paradox is strange but quite logical. Sacrifice is the stake in the struggle between doubles, with everyone accusing everyone else of giving in to it, everyone trying to settle his own account with sacrifice by a final sacrifice that would expel all evil for good."\(^{466}\)

This is why everyone enters the kingdom of heaven violently, says Girard, quoting Luke 16:16. This verse, frequently seen as enigmatic, is otherwise translated as “everyone forces his way in”\(^{467}\), but Girard’s interpretation stands up to this rewording.

Mankind, says Girard, has no wish to give up the sacrificial wish wholesale, but has ‘devoured’ the sacrificial forms in existence, and many other forms of universality, and left itself with a death of cultures worldwide, through loss of ‘the signified’:

> Present-day thought is the worst form of castration, since it is the castration of the signified... We struggled against the Puritanism of our parents only to fall into a form of Puritanism far worse than theirs - a Puritanism of meaning that kills all it touches. This Puritanism desiccates every text.”\(^{468}\)

The sacredness of violence has been deconstructed, and the casualty on a wider scale is meaning generally. Therefore, meaninglessness becomes an

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\(^{466}\) Ibid., p.440.
\(^{467}\) NEB, GNB.
\(^{468}\) Girard, 1987, p.442.
overwhelming problem and constant, undirected attempts to escape from it are the symptom in contemporary society.

In a rather later book, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*\(^{469}\), Satan is seen to exist first of all as a figure created by structures of mimetic violence. Logically, once those structures are exposed and lose their efficacy as a consequence, Satan has lost his power and maybe his very existence. But, says Girard, “Satan is always someone”\(^{470}\), and quoting Jesus, “Satan expels Satan”\(^{471}\), from which one might distil that disorder is expunged by a new situation which includes the basis of future disorder. The target which the Christian, anti-mimetic approach must address is therefore a moving one, and Girard’s observations are essentially historical ones, and therefore lacking much of a foreground; he looks at what has happened, and discerns what might happen in the coming phase only indistinctly, but with the certainty that there is a new Satan, or a revised version of the old one, which having lost a good part of his old system, has simply moved to a new area of operation. The model of Satan he is working with is the personalised version of the abstract concept of ‘scandal’, used in the synoptic gospels to refer to mimetic rivalry.\(^{472}\) St. John’s gospel, though, uses the name ‘Satan’ to refer to this same phenomenon.

If, as Girard says, the world is now in a situation where ‘the signified’ is at risk, then Brueggemann’s scheme of priestly action may no longer be an option, and those who doubt the relevance of religion in the present day will be quick to agree with this; but if, a Girard also says, people are in flight from meaninglessness, then they must by definition be trying, however blindly, to flee towards some form of meaning. Previously, sacrifice was found to be an effective mechanism for approaching and reconciling oneself to God, the source of all meaning. Now, that direction for many is no longer valid.

There are various ways on understanding what is happening; the loss of Satan as previously understood has removed some of the means of defining

\(^{469}\) Girard, 2001, p.192.
\(^{470}\) Ibid., p.46.
\(^{471}\) Ibid, p.44.
\(^{472}\) Girard, 2001, p.16.
and recognizing God; Satan has in a sense taken God with him in the course of his own destruction; put in personal terms, Satan is engaged in new work, and part of the new project is obscuring God.

If it took Jesus to explain the old Satan to us, then we may well wonder when and how the new Satan will be explained. What, to use Kirwan’s term, is a truly relevant ‘framework for soteriology’ in a situation where Satan has moved on, and the explanations of Jesus, and the general truths he announced, are no longer quite as topical as they were, because the problem has shifted. The speculations lead one to imagine that Girardian insights, valuable as they are, might be only one set of a series in which an unfolding scenario is depicted.

Coakley, as we saw in a previous chapter, sees salvation as dependent on religious commitment of sorts. She takes the salvation of the planet, rather than personal salvation as her focus, and therefore raises the discussion to the level of a universal. Her message is, though put in analytical terms, compatible with Christian commitment and Christian ethics, but it leaves a large area as the work of ‘faith’, and does not address what ‘faith’ might amount to in an age when meaning itself is under attack.

If Coakley’s argument is to be accepted here (and it certainly seems strong, even if it lacks much detail), then sacrifice will not have come to an end, because Christian sacrifice will have found a telos at the level of the human universal. Further, it will be possible to trace sacrifice as an evolving concept which may be expected not only to continue in existence but to continue to evolve with society and the conditions which come to prevail; and if indeed Jesus’s intervention has had the effect of redirecting the sacrificial tendency, then his work might be seen in sociological terms as to be seeking to bring about a conscious shift in human behaviour. Coakley and Darwin seem to look at such a phenomenon and say that it has as an evolutionary effect.

The current project, then, is to understand the reconnection with meaning that might occur through a new form of commitment to sacrifice. As an

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473 Kirwan, 2009, p.68.
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ethical project and no more, this is easy enough to define; but, Coakley says, ethics are not enough: only a religious commitment will be sufficient, and it is not clear what shape the religious component will take, particularly if it were to depend on, or be facilitated by, effective practice. Brueggemann describes such effective practice, but he speaks with historical focus (though he may also delineate lasting truths), and Girard believes that Christian sacrifice, as defined by Jesus, is a lasting concept not susceptible to further change.

However, a new, or modified, focus may be in order now, and the idea is worth exploring. To commence this project we will propose that the end of meaning and ‘the signified’, which Girard refers to at the end of Things Hidden, is a mistaken perception, and that what is actually occurring is a shift in these things. Girard is concerned that the end of the mimetic system might mean the escalation of violence out of control, and this could be the case; but sacrifice itself might be moved on by new patterns in behaviour which themselves help to deflect such consequences.

Brueggemann detects a failure or significant decline in communion, that is, close relationship with God. It is speech that is the central ‘act of communion’, and speech has failed us:

"Reduced communion and reduced communication take two identifiable forms in our society. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues have shown so well, one form of reductionism is the practice of subjective consciousness. That is, we no longer imagine a real live, responding other, with a centre of his own. We imagine that reality is only us, our yearnings and our cravings. In such a collapsed world, there is no real speech, because there is no one but us, no one to address, no one to answer, no one to whom to speak seriously, no one who addresses us with authority...The world is defined by one's subjective shaping of reality, a shaping that can never satisfy, nor lead to communion, because the partner is permitted no real existence of his or her own"

474 Brueggemann, 1989, pp.43ff.
475 Bellah et al., 1985.
This view seems to have a distinct overlap with Girard’s ‘loss of the signified’. If all that counts for each of us in his or her own life is ourselves and our own aspirations, the world otherwise becomes stripped of its links to God. Little is signified, because under this perspective there is little to signify. Girard seems to come close to despair over this, and hopes that the Holy Spirit will reactivate people, whose spirits are desiccated so that they resemble the dry bones in Ezekiel’s valley of the dead:

“All of us are in this valley, but it is up to us to resuscitate meaning by relating all the texts to one another without exception...meaning which is being lost or threatened on all sides but simply awaits the breath of the Spirit to be reborn.”

Therefore, meaning is dependent on a view of life and God, which is relational. Brueggemann senses a deep sense of loss, a ‘yearning and wishfulness’ and ‘resilient hope’ in people who exist in discommunion or reduced communion, and do not have the wherewithal to expand their understanding of reality and embrace God. He quotes Alistair MacIntyre’s explanation of this reduced state as it manifests itself in public and private arenas; in the public, the subjectivity “is visible as a ‘managerial’ consciousness in which all reality is reduced to problem-solving.” And a problem-solving approach, Brueggemann and Girard would agree, is not equipped to deal with this big problem: in some ways it looks straight through it as though it were transparent.

Brueggemann goes on to speak of a second form of reductionism which is “an uncritical form of objectivism about God that assigns everything to God...(it) is powerful in the North American scene that lusts after a settled, uncritical religious assurance.” He is very critical of this syndrome and the worship associated with it, which is “mistaken, dishonest and destructive”.

Let us therefore dismiss the second form from our enquiry and concentrate on the first. Brueggemann sees the missing key from both public and private areas of people’s lives as the absence “from any such speech (of) any practice

476 Girard, 1987, p.447
477 Brueggemann, 1989, p.45.
Atonement and Contemporary Sacrifice

of commitment that may raise any critical question.” This leads, in the private area, through an “excessive ‘therapeutic’ preoccupation to yearning for relations in which there is no “sacrifice, durability or responsibility” (my emphasis).

The linking of these three terms is telling in the context of loss of meaning, which we have detected in both Brueggemann’s and Girard’s understanding to be the fundamental to the contemporary malaise. According to both, it is suggested here, the finding of meaning can only be supported by a view of life, and God, which is relational, and, to use Brueggemann’s rather Wittgenstian term, the ‘speech’ is not there to enable this mental direction to be taken. Girard uses a different turn of phrase: the breath of the spirit is required to restore the faculty.

This measure of agreement still leaves us with the underlying problem, which is that we are all operating in a sort of spiritual deoxygenation brought about by the harmful effects of individualism. To borrow Girard’s term, this is the new Satan, but unlike the old one (mimesis and victimage), he does not work in secret. Instead, he has a complete public facade which is explicit and well argued, and may even seem to be complete and adequate; it is the human emotion of desolation that tells of the underlying problem.

Although Girard’s response to perceived future prospects is very limited and includes apocalyptic scenarios, (inevitably so, since he regards the mimetic system as a single, colossal, irreplaceable feature of human history) Brueggemann’s, by contrast, is extensive and set within a vision of cycles of relationship with God. He sees the present problem as one to be addressed by preaching, and says that the preacher must speak through “this taxonomy of guilt and suffering”, as indeed the prophets of the exile did in their own way, according to the problems of that time. Brueggemann therefore seems to think he has a solution, or at least an approach, to the besetting problem; Girard simply leaves us with the problem, and fears it may be terminal.

478 Brueggemann, 1989, p.46.
Review

Research question Part 2: The fading concept of sacrifice ("Investigate the Christian concept of sacrifice and place it in its context; examine its effectiveness.") has produced the following outcomes:

The Christian concept of sacrifice is half-developed from its traditional form in the religion of Israel to the model suggested by Jesus. That is not to say that elements of the old religion remain, but that the function they had has not been fully transferred. ‘Mending the relationship with God’ is the key example of this. Confession and penance within Catholicism do address this to an extent, but within Protestantism there is no equivalent, and nowhere is there a developed system for the community to mend the relationship except in joint prayers of confession. According to Brueggemann, a good deal more is needed by way of mediation by a priest whose function corresponds to that of the Temple (this at least is his claim in relation to Protestantism), and as we have found in our analysis, the understood absence of God from self-indulgent life is itself a call away from the DVR.

The thinking here builds upon Girard’s analysis of the fundamental nature of sacrifice in human societies – but Girard offers little by way of observation on creative developments in the concept and activity of sacrifice, except for a general fear of how the future might unfold.
PART 3: PROPHECY:

OUTDATED AND NEVER OUTDATED
12 The Sacred, the Holy and the Signified

“.…since we are primarily heirs to the Latin language, we are equally heirs to the fact that ‘it is in Latin that the division between the sacred and profane expresses itself most clearly’... This is as much in the political sphere… as in the cultural… As an absolute noun, ‘the sacred’ is a modern creation…”

The Sacred as Something Felt

In this chapter, we will look at the sacred as a concept in long-term decline in the Western mind. It is often thought to have begun to lose its power at the time of the Reformation; a time when the word of God assumed an overwhelming importance, at least in Protestant culture. But is this just a shift in emphasis, or is there an incompatibility between these two types of revelation (the word of God, and the sense an occasion, a place or a person possessing a value which far exceeds the normal) which makes it hard for them to exist in parallel? Is, in fact, the decline in the sacred something which has only set in since the Reformation, or is the trend of much longer standing, but obscured by the ascendancy of the Catholic tradition up to the time of the Reformation? And, given the effect of Post-Modernism in rejecting meta-narratives, has the playing field been levelled again, and an opportunity been created anew for religion which is felt as much as explained?

The idea of the sacred is certainly something more easily felt than defined. The words scholars have used to describe it, such as ‘shaking’, or ‘fascinating’ are subjective rather than objectively analytical, and this is illustrative of the problem. Loss of the sacred seems to amount to a loss of the feeling that something is sacred.

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481 Chauvet, 2010, p.150.
482 Ricoeur refers to this and credits Rudolf Otto and his book The Idea of the Holy for the ideas of the sacred being irrational, shaking and fascinating. Ricoeur, 1995, p.49.
Beyond the Sacred Cosmos

Ultimately, if expressed as an assertion ("this is sacred"), that feeling depends on a sense of special value and perhaps of God’s presence or ownership as an active reality within the world; on the other hand, if used in commentary ("sacred to the Incas"), it tends to refer to irrational behaviour within a culture: the group referred to held something dear to their deity, but the commentator does not see why to support this, or has no feeling for it. ‘Sacred’, therefore, as an active concept, involves not only the living sense of God, but also the feeling or conviction that certain things (places, objects) and certain behaviour (thoughts, memories and imaginings) in a sense belong to God and are transformed, or made holy, by that association. These understandings are “folded up in myths” according to Ricoeur. When that value is lost, the view becomes a phenomenological one, and ideas of the sacred (and its near synonym, the holy) are often demoted in status to superstition; that is, their content of meaning, no longer felt, becomes invisible or is discounted.

As an illustration, take the ending of the middle ages and the world-view which accompanied. In the climate of scientific thought which came with the Enlightenment, (and that itself followed the Protestant revolution which shrank the potential for the sacred), there was a great simplification, and some would say, impoverishment of understanding of the world:

“If compared with the ‘fullness’ of the Catholic universe, Protestantism appears as a radical truncation, a reduction to ‘essentials’ at the cost of a vast wealth of religious contents.”

By contrast with the well-lit but plainly-furnished world of post-Reformation Protestantism, the middle ages have come to represent a time of unreason, to the extent that ‘mediaeval’ and ‘superstition’ have become associated

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484 Berger, 1969, p.111.
12 The Sacred, the Holy and the Signified

terms. That association, differentiating the mediaeval mind-set from our own, points to a loss of the idea of holiness as a descriptor of the way the world is: during the time that the mediaeval mind-set represented the dominant version of reality (to use Brueggemann’s phrase), there was a vision of God in almost everything:

“To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us...Every event, every action was still embodied in expressive and solemn forms which raised them to the dignity of a ritual. For it was not merely the great facts of birth, marriage and death which, by the sacredness of the sacrament, were raised to the rank of mysteries; incidents of less importance, like a journey, a task, a visit, were equally attended by a thousand formalities: benedictions, ceremonies, formulas.”

“Towards the end of the Middle Ages two factors dominate religious life: the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency for thought to embody itself in images...All thinking tends to religious interpretation of individual things; there is an enormous unfolding of religion in daily life...Religion penetrating all relations in life means a constant blending of religious and profane thought.”

At an extreme, the contemporary view is a complete inversion of this:

“Our modernity is constituted as modern precisely by having moved beyond the sacred cosmos... Human beings no longer receive the meaning of their existence from their belonging to a cosmos itself saturated with meaning...Their existence is decentred, eccentric, a-centred. They lack festivals, their time is homogeneous like their space. That is why we speak of the sacred world today as something archaic. The sacred is the archaic.”

Of course, the move ‘beyond the sacred cosmos’, though substantial, is not complete. The human instinct for religion, though given a reduced scope by

486 As in “Satanism and Witchcraft: a Study in Mediaeval Superstition” Michelet, 1946.
487 Huizinga, 1924, p.9.
489 Ricoeur, 1995, p.61ff.
12 The Sacred, the Holy and the Signified

the long dominance of Enlightenment thinking, has not perished entirely, and finds outlets not only in the remnants of Christianity but also in natural pantheism and ecology: an appreciation of divinity demonstrated in the world. This preaching, even in a largely irreligious age, still grounds the community. Also, it is of course the case that within Catholic thought the desacralization of the cosmos has been resisted:

“...Catholicism succeeded in re-establishing a new version of cosmic order in a gigantic synthesis of biblical religion with extra-biblical cosmological conceptions”

Berger goes so far as to suggest that this process has had the effect of reversing some of the development of religious thought which took place in Old Testament times. That is to say, the Catholic Christian world-picture departs from the Hebrew one and in some sense reverses the progress of the theological thinking demonstrated in the Hebrew Bible. The “disenchantment” of the world is a feature of the religion of Israel from its earliest days, he contends. For instance, writing of the similarities between the religions of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, despite their strong cultural differences, he notes:

“...the human world (that is, everything that we today would call culture and society) is understood as being embedded in a cosmic order that embraces the entire universe... it is an order that posits continuity between the empirical and supra-empirical, between the world of men and the world of the gods. This continuity, which assumes an ongoing linkage of human events with the sacred forces permeating the universe, is realised (not just reaffirmed but literally re-established) again and again in religious ritual...

The Old Testament posits a God who stands outside the cosmos, which is his creation, but which he confronts and does not permeate. By the eighth century, at the very latest, we find that conception fully developed and radically divergent from the general religious conceptions of the ancient

490 There are many examples of this. One is the 2005 book, Finding God in the Singing River (Wallace, 2005).
491 Ricoeur 1995, p.70.
492 Berger calls as witnesses to this the attitudes of Jewish and Muslim critics of Christianity, who see Christian incarnationism as an apostasy from true monotheism. Berger, 1969, p.121.
Near East. This God is radically transcendent, not to be identified with any natural or human phenomena...He appears without mates or offspring, unaccompanied by a pantheon of any sort. 493

However, it is already apparent that there are cycles in operation here, in disenchantment and re-enchantment, amongst different peoples at different times, and not the single movement to an apocalyptic conclusion which Girard detects in his understanding of the loss of meaning which 'castrates the signified'. 494

Berger’s observation about the departure of Catholic thought in particular from the pattern of the Old Testament (Protestant thought representing a partial reversion), is significant because we are dealing with a Protestant in Brueggemann, and a Catholic in Girard. We might therefore expect to see the influence of their respective backgrounds in their underlying attitudes to the cosmos as sacred or as rationalized; we might also look for a more strictly monotheistic stance in Brueggemann’s interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, relatively free of what Berger describes as ‘re-enchantment’ and ‘re-mythologization’, and a more natural sympathy with “the radicality of the Israelite conception” 495 and “the anti-magical animus of Yahwism” 496. This tendency, carried to a logical conclusion, results not only in desacralized religion, but even in the death of religion itself. Ricoeur has commented on this seminally:

“...the argument would seem to require carrying this process through to free the kerygmatic kernel from the sacred husk... In this regard, the programme of demythologizing the Christian message in the twentieth century may be understood as an attempt to radicalize a tendency already at work in primitive Christianity. Rudolf Bultmann, for instance, has argued that if demythologization is externally motivated by the destruction of the mythic universe under the blows of science, it is internally based on a demythologization that is part of the kerygma itself and that can be documented by the exegesis of the New Testament. Christianity’s response

494 This is discussed at pages 219 and 281. See Girard, 1987, pp. 435ff.
495 Berger, 1969, p.121.
496 Ibid, p.120.
to desacralization therefore is not to submit to it as an unavoidable task but to carry it out as a task of faith. Or to put it another way, faith and religion need to be separated and we need to go so far as to conceive of an a-religious Christianity such as that spoken of by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his later writings.”

However, the outcome of the comparison is not what might be expected. As we have seen, it is Brueggemann who offers a detailed account of the function of priesthood in the process of atonement and healing within the biblical accounts; he is arguing for sacralisation and noting its effective part in the scheme of things. Girard pays close attention to the meaning of the sacred in areas he considers to be formative to human society as a whole, notably primitive, sacral kingship and mythological elements, in other words, at an early developmental stage. He has little to say, though, about the disenchantment of the universe and the influence of Protestant thinking.

**Manifestation & Proclamation**

Paul Ricoeur, in *Figuring the Sacred*, quoting Mircea Eliade, suggests that the idea of ‘hierophany’ is central: anything by which the sacred shows itself is a hierophany. The logic here is that although the sacred element may be beyond description, the experience of its manifestation is something that can be recounted. Ricoeur contrasts manifestation and proclamation, and argues that the sacred belongs to manifestation, which

“...is not verbal by origin. But I think there is something specific in the Hebrew and Christian traditions that gives a kind of privilege to the word...The notion of sacred text may have been alien to the Hebraic and pre-Christian tradition. We apply a category that belongs to this sacrality that is cosmic and then that is condensed, as it were, in a book, and that thus changes its function as it becomes fundamental without being sacred.”

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498 Ricoeur, 1995, p.49.
12 The Sacred, the Holy and the Signified

Ricoeur’s speculative point is noted without necessarily being accepted. From the point of view of this study, the sacred may be indicated within a text, and may be accessible through accounts of behaviour. Sacrifice and prophecy are, of course, areas or aspects of human behaviour, and therefore a key question here is what elements of behaviour are seen in the contemporary world as sacred or potentially so. Thomas Berger comments:

“All phenomena are profane that do not ‘stick out’ as sacred. The routines of everyday life are profane unless, so to speak, proven otherwise, in which latter case they are conceived of as infused in one way or another with sacred power (as in sacred work, for example).”

This starting point effectively notes the foundation of Girard’s thinking on the sacred. He indeed sees the human world (not the natural one) as ‘infused with sacred power’, in one particular way: the way in which sacrifice and the sacred are inseparable and both tied to violence:

“..the full range of the term sacred, or rather of the Latin sacer, which is sometimes translated “sacred”, sometimes “accursed” for it encompasses the maleficent as well as the beneficent.”

For Girard, the sacred is a concept essentially identified with violence, and hardly defined otherwise. He refers to primitive societies that have no legal system, and observes that they have attitudes to violence which are incomprehensible to us. They recognize that violence is contagious, and recognize it only in “an almost entirely dehumanized form, that is, under the deceptive guise of the sacred.”

“Although the sacred is “bad” when it is inside the community, it is “good” when it returns to the exterior. The language of pure sacredness retains whatever is most fundamental to myth and religion; it detaches violence from man to make it a separate, impersonal entity, a sort of fluid substance that flows everywhere and impregnates on contact.”

For that reason, the sacred is invoked in driving out violence, and the mechanism for this is scapegoating.

Berger, again thinking of the sacred cosmos (though his thoughts are transferable to the human world) observes as follows:

“To be in a ‘right’ relationship with the sacred cosmos is to be protected from the nightmare threats of chaos. To fall out of such a ‘right’ relationship is to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness... But behind this danger is the other, much more horrible one, namely that one may lose all connection with the sacred and be swallowed up by chaos... In the sacred cosmos, however, these constructions achieve their ultimate culmination – literally, their apotheosis”  

Therefore, both for Girard and for Berger, the sacred is a protection against chaos. Girard’s scapegoat theory describes a system built into human behaviour, which automatically steers communities away from chaos by causing them to focus blame (whether deserved or not) on one individual, who is evicted, or killed, and may later be declared divine. This is the pattern of sacral kingship, as defined by Frazer, Hocart and others.505 The king is the surrogate victim who is killed to bring order and prosperity to his people. However, the automatic process is one which makes the participants blind to what they are actually doing; they do not think of the victim as a surrogate, and this characteristic distinguishes the processes and the language of the sacred:

“Though generally less mythic than the language of divinity, the language of pure sacredness is more mythic in that it eliminates the final traces of the real victims, thereby concealing the fact that the sacred cannot function without surrogate victims.”  

505 Quigley (ed), 2005.  
According to Grande\textsuperscript{507}, Berger’s view is that the eviction of chaos is achieved by a cultural construct. This he recognizes as widespread, but not as automatic:

“Religion for Berger is on the whole the establishment, through human activity, of an encompassing holy order or holy cosmos which is capable of maintaining order despite the continual threat of chaos”

Therefore, although Girard is not unique in identifying the sacred as a social phenomenon, he stands out from others who have investigated it (Frazer, Hocart, Berger, et al.) because of his theory that it is feature of humanity and a product of the process of hominization\textsuperscript{508}, and thus in a sense inevitable; it is built into the way that human groups operate, and not just a feature of the way that certain cultures have evolved. Further, it is invisible to those who are involved in it, so its process tends to evade analysis. However, Girard sees human development reaching its final phase, and as part of this, the sacred is becoming exposed for what it is:

“The sacrificial system is virtually worn out, and that is why its inner workings are exposed to view.”\textsuperscript{509}

In other words, Girard does not claim particular insight for himself, but instead observes that the unveiling of the interlinking of violence and the sacred was something bound to happen as the sacrificial system decays and loses its natural camouflage.

The idea of the sacred therefore both lies at that heart of Girard’s thinking, and is declared by him to be in inevitable decline as humanity progresses towards a final denouement: once the sacrificial system has gone, there is nothing to prevent violence escalating and destroying the world, particularly as the technology now exists to do just that. The decline of the sacred points to the apocalypse.


\textsuperscript{508} Though this theory is now questioned. See Chapter 8.

\textsuperscript{509} Girard, 1977, p.295.
Brueggemann, the sacred and divine engagement

In Brueggemann’s writing, the term ‘sacred’ is hardly used, perhaps for reasons that Ricoeur has explained, though this similarity does not necessarily imply any immediate influence by Ricoeur. He would be more inclined perhaps to use the term ‘holy’, though actually that near-synonym is not much used by him either.

It does not seem worth dissecting the terms and finding differing shades of meaning between them, or forensically laying out their usage within Brueggemann’s work, as the evidence to be gathered is minimal in extent and mainly notable for that fact alone. Broadly speaking the two terms are either interchangeable (holy place or sacred place), or, when they are not (God’s holy word but not his sacred word), the difference seems to be one of habitual usage. Therefore, we shall consider them as a combined term, and from here on, one will imply the other.

It is therefore necessary to look at Brueggemann’s work analytically to see how the combined term fits into it. The idea of something held dear to God leads into his idea of prophecy and preaching, which in both cases reveals what is held dear to God, and therefore possibly what is sacred. However, there is a counterpart to this; God holds dear humanity when humanity keeps his commandments, and otherwise turns his back. When he does, evil and chaos become ascendant. The alternative to God holds superficial attraction; prophecy and preaching are a call back to the ways which invite God’s favourable attention. The prophets rail against the ways that lead away from God and his holy ways, and towards injustice, and against those who promote those ways, profit from them, and seduce people to them. Jeremiah has God say:

“Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you; for wicked men are found among my people; they lurk like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap; they catch men; like a basket full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, they
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have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.”

In Brueggemann's scheme, then, sacred might be identified with the presence of God, and God's attention and direction, achieved through obedience to God's word. Prophecy is the barometer which detects the climate of sacred presence and its counterpart, the ascendancy of evil, injustice and chaos in its absence.

Brueggemann has another pair of counterparts: the poetry of prophecy and its converse. Prophetic vision is differentiated from the ordinary world, or (in Brueggemann's phrase, “the prose world”) and the mode of expression used is crucial to any attempt to get out of the bind of thinking in the terms of this world, or “to move beyond settled reality”:

“The Bible is our firm guarantee that in a world of technological naiveté and ideological reductionism, prophetic construals of another world are still possible, still worth doing, still longingly received by those who live at the edge of despair, resignation and conformity. Our preferred language is to call such speech prophetic, but it we might also term it poetic. Those whom the ancient Israelites termed prophets, the equally ancient Greeks called poets. The poet/prophet is a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes new possibility in the listening assembly.”

The coupling of ‘settled reality’ and ‘prose’, and also of ‘prophecy’, ‘poetry’ and ‘new possibility’ can of course be taken at the level of matter-of-fact description of modes of communication; but in the context of religious discussion, the implication must be of effective practice in opening a link to the divine and transcendent. It is, therefore, necessary to move from prose to

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511 Brueggemann, 1989, p.3. it might be observed that the mediaeval world was essentially not a prose world, but a sacred one, without being a prophetic one particularly. This is not a conjunction which Brueggemann foresees.
512 Brueggemann, 1989, p.5.
514 Brueggemann, 1989, p.4.
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poetry to speak of holiness, and therefore to speak of hierophany or revelation:

"God needs prophets in order to make himself known, and all prophets are necessarily artistic. What a prophet has to say can never be said in prose."  

'Poetry' and 'prose' need some definition here. This is the sense in which Brueggemann uses these two terms:

"By prose I refer to a world that is organised in settled formulae, so that even pastoral prayers and love letters sound like memos. By poetry, I do not mean rhyme, rhythm or metre, but language that moves like Bob Gibson’s fast ball, that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion and pace. Poetic speech is the only proclamation worth doing in a situation of reductionism, the only proclamation, I submit, that is worthy of the name preaching. Such preaching is...the ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age. The preacher has an awesome opportunity to offer an evangelical world: an existence shaped by the news of the gospel."

The interesting point then arises, to what extent does this type of communication, poetically mediated, necessarily involve the concept of the sacred or holy? Indeed, does the fact that Brueggemann can and does speak at length about God’s self-communication through the prophets mean that he must be speaking of the sacred, even though he is not minded to use that word? If it does, then talk of God and talk with God– the responses to God’s self-revelation – by definition are in prophecy-poetry. If finding ‘meaning’ as Brueggemann and Girard use that term, is dependent on communication with God, then it would be the case that in an age or in a society not inclined to speak poetically, communication with God, and the finding of meaning would both be considerably handicapped. Loss of the sacred would be coincident with a decline in the ability to speak prophetically. Therefore, prophecy and the sacred stand together as something felt. Prophecy is not a

516 Brueggemann, 1989, pp.3-5.
left-brain activity that one can class with the emerging rationalism of the post-reformation age, or wholly apportion to the category of ‘explanation’.

It may help to clarify this issue if one reflects on the urgent need for an ecological commitment to the future of the planet. Coakley stated that in order for the magnitude of the task to be taken on and dealt with, a religious commitment was required. Would such a religious commitment be centred on nature because it is sacred, or on the Word which calls the believer to act in a particular way? One has the impression that Coakley herself (and possibly her intended audience) fall into the second camp, but that many enthusiasts for ecology by contrast belong to the first, and are motivated by the perceived sanctity of nature.

The Sacred and the Word

So, it seems from Brueggemann’s account, if the idea of the sacred is to be admitted at all, it is in prophetic words. The religious status of such words is therefore extremely high. What, one might ask, is the relationship between truly prophetic words and ‘the Word’ itself? Might one jump to ‘the sacred is the Word’, and even go further: could it be that in the Word and the person of God is all that is sacred, and that there may be nothing sacred at all apart from these.

That is the conclusion pointed to by Ricoeur, when he says that the Israelites refused a sacred universe. And it is beyond dispute that prominent New Testament texts support the view that the Word is divine in itself and unsurpassed in importance:

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517 Coakley, 2009.
518 ‘Word’ and ‘words’ are not interchangeable terms, but there is at least an oblique link here to Fishbane’s point about “the meaning of words is ‘Torah’”, and “the Torah bears Israel’s sins”.
519 Ricoeur, 1995, p.57.
12 The Sacred, the Holy and the Signified

“when all things began, the Word already was. The word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning.”

“And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God”,

The Word, then is fundamental to existence itself, as a sort of DNA or policy. The fragments of it we encounter or identify in life are to be our guide. It is closed by nature and not apparent to people much of the time; revelation achieved through preaching, according to Ricoeur’s definition, permanently alters perception of the Word and opens up its hidden state.

However, Ricoeur goes on,

“The hope to see faith in the word outwith the religion of the sacred is really vain and that the end of the word as well as of the hearing of the word is bound to some new birth of the sacred and its symbolism, beyond its death...?”

He articulates a point here which he further develops into a rapprochement with the religion of manifestation rather than proclamation. Brueggemann is less clear on the subject, but it might not be unfair to make the same point on his behalf, given the explicit importance of priestly action in his scheme. So, although Brueggemann tends not to use the word ‘sacred’, it could be argued that he engages with the content of that word in a serious way.

Girard, on the other hand, does use the word ‘sacred’ a lot – even in a book title – but it may be questioned whether he is actually all that much concerned with it. Violence and the Sacred, despite its title, is actually about sacrifice, and the idea of the sacred as discussed by him tends to lead immediately into a discussion on violence. For instance, he states

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520 St John’s Gospel, 1:1 NEB.
521 Luke 4.4. Matthew 4.4 contains a similar text. Both are based on and probably deliberately refer to Deuteronomy 8:2-3.
522 Ricoeur, 1995, p.72.
523 Ricoeur, 1995, p.68.
"The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires, and plagues, among other phenomena, may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these, however, though in a far less obvious manner, stands human violence – violence seen as something exterior to man and hence as part of all the other outside forces that threaten mankind. Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred."  

From this point, he goes on to discuss violence, contagion and ritual impurity. The impression is that violence, the struggle between order and chaos, is the main thing to be discussed when 'sacred' is used, and most of the other content of that word can be left aside. At a later stage he states,  

"As we have seen, the sacred embraces all those forces that threaten to harm man or trouble his peace,"  

and again the discussion reverts to violence. He goes on to explain the book title, *Violence and the Sacred*:  

"This impersonal designation is fundamental to our discussion. In Africa, as in many other parts of the world, there is only a single term to denote the two faces of the sacred – the interplay of order and disorder, of difference lost and retrieved, as enacted in the immutable drama of the sacrifice of the incestuous king."  

Girard links his discussion to Greek mythology, but returns to the idea of the sacred in primitive societies:  

"We are wont to say that primitive peoples are imbued with the sacred. The truth is that these peoples assume, just as we ourselves do, that they have freed themselves, up to a point, from subjection to the sacred. They alone adhere to the rules, promulgated by the sacred itself, that allow them to maintain a precarious independence from divine intervention."  

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524 Girard, 1977, p.31.  
525 Ibid, p.58.  
526 Ibid, p.257.  
527 Ibid., p.267.
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This seems to be a reference back to the ‘sacred cosmos’ with which we began this chapter. Indeed, it appears that Girard’s thinking on ‘the sacred’ is rooted in this understanding and anthropological descriptions of primitive societies. He extends all of this into the biblical period, and with only a fairly short look at the Old Testament, focuses sharply on the New Testament, and the resolution of the age-old problems of victimage and sacrifice as defined in the anthropological work.

Therefore, as we have seen, Girard and Brueggemann are both starting from, and restricting themselves to, different areas of meaning in the term ‘sacred’. Put together, they seem at first to be hardly compatible, as Brueggemann starts with an understanding of Israel after it has rejected the sacred cosmos, and never looks back. Therefore, the issues with which Girard is so much concerned have little history, though they do have something of a lingering presence, in biblical Israel, and Brueggemann’s scheme reflects this: it is hard to point to anything ‘sacred’ in the sense in which Girard uses the term and identify it in Brueggemann’s understandings, except of course the role of priests. But the sheer absence in Brueggemann of the word ‘sacred’ tells its own story of his disenchanted universe and near-absolute reliance on the Word and on words. It is only through focussing on Brueggemann’s account of prophetic method, that it becomes apparent that prophecy is not just an account of the world as it truly is, or a route to solving problems, but a method of speech that is efficacious in itself, because it is holy. This is the adjustment to the old concept of the sacred. However, it would take an additional component, not at present to be found in the work of either writer. This would involve modification of Girard’s thinking on ‘loss of the signified’, as demonstrated in the final chapter of Things Hidden, to the extent that it was Israel (not any form of recent Puritanism) which began the process of desacralization, and did so very long ago, early in Israel’s history. The final stages of loss of meaning which Girard comments on are a long-term consequence of a process that has been running ever since. If we make
The terms the ‘sacred’ and ‘holy’ subsidiary to Girard’s term ‘the signified’, then the problems noted by both writers of the shunning of the sacred and the dismissal of the enchanted universe can find common ground, though not a common timescale. If one were bold, one could say that hominization, (which Girard is inclined to speak of as a sort of generative event, in fact, the ultimate generative event as the culmination of a number of others, is in fact a cyclical process). This produced certain kinds of behaviour (notably all that is observed as developed human mimetics) and which then disposed of the means of mimetics (the sacred) once they had served their purpose. This is what Christianity has done. By doing so, it has brought humanity into a perilous state in which the protection of the scapegoat process, which is part of the sacral approach, has been exposed and therefore no longer is operative. That is the situation humanity is now in, and Girard thinks that it might herald the apocalypse. It heralds the end of the cycle; this ties in with Girard’s apocalyptic thinking well enough, but with Brueggemann’s work, there is theory about apocalypse without any sense of immediate problem: “Apocalyptic turns the future as a problem productive of deep anxiety into an arena for praise and obedience of God who will surely prevail.”

What is left after that major adjustment? The mutual recognition of meaning has had to be constructed for the two authors, and the reconstruction lives in the uneasy circumstances of a complete difference in tone. For Girard, the contemporary world has ceased to find meaning because it looks for it in the wrong place, and overlooks the gospel, which is where meaning is to be found.

For Brueggemann, meaning is present in the Word and in words; this much might be expected of him as a Protestant theologian. But, Brueggemann suggests, it is also present in ritual, and he embraces the post-modern world and its attendant fragmentation of the grand entities of thought; he claims

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528 For a much fuller discussion of this term, see McKenna, Andrew: Violence and Difference, which is an extended comparison of Girard and Derrida, involving the ideas of deconstruction.

529 Girard, 95-96, 100.

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that preaching (prophecy) continues in loci which are contextual, local and pluralistic.
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“The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition.

Isaiah answered, I saw no God, nor heard any in fine organical perception; but my senses discover’d the infinite in everything, and as I was the perswaded & remain confirm’d; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.

Then I asked: does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so?

He replied. All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this form perswasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of anything.

...I heard this with some wonder, & must confess my own conviction.”

This truly remarkable passage is quoted by the editors of a collection of essays published as a tribute to Brueggemann. Their observation on it, noting a resonance with Brueggemann’s work, is that “the poet has the risk-ridden power to make available through the written word that which was not previously available.” That is to say, the poet (Blake) or the prophet (Blake, or Blake’s Isaiah) can make something so by writing it; the revelation is in the act of writing, and does not precede it. The writing is no mere report of something which originated earlier or in another place. Spontaneity and creation are involved, and in that simple, low-key phrase, not previously available, lies the shocking new world of prophecy: somehow rooted in everyday experience, but moved out of its familiar form by the shaping force of imagination which invents, or brings into the world, knowledge of God on the basis of a personal conviction.

Both Girard and Brueggemann have ‘the shocking new world of prophecy’ right at the centre of their thinking. In Girard’s case, it is something which

531 Blake, William from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell plates 12-13, in Blake, 1966, p.153
simultaneously rejects the most vicious and universal tendencies in the human character (which he holds are mimetic in character) and also the normal human mechanisms for dealing with those tendencies. And, according to Girard, although the mimetic process is both contagious and invisible to people who are almost inevitably swept up by it; but the questioning response to the mimetic system is not automatic, involuntary or instinctive in the same way. Instead, it requires a conscious rejection of the normal pattern of behaviour, of normal relationships, and possibly of the status quo in a general sense.

Brueggemann notes the effect of the shocking new world, which often includes a hostile reaction to what looks like, and indeed turns out to be, subversion of the dominant version of the world: the prophets are resented, sometimes killed, and according to the texts this is an offence to God. God is not on the side of those who value the settled stability which comes of worldly-wisdom and human power-structures. Brueggemann works outward from this observation and from the idea of prophecy as alternative reality to examine what prophecy is and does in relation to society. He also explores what conditions are favourable to prophecy, in other words, when it is likely to occur and have an effect, and finds that God speaks powerfully when human power and human systems have failed, or are in abeyance.

It is therefore more or less inevitable, under both views, that prophecy will be seen as a dangerous challenge to the stability of human relations.

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534 Girard, 2001, p.19ff. This subject will be explored in much greater detail later on. For the present, the main point is that mimetic behaviour is not voluntary; it is the default mode of humanity.
535 Brueggemann, 2000, p.6. The ‘dominant version of the world’ is the normal world view in any society and any one time. It is almost universally a ‘narrative of violence’ according to Brueggemann, both literally speaking and also metaphorically in what he terms the ‘economic violence’ of the free market economy.
536 There are a number of statements in the New Testament to the effect that the prophets have been killed, for instance, Acts 7:52.
538 However, it should be borne in mind that the two writers are not really looking at the same areas of prophecy. Girard’s main focus is on the prophecy of Jesus and later writers,
As a background to the insights of these two authors, let us explore first in a general way what the relationship of prophetic talk is to everyday life – the here & now – and to perceptions of what is divine. The exploration begins with an examination of how we accommodate God in our description of the world.

The Basis of Talk of God, and of Talk with God

Much talk of God in the Bible is drawn from the language of everyday experience. For example, God “was walking in the garden in the cool of the day”\(^{539}\). This description refers to the most accessible kind of shared experience, drawn from the here-and-now of whenever and wherever the reader lives, in good times or bad, whether good or evil seems to rule the world. The reader is asked to imagine God doing what she routinely does. Therefore, the experience of God is bracketed with ordinary human experience. No abstract conceptualisation is called for, simply the recall of the personal experience of the reader. So, it may be that the here-and-now is the inevitable starting point for any dialogue, because it is the arena of our common experience, the least private aspect of our minds, and seems to need no verification beyond its simple presence.\(^{540}\) So to refer to God using such terms, however metaphorical the mode of speech may be, is to couch the reference in such a way that nothing beyond a simple report seems to be required. God was encountered, at that point in space and time, as we are in our daily lives, in the garden, in the evening. However, what may be implied is the emotion that goes with the situation: hearing a person of authority approaching, bearing in mind our experience of such persons in our lives to date. Genesis uses the situation to show a newly frightened Adam, suddenly

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539 Genesis 3:8.
afraid because he realised that he was naked, having equally suddenly lost
the trust of God with which he was born. The dominant version and the
narrative of violence begin here, in the expectation of God’s retribution.

But the corollary of the situation in which there is, to use Brueggemann’s
phrase, a dominant version of reality, is that the attitudes of ordinary human
life come along with the general expression; the dominant version in the
reader’s experience is automatically imported into this and any description,
and would tend to persist in any extension of the simple anecdote. It
therefore becomes impossible to separate interpretation from the original
intended meaning; such is the power of the dominant version of reality at
either end of the equation.541

This brings us to a point which on the face of it seems beguilingly simple, in
that there appears to be a division between two fundamental categories of
human thought: the monitoring of experience (the here-and-now), and the
use of imagination and memory, but close examination reveals that they are
inseparably conjoined. The dominant understanding of the world is implied
in any reading of ordinary experience under ordinary circumstances (unless
the reader is exceptional). Such a normal reading seems to involve no
exercise of the imagination, but only reporting of facts, but in fact the process
involves the application of a ‘reality template’ which is constructed through a
process dependent on imagination. Nevertheless, to the user, as it were, the
reality template, or dominant version of reality, almost always seems to be
merely factual.

Where a different understanding of the world, or (to use Brueggemann’s
term) a counter-imagination of the world542 is concerned, the two categories
interact in a different way. This can involve shock, and bring about the
charge that God being redefined, imagined rather than perceived – a charge

541 Nicholas Lash, in Theology on the Way to Emmaus, explores the contribution to meaning
542 Of course, the counter-imagination is not rooted in violence, in contrast to the dominant
view, in Brueggemann’s opinion.
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which Blake would admit, but Brueggemann neutralises by using the vocabulary of imagination throughout\(^ {543}\).

A prophet, therefore, according to Brueggemann, is someone who detaches description from its normal associations, and supplies new connotations instead. She does this in order to subvert: “flying low under the dominant version with a subversive offer of another version to be embraced by subversives.”\(^ {544}\) (Original emphases).

Girard’s view has its similarities to this, though he approaches from another direction. He insists that truth lies only in the unmasking of the mimetic delusion which causes human understanding of reality, and of God, to be reshaped. In other words, human history carries with it throughout a pattern of imaginations of the world, and that near-universal imaginative construction tends to be the dominant world view\(^ {545}\).

These corporate acts of delusion or imagination can be undercut by the analytical truth of the view which identifies the mimetic system for what it is. This analytical view is equivalent to Brueggemann’s re-imagination of the world, but with the important difference that Girard does not use the language of imagination but instead makes up-front realist claims for what is being recognized in such a situation. Indeed, his argument is that the absolute reality of the world is being revealed in the laying bare of the mimetic process and its mechanisms of violence and sacrifice. He concludes Violence and the Sacred with these words:

\(^{543}\) A point which may seem to hint at an anti-realist orientation characterising Brueggemann’s thinking; but in fact, it may be that Brueggemann does this because of a belief about human processes, not because of any doubts about universality of truth. This point will be further examined later.

\(^{544}\) Brueggemann, 2000, p.6. However, the theme is recurrent in Brueggemann’s work. For instance, in The Prophetic Imagination (1978), there is a prolonged discussion of alternative approaches, including a testing of the hypothesis that ‘the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.’ (p.13). In Texts under Negotiation (1993), there is a chapter headed Inside the Counterdrama which sets out the possibilities for subversives in the contemporary Church.

\(^{545}\) This point underlies much of Girard’s thinking and is made time and again in his work. One book, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (1978), has it as its principal theme.
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“We have managed to extricate ourselves from the sacred somewhat more successfully than other societies have done, to the point of losing all memory of the generative violence; but we are now about to rediscover it. The essential violence returns to us in a spectacular manner - not only in the form of violent history but also in the form of subversive knowledge.”

It will be apparent immediately firstly that both Girard and Brueggemann are using the word ‘subversive’, and also that the prophets, or those who can see for what it is the mimetic process and its narrative of violence (this is a combination of Brueggemann’s and Girard’s terminology), will speak differently from others; and that the here and now will have a different meaning for them.

So, under identical physical conditions, one person may find circumstances (the here and now) reveal God in a certain way, and another not. The quotation from Blake at the head of this chapter refers to this issue. Then, it would be fair to say that talk of God has imposed demands on expression that cannot be supplied fully from that arena of the everyday without encountering issues of veracity. The result, which is frequently encountered, is that those who do claim to encounter God begin to use language in a different way, and develop a finite (private) province of meaning, which is capable of being shared by those who undergo the same experience, but not otherwise. When religious groups do this, they are in a sense withdrawing from the territory of the dominant version of reality, and pitching camp on their own defined space.

Let us take as an example of what happens under this human adjustment of reality: a visit to the theatre. When the curtain is down, the everyday world is the dominant reality. When it goes up, the audience visits a world of other

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546 Girard, 1972, p.318.
547 This is a term coined by me to describe a key part of what is involved in creating the ‘dominant version of reality’, to which Brueggemann refers.
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meanings and a different order.\textsuperscript{548} That world is temporarily available through the special circumstances of the theatre, and it is not available in the audience's daily life, in the world from which the theatre is set apart. For this reason, Peter Brook has described the experience as 'holy'.\textsuperscript{549} However, for those who have visited a particular theatrical performance, the meaning found in the performance witnessed is transferred and becomes a part of the filter through which the everyday world is perceived.\textsuperscript{550}

This kind of adjustment is one small part of the elaborate process by which a particular world view is built up and maintained. In uncountable minute ways, the world perceived is changed and built up, and within a culture, that emergent world is held largely in common.\textsuperscript{551}

Connecting within and without the Finite Province

It will be apparent that the process for constructing finite provinces of meaning, from which a dominant version of reality will emerge, is one in which the imagination plays an important part. Imagination, therefore, is the mechanism through which communities build up their dominant versions of reality, and is the generating agent for perceptions of reality even when they seem to boil down to reports of perceptions, lacking any element of invention. The idea of truth may seem to be at risk here, if imagination is used in arriving at its definition. Brueggemann, who is inclined to use the language of imagination quite generally, has examined ‘contested truth in a post-Christian World’\textsuperscript{552}, in which he puts forward that the definition and redefinition of truth is a continuous process, in which the episodes of the Bible have a re-entrant function, becoming newly appropriate to situations

\textsuperscript{548} Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.39.
\textsuperscript{549} This is a major theme of his book The Empty Space (Brook, 1968).
\textsuperscript{550} Some playwrights, notably Berthold Brecht, call time on this phenomenon by frequently reminding listeners that they are experiencing theatre, not real life.
\textsuperscript{551} Green (1978) explains this in terms of paradigms, that is, templates of interpretation.
\textsuperscript{552} This phrase is the strap-line to the book title Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope Brueggemann, 2000.
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as they arise. God, as rendered in the Bible, is ‘an unsettled character’\textsuperscript{553} who poses a problem for theology as it has been done conventionally in the Christian West, where it has been the business of a dominant cultural power (the Church) with a long historical perspective tending to reinforce a linear view.\textsuperscript{554}

The idea of non-linearity, both in human affairs (cycles of growth and collapse of dominant versions of reality) and in the prophecy which calls such schemes to account, is contrary to the normal assumption of history, which traditionally looks for a particular cause of any disruption to affairs which otherwise are in a normal, steady state. Contemporary thought, with the emergence of chaos theory\textsuperscript{555}, has questioned the assumption that there is such a thing as a default steady state, or that instability results from some action disturbing a status quo which would otherwise be fit to endure, and instead sees growth and collapse as both effects of an underlying instability.

For the purposes of this argument, let us follow the suggestion that assumptions of stability have been exaggerated in the post-Enlightenment dominant world view, and admit the possibility of non-linearity in human development. The model which might be applied instead of the linear one is that of episodes which may be viewed collectively as a sort of web, separated but interdependent, and possibly mutually interpretive.

This realisation tends to promote the view that the Bible is to be read like a drama, which unfolds through a number of interactions, which are both isolated for the reasons given above, but also interrelated. This is a subject which Raymund Schwager, drawing upon Girard\textsuperscript{556}, has made his own\textsuperscript{557}.

\textsuperscript{553} Ibid., p.77
\textsuperscript{554} Ibid., page 130, ch.7 footnote 1.
\textsuperscript{555} This is an enormous subject which can only be touched upon here. An example of this is the appearance in the journal Foreign Affairs of an article by the Harvard academic Niall Fergusson on \textit{Complexity and Collapse}, in which the fundamental instability of human cultures and organisational constructions is reviewed. \textit{Foreign Affairs}, March/April, 2010.
\textsuperscript{556} The developed panoply of Dramatic Theology is unquestionably Schwager’s work, and it is to his credit that it has spawned the ‘Dramatic Theology’ movement. But the thinking that lies within it shows many connections made between biblical texts and Girard’s ideas, an
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Interestingly for this study, Brueggemann has also investigated the idea of drama and particularly counterdrama\textsuperscript{558} as a playing out of the subversive message of the gospels.\textsuperscript{559}

Brueggemann also has much to say in relation to non-dramatic, but static and resolved schemes of theological interpretation. In \textit{Texts Under Negotiation},\textsuperscript{560} he argues that the Church responded to the advance of science in the eighteenth century by hardening its theology into a set of concepts and ideas to provide “a settled unchanging frame of reference”. This came out of a vision which saw religion and science as companions within a divine scheme of a deist nature, in which God had invented the system by which the world was constructed and is maintained. Science discerns this system and religion interprets it, and states its interpretation in terms of propositions which are not negotiable.

Brueggemann argues that a descendent of the eighteenth century’s project is fundamentalism\textsuperscript{561}, in which the Bible is the servant of a coded system. That is to say, the Bible may be defined as a system of propositions which are factual truths, each of which can be approached in the same way. It is the coded system, understood as the normal, reasonable view in the present age, which makes this claim. In another age, and another culture, a different claim could have been made. For instance, one might take descriptions by Brueggemann and others of how the Hebrew language and its associated

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{557} Schwager, 1999: Jesus in the Drama of Salvation.
\textsuperscript{558} Because Brueggemann is so concerned with opposing the dominant version of reality; this is what he calls ‘the counterdrama’ is configured to do. Brueggemann, 1993, pp57ff.
\textsuperscript{559} Brueggemann, 1993, p.57ff. On p. 65, Brueggemann states, “I propose that we “take” reality as a drama, and that we see the text as a script for that drama”.
\textsuperscript{561} Ibid, p.66: [The practice of ordering faith into hard and non-negotiable sets of ideas and concepts]. “evolved in both Catholic and Reformed circles and eventuated, in the United States, in fundamentalism”.
\end{flushleft}
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culture works in relation to the interpretation of the Torah and say that in that case, the coded system was one in which mystery figured large, and the truth was revealed as one peeled away layers of meaning and probed through uncertainties and ambiguities to what was hidden within.

Someone who belongs in one culture and naturally operates within its coded system may have difficulty accepting the realism of the meaning found through another. The barriers are very hard to surmount and an inclusive approach may not work. Getting to grips with the new is likely to depend on abandoning the old mind-set as ‘error’.

Brueggemann’s point about the power of the coded system applied to Christianity since the Enlightenment is a fundamental one for our consideration of the whole matter of prophecy and the mechanisms involved, and it is of strong relevance to the present moment. Consider any form of religious literalism which might be perceived in the world today, such as a group which typically tends to believe that they act in simple response to their texts; they unswervingly follow these and the statements made in them as simple factual statements. This mode of interpretation is explained by Brueggemann as a coded system, but the conservatives in question take it as their justification and their claim to authority.

In other words, those who follow a coded system will not at any price agree that it is the case that the text is the servant of the system, but the reverse. The coded system is typically blind to its existence as a system, and to the selectivity involved in being a system; the proponents of such a system

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562 There are said within Judaism to be 4 layers of Torah interpretation: simple, hint, search, hidden. These are known by the acronym PaRDeS. This Hebrew word refers to a garden of delight or a park closed with a wall (here there are echoes of Eden); it is also translated as ‘orchard’ The word ‘paradise’ in English is related, and shares the same Persian root http://ucija.org/Jamaica/pardes-full.pdf accessed 13.9.11.

563 This, in its strong and irreconcilable contrast to propositional realism, has similarities (though limited similarities) to the approach of the Apophatic tradition, which has popped up from time to time during eras of rationalism, and generally been viewed as no more than a backwater of faith.
would tend to believe that they are just getting right down to the truth, the content of the texts, and, further, that the truth they have found is universal in its application and in its availability.

Girard resoundingly agrees that there is such a thing as a coded system, though he does not use that term to define it. Instead, when he uses a name at all, he talks of principally mimetic theory or the mimetic process and then of related topics like scapegoating or ‘the scapegoat mechanism’. What is particularly interesting is that both involve a form of blindness or blinding, which affects some (possibly a great majority), but not all. It is suggested here that there is a broad similarity of function between Brueggemann’s coded system and Girard’s mimetic system, not least in that each of them is invisible to those operating within their system.

As both Brueggemann and Girard invoke religion as the antidote to this problem, it will be useful to start by illustrating the problem from the New Testament:

“...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”

What Paul is saying here is that the message does not fit into the modes of thought of either of these groups. To the Gentiles (Greeks in some translations) it simply lacks logic and therefore common sense; to the Jews it is a ‘stumbling block’. This translation of the Greek skandalon is sometimes rendered ‘scandal’, sometimes ‘obstacle’ or ‘offence’. The word can also mean ‘snare’ and derives from a root meaning ‘to limp’. However, the metaphor of stumbling is a graphic one, and ties up with other texts in which divinity is said to be ‘a stone of stumbling’ What I want to suggest here is

564 In his most recent book, the form he uses is, “my hypothesis is mimetic” (Girard, 2010, p.ix). This is perhaps more helpful than Brueggemann’s term ‘coded system’ in that it refers to the tendency in human behaviour rather than its product.
565 1 Cor. 1:23  NIV.
566 Darby Bible Translation.
567 Isaiah 8:14: “Because of my awesome holiness I [the Lord Almighty] am like a stone that people stumble over.” (GNB).
that a *skandalon* is an affront to the coded system and an instance of the mimetic principle in action - and on occasions in the process of being recognized for what it is.

Girard homes in on the term ‘scandal’ and deals with it in some detail⁵⁶⁸, as he considers it very significant. He starts from the notion of scandal, which he says is common to a group of texts which he says ‘centre’ on that word. His explanation is difficult, because the term itself is confusing to the modern mind. Girard tries to explain its usage: in the Gospels, the *skandalon* is always someone, and never a material object; it can even be the speaker herself, if alienated from others. It involves, he says, “an obsessional obstacle, raised by mimetic desire”⁵⁶⁹. Girard quotes 1 John 2, 10-11:

“He who loves his brother walks in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling [skandalon].”

And again, from Matthew’s gospel:

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to [be scandalized], it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”⁵⁷⁰

Girard goes on⁵⁷¹ to refer to the passage in which Jesus turns on Peter when he rebuked him for speaking of his coming death⁵⁷². Girard justifies the translation “Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal to me”, explaining that Peter is in a state of scandal; this in turn makes him a threat of scandalization to Jesus.

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⁵⁶⁹ Refer to explanation of mimetic desire in Introduction.
⁵⁷⁰ Matthew 18:6. Girard does not quote the version of the Bible from which he is quoting. It seems to be a modified version of the New American Standard Bible.
⁵⁷¹ Ibid, p.418.
⁵⁷² Matthew 16:22-23.
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The idea of the *skandalon* is very frequently accompanied by references to blindness, as in the quotation from John above. One stumbles over something one does not see. This idea of blindness to God is something that Girard takes up, with particular reference to imposing the mimetic habit that carries it on others, in the worst case on impressionable young children. Brueggemann also touches upon it, though using other vocabulary in his discussion of the coded system. All of them, knowingly or unknowingly, follow in the footsteps of John Calvin, who said that humans’ ability to make sense of a confused knowledge of God can be greatly enhanced by the ‘spectacles’ of Scripture. Green interprets Calvin’s metaphor: revelation does not introduce new content into the world, but “corrects the astigmatism of the sinful imagination, thereby freeing us to see clearly what has been there all along.” In other words, it highlights the stumbling-block.

Ricoeur, investigating tragedy in Greek myth, observes that sometimes blindness is sent by the gods in their satanic mode (*kakos daimon*) when they try to crush a tragic hero; conversely, the gods can enable clear sight. Girard holds that the blindness is the product of mimetic rivalry, and the skandalon is mimetic rivalry itself. To be in the grip of mimetic rivalry, which is the persisting problem of people generally, puts them into darkness. They are therefore in the grips of a situation which blanks out the part of reality which lies in Jesus’s message.

Brueggemann’s term ‘dominant version of reality’ is useful here. It embraces the idea of the coded system, but it can also be explained in mimetic terms.

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574 Brueggemann discusses the issues in terms of philosophical-historical categories: eighteenth century propositionalism and nineteenth century developmentalism. Brueggemann, 1993, p.66.
575 Calvin, John, 1960, 1.6.1, p.70.
578 There seems to be an inconsistency between this claim and the idea that he also puts forward (previous page, para 2) that the *skandalon* is always a person. The explanation may be that it is normally identified with a person.
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Challenging the Coded System & the Effect of Language

The outcome of this discussion is that a challenge to the existing coded system, if it succeeds, results in a revolution, or code change. Let us summarize the main points and linkages we have touched upon so far in this chapter, which lead up to and support this point:

1. Basic talk of God and of experience of God may be drawn from everyday experience, the arena of the ‘here-and-now’, but conceptualisation of God inevitably depends on the imagination.

2. Talk of God, even when drawn from the here-and-now, carries with it a world view. In most people’s case, this is what Brueggemann calls the ‘dominant version of reality’ of the place and time, as most people conform to it. Brueggemann has suggested that cultural patterns involve a ‘coded system’ which intervenes between reader and text and becomes the set of conditions for interpretation. Different coded systems may have similar aims, but a different method, and the method of one culture may not carry meaning for another.

3. The message of prophecy, in the view of both Girard and Brueggemann, is subversive of the dominant version of reality. Prophets are therefore involved in undermining the coded system, not in articulating an existing orthodoxy.

4. The work of prophecy is therefore, when viewed together, a web or an unfolding drama, as Schwager has described it.

5. When cultures become worn out and cease to have adequate utility, the syntax of thought through which meaning was developed and communicated is disrupted and may become inaccessible. For that reason, the history of societies and of ideas is non-linear.

6. Brueggemann also suggests that in the eighteenth century, as part of the Enlightenment, the church in response to the advance of science,
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hardened its doctrine into a set of propositions which can be approached ‘on the level’.

7. This has led to doctrinal fundamentalism, as seen, for instance, amongst some contemporary evangelicals.

8. It is also at odds with the Hebrew mode of understanding, and that of mystics such as the Apophatics, which probe unknowing as the medium for approaching God.

9. The coded approach of the Enlightenment scheme gives dominance to the ‘here-and-now’, and undercuts the religious imagination which may find religious meaning in all things.

In the next section, we will look at what opportunities exist uniquely before this has happened, at the points in time when culture had not set fast into a mould, and consider the possibility that expression is at its peak at this time of remoulding, and loses its efficacy as it becomes progressively more firmly set. The agenda of the enquiry is threefold:

a. To consider whether it is in the nature of formative periods in culture to define the relationship with God in new terms, and enable insights in a way that is not available outside such periods.

b. To set against this idea the suggestion by Brueggemann that preaching is by definition the sub-version of reality, which exists in opposition to the dominant concept of the here-and-now; preaching is therefore a reaction to the status quo. We will also consider the suggestion by Girard that Jesus breaks through an illusion or blindness affecting the whole of humanity as to the reality of human behaviour.

c. To investigate Girard’s claims that the world is undergoing a change which may be terminal: the new Puritanism ‘castrates
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the signified’ and by doing so may lead to a severe and even terminal crisis within the foreseeable future. We shall also consider Brueggemann’s more optimistic comments on the general function of trouble, as producing the conditions to allow and even to generate a new view of the way ahead.
The Beginning and End of a Formative Period of Culture

We saw earlier that it is Brueggemann’s claim that the new social reality of Israel was radically discontinuous with that of the region and with the state religion of Egypt, and that the faith of Israel had mutated away from the common form in the Near East in that era. The differences which emerged had much to do with power, and God was described in a way that drew attention to misuses of human power. The effectiveness of the new view was found to be proved by the helplessness of the gods of Egypt and the regime (the two have to be considered together) to prevent the plague of Aaron and the exodus.

The new mode of religion lasted from the 13th century BCE to the year 1000 BCE as a ‘viable social reality’. It was followed by the kingship of David, and then there began a period of change from the time of Solomon (acceded 962) in which the Mosaic scheme was abandoned. The radicalism of the religion of the exodus was lost in this process.579

The Mature Culture and Adapted Religion that Accompanied it

Brueggemann notes the royal consciousness at work in the kingdom of Solomon, “a self-serving achievement with its sole purpose the self-securing of king and dynasty.” He quotes Mendenhall, who described it as ‘the paganization of Israel’: it involved “a steady abandonment of the radicalism of the Mosaic vision,” as well as an eradication of tribal structures and perspectives. It was therefore syncretist in the adjustment of religious, social and ethical standards to mesh with a political scheme. It was also

579 In making these claims Brueggemann refers to George Mendenhall, who described the achievement of Solomon as ‘the paganization of Israel’ (Mendenhall, 1963, chs. 7-8).
580 Brueggemann, 1978, p.30
581 As footnote 579 above, p..160.
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revisionist, because it inverted the idea of the Promised Land which had been defined over against royal Egypt, and qualitatively different from it: a rich, stable Israel had a certain amount in common with Egypt. This revision had dire effects for prophecy: the vital combination of criticism and energizing, which Brueggemann sees as its characteristic effects, were hamstrung because the transcendent agent necessary to criticism was gone, and “no more futures could be envisioned because everything was already present a hundred-fold”. However, this is not so much a point about monarchy as about successful monarchy which generates prosperity. It is also not a point about whether prophecy was produced, but whether it was heeded.

In the economics of affluence, the people of Israel are “so well off that pain is not noticed and we can eat our way round it” Satiety is the character of life, and makes it difficult to keep a revolution of freedom and justice under way, because these have ceased to be the underlying criteria for society; instead the order of the state has replaced them, using oppression and delivering a “royal programme of achievable satiety.” Theology is ‘flattened’ and delivers a ‘coded certitude’. This dominant version of reality involves the politics of oppression, and even of rapacity, as Brueggemann comments with reference to Amos. The function of the people becomes to underpin and guarantee the dynasty and the court.

582 Brueggemann, 1978, p.32.
583 Brueggemann does not explain his use of the word ‘coded’, but there is an element of interiority implied; that is, the certainty is the case, because those who hold the certainty to be the case make the claim unilaterally, and interpret the texts accordingly. In the instance referred to, theology confirms and affirms the royal programme. [Brueggemann, 1978, p.41].
584 Brueggemann, 1978, p.32.
585 Ibid, p.42.
587 “Therefore you trample upon the poor, and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.” Amos 5:11, quoted at Brueggemann, 1992, p.55.
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God Made Immanent, and God Made Abrasive

God is made domestic and safe through being immanent. Because he has been built a huge house to be accommodated in (the Temple), he is deemed to be present in it and his real absence might go unnoticed.\(^{588}\) This stands in contrast to the Mosaic tradition’s assertion that “Yahweh stands apart from and over against Israel, thereby asserting that Israel’s access to Yahweh is characteristically precarious.”\(^{589}\) But under Solomon, because his possible absence is not on the agenda, God is ‘over-present’, and his “abrasiveness, his absence, his banishment are not noticed, and the problem is reduced to psychology.”\(^{590}\) Brueggemann draws a comparison with contemporary America: Americans are accustomed to imagine “a comfortable congruity between the gospel and dominant American values.”\(^{591}\) Where this is challenged by church leaders, he gives great credit:

"I regard the two letters of the American Roman Catholic bishops on nuclear arms and economics as among the most important religious events of recent times in America. I submit that their importance is that the bishops have publicly asserted the profound tension that exists between the claims of the gospel and the dominant values and policies of the American system... The bishops have shown in powerful ways how the theological claims and social reality go together, and it is clear that the bishops do their theology in the presence of God's peculiar friends, the marginal."\(^{592}\)

The Difficulties of Discussing the Religion of Immanence

The idea of God's assumed presence is something Brueggemann dwells upon. He seems to take at face value the simple view inherent in the religion of the

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\(^{588}\) “You, Lord, have placed the sun in the sky, yet you have chosen to live in clouds and darkness. Now I have built a majestic temple for you, a place for you to live in for ever.” 1 Kings 8:12-13.

\(^{589}\) Brueggemann, 1992, p.150.

\(^{590}\) Brueggemann, 1978, p.41.


\(^{592}\) Ibid.
monarchy in Israel: God's presence is a singular event; God is here because he is not elsewhere. Brueggemann does not raise philosophical questions on whether God, as a Spirit, might have multiple presences or a universal presence, as indeed he must have if he answers prayers sourced from a number of different locations at the same time. With Temple worship, in which there is only one official residence for God, this question perhaps seemed not to apply, and the self-deception involved in assuming God to be ever-present is therefore thickened: he cannot be anywhere else, if he is always here.

Brueggemann may therefore be as it were, quoting the situation, rather than describing the concept of God's presence. Of course, it involves a theological diminution of the concept of God, in which God's freedom is not considered, and the personhood of God is assumed to be limited in space as humans are, but the assumed right of access to God is also affected:

"The tension between God's freedom and God's accessibility is a tricky issue that every religious person and especially ministers would do well to reflect upon. Indeed, the whole point of having religious functionaries is to assure access. That is the sociological expectation: "Will you say a prayer, pastor?"" 593

Brueggemann is here referring to expectations under Solomon and referring both back to the time in the desert, in which the Elohist texts clearly depict God as elusive, and forward to the present age.

However, it would be useful also to look forward in time to Jesus's commendations on prayer, which involve prayer alone in one's room, and prayer conducted by small groups of believers. This sort of prayer either was a replacement for, or was supplementary to, worship at the Temple. 594 The key to obtaining God's ear is apparently in the mode of approach, not in the place. (This is perhaps a point Brueggemann would agree with, though he does not make it himself overtly).
These point add to Brueggemann’s critical review of what was happening under Solomon. He constructs a triangle of three interdependent characteristics to illustrate this:

An Economics of Affluence ← Politics of Oppression

[1 Kings 4:20-23]  
[1 Kings 5:13-18, 9:15-22]

Religion of Immanence

[1 Kings 8:12-13]

However, there seems to be a serious problem with this analysis, in the way it appropriates ‘immanence’ (a word for which he offers no special definition). The intention is apparently to set the transcendence of God as experienced by Moses against the presence of God assumed by Solomon, amounting to an appropriation of God to the regime. By implication, Brueggemann is applying the same criticism to regimes which share cultural characteristics with his, particularly contemporary America.

In support of Brueggemann, it might be said that there are parallel cases where immanence seems to have displaced other aspects of religious vision, with serious, long-term consequences. Alister McGrath suggests that in the nineteenth century Britain a major failure occurred. Some writers, led by the Romantic Poets, moved from God and the transcendental as subjects, to the natural world. In some cases, this seemed to involve deifying the natural world.

595 Brueggemann, 1978, p.36.
596 1 Kings 4:20-23 is a passage about the prosperity and contentment of Solomon’s subjects, and the huge resources needed to support his regime.
597 1 Kings 5:13-18 & 9:15-22 described the resources Solomon used to build his temple: 30,000 men as forced labour, project managed as three rotating groups, with one group in Lebanon at any one time; and the distinction Solomon made in his choice of labour: non-Israelites were forced to labour, but Israelites were not, and occupied superior positions in his organisation.
598 1 Kings 8:12-13 The superior conditions for God created by Solomon are described: instead of living in clouds and darkness, he has a majestic temple.
599 McGrath, A. 2004, Ch. 5, pp. 112-143.
world\textsuperscript{600}, which of course is a feature of some contemporary ecological approaches. However, the main point of the Romantics was to find God at work, and manifested, in the world around us. This has led to a more general modern trend to concentrate on God’s immanence in the world, and sweep away old notions of ‘elsewhere’ and the occult. As Don Cupitt says, this cultural trend refuses “any kind of jump to a higher level...The External descends into the contingent world and is diffused through it.”\textsuperscript{601}

But there is more to be extracted from a ‘religion of immanence’ than this, which seems gratuitously to impose a particular perspective on the ministry of Jesus, and to raise questions over the important role of the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrine. If the Holy Spirit is defined as the immanent aspect of God, because she pervades the world\textsuperscript{602}, and the life of Jesus also represents God’s immanence within humanity\textsuperscript{603} (Emanuel = God with us), then Brueggemann’s triangular model is clearly either too simple, or else historically discrete in a way which discounts other forms of immanence illustrated in the Old Testament, let alone the New.

Brueggemann might be exonerated of a significant omission, on the basis of his focus on the pre-Christian era, were it not for the fact that he began The Prophetic Imagination with a statement about the relevance of the Old Testament experience to Church and society in America today\textsuperscript{604}. His aim therefore depends on modes of God’s immanence but his argument in the section tends to bracket immanence generally with the state religion of Solomon. Indeed one might go further with Gottwald and see immanence as the basic mechanism of God’s interaction with the world: “Since the primary manifestation of Yahweh is Israel itself, any misconception of Israel entails a misconception of Yahweh”.\textsuperscript{605} Brueggemann is clearly saying that

\textsuperscript{600} The archetypal example of this, much quoted, is Joseph Addison’s The Spacious Firmament [CH4 148], though in fact Addison lived a hundred years earlier. Church of Scotland, CH4, 2005.
\textsuperscript{601} Cupitt, Don, 1987, p.8.
\textsuperscript{602} Luke 3:22. To emphasise the point, the Holy Spirit descended in corporeal form, like a dove.
\textsuperscript{603} Philippians 2:6-8.
\textsuperscript{604} Brueggemann, 1978, p.11.
\textsuperscript{605} Gottwald, 1979, p.658.
Solomon is responsible for a misconstruction of Israel, and by doing so ‘misconstructs’ Yahweh.

A solution to this uncharacteristically opaque section of *The Prophetic Imagination*, which involves no loss of differentiation between Solomon and Moses, or for that matter Solomon and Jesus, would be to address the character and limits of the perceived immanence in various cases, and see how the variation might amount in either case to ‘a misconstruction of Yahweh’. The immanence exhibited in the episode of the burning bush or of Pentecost is, after all, qualitatively very different from that of Solomon’s temple. Significant variations of mode are apparent, and Brueggemann’s point about the domestication of God gains additional force once these are expressed. The key point is that Solomon’s religion is one in which God is subjugated and expressed as a feature of the state system, a ‘coded certitude’, to use a term which is resonant within Brueggemann’s scheme. As we have seen, Brueggemann is sensitive to the development within cultures of ‘coded systems’, which are foundational to meaning.

To say that a coded system is at work is not so much to speak of a ‘religion of immanence’ as of God deemed to be immanent within the body politic, or “present in the regime”, which could (and in Brueggemann’s view does) amount to self-idolatry.

A final point is that the regimes of Pharaoh and Solomon aspire to be unchanging, and in that sense are opposed to the theology of revolutionary justice. Imperial politics block out the cries of those who are denied, and anaesthetise the people with satiety so that they do not notice, whereas passion, defined over against satiety, is the state in which “the capacity and readiness to suffer, to die, and to feel is the enemy of imperial reality.”

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606 In *Texts Under Negotiation* (Brueggemann, 1993,) he refers to a ‘coded system’: “in response to the advance of science, faith was ordered into a hard and non-negotiable set of ideas and concepts…the upshot for biblical interpretation is that the Bible had to become a servant of the coded system.” (pp65-66).

607 Brueggemann, 1978, p.36.

Brueggemann makes one of few forward links from his Old Testament studies to Christ and Christian thought, when he speaks of Jesus’s care for those suffering on the margins in the midst of “social power unfairly managed and ideologically legitimated”.609 There seems to be a point here, implied rather than explicit, and only partly developed, about the interdependence of power and immanence. As Brueggemann says, “Israel’s discernment [is] that Yahweh’s presence is always powerfully related to social experience and social reality.”610 We may trace this relationship through, and beyond, Brueggemann’s work as follows:

1. God’s immanence in the world takes on differing forms depending on the mode of power which is salient at a particular juncture. Cultures produce socio-political definitions for the nature of God and detect or imagine his immanence, as part of the dominant version of reality. The dominant version which finds God, for instance, within its own regime is usually blind to God in the aspects which the regime turns its back on: possibly such areas as freedom, justice, the plight of the poor, etc.

2. God’s immanence in prophecy is defined over against the definition of God as claimed by the regime for itself. It is a corrective restatement.

3. God as related in prophecy (including that of Jesus) is always progressively accommodated within the dominant version in a reduced form. That is, the dominant version adopts and adapts prophecy to itself.

4. The reason is that dominant versions throughout history and very often between cultures have features in common and share a dynamic.

Points (1) & (2) belong to Brueggemann; point (3) is something he is likely not to have difficulty with; point (4) really comes out of Girard but fits with Brueggemann.

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Brueggemann’s Extension of Gottwald’s Thinking

Brueggemann, following Gottwald to some extent, considers that

“the Old Testament both partakes of the common theology and struggles to be free from it. The Old Testament both enters the fray of ambiguity and seeks distance from the fray to find something certain and sure. The God of Israel is thus presented vicariously as the God above the fray who appears like other Near Eastern gods and as a God who is exposed in the fray, who appears unlike the gods of common theology, a God particularly available in Israel’s historical circumstances.”

Within the common theology, the dominant version of reality held that “The world may be delineated as a ruthless savage contest for control that works violence beneath the surface of democratic mantras and religious legitimation”. In this context, God’s position either above or within the fray may alternatively place God either in a position of control or of risk; in the latter case, God abandons not only control but also certainty in entering the fray. But Israel’s theology is also contractual and sets limits for humanness: “such a conclusion affirms that the Old Testament belongs to its cultural world in basic theological ways, and it warns against any inclination to see Israel’s faith too readily as a religion of grace.” Brueggemann therefore balances the context of Israel’s faith within the common tradition with its essentially unique points, but keeps a time-focus in this comparison.

Elsewhere, Brueggemann refers to Israel’s God as “nonimperial”. He seems to suggest two things:

1. The idea that God is ‘in the fray’ and is impinged upon by ‘the cry of pain’ of his people. The hurt is taken as “the new stuff of faithfulness”. God is no longer trouble-free, presiding over untroubled legitimated structures. Instead, trouble is the context of the relationship.

611 Brueggemann, 2009, p.3.
612 Brueggemann, 1992, p.15.
613 Brueggemann, 1992, p.29.
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2. Gottwald’s idea, which Brueggemann summarises as “Israel is founded precisely by those who reject and are rejected by the nonslippage of the world of Egyptian (and Canaanite) totalitarianism. Israel, in contrast to those political forms, is a social movement of the failures and rejects who delegitimate both the rationality of empire and the coherence of the gods who legitimize those structures.”

The point in (1) is something that Brueggemann has pursued at some length. In *The Costly Loss of Lament*615, a study based on the Psalms of Lament, and drawing upon the work of Westermann616 he comments on the effects of lament: the situation or attitude of the speaker is transformed. The response to the cry of pain, as Brueggemann explains it in another context, is that “the startling affirmation of biblical faith is that God accepts the groan, takes it into God’s own person, and speaks it back to hurting Israel as promised from on high.”

He puts forward the theory that the relationship between Israel and its God is one in which God is held responsible for things not being as they should; hurt and hope are voiced; this in itself guarantees a two-way relationship. Lament helps to resist a theological monopoly, through giving the second party to the covenant (the petitioners) a voice additional to that of praise and doxology. That additional voice insists that things are not right as they are, that things may be changed, that continuation of the present situation is not acceptable, and that it is God’s role and obligation to change things. The underlying principle is that justice is required in God’s dealings with his people, and that God is accountable under the covenant, just as people are. In any crisis, God is at risk because God is engaged in the crisis. Brueggemann specifically describes this phenomenon as a ‘social reconstruction of reality’618, and this indicates an emphasis on what is happening as a socio-political event, a redistribution of power.

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615 Brueggemann, 1986.
616 Westermann, 1981.
617 Brueggemann, 1992, p.52.
He sets against this what happens when lament does not form a part of Israel's worship: the political-economic monopoly of the status quo is consolidated and re-enforced. Covenant interaction is diminished and loses value because one party to the covenant loses its voice, at least partially: the only voice that remains is that of thanksgiving and celebration, which turns the corpus of the faithful into ‘yes men and women’:

“where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego strength that is necessary for responsible faith. But where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology.”

Under this view, God is not omnipotent, but is like a mother who dreams with her infant “that the infant may one day grow into a responsible, mature covenant partner who can enter into serious communion and conversation.” The first act of the infant society, as its history begins is to cry out for justice: God is mobilized into public life. But when lament is lost, justice questions “cannot be asked and eventually become invisible and illegitimate.” And once justice questions can no longer be asked of God, they also fade from every aspect of public life, including the courts. In a situation where the lament is absent (through the form having fallen out of use), justice questions cannot be asked of God and may become “invisible and illegitimate. Instead we learn to settle for questions on ‘meaning’ and reduce the issues to resolutions of love”.

Brueggemann extends his argument to suggesting that silencing aspects of justice in the dialogue with God deteriorates the relationship with him, and runs the risk of reducing him to a “dead cipher who cannot be addressed and is only the silent guarantor of the status quo.” He contrasts this with the alternative: God as the transformer of what has not yet appeared, who is vulnerable and whose omnipotence is reshaped by pathos.

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622 Ibid., p.64.
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Convergence between Brueggemann and Girard

Having established the common context and the relationship between the Israel’s God as revealed in prophecy, and ‘the silent guarantor of the status quo’, let us return to the point we noted as one of potentially common ground between Brueggemann and Girard:

Dominant Versions of Reality throughout history and in many cultures have features in common and share a dynamic.

We will begin with Girard’s position, and see how that relates to Brueggemann’s thinking.

1. Girard declares that the victimage mechanism is the common basis of religion

623, but the Bible is condemning of ethics which involve persecution. Therefore, the Bible is in opposition to the general nature of religions and the common religion of its historical context.

2. The mimetic system is almost universal in human societies and involves a tendency to escalate to extremes.624 The Gospels call people away from this tendency to a high duty not to respond to evil with evil.625 This command deals not only with the general tendency to default to mimetic behaviour but also with the inbuilt perception of those caught up in the mimetic process that they are not aggressing so much as responding to a wrong received, and are defending what is right. However, it is possible to renounce the mimetic tendency, or, as Rebecca Adams put it in discussion with Girard, by “imitation of a positive model”626, the ultimate positive model of course being God. (however, to this writer the tendency to imitate comes first and forms a basis for either positive or negative mimesis).

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624 Girard, 2010, Ch. 1.
625 Matthew 5:38-42.
From these factors, we might draw the inferences from Girard but within Brueggemann’s terms that

(a) The Dominant Version of Reality and the basis of religion will most frequently be closely intertwined (as in the common religion), except where religion becomes a counter-definition of reality (as in Gottwald’s analysis of the origins of Israel and in Brueggemann’s account of prophecy).

(b) In nearly all societies, the dominant version of reality and the Bible naturally provide differing frames of reference. Of course, the frames of reference arising from either may be adjusted to approach the other.

Having established the correlation and noted the possibility to work within the terms of either author in the areas where their thinking runs close, let us look in more detail at the thought of Girard in these particular areas, and how susceptible it may be to interpretation into Brueggemann’s terms and vice-versa.

Girard’s thinking often stems from an anthropological approach. He is more inclined to think of human origins than the formation of Israel, as Brueggemann does. Specifically, he looks to myth as the evidence of early human understandings of what it means to be human and divine. In doing this, he draws extensively on the work of others who have studied that field: Fraser, Hocart, Levi-Strauss, Durkheim and Ricoeur, for instance.

Girard is convinced that myth describes violent human origins. Myths by definition have a code (this point is a parallel one to Brueggemann’s observations on ‘coded systems’), and the code has no key; it may therefore be difficult to crack, except that myths, according to Girard, are all rooted in

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627 Brueggemann, 2009, p.5.
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the violence of human origins, and speak truthfully of those origins. Almost all myths involve what Girard calls a ‘founding murder’, and this event is both enshrined in the mythical story and concealed by it. Thus the murder which is the first recorded event of a nation or group is ‘invisible’. He therefore places violence as the foundation of the human story and as the root of all ideas of the sacred, which tend to involve the mimetic process in which scapegoating forms a part.

The gospels, on the other hand are distanced from other sacred texts, because they recognize for what it is the mimetic processes and scapegoating involved in them. They expose this, and by exposing it, cancel its power, and call in question the transcendence which is attributed to it. Let us now look in some detail at how Girard builds up his case.

In Things Hidden, Girard refers to a group of texts in Matthew and Luke’s gospels, which were once referred to as ‘the curses against the Pharisees’. That term has now dropped out of currency, though it is clearly apparent that Jesus is directing accusations against them repeatedly. Girard suggests that Jesus is using the Pharisees as intermediaries for something much larger, and that “something of absolutely universal significance is at stake.”

In passages in both gospels, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of murder and names Abel (the first person in the Bible to be killed), and Zechariah son of Barachiah, who is killed right at the end of 2 Chronicles, that is, at the end of the Bible as Jesus knew it. The blame is to rest on ‘the people of this time”, and the position is therefore grievous of those (the teachers of the law) who have withheld the truth from the people by keeping from them the key to the door of the house of knowledge; “you yourselves will not go in, and you stop those who are trying to go in!”

Girard opines that Jesus by citing the first and last murders of scripture, by implication included all the others in between, and explicitly mentions ‘all

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the righteous blood shed on earth’, or in Luke, ‘the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world’. Girard attaches special significance to the words ‘from the foundation of the world’, noting that in the original Greek the word used implies a crisis, or a violent event out of which comes a resolution.633

The foundation of the world, here, coincides with the event which Girard calls ‘the founding murder’, which sets in place the mind-set which allows further persecutions but does not recognize them as such. For that reason, ‘darkness’ is a characteristic of the situation.634 Blindness and self-justification are built into the behaviour: when the Pharisees say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we should not have taken part with them in the shedding of the blood of the prophets”, they are paradoxically behaving in the same way as their fathers did, because their imitation and repetition of their actions is unconscious to the extent that they can disown what their fathers did, whilst carrying on in the same way. Girard finds confirmation of this in John’s gospel:

“You are of your father the devil...(who) when he lies, speaks according to his own nature, for he is liar and the father of lies.”635

Society is host to dynasties of lies about the way the world essentially is and might be, because people, generation after generation, are trapped within a system of thinking which is satanic.

This immensely powerful, self-perpetuating social tradition which conceals itself from those involved in it loses its power when it is exposed for what it is. That is the work of Jesus, and his singular achievement is the expansive visionary analysis of the methods of God and Satan636, and the incipient, catastrophic failure of the Satanic method.

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633 The word in Greek is kataboles, which in medicine refers to the onslaught of a disease.
634 As in “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” Luke 22:53.
635 John 8:43-44.
636 Or, the Devil, diabolos, which is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew term Satan used in the Gospels.
It is not difficult to approach Brueggemann's scheme from this point. If dominant versions of reality share a dynamic, as Brueggemann has suggested they do, in the exemplar cases of royal Egypt, Israel under Solomon and contemporary America; and if the factor uniting these dominant versions of reality is the 'royal consciousness', a state of mind in which it is assumed that God and the state are at one, then what is happening is that the contemporary mores of the establishment eclipse the God of prophecy. If Girard's point is accepted that the general mores of most societies, at most times, are governed by the mimetic system which is founded upon violence, and works by controlling violence with violence, and that its opponents are suppressed by violence or suborned by the threat of violence, then the voices raised against both the mimetic system and the Dominant Version will be well illustrated by those of Moses and the prophets in the Exodus and the Exile.

Further, if God is not always present, and if his assumed immanence in national life is a misconstruction of God, then the cause, according to Girard is that it is not God who is being followed at all, but the mimetic process, which Girard identifies with Satan.

Now, whilst it is possible to say at this juncture that a partial fit between the thinking of Brueggemann and Girard is emerging, it has to be stressed again that this does not mean that they themselves would each accept the thinking of the other.
“Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. “Here is this man working all these signs”, they said, “and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way, everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy the Holy Place and our nation. One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, “you don’t seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is better that one man should die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed.” ...From that day, they were determined to kill him.”

One of the difficulties inherent in this mutually critical correlation is that Girard homes in on characters, real persons, the fictional characters of great literature, and the main players in religious and texts. Brueggemann does none of this, and correlating the ideas put forward by Girard in this way with the much more abstract observations of Brueggemann is therefore complex.

Satan

Let us look first at the identity of Satan as Girard describes him. The definition flows from the main Old Testament role of legal prosecutor, in which he acts as agent provocateur to entrap and condemn. However, his power and hugely extensive activity does not, for Girard, involve any individual existence: “to clothe himself in the semblance of being, he must act as a parasite on God’s creatures.” He is “totally mimetic” and his quintessential being is “the violent contagion that has no substance in it”. Girard has therefore made the old personal concept of Satan into an abstract one. His social science or anthropological approach has observed a coherent link between the various characteristics ascribed to Satan and this leads to the definition.

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638 As illustrated in the book of Job.
15 Satan & Dionysus

Drawing particularly on the Gospel of John, because more than the Synoptics, John “defines anew, abruptly indeed but also without hostility, the consequences for rivalistic imitation”\textsuperscript{640}, Girard sets out and relates to the Gospel account an analysis of Satan as a complex character, who works with extraordinary power in different, even contradictory ways, and is simultaneously a principle of order and disorder.\textsuperscript{641} The complexity is illustrated in Satan’s use of desire; he is able to manipulate people not only through imitative desire but also the rivalry that springs from it.

Girard grounds this analysis in the Tenth Commandment, normally translated as

“You shall not covet thy neighbour’s house. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbour, nor his male nor female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him.”\textsuperscript{642}

Girard asserts that the word ‘covet’ used here is misleading because it suggests an uncommon desire, but the original Hebrew in contrast uses the straightforward word for desire; the prohibition is therefore against the inclination to want what your neighbour has. Girard identifies this state, wanting what the other person has, as the default position of people generally: they will easily quarrel over what the other has, or desires, and it is this involuntary mimetic rivalistic process, rather than anything truly autonomous that tends to drive their desires. Desire is therefore often not

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\textsuperscript{640} Girard, 2001, p.39. Girard quotes John 8:42-44 to set the scene for his analysis of what Satan is and does:
\begin{quote}
If God were your father, you would love me,
For I proceeded and came forth from God;...
You are of your father the devil
And it is the desires of your father
That you wish to do.
From the beginning he was a murderer
And had nothing to do with the truth
Because the truth is not in him.
When he speaks lies,
He draws them from his own nature,
Because he is a liar and the father of lies.”
\end{quote}
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{641} Girard, 2001, p.32ff.
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{642} Exodus 20:17.
\end{flushright}
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just a matter between the desirer and the desired, but involves a third party. Jesus understands this, and acts accordingly to break the pattern:

“If Jesus never speaks in terms of prohibitions and always in terms of models and imitation, it is because he draws out the full consequences of the lesson offered by the tenth commandment. It is not through inflated self-love that he asks us to imitate him; it is to turn us away from mimetic rivalries.”

Jesus is therefore offering an alternative model, and invites his followers to turn their imitative tendency to embrace his model rather than that of the devil. This is the core of his claim that he represents that Father over against Satan, and light (a message of understanding) against darkness (a way of living based on principles which are concealed even from those who follow them).

Girard traces Satan’s methods. Initially, he invites people to abandon irksome discipline. As in the Garden of Eden, he is a seducer; he says, have what you want. This starts people, Girard says, on “the superhighway of mimetic crisis.” Of course, the idea of the broad and winding way to destruction is no more than a conventional illustration about Christian doctrine of good and evil, found for instance in dramatic form in The Pilgrim’s Progress. What Girard is building onto this foundation is the jagged track of mimesis, which entices us then frustrates us:

"But then suddenly there appears an unexpected obstacle between us and the object of our desire, and to our consternation, just when we thought we had left Satan far behind us, it is he, or one of his surrogates, who shows up to block the route. This is the first of many transformations of Satan."

The second move of Satan is therefore the conversion of the mimetic model into a rival. That is to say, simple desire develops a reflexive aspect to it; desire leads to envious imitation of what one’s neighbour has, and the

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646 winding, In Bunyan’s terms.
neighbour responds by being the more intent on keeping what he has. A spiral development of desire is set up, which leads to hostility:

"As a general rule, quiet and untroubled possession weakens desire. In giving my model a rival, I return to him, in a way, the gift of the desire he just gave to me. I give a model to my own model. The spectacle of my desire reinforces his at the precise moment when, in confronting me, he reinforces mine. That man whose wife I desire, for example, had perhaps ceased to desire her over time. His desire was dead, but on contact with mine, which is living, it regains life."

It is this that brings about ‘scandals’, a term from the Gospels into which Girard delves deeply, as we have seen. It denotes the consequences of mimetic rivalries; to be scandalized is to be compromised in progress, diverted (from God), tripped, blocked, or hobbled. He gives the example of Peter, who rebuked Jesus over his foretelling of his rejection by the religious establishment and his future suffering. In doing this, he was (unconsciously, no doubt) inviting Jesus to change the pattern of his desiring and follow Peter, not God. Jesus turned on him and said,

"Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts do not come from God, but from man."

‘Obstacle’ here might also be translated ‘scandal’, or ‘stumbling block’. In other words, Peter’s proposal would trip and incapacitate Jesus: lead him off the way he should be following, and into the trap of mimesis.

Satan works in ways that seem contradictory, but nevertheless it is by tacking this way and that with changes of direction that he makes progress. This progress even includes his own temporary self-expulsion, in a move which brings order back into human communities, but encourages those communities to operate on the kind of basis which is underpinned by mimetic, and therefore, satanic, systems. Disorder expels disorder to create order on the basis of victimage and the politics of oppression. Satan can always put enough order back into the world to prevent the total destruction

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649 Matthew 16:23.
of what he possesses. His strength is that he uses processes which are invisible, and therefore works under cover of darkness.

Jesus, however, disarms Satan by exposing his processes, and he therefore works in the light. As part of this aspect of the subject, in Things Hidden, Girard examines Jesus’s self-defence against the Scribes, when he refutes the suggestion that he is using the power of Satan to cast out devils:

"How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, it cannot be maintained. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot endure and is finished."

Girard claims that the general sense of this is usually misunderstood, because what Jesus is trying to do here is to get his listeners, the Pharisees, to reflect on how it can be that Satan is divided against himself (which Girard holds, he is). The relationship of Girard’s point to the text is not very clear in this case, where he is relying on Mark’s version. However, in The Scapegoat he quotes Matthew 12:23-28, in which Jesus clearly claims that his opponents cast out Satan by Satan, but he casts out Satan by the power of the spirit of God. He makes two points: the logical conclusion to be drawn from Jesus’s action is that “the kingdom of God is already among you”, and if the Pharisees are casting out Satan by the power of Satan, then their kingdom cannot stand. This is the passage in full as Girard quotes it:

“All the people were astounded and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard this they said, ‘The man casts out devils only through Beelzebub, the prince of devils.’ Knowing what was in their minds, he said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, Now if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; so how can his kingdom stand? And if it is through Beelzebub that I cast out devils, through whom do your own experts cast them out? Let them be your judges, then. But if it is

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through the spirit of God that I cast devils out, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you."653

What Jesus is able to confer is an understanding of how Satan works, and of how Satan's self-division is made into a fatal flaw, rather than a tactical regrouping, when Satan's methods are seen for what they are. Without this insight, Satan reinstates himself in the process of his own persecutors. Satan, therefore, in the longer view, cannot be cast out by Satan, but only by the spirit of God.

Principalities and Powers

Girard considers where in the world the constituency lies for the foundations of the Satanic scheme – the founding murder and single victim mechanism. He notes that

"Christians heartily distrusted the sovereign states in which Christianity emerged and spread, on account of the violent origin of these states. In naming them Christianity did not resort to their usual names, such as the Roman Empire or the Herodian Tetrarchy. Instead, The New Testament usually calls upon a specific vocabulary, that of 'principalities and powers'."654

The ‘violent origins’ which Girard refers to are of course his way of linking in this statement to the ‘founding murder’ of his own theory; in other words, he is tying the Christian recognition of mimetic violence to his own explanation of it. The distrust is illustrated when Peter quotes Psalm 2:

"The kings of the earth took their stand
And the rulers were gathered together

653 There is a further reference to this in the Girard-Schwager correspondence. Schwager states, "Being a man and the claim to be God is the essence of Satan (sic). So the Jews accuse Jesus of being a totally satanic being... In accusing Jesus of being Satan the Jews react themselves according to the satanic spirit, because they kill him falsely." Girard-Schwager, 1975-91, p.84.
654 Girard, 2001, p.95.
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Against the Lord and his anointed.”

Girard goes on to explain that ‘principalities and powers’ are the social phenomena which the founding murder created. But the term used in the New Testament variously of the powers of this world, and of ‘celestial’ powers, a term which refers to the spiritual component corresponding to the material power; both stem from the collective founding murder.

At this point, there is clearly scope for relating ‘principalities and powers’ to Brueggemann’s dominant version of reality, or at least its governing aspect. However, there are also difficulties in this correlation.

To begin with, there is the metaphysical aspect to Girard’s definition of Satan which is quite unlike Brueggemann’s conceptualisation of what is happening in the dominant version of reality. There, God is acknowledged as a force with human agents (the prophets), but no equivalent scheme is offered for the opposition: it is simply a misconception of God and a misunderstanding of his will that is involved.

However, a dominant version of reality considered in a general sense, or anthropologically, involves constructs of reality. This might feature the personification of ideas, including, for instance, a god-king, or Satan. Although Brueggemann himself tends not to stress that anti-realism is involved, the point is there tacitly. Therefore, there is, logically, no disagreement between Brueggemann’s idea that there are multiple versions of reality in use simultaneously in the life of Israel and use of the term ‘Satan’. It’s just that Brueggemann avoids it in his analysis, and there is therefore no clear distinction between Brueggemann’s assertions which are realist (the existence of God, to take a simple example), and those which are interpretative but not realist. This situation is, perhaps, a consequence of

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656 Girard, 2001, p.96-97.
657 Though Brueggemann does consider the scheme in the Book of Job, in which Satan as prosecutor and God collude together, and Job remains unaware of the collusion. An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination, pp. 300-301.
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following the socio-literary method, which tends not to distinguish in these
terms.

However, if Brueggemann's approach is anti-realist to some extent, Girard's
is not. For instance, his approach to Satan is a realist one even though he
asserts that Satan does not have a personal existence; the force in the world
to which the name 'Satan' is given is real, and actualised in human behaviour.
This is a realist religious assertion in the same way that 'God is a spirit' is.

We are therefore left with the possibility of only a partial correlation – but a
helpful one nonetheless.

In the following section, we explore some ideas found only in Girard, which
have no echo in Brueggemann.

Dionysus

Dionysus, like Satan, is a personification of something recognizable in the
world. Dionysus is therefore a characteristic of the way things are. Girard
explores this phenomenon in Violence and the Sacred.

Dionysus is actualised in festivals. Anthropologically, festivals are found
frequently to prescribe or allow the violation of normal practice, the law, and
sexual mores:

"Such violations must be viewed in their broadest context: that of overall
elimination of differences. Family and social hierarchies are temporarily
suppressed or inverted; children no longer respect their parents, servants
their masters, vassals their lords. This motif is reflected in the aesthetics of
the holiday – the display of clashing colours, the parading of transvestite
figures, the slapstick antics of piebald 'fools'. For the duration of the festival
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unnatural acts and outrageous behaviour are permitted, even encouraged."\textsuperscript{658}

Girard believes that such festivals commemorate a sacrificial crisis\textsuperscript{659}, and, referring to Durkheim’s perception, he states:

"the festival revitalizes the cultural order by re-enacting its conception, reproducing an experience that is viewed as the source of health and abundance; re-enacting, in fact, the moment when the fear of falling into interminable violence is most intense and the community is therefore most closely drawn together\textsuperscript{660}.

Sacrifice and the original crisis recorded in it are considered in another chapter, and therefore at this point let us concentrate on how Girard’s thinking on Dionysus relates to that point of confluence in Girard’s and Brueggemann’s thinking, the dominant version of reality.

Bad and Good Violence

Girard claims that societies distinguish between ‘bad’ violence and ‘good’ violence, and this is reflected in its rituals, which

“select a certain form of violence as ‘good’, as necessary to the unity of the community, and sets up in opposition to it another sort of violence that is deemed ‘bad’, because it is related to violent reciprocity.”\textsuperscript{661}

Now, although it is not a rite or ritual, the event recorded in the quotation at the head of this chapter (Caiaphas’s justification for the execution of Jesus) shows such a distinction being made in practice. The good violence is part of the method used to maintain and safeguard the dominant version of reality. When people are involved in the dominant version they seem to have little difficulty in regarding its ‘good violence’ as benign. That is how we are able to think of our troops fondly as ‘our boys’, and simultaneously demonise

\textsuperscript{658} Girard, 1977, p.119.
\textsuperscript{659} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{660} Girard, 1977, p.120.
\textsuperscript{661} Girard, 1977, p.115.
enemy troops as vile murderers, even when the methods of the two sides are similar.

When prophetic voices question this domestication of violence, as Ghandi did, those voices tend at first to seem oddly discordant and disloyal. It is only when a perspective is gained, perhaps by the passing of time, that the discordance is modulated.

‘Good’ Violence in Festivals

Think of November 5th and Guy Fawkes. He was a terrorist (or freedom fighter), in modern terminology, whose plot to blow up King and Parliament in 1605 was discovered before the explosion could be set off. His guilt was hardly in question, as he had been caught red-handed, but he could not have acted alone. He was tortured to reveal the names of his co-conspirators and put to death elaborately and horribly. He was the last of the conspirators to be executed, and his name stood for all, and has been remembered in that way; for the last four hundred years the death has been celebrated at parties, during which his effigy is burned on a bonfire. The ghoulish foundation of this happy family occasion is hardly ever questioned, and to those involved, violence hardly seems to be a part of it. All of that is because Good Violence is involved. It was better that one man (Guy, plus of course his unremembered handful of accomplices) should be killed than that the leadership of the nation should be blown up, with the possible consequence of a coup d’état and other perceived catastrophes including foreign domination.

This anecdote illustrates the link between festival and violence associated with Dionysus. Some abnormal behaviour is present in it too, though not the wholesale inversion described in Greek myth and in anthropological studies of kingship rites in primitive societies.
Turning to Caiaphas’s speech, with its obvious similarities to the case of Guy Fawkes, it is important that the Christian response to it is to invert the power game in it. Christians are the ones to celebrate the event, not their adversaries. It was the defeat which led to the victory, and it was able to do so because the rules had changed to subvert the system of power: the victimage system which has its foundations in mimesis.

Any consideration of Dionysus would be incomplete without taking Nietzsche’s writing into consideration. Nietzsche saw Dionysus as a principle of life subject to no extraneous principle: “raw, tragic, joyful, but real.” In The Antichrist (1888) and The Genealogy of Morals (1887) Nietzsche argued that raw life is characterized by ‘will-to-power’, the tendency of any organism to maximise power; Christianity, on the other hand, is anti-life, suffocating natural emotions and killing this life through the superimposition of another world. Under this view (which has a simpler structure than Girard’s), disorder and frenzy (Dionysus) are confronted by stifling order (Christianity) which will use any means to impose its code. Nietzsche’s is a vision of ‘either-or’, but in the last days before he was overtaken by madness, it modulated into ‘both-and’, according to Girard:

“...the manic-depressive embodies the two opposing faces of the sacred, which are interiorized and lived through interminably in an alternating pattern. I believe this is what Nietzsche is alluding to, on the threshold of madness, when his long-standing opposition between Dionysus and Christ completely disappears. Instead of writing Dionysus against the Crucified, he writes Dionysus and the Crucified. What Nietzsche never detected in his researches... the identity of God and the scapegoat – he was able to realise in his madness. Wishing to be God, he became the victim, his own, primarily: he experienced the destiny of the scapegoat.”

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In other words, the mimetic victimage mechanism leading to scapegoating, which is rampant within the concept of Dionysus, turned on its own prophet, Nietzsche, and the realisation came at the time he lost his sanity.

In the conclusion to Things Hidden, Girard claims that “our own ability to detect the scapegoat mechanism is wholly determined by the detection that has already taken place within the gospel text.”664 The gospel has therefore set in motion a process of increased understanding, and this understanding, which comes of an authentic reading of the gospels, increases as sacrificial Christianity declines or ‘disintegrates’.

The increased understanding coincides with the modern threat of violence which “knows no limits”, and is understood as being human rather than divine in origin. We, in the present age, are part of an historical succession, and treat our predecessors in that succession with a polemical spirit and lack of fairness:

"Like them, we are motivated to by the worldly ambition to refute and replace the dominant modes of thought. The only advantage that we have is that we happen to be at a more advanced stage in the same historical process, which is accelerating and leading towards and increased revelation of the truth."

Note that whereas Brueggemann sees the dominant version of reality as something which tends to develop in settled societies and stands in need of periodic challenge by prophets who paint an alternative picture, Girard sees its traits as the motor which drives most human interaction under any circumstances. It is the way the world is, and departing from it is a traumatic business:

"The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone enters it violently."665

However, it would not be incompatible with Brueggemann’s main argument to suggest that departing from the DVR is a business in which things can get

nasty; but he does not suggest that such a departure inevitably leads to violence, or that there is a necessary link between the business of prophecy and violent outcomes.
“Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.”

It may be stating the obvious to say that the projects of both Brueggemann and Girard are deeply concerned to reveal what lies at the heart of religious texts. But that is a complex matter, and from the point of view of this study, the correlation of two distinct agendas and methods increases the obliqueness of the connections to be made. Sacrifice, for instance, may be explained by prophecy, but the explanation may be far from explicit; it may lie in the domain of what is sacred; and prophecy may disown the category of what is sacred, or aspects of it.

Is there prophecy in the very explanation of prophecy? Is the writer who articulates and even gives meaning to sacrifice enacting a priestly function? The answer to these questions may be a partial affirmative, but it is not a simple one. The academic writer does not address the world at large, so much as a specialist readership of academics and people who have an interest in theology. That is true of both Brueggemann and Girard. Nor do they address their public in terms which are designed to win them over emotionally, nor make use of devices like parables or poetry, as the biblical prophets did, though (in Brueggemann’s case) the essential nature of such an approach is discussed and affirmed. They are not apparently seeking to express themselves resonantly and pick up on their readers’ inner feelings, or ‘cement the words to their hearts’. They are not, either of them, in their academic work at least, overtly engaged in the proclamation or the manifestation of God, though they talk about such things.

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666 Forster, E.M. Howard’s End Ch. 22.
667 Quote from Amos.
668 Brueggemann, 1989.
Nevertheless, the work that they both do in illuminating biblical texts may further the work of prophecy. If this is the case, part of the cause will be that prophecy begins to seem more relevant in the present time. Therefore, they may justifiably be claimed to belong to the field of prophecy in a way, as we shall see.

Making the texts talk, that is, making them illuminate our minds with meaning, means actively understanding their language. This does not only mean comprehending the Hebrew or the Greek, and the mind-set that went with the speaking of those languages two thousand or more years ago (though Brueggemann is certainly a notable expert in this, and Girard is not), but also understanding the normative concepts which assembled themselves into a world-view, or dominant version of reality. The approach involved is not so much a historical one as a literary one, in that it studies the mode of communication more than the facts surrounding the circumstances of that communication.

In writing about such things, both Brueggemann and Girard are communicating the non DVR message to an audience which for the most part probably speaks DVR, as it were. This is, of course, the universal problem which prophecy faces: bridging a conceptual gap; successful mastery of that problem defines the speaker as a prophet, who is found to reveal meaning, rather than a crank, who does not.

Brueggemann considers that the problem to be overcome, and the context for ministry in the present time, is “the failure of the imagination of modernity”\textsuperscript{670}. In this, he includes both moral-theological and economic-political aspects. Writing in the early 90s, he declared that

\textsuperscript{670} Brueggemann, 1993, p.19.
"We are at a moment when the imagination of modernity is being displaced by postmodern imagination, which is less sure and less ambitious, and which more modestly makes a local claim. The postmodern act of imagination must work its way in the presence of other, rival and competing acts of imagination, none of which can claim any formal advantage or privilege. Thus, at its deepest levels, our culture is one in which the old imagined world is lost, but still powerfully cherished, and in which there is bewilderment and fear, because there is no clear way on how to order our shared imagination differently or better."671

These conditions are analogous to those of Israel's exile, when faith had to survive in an environment in which there was indeed bewilderment and fear, because the old certainties had been lost and the present time involved multiple, competing claims to truth.

In this situation, Brueggemann does not think that his job is to redefine the religious imagination, but to ‘fund’ it:

"Rather, the task is to fund – to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined. Our responsibility is not the voicing of a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations"672

‘Our’ here refers to ministry, or possibly to a grouping he refers to at the beginning of the book as “many of us in the academy and in the church”673, who have noticed that a new interpretative situation faces them, and regard it as an emergency. These are the people who have the job of generating the fragments from which individuals will, through their own imaginations, assemble their own vision.

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671 Ibid.
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The situation which has been found to have expired is the 'modern' one (meaning post-Enlightenment), and its method is factual analysis and scientific positivism; that is, it regards the scriptures as history, describing events that are held to have taken place as described. The new approach requires a distinctively different "practice of knowledge and a new, derivative option in political power."^674

Referring particularly to the work of Stephen Toulmin^675, Thomas Kuhn^676 and Michael Polanyi^677, Brueggemann notes that the Post-Modern mind-set marks a return to Pre-Enlightenment standards, marked by a concern for information, or an information culture, which is oral, particular, local and timely,^678 and thus relevant to the context of the specific person or people involved.

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<th>Post-Modern</th>
<th>Brueggemann’s comment</th>
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<td>Reliable Information</td>
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From this analysis, Brueggemann concludes:

"Thus I shall want to argue that the practice of Christian interpretation in preaching and liturgy is contextual, local and pluralistic. We voice a claim that rings true in our context, that applies authoritatively to our lived life.

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^676 The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: Kuhn, 1962.
But it is a claim that is made in a pluralism where it has no formal privilege."679

Admitting that this will look to some like a relativist position, Brueggemann stresses that he is not advocating an end to objectivity, but finds that it is ‘with us’; he goes on to claim that relativism is less of a threat than objectivism, because objectivism involves such a deception. With Kuhn and Polyan (as he reads them), he commends a kind of perspectivism:

“...a perspective has the power to make sense out of the rawness of experienced life, even though it cannot be ‘proven’ or absolutely established.”680

What, it may be asked, is the difference between a current perspective which is not merely an individual one, and a dominant version of reality? Only, it seems, whether or not it is the view of those who hold the power to dictate the dominant culture. A perspective may be embodied within the DVR, or exist, as it were, underneath it. This idea of a non-consensus or majority view (that is, a situation in which pluralism is the rule) is very much a concept rooted in the post-modern context, in which great absolutes have no part, but individual reconstructions of meaning in a landscape of “general failure, demise and disease”681.

At this point, it is apparent that the alternative to the incoming DVR (that is, a Post-Modern view of the world), is not anything like a reinstatement of the old certainties. Brueggemann’s persistent refrain, a counter-imagination of the world, indicates a set of individual counter-imaginations, which may nevertheless have a collective force.

That leaves us with the idea of counter-imaginations which may or may not be pluralistic in nature, but at the time when old understandings are going

679 Ibid., p.9.
681 Ibid, p.20.
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through a prolonged period of decline leading to “evident cultural collapse”\textsuperscript{682}, they are seen as mutually in opposition to the decaying established culture. The shape of the new thinking that will in time be seen to have displaced the old is not yet clear. That is why Brueggemann is committed to finding an alternative understanding which works in conjunction with the Post-Modern mind-set.

So Brueggemann has no expectation of rehabilitating old certainties or any single vision of truth. He dreams of voices singing in harmony, not in unison, and in a place we do not fully recognize as home.

Analogies of Exile

The analogy of exile, and its resonance for the Post-Modern mind, is a point discussed by Brueggemann in \textit{Cadences of Home} (1997), a book which begins with a discussion of the metaphor of exile. Published four years after \textit{Texts Under Negotiation}, the thinking in it builds upon that of the earlier book, and develops in the direction of the metaphorical exile of contemporary Christians:

"I suggest an \textit{evangelical dimension} to exile in our social context. That is, serious reflective Christians find themselves increasingly at odds with the dominant values of consumer capitalism and its supportive military patriotism; there is no easy or obvious way to hold together core faith claims and the social realities around us. Reflective Christians are increasingly 'resident aliens'."\textsuperscript{683}

\textsuperscript{682} Brueggemann, 1997, p.3.
\textsuperscript{683} Brueggemann, 1997, p.2.
At this point, we have people of faith (a) distanced from the old, unambiguous certainties of faith by an unavoidable new relativist mind-set, and (b) alienated from the socio-ethics of society around them. The combined trauma must be considerable, and in one way, worse than that of exile. The way in which it is worse is that there is no clear event for them to take as the turning point in their fortunes; they cannot say, “when they led us away captive”, or look forward to when the Lord will turn again the captivity. There are no historical markers. Instead, there is just the aching awareness that the world has changed, that the tide has gone out and left them, if not high and dry, then perhaps cut off in their own little rock-pool.

Brueggemann sees the metaphor of exile as "a rich source for self-discernment"\(^{684}\), and distinguishes between ‘Christian exile’ in a secular culture and ‘cultural exile’ with the loss of conventional hegemony; he characterises these two as ‘evangelical’ and ‘American’ respectively, referring to the loss of the alignment between Christianity and establishment. He suggests that exile has a cultural dimension which is more ‘American’ than Christian:

> “The 'homeland' in which all of us have grown up has been defined and dominated by white, male, Western assumptions which were, at the same time, imposed and also willingly embraced. Exile comes as those values and modes of authority are being effectively and progressively diminished. That diminishment is a source of deep displacement for many, even though, for others who are not male and white, it is a moment of emancipation...For all these quite visible resistances to the new, however, we are required to live in a situation that for many feels like less than 'home'. In such a context, folk need pastoral help in relinquishing a 'home' that is gone, and in entering a new, dangerous place that we sense as deeply alien.”\(^{685}\)

Brueggemann follows Martin Buber in declaring an “epoch of homelessness”, arising from the loss of old certainties, as a consequence of the intellectual

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\(^{684}\) Ibid, p.2.
\(^{685}\) Brueggemann, 1997, p.2.
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revolution caused by Locke, Hobbes and Descartes. He is therefore tracing a
descent into metaphorical exile which began three hundred years ago, the
final stages of which are exhibited in the Post-Modern revolution in concepts.
The realisation that this descent is the case is the painful aspect which has
traumas evident in the fields both of faith and of culture.

Brueggemann is proposing that Christians declare themselves as in exile, and
thus realise the metaphor, and cut through the cords which bind
expectations to situations now in the past. The realisation of the metaphor,
and mutual confession mutual admission within the community of faith that
the adverse circumstances are indeed the case, would bring reconciliation to
the condition of Christians in the present time. This move would involve

“..refocusing our attention, energy, and self-perception. In times when the
church could assume its own 'establishment', it may have been proper to
use prophetic texts to address 'kings'. But a new circumstance suggests a
very different posture for preaching and pastoral authority, now as an exile
addressing exiles, in which displacement, failed hopes, anger, wistful
sadness and helplessness permeate our sense of self, sense of community
and sense of future.”686

Having got this under its belt by this act of initiative, Brueggemann suggests,
a new form of thriving will begin, despite the apparently unpropitious
circumstances. He notes that Israel’s exile was marked by such a turn-round:

“The most remarkable observation one can make about this interface of
exilic circumstances and scriptural resources is this: Exile did not lead Jews in
the Old Testament to abandon fate or settle for abdicating despair, nor to
retreat to privatistic religion. On the contrary, exile evoked the most
brilliant literature and the most daring theological articulation in the Old
Testament.”687

686 Ibid, p.3.
687 Ibid, p.3.
This is, then, a time of opportunity, in which “preachers are ‘liberated’ to assert that hard-core, pre-rational buoyancy in a church too much in the grip of the defeatist sensibility of our evident cultural collapse.” He sees a buoyant response to trouble as both deeply Jewish and evangelical, that is, “grounded in a sense and sureness of news about God that circumstance cannot undermine or negate.”

Brueggemann goes on to discuss how one might preach to exiles, and about the lament involved in speaking of one’s own condition as an exile. We will return to this later, but for the moment, let us leave Brueggemann here, and investigate how Girard views the situation of dislocation in contemporary life, and what response to it there may be.

Girard, Post-Modernism and the Apocalyptic

Girard is not interested in adapting to Modernism and Post-Modernism. He claims to be a ‘mimetic realist’, and sees himself as an apocalyptic thinker:

“...I am a theorist of mythology...However, there is a sort of outline of a theory of modernity at the end of I See Satan that is purely apocalyptic...The apocalyptic feeling is the consciousness that the scapegoat business has run its course...Any great Christian experience is apocalyptic

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688 Ibid, p.3.
689 Ibid, p.3.
690 Girard, 2007, p.26. (on Dostoevsky’s The Eternal Husband and Cervantes’s El Curioso Impertinente) “That was the real insight. The fact that the plot was the same...in the two texts turned me into the mimetic realist I have been ever since”, and page 28: “I have always been a realist...No new discipline has ever produced any durable results unless it was founded on common-sense realism...I think the old German idealistic legacy has simply been misleading for the whole European culture.”
because what one realises is that after the decomposition of the sacrificial 
order there is nothing standing between ourselves and possible 
destruction.” 692

Therefore, there is a distance between Girard and Brueggemann in how they 
view the present age and the possibilities for any future. For decades now 
Girard has expressed the view that the former controls on violence have 
become dysfunctional, and the world is in danger of being overwhelmed by 
vio

ence of unprecedented magnitude. Systems in society which contain and 
limit violence through scapegoating have failed because

“after the Christian revolution this is no longer possible. The system cannot 
be pulled back by any pharmacological resolution, and the virus of mimetic 
vio

ence can spread freely. This is why Jesus says ‘Do not suppose I have 
come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword 
(Matthew 10:34)”693

The ability to contain mimetic rivalry being gone, Girard looks to the future 
and sees the consequence as destruction.

In The Scapegoat (1986) p.187, he states “the gospels state explicitly that 
Satan is the principle of every kingdom.” It is only a short step from talking of 
‘every kingdom’ to talking of ‘the dominant version of reality in most 
societies.’ In other words, despite their differences on the future, both Girard 
and Brueggemann seem to have a similar foundation to their theories, in this 
view that societies tend to be distanced from God, and even in the grips of 
forces polarly opposed to God, or in exile from God. Achieving a 
rapprochement, according to each in his own way, involves a call away from 
the dominant version of reality.

692 Girard at al., 2007, pp. 234-237.
The Idea of Exile

However, the idea of 'exile', literal or metaphorical, has more to it than distance from God, and must include distance from home, loss of freedom, being compelled to live in a strange place, in strange ways, subject to strange and perhaps repulsive laws and customs. Girard would have no difficulty with the idea of compulsion, or of people being compelled or dragged away by a malevolent force, and made to live in an environment both sinister and evil, as we shall see; all of that is part of mimetic theory.

But if people are dragged off from a kind of metaphorical 'home', or natural uncorrupted state, what can be said of it? Girard describes societies as defined by a 'founding murder', and analyses mythology to show how this memory is enshrined in the earliest records of many societies. If that founding murder is the first event, then what can be said of the state that preceded it? Unless one resorts to metaphysics, how can one speak of an age of innocence if all the records refer only to the corruption that came after it; does the whole idea rely on a Platonist excursion into some realm of pre-experience in which truths reside about the uncorrupted essence of humanity? As Girard identifies mimetic behaviour in children from their first interactions with others, he cannot be referring to uncorrupted childhood versus deviance in adult years. A fall from grace, to use a term rooted in the book of Genesis, seems to be involved, but it overtakes the infant early, as she enters a "world of fallenness".

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694 Oughourlian is a practicing psychiatrist, and also professor of clinical psychopathology at the University of Paris. Writing with reference to his clinical experience as a psychiatrist, is definite about the display of mimetic behaviour from the earliest moment: “It appears that we are constantly in mimetic reaction with one another from the very moment of birth” Oughourlian, 2010, p.13.

Girard-Schwager and the Uses of Exile

Schwager is hardly concerned with the Old Testament, and, like Girard, sees the unfolding of the biblical texts as progress towards Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Therefore ‘exile’ is not a concept he mentions much except to refer to the gathering of God’s people at the end of exile, as a stage in that progress:

"Whenever God rescues oppressed men and women from their enemies he gathers them anew at the same time... God rescued the dispersed of his people from the hands of their enemies and gathered them from all the lands... the liberation and the new gathering are in fact one and the same event.

The message of the new gathering was first proclaimed by the prophets of the exilic period"697

And again,

"The prayer which Jesus taught his disciples includes in it the incipient existence of a renewed Israel -- for "our Father" is not the Father of an individual but of a people -- and at the same time it aims toward the further coming of God's kingdom. The petitions involving the sanctification of the name and the coming of the kingdom belong closely together, as is clear from Ezekiel, for God promised by this prophet that he would act anew not because of the sinful people, but for his name’s sake, and that he would show himself as holy when he gathered Israel together again from its scattered state of exile (Ezek. 20:41, 44; 28:25; 36:22, 24)... The request of the Our Father for sanctification of the name consequently pleads for that double event in which God is sanctified as Lord by his gathering together of

the people and turning them toward himself. So we concur with what Jeremias says: "the only, meaning of the total reality of Jesus is the gathering of eschatological people of God." 698

So, it appears that whilst Schwager is very interested in the outcome of exile, and how this leads towards salvation and the realisation of the Kingdom of God, Brueggemann lingers looking at the effects of exile as it happens, rather than at its consequences. This means that the correlation between Brueggemann and Girard-Schwager in this key point can only be that they complement one another by discussing different parts of a sequence; but even this limited outcome does not have much content, because Girard-Schwager look towards a future (the coming of the Kingdom, or apocalypse), whereas Brueggemann is concerned with states of being, which partly repeat themselves in time, but under differing cultural circumstances. Apocalypse is hardly in his vocabulary, though he certainly looks to the drawing near of the Kingdom on earth. 699

Dramatic Theology

However, despite this fundamental difference and others, the idea of exile, used metaphorically, provides an arena in which their thinking can interact, and synergies reside in this, as will become clear.

In order to view the interaction under a perspective which shows the synergies in action, let us move to the idea of Dramatic Theology.

699 In Reverberations of Faith, (2002) Brueggemann does have a section on ‘Apocalyptic Thought’ (p.5ff), but this is mainly a survey of the subject and has little that is original to Brueggemann in it.
The idea of Dramatic Theology has been developed by Girard’s associate Raymund Schwager at Innsbruck University. Schwager, working from a Roman Catholic cultural standpoint, dismissed the kind of approach which considers revelation as a set of propositional statements amounting to a theory and instead proposed a reading of the Bible as a web of actions, by a variety of persons (divine and human), at various points in time and place, which cannot be described in any linear fashion, but can be distilled into dramatic episodes. The theory is only arrived at retrospectively and through taking into account the many acts that contribute to it.

Schwager makes use of the word ‘act’ in its dramatic sense, presenting in *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* a structure like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Act</td>
<td>The Dawning of the Kingdom of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Act</td>
<td>The Rejection of the Kingdom of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Act</td>
<td>The Bringer of Salvation Brought to Judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Act</td>
<td>Resurrection of the Son as Judgement of the Heavenly Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Act</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit and the New Gathering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From that, essentially Catholic, analysis, he moves on to a section of observations including one entitled *The Drama of Christian Life*. In this, the person of faith is presented as an actor playing a part in which she imitates God and Jesus as closely as possible. The message is a direct, votive one: the good actor is the one who is truly dedicated, and subjects her (or his) own will and personality to true service:

“Even if a good actor puts everything into his part, his own life remains more important. It was different with the faith of Jesus. His human life had

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Schwager, 1999.

Ibid., p.218ff. Schwager acknowledges his debt to von Bathasar, from whose work his own ideas have been developed.
Making the Texts Talk

no aim of its own beside his mission. It was a matter of being the living flesh and dramatic instrumentality for that threefold life which had gripped him. A similar task stands before those who are ready to follow him. Christian faith...includes a fundamental conversion.”

One aspect of this situation which is developed in the Girard-Schwager correspondence in two ways is (a) the idea of the priest and therefore of priestly action being defined by prayer and (b) a convergence with Protestant thought, particularly that of Luther, which he found allied well with the scapegoat thesis. This writer adds to those observations that the core protestant idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ involves each Christian, through prayer, in the dramatic theology process as a participant, not as a spectator. This has profound implications for Brueggemann’s idea of the necessity of priestly intervention in the process of sacrifice, which we unfolded in Part 2, and which we will synthesize with Schwager’s insight in Chapter 20.

Brueggemann has also launched a theory of dramatic interpretation. It is not by any means identical to Schwager’s, but has a significant overlap and predates it by several years, in terms of published major works on the subject.

Although Brueggemann’s focus tends to be on a dramatic episode, whilst Schwager is interested mainly in an assembly of such episodes into something from which a viable theological scheme of some sort can be derived, each embraces the other’s range, and both settle on the key phrase

703 Girard-Schwager 1975-91, p.72.
705 Luther does not use these precise words, but says, “In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 says, “You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom,” and Revelation 5:10, “Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings.” Luther, 2009.
‘drama of salvation’ to describe the overall effect. For Schwager, this means that his starting point is to investigate the doctrine of redemption. Brueggemann’s project is rather different: to liberate the texts for the church in a new situation.

Brueggemann in particular sees the dramatic approach as a tool for understanding one’s own life in relation to God, and as a useful counter to the state of theology in the USA and elsewhere, which followed science into “a hard and non-negotiable set of ideas and concepts” and this reinforced a closed or ‘coded’ system. Acknowledging that he is greatly simplifying the issues, he claims that the current ‘Battle of the Bible’ is rooted, for conservatives, in eighteenth-century propositionalism and for liberals in nineteenth-century developmentalism, and the way out of these whirlpools is to see “biblical faith as drama for our time”.

What this actually means in theological terms and how God can be involved in drama despite being “scripted by habit” is explored on two essays on the Shape of Old Testament Theology: 1: Structure Legitimation and 2: Embrace of Pain.

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709 “To see my life as a drama (or series of overlapping dramas) is to insist that my life is not a settled certitude, as though I were painted by number. Nor is my life an empty procession of one damn thing after another. My life is rather an ongoing transaction in which issues of constancy and development (freedom), elements of playfulness, credibility and danger are all underway. While this drama is one of enormous seriousness, I can indeed trust myself to the drama, for I do not need single-handedly to ‘make it work’. In part I play against, in the presence of, and supported by the other members of the cast.” Brueggemann says that the dramatic view of one’s life enables one to see oneself as “a genuine and significant other to God.” Ibid., pp 67-68.
710 Involving for conservatives the question about God’s reality offstage (a point rooted in dogma), and for liberals the question about whether ‘this could really happen’ (a preoccupation with historical veracity). Ibid, p.69.
711 Ibid, p.66.
Brueggemann starts with a more distant perspective than Schwager, not with any call to action, but with the abstraction of reality as drama:

“What is now required and permitted is a mode of scripture interpretation quite unlike most of what we have practised before. In seeking to find a mode of interpretation congenial to our actual life in the world, I propose that we 'take' reality as a drama, and that we see the text as a script for that drama.”714

The metaphor of drama, Brueggemann says, “with its playful open-endedness”, is found to be

“an appropriate counterpart to the to the epistemology of post-modernity, because drama in life and death, as drama in the theatre, need not be so imperialistic and dare not be so absolute. Drama need not claim to voice or enact the whole of truth, but can play with, probe and explore one moment of truth with patience and courage. It intends, moreover, that this fully exposed moment of enactment should be an opening and a sacrament of everything larger, though it does not claim to grasp all that is larger.”715

Schwager has a response to this. He begins by reciting his core message of faith and action:

“Existence in faith does not mean playing a role which is strange, but being addressed by a role received (mission) in the indeterminacy at the centre of

715 Ibid.
16 Making the Texts Talk

one’s person and challenged to a new self-termination and freedom made possible by the Holy Spirit.”

He then goes on,

“It may appear at first glance that such an understanding of life is in radical opposition to modern thinking, which since the Enlightenment circles round that autonomous subject which is responsible to itself and gives laws for itself. Where Christian thought has almost exclusively based itself on the autonomous moral subject, the doctrine of redemption has also in fact run into a fundamental crisis...it is acquainted with the dialectic of the Enlightenment and has dissolved into different tendencies, so that today there no longer exists a unified modern thought.”\(^{716}\)

Schwager goes on to discuss the implications for praxis and orthopraxis under these chaotic circumstances. He concludes that *lex orandi - lex credendi*, ‘the law of prayer is the law of belief’. He directs his investigation from this point into whether “the hidden divine life finds clear expression pre-eminently in the liturgy of the church and whether this liturgy can be understood as the dramatic performance of the dramatic event of salvation in Jesus Christ.”\(^{717}\)

This is of course in clear contrast to Brueggemann, who is not concerned with liturgy, and looks mainly to the texts. A clear point of divergence has become apparent, beyond which any further comparison would become perverse. But even as this point is reached, it is also clear that there is a mutual acceptance of the location of the individual in a stew of dislocated schools of thought, in which the individual and her understanding of reality

\(^{716}\) Schwager, 1999, pp. 220-221.  
\(^{717}\) Ibid, p.223.
legitimately understood as that which impinges on her and accordingly
seems to be the case, looms large. They are, both, then, concerned with the
flight from absolutes in thought, and with the general predicament of
modern life as “postmodern, postsystem, postcertitude”. 718

The interpretation in dramatic terms of what the person of faith does when
the proposed world offered either by the text or by dogma “runs dead
against my presumed world”. 719 Any form of alienation, either from
contemporary understandings of what truth is, or from the so-called facts of
faith, or from contemporary mores, or from the religious call to action which
Schwager describes, involves liminality, and possibly exile. The metaphor of
exile is therefore one of great utility.

Brueggemann sees the drama of exile as one that prepares one for the drama
of salvation. To Schwager, the gathering of God’s people is the outcome of
exile that moves the world on - on, as both he and Girard would claim,
towards the Kingdom and the Apocalypse.

The unfinished business of both Brueggemann’s and Girard-Schwager’s
thinking (even though it is not within their personal remit) is the project to
determine how the church is to make use of drama coupled with the
experience of exile in all its forms to describe its location and its future
journey. A rich source for self-discernment, as Brueggemann said, and an
opportunity to look forward to liberation and new gathering, in Schwager’s
words. Both would agree, an opportunity to make the texts talk powerfully,
within a new order. Schwager’s emphasis on roles, and following the role
one inherits within the situations one finds oneself in, could be matched by
an additional condition: the playing of that role in relationship to other

719 Ibid.
‘characters’. The role has a meaning only in the context of relationships. And, Girard might add, the relationship can only truly prosper when Satan is not an invisible third party to it.
17 When the Sub-Version Surfaces

Like fireworks in the night
The Holy Spirit came;
Disciples’ fears took flight
When touched by fronds of flame
And suddenly the world was young
As hope embraced a Saviour’s claim.\(^{720}\)

The business of this chapter is breakthroughs: breakthroughs from one habit of thought to another, the shattering of the usual way of looking at the world, to admit a new form of understanding. In science, this is often referred to as ‘paradigm shift’: a revolution in thinking which affects how reality is perceived. Within religion, it is what prophecy achieves.

When Brueggemann speaks of prophecy as the sub-version of reality\(^{721}\), he is employing a deliberate double-entendre, referring to the paradigm-shift\(^{722}\) involved in committing to an alternative future scenario. He is of course also referring to its subversive effect. In considering this, the first thing to be done is to examine the relationship of the sub-version of reality (the catalyst of the incipient paradigm shift) to the everyday world and established attitudes, and see how and when it successfully changes perceptions of reality. So, we will look first at what the paradigm-shifters actually do: they criticise the established view as being unsound, and they present a vision of future possibilities which are differently founded. They function as critic-visionaries, and whilst the critical aspect may be straightforward in itself (though probably disputed and almost certainly unpalatable initially), the visionary aspect with which it is associated is likely to call into question perceptions of what exists and what is possible. The combination of the two may therefore be intensely difficult, threatening and unwelcome.

\(^{720}\) Ian Masson Fraser, in Church of Scotland Church Hymnary 4, No. 584.
\(^{721}\) Brueggemann, 2000, p.1ff.
\(^{722}\) See page 115, footnote 246.
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This takes us back to the quotation from Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which we referred to earlier. Blake’s point was that poets assert truth which they feel, but do not necessarily derive from any external source that they can positively identify. They do this through an intuitive sympathy with ‘the infinite in every thing’, and through ‘honest indignation’. The first of these may be the identity of God, but the second is the voice of God. The sense of the infinite is the spring from which the indignation flows. Blake also refers on many occasions to the imagination not only as the fundamental capability of the poet (visionary), but also as the foundation of knowledge.723

Brueggemann refers to the energizing language of amazement used by the prophets of Israel in describing God’s new plan.724 Acknowledging his debt to Paul Ricoeur in the development of his thought on this subject, he says,

“I have come to see that imagination is the capacity to entertain, host, trust and respond to images of reality (God and the world) that are beyond conventional dominant reason. It has slowly dawned on me that biblical exposition ...is an artistic preoccupation that is designed to generate alternative futures.”725

The ‘depiction of alternative futures’ is identical with ‘paradigm shifts’, and paradigm shifts are in a relationship with formative periods in culture.

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723 For instance:

“Imagination is the Real and Eternal World of which the Vegetable World is but a faint shadow.”

“What is now proved was once only imagined.”

“To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.”

Blake, 1966 p.431 *Auguries of Innocence.*


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(though cause and effect are hard to distinguish). Therefore, let us consider the circumstances under which paradigm shifts tend to occur, or, to use Brueggemann’s term, the point at which the sub-version surfaces. That is not so much a point about when the prophet speaks, as about when and in what conditions his message registers.

Prophets have the capacity to insert into the culture they serve a new conceptual framework relating to God and mankind. Intuitively, they comprehend the scheme of that relationship, understanding what its essentials are. They know how to communicate it, because they understand their public, or, to use Brueggemann’s own term, they comprehend the dominant version of reality of the moment. Without that comprehension and an ability to confront it, they would remain voices crying incomprehensibly in the wilderness. But with these twin capabilities, they can articulate the possibility of a new reality. Their capabilities come from, and are dependent upon their liminality, their position of being on a threshold between two existential states, and being able to mediate the future one to the present.

Prophets effectively try to set new rules, and that means that they must either modify or dispose of the existing ones. To fail would be to invite a backlash, and there is anecdotal evidence in the Bible that this often happened. Prophets being scapegoated: persecuted, driven out or exterminated is something on which Girard has much to say.

The cycle of prophecy successfully attacks the status quo, establishing new rules which in time harden into orthodoxy, and in the long term are sooner or later overthrown. There are minor revolutions and phases of modification.

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726 The depth, vigour and cost of the communicative power is well illustrated in Hosea 1-3, in which the prophet’s own marriage to an unfaithful wife is a vehicle for bringing alive the reality of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

727 The term is used formatively by Victor Turner in Turner (1969).

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too, in which prophetic groups emerge who define themselves over against the dominant version within their society: mystics, radicals, charismatics, apophatics, Methodists. These dissenters, who may be prophets in the sense in which we have proved that term, often punch above their weight, particularly in their popular appeal.

Religious Radicalism and Social Crisis

If prophets tend to stand at turning points in the religious tradition, the turning points themselves tend to coincide not only with cultural crisis but also times of social stress. The prime examples are the Exodus from slavery in Egypt and the wanderings in the wilderness which were led by Moses, and the exile in Babylon which was the context for Isaiah. Brueggemann has concentrated on the second of these, and Norman Gottwald has produced seminal studies of the first, most notably, *The Tribes of Yahweh*.729

Gottwald’s work on the Exodus paints it as the tradition which recounts the forming of a nation. The account is “narrative-like literature of a history-like quality that stops short of being actual historiography”, but nevertheless “it is possible to extract a plot line that exhibits unity of action and causal connections.” 730 The account serves to link Israel-in-embryo in the wilderness and Israel in florescence in the land, by means of the following factors:

1. A people oppressed by kings unites to escape from bondage to the oppressor.

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2. A freed people unites and experiments to create a tribal/intertribal community of mutually supported equals.

3. A people struggles to create necessary leadership in the absence of coercive state power.

4. A people in a very precarious economic situation labours to provision itself both as it migrates and as it cultivates its own land.

5. A people threatened by disease and plague, and perhaps under-population, struggles to reproduce and preserve itself by adequate hygienic measures.\textsuperscript{731}

The function of the prophet, Moses, was to envision the new possibilities and lead his people through a long and perilous journey to their realisation. The range of issues involved is nothing like the situation which confronted Israel in exile in Babylon. Brueggemann describes that predicament as follows:

"Exile, that is social, cultural displacement, is not primarily geographical but liturgical and symbolic." \textsuperscript{732}

The statement is not entirely clear, as liturgy is not a subject which Brueggemann writes about, though of course, writing elsewhere, he composes it. He quotes Alan Mintz:

" the catastrophic element in events [of exile] is defined as the power to shatter the existing paradigms of meaning, especially as regards the bonds between God and Israel"\textsuperscript{733}

\textsuperscript{731} Ibid., p.127
\textsuperscript{732} Brueggemann, 1997, p.15.
\textsuperscript{733} Mintz, 1984, p.x
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So, the Exodus covers the formation of the nation and its bonds with God, and the Exile the situation in which those bonds seemed in danger of being shattered, and the paradigms of meaning, according to Brueggemann, were indeed shattered.  

Brueggemann goes on to comment that when this happens, there is a difficult move to be made through the shattering to “newly voiced meaning”. This move depends on “careful and sustained attention to speech.”  He then goes on to adopt Paul Ricoeur’s terminology of ‘limit experiences’ articulated through ‘limit expressions’. This is a point about extreme situations calling forth radical expressions.

“Newly voiced meaning” can amount to radicalism, and there is a tradition of this across the centuries against which one can compare Brueggemann’s views. The results of this comparison are illuminating. For instance, Norman Cohn, in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, describes a great range of such occurrences in the Middle Ages, and relates them to uncertainties: the sense that the age was about to end and the terrible economic precariousness of the expanding class of urban poor in particular. This insurgence of radicals included many claimants to being the new Messiah, or Jesus himself, or the reincarnation of other charismatic but secular leaders such as Baldwin, Count of Flanders and Emperor of Constantinople or Frederick I Barbarossa, Holy Roman Emperor. Although not restricted to Germany and the Low Countries, the insurgence was much more widespread there than in France, Britain, Spain or Scandinavia.

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734 Brueggemann, 1997, p.2. He refers to the “loss of a structured, reliable world, ...(and new circumstances in which) treasured symbols of meaning are mocked and dismissed.”  
735 Brueggemann, 1997, p.15.  
736 Ricoeur, 1975, pp.107-45.  
737 Cohn, 1957.  
738 Baldwin was made Emperor by the Crusaders when he captured that city in 1204. With a year, he had been captured by the Bulgarians and put to death. Ibid, p.90.
17 When the Sub-Version Surfaces

It is notable that this distribution follows a pattern of government. The areas where radicals were more likely to appear (Germany and the Low Countries) were governed as smaller units often led by dukes, margraves and electors who were at odds with each other, so that warfare constantly recurred.\textsuperscript{739} The settled state which kingship brings, and particularly national kingship with consistent, systematic government, tends to be inimical to prophecy. On the other hand, rapid social change was often the catalyst for “revolutionary movements of the poor, headed by messiahs or living saints”.\textsuperscript{740}

Compare this with parts of the history of Israel. The administration of the people during the period following the invasion of Canaan was by ‘judges’ (whose character is of national heroes) responsible under God as the deputies who implement his policies. This spasmodic mode of government was brought to an end by the people’s request for a king\textsuperscript{741}; what they wanted was an end to unreliability and the current (rather sleazy) rule of Samuel’s sons as ‘Judges’, so that Israel could be more like other nations, and be managed, organised in peace and have their battles fought in times of war. In other words, they wanted a settled, comprehensive, systematic government, even at a high price in taxes. Their request was granted, but with the proviso that they would not have God’s ear in the way that they had had in the past. God would not be responsible to them in hearing their complaints.

Prophecy is, then, often the child of turbulent conditions, and the words attributed to God in 1 Samuel indicate that these are the conditions in which God is active within the life of Israel; actively in touch. On that basis, it would be logical to infer generally that God’s word is not readily heard, or so accessible, in settled times when people have put in place their own scheme which dominates all others. Indeed, Samuel is saying (on God’s behalf) that

\textsuperscript{739} Ibid, pp. 53-60.
\textsuperscript{740} Cohn, 1957, p.53.
\textsuperscript{741} 1 Samuel 8.
17 When the Sub-Version Surfaces

in such circumstances, God is not at hand. The dominant version, not just of government but even of conceptualised reality, is that of the human rulers.

The Catastrophe of Exile & Limit Expressions

In *Cadences of Home*, Brueggemann goes a stage further. Writing about exile, both the biblical exile in Babylon, and the metaphor it represents for the contemporary church in the USA, he suggests that as the Christian message is a message of the dispossessed. Christians exist under a foreign culture, with an alien version of reality emphatically dominant in the world they inhabit. Therefore, to be Christian is to stand apart from the dominant culture and naturally to have a bias for the changing or overthrow of that culture, or for departing from it and leaving it behind. (This last point is my inference, rather than Brueggemann’s explicit statement.) The longing for a God-related form of structure and meaning in their lives can be interpreted for the present day as ‘Christian exile’ in a secular culture.\(^{742}\)

Christian ‘exile’ is defined by assaults on Christian paradigms of meaning, and Brueggemann and Mintz claim that the position of the dispossessed makes it essential to recount the event or state of exile, then re-voice their message in new terms; as Mintz puts it,

> “first to represent the catastrophe, and then to reconstruct, replace, or redraw the threatened paradigm of meaning, and thereby make creative survival possible.”\(^{743}\)

\(^{742}\) Brueggemann, 1997, p.2.
\(^{743}\) Mintz, ibid., p.2.
This is the kind of thing that Paul Ricoeur refers to as ‘limit experiences’, which bring about ‘limit expressions’, which are necessary to articulate the shattering of paradigms of meaning:

“Limit expressions bring about the rupturing of ordinary modes of speech....The expression ‘Kingdom of God’ may be understood as the index that points limit-expressions in the direction of limit experiences that are the ultimate referent of our modes of speaking.”

Ricoeur holds that language uses limit expressions only to open up our experience, to make it explode in the direction of experiences that are themselves limit-experiences. The suggestion made here, drawing upon both Ricoeur and Brueggemann, is that the expressions which have the capacity to articulate prophetic insights are ‘limit expressions’, coined in the white heat of ‘limit experiences’. Only in such special conditions can they be brought into existence.

However, Ricoeur redefines what ‘limit experiences’ might be, drawing back from ‘the language game of the eschatological’ and apocalyptic associations, and refers to moments of inner transformation, quoting “the kingdom of God is within you.” This is an aspect which lies outside Brueggemann’s field of argument in his discussion of the Exile and contemporary situations on which that experience throws light.

Brueggemann, drawing upon Victor Turner, refers to transitional states, the in-between time and place in social transformation when “the old

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744 Ricoeur, 1995, p.61.
747 Brueggemann, 1997, p.29.
748 Turner, 1969.
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configurations of social reality are increasingly seen to be in jeopardy”. He stated that a safe place is required within such situations to host ambiguity and resolve it without pressure. In this, he is seeking to avoid the culture of violence against which Christianity is defined. However, as we have seen, the emergence of prophecy has frequently not coincided with any safe place, but only with the most turbulent and unsettled of times.

Our focus, following Brueggemann’s theory, is therefore upon prophecy as a temporary phenomenon, surfacing from time to time, usually at a time of social turbulence, in the form of a subsidiary, contrary vision of reality. It is temporary because its expression is articulated powerfully only for a limited time, before the mainstream of the discussion hardens into orthodoxy. Such an orthodoxy goes with more settled, stable times, and is found to have come to terms with human institutions, and therefore tends to affirm them. In other words, orthodoxies by definition tend to be tied to the dominant version of reality within their form of life.

However, there is an alternative scenario, such as that exhibited by particular orthodoxies such as Orthodox Judaism, in which existing beliefs (including prophecy), existing customs and rituals and membership of the group are protected and made unchanging to preserve them in a foreign or hostile environment, or indeed during a long period of instability.

The general tendency towards orthodoxy is exhibited in most faiths, which have a defined canon of texts which is closed. The reason given is usually the avoidance of error or heresy, but it may be that an underlying human

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749 However, there is an immediate collision with the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible, much of which is coercive in the Monarchical period (though not the Elohist), and also with the very confrontational nature of some of Jesus’s preaching.

750 As in the Synod of Jerusalem (1672), at which the Greek Orthodox Church defined its canon of divinely inspired writings. Similar definitions were made at the Council of Trent.
tendency is at work: the quest for certainty. Therefore, it is very hard for orthodoxies to be prophetic, without ceasing to seem to be orthodox. This means that prophecy tends to be defined as an activity of the past within orthodoxies and if it emerged in the present moment would certainly run the risk of being branded and even dismissed by those who control the orthodoxy as unorthodox and therefore reprehensible. An example of this, some would agree, might be the lack of approbation for the Liberation Theology movement of South America in certain parts of the Catholic establishment; and approval of the late Archbishop Oscar Romero in others.

As a broad generalization, it would probably be fair to say that in defending a status quo, orthodoxies historically have often knowingly or unknowingly gone along with the ways of the world, or the normal standards of the society of their time. Their motivation may just have been to survive and continue in some remaining aspect of their work. An extreme example of this would be the churches in Germany in the 1930s, all except one of which affirmed the Nazi regime. If Brueggemann and Girard are to be followed, then that acceptance of the status quo, through embracing the dominant version of reality, is tantamount to an acceptance of the narrative of violence. The implications of this are of course very serious within the thinking of these two writers.

There are moments (relatively short periods in history) when the subversion breaks through orthodoxy as an isolated event, the orthodoxy continuing afterwards, even if somewhat influenced by the outburst. When

(1546) by the Roman Catholic Church, the 39 Articles of 1563 by the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 by British Calvinists. Within Judaism, the canon is defined by the Masoretic Text.

Though such radicalism may seek to get back to an original orthodoxy, as in the case of the current Radical Orthodoxy movement.

If evidence of this is required, the sheer absence of recognized prophets since biblical times in the Christian tradition would provide the strongest possible evidence.

The exception was the Confessing Church, led by Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, amongst others.
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this happens it can be an occasion of remarkable vibrancy and energy, and this quality is characteristically preserved in its literature. That is not to say that such periods are set apart from the narrative of violence – far from it – but the turbulence of the period is not only one in which God-talk is more necessary\textsuperscript{754}; it also throws up opportunities for revised imaginings and new expressions, which at other times are much harder to come by. An example would be the Apophatics, a tradition which includes writers widely separated in place and time, from fifth-century Syria to seventeenth-century England: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Meister Eckhart, the writer of The Cloud of Unknowing, Thomas Traherne.

The suggestion here is that what we observe in these mystics is a form of prophecy which is particularly apparent not so much at the end of a cultural cycle, or a point of crisis in a settled state; on the contrary, these effects are more apparent at the beginning of cultural cycles when concepts, and therefore language, are naturally in a state of flux. The volcanic eruptions throw up new forms of expression in the period before the lava hardens and loses its fluid capability and its heat. This is not the same point as Brueggemann’s: he suggests that prophecy accompanies the end of a cycle. It could be argued that the distinction is not a particularly helpful one, as both end and beginning are part of a process of transition. However, in this discussion, causation is important, and that is where the difference of emphasis lies. The association of prophecy with emerging new ways of thinking may be consistent with aspects of Girard’s theories, as we shall see later.

The Contemporary Attack on Meaning

Girard takes a dark, sometimes apocalyptic view of the present day. Far from believing that the period of flux through which we are living is likely to prove

\textsuperscript{754} Brueggemann, 2000, p.95.
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any sort of golden age or time of Renewal for religion, he suggests that the current changes may prove to be terminal. As we have seen, he detects a new Puritanism which ‘castrates the signified’ and by doing so may lead to a severe crisis within the foreseeable future.

In the last chapter of *Things Hidden*, Girard describes an observable trend in society:

"We are getting away from one kind of Puritanism only to fall into another. It is now not a matter of depriving mankind of sexuality, but of something we need even more – meaning" 755

A follower of Brueggemann might point out straight away that this is what happens in the crisis-ridden environment that marks the end of an era and the opening up of times favourable to prophecy. Similarly, one might observe that the desiccation of old modes of finding and expressing meaning is a necessary precursor to the dawning of the new. What happens, it could be said, is that old modes of conveying meaning decline, become stiff and lacking in utility, and from this situation in which meaning is the casualty, a vigorous new mode emerges.

But Girard does not seem to be saying that the existing modes of thought and expression have become incapable of conveying meaning, but that a form of Puritanism has got a grip on contemporary culture, just when old puritan attitudes to sex have been relaxed. In what seemed to be a liberal time, a new form of restrictive thinking emerges. This new Puritanism clamps down on any signs of belief, and its effect is to exorcize meaning, 'desiccating' texts and annihilating any prospect of knowledge with a nihilism put with an assurance and dogmatism of the strongest kind. This is “a Puritanism of

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meaning that kills all that it touches.”756 It is suggested here that the ‘Puritanism’ referred to, even though it may be Puritan in character in this case, might be defined more generally as an inelasticity of thought, and that then parallels become apparent in other situations where a phase of culture is in decline.

Girard is articulating a desperate realisation that thought has nowhere to go under such circumstances. The old certainties have been cast aside, but nothing is available to replace them. The 19th century philosophers and theoreticians (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) – thinkers with whom Girard engages widely757- are not possible sources of a new kind of thought. Christianity is in a double bind because it has done away with the old sacrificial version, but the new progressive version has done away with apocalyptic intervention: it “has sacrificed a large part of the text to an ideal, without noticing – irony of ironies! – that this text is the only way of attaining it.”758

In other words, Girard is saying that we have reached a point in contemporary society where we are expert in defining lack of meaning and concentrated on that end, but have lost the ability to find or recognize meaning. In that sense, we ‘castrate the signified’. Girard is historically-minded, and often quick to quote examples from the past in support of his claims, but in this case, he quotes none. This is because he believes that the present situation is uniquely barren. However, Girard, despite himself, concludes Things Hidden with Ezekiel’s parable of the dry bones returning to life when all seemed extinct, commenting that he “had always cherished the hope that meaning and life were one”, and that the breath of the spirit is all

756 Ibid, p.441-442.
757 For instance, his most recent book Battling to the End (Girard, 2010) has a section on Clausewitz and Hegel; Violence and the Sacred (Girard, 1972) considers Freud and the Oedipus Complex, etc.
758 Ibid.
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that is needed to bring about renewal. Although Girard does not state this at this point, it is evident that within his thinking, hope now rests on the renunciation of revenge, and this is the 'meaning' lost sight of in the barrenness of the present situation.

If this is the case, we see the point at which Girard's vision runs out, and apocalypse looms. Girard clearly sees terror in his own theory. But Brueggemann's vision does not run out. Girard witnesses a triumph of the here-and-now over vision, and an eclipse of the holy; beyond that he can only hope and pray. But Brueggemann would ascribe to the situation the favourable conditions for a new beginning, a destruction which is necessary and ultimately creative.

If this new opportunity is not to be understood in terms of ideas which can be assembled into a grand narrative, what vehicle is possible? The answer may be, the understanding of the place of oneself and also one's group in a confused, alien world of chaotically clashing accounts as being one of a role played in relationship to others.

Old men ought to be explorers
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

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Review

Research question, part 3: Prophecy: outdated and never outdated
Examine the meaning of prophecy, ancient and modern, its relationship
to the dominant version of reality, and the meaning that might be found
in it.

The response to prophecy, in all ages we know of, seems to have been
often simply to reject them, to stone the prophets literally or
metaphorically, because they are subversive and threaten to
undermine the DVR. Therefore, prophecy may be frequently invisible
as such, and classed in other ways, until time or some radical change
in circumstances brings about a change of perspective which gives the
prophets recognition.

Brueggemann explains the circumstances and workings of the whole
area of prophecy; Girard is involved in laying out a new version of
reality in the face of the DVR.
PART 4: SYNTHESIS
A covenant is a solemn contract, not merely a set of promises, though that is how it is often interpreted in church circles; it involves rights and responsibilities on both sides, and breach of the terms may endanger the whole relationship. It is therefore relational in essence; its chief concerns are how the parties are to interact, and how people are to behave towards one another and meet predetermined standards in so doing. In so far as covenant defines religion, religion is about behaviour. Ethics forms a large part of this, but ‘behaviour’ covers more than just ethics; it involves the maintenance of relationships: the relationship between God and his people, the relationships between people.

The obvious parallel is the idea of a social contract, mooted by John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Some writers on the subject go further than the idea of a parallel, and suggest that “the Covenant of Moses and the New Covenant of Jesus are actually “early examples of a Social Contract” on the basis that a social contract is a record of reciprocal promises between the parties:

“The details of what is being promised vary from one Social Contract to another, but the promises are voluntary, mutually reciprocal, and rely on trust and honour rather than policing through sanctions or punishments. In a social contract community, breaches of promise or breaches of expectation are typically resolved through a civil

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761 Ricoeur, 1995, p.65.
762 Not all writers on the subject share this emphasis on relationship. Brueggemann, for instance, describes it as “a theological idea, a liturgic practice, and a durable public institution in Israel”. He does, however, acknowledge that it is founded on God’s resolve to be in the relationship. Brueggemann, 2002, p.37.
763 This paragraph is the present writer’s analysis, though it draws in ideas from Brueggemann.
resolution process that does not contemplate a sanctions or punishment enforcement regime.”\textsuperscript{765}

Biblical covenants are like secular bargains and treaties but at this point, the parallel breaks down, because of the form of some biblical covenants. In the Bible, not all covenants place duties on both parties, and some, such as those at Gen. 9:16 and Gen. 15:18 look like simple promises by God. However, duties may still be implied (particularly of faithfulness), and this writer’s view is that this duty is implied and that consequences follow its breach. So, we see that a breach of the agreement puts the relationship itself into suspension. God understands the failure as a rejection, and Israel comes to understand that this is indeed what has happened. And for God to ‘turn away his face’ can have dire consequences and be a punishment of the most severe kind, leading to a loss of protection and security. Indeed, the relationship with Israel is a particular one, because Israel understands the idea of a covenant, whereas its neighbour peoples do not:

“The term ‘Canaan’ or ‘Canaanite’, it is agreed, is not an ethnic term. It is an ideological term, and is used by Israel to characterize all those who refuse Israel’s vision of a covenantal reality.”\textsuperscript{766}

“The promise of the covenantal drama is the evocation of a community of joy that finds true communion and freedom in glad obedience. The entry point into such a community of joyful freedom in obedience is the practice of assertion and abandonment. It is this practice that our culture so fears and resists, that our community of faith has long understood to be the arena for obedience that glorifies God and makes the world a neighbourhood. In such a practice, both our fearful conformity and troubled autonomy are overcome. Through

\textsuperscript{765} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{766} Brueggemann, 1999, p.27. Brueggemann refers to Nils Peter Lmche (sic), The Canaanites and their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites (JSOTSsup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 191).
such daring and constancy we become members of the Beloved Community."\textsuperscript{767}

So, in the Bible, the idea of a covenant depends upon the recognition of the deal and the attention of the parties; their absence from the arrangement or lack of attention to it renders the whole thing defunct, or a sham. God must be actively present, and the people must truly focus on him. So, in this particular context, it is hard to dispose of the idea of the numinous, or talk of religion fined down to ethics, as Bonhoeffer did in an exploratory way. Covenants may be largely ethical in content, and be interpreted as an aspect of ‘the Word’; indeed, they are thought by some to be capable of displacing the numinous, or the functions of the numinous. But to allow that this has happened or could happen, is to deny the relational aspect and be left only with an ethical understanding, and therefore a lesser arrangement than once existed. However, within such an understanding could lurk an aspect of the numinous not recognized as such, in waiting, as it were, for revelation.

In this chapter, we shall examine in what way covenants, and particularly the one or ones to which Jesus referred, are foundational: foundational to belief, but also perhaps foundational to an understanding of the predicament of humanity.

The Everlasting Covenant and the New Covenant

Let us put the various covenants in perspective. There are a number of them referred to in the Old Testament: those of Noah [Gen. 9:16], Abraham [Gen.15:18-21], at Sinai [Ex.24:8], with the royal house [2 Sam. 7:12], and the new Covenant anticipated by Jeremiah [Jer. 31:34]. Gottwald, in his seminal study on the sociology of the religion of liberated Israel, has analysed Theophanic and Covenant Texts, as sources for Covenant in pre-monarchic Israel. The analysis is intended to show the kind of relations that existed

\textsuperscript{767} Brueggemann, 1999, p.34.
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between Yahweh and Israel in early times. Note that the occasion of Covenant may be marked by animal sacrifice\textsuperscript{768}.

Margaret Barker, in her work on the relationship of Jesus’s message to the theology of the First Temple\textsuperscript{769}, has given close attention to these various covenants. She notes that ‘new covenant for the remission of sins’, so often assumed to be key within Christianity, is a term probably patched together; the words ‘new covenant’ are only ‘securely’ found at 1 Corinthians 11:25\textsuperscript{770}, and not so found in the early-dated manuscripts of the gospels. The words at Matthew 26:28, “this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” may be a redaction, as they appear first in the third

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Exodus 19:3-8} Israel, through Moses’ mediation, agrees to a covenant with Yahweh in which it accepts his sovereignty and agrees to do what he commands.
  \item \textit{Exodus 24: 1-2, 9-11} Moses, the Levitical leaders, and seventy elders of Israel ‘behold’ God on the mountain and eat and drink in his presence (a covenant meal?).
  \item \textit{Exodus 24:3-8} Moses and young men of Israel officiate at a sacrifice in which people covenant to obey the commands of Yahweh as written in ‘the book of the covenant’ (the Covenant Code of Exodus 20:24-23:19) and announce in his “words” (the Decalogue of Exodus 20:1-17).
  \item \textit{Exodus 34:2-3, 5-10, 27-28} Yahweh declaims his sovereignty over Israel to Moses and announces his covenant “in accordance with these words” (the Decalogue of Exodus 34:11-26).
  \item \textit{Deuteronomy 26:16-19} A two-sided covenant formula is given in which Israel declares Yahweh is its God and Yahweh declares that Israel is his people.
  \item \textit{Joshua 24} At Shechem, Joshua receives converts to Yahwism in a covenant act in which the alternative choices of Yahweh, or the old gods of Canaan are offered to the assembled peoples.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{768} Gottwald, 1979, p.57:

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  \item \textit{Exodus 19:3-8} Israel, through Moses’ mediation, agrees to a covenant with Yahweh in which it accepts his sovereignty and agrees to do what he commands.
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\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{769} Barker, 2004, Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{770} Though these words are also used at Hebrews 9:15. It seems clear that this recounts the announcement of a new covenant. In Hebrews 9, the words ‘remission of sins’ are not used in relationship to covenant, but it does say that Christ died to ‘abolish sin’ (9:26), so the self-gift and sacrifice are perhaps tied together with the ‘new covenant’ mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:25.
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century. She believes that the Covenant Jesus refers to, ‘for the remission of sins’ is not a new covenant, but a long-existing one. She also believes that the reference is not so much to the covenants with Noah and Abraham, or that at Sinai, or that with the royal house, but that mentioned at Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is the only one which refers to the remission of sins. Jeremiah’s covenant is described as ‘everlasting or ‘eternal’, a word which can also carry the meaning ‘hidden’. Yet, on the face of it, the situation Jeremiah looks forward to is not hidden at all, because universal knowledge of God is involved, and the law will be “written on the hearts” of Israel. Perhaps what is intended is that it is God’s law that will occupy the hidden places of their hearts rather than the unworthy instincts which people generally secrete there, and because this is the case, God will have no need to hold their wrongdoing against them or remember their sin.

But Barker goes on to assert that “in the world of the Temple, the hidden, secret place was the eternal state outside time”. This seems speculative. The evidence presented is only in the form of understandings of the conceptual understructure of Hebrew and biblical quotations which seem to this author to have been selected somewhat opportunistically. Nevertheless, the idea is an interesting one.

771 Barker refers to ‘earlier texts’ without being specific as to which ones exactly she has in mind.
772 Gottwald states that “Israelite tradition identifies Moses as the one who first brought Israel into covenant with Yahweh, as opposed to the anticipatory covenants made with individual ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ‘Covenant’ is an awkward and somewhat misleading term for the Hebrew berith, which refers to a formal, solemn, and binding agreement between parties in which there are obligations to do certain acts, or to refrain from doing them, and there are promises or threats of consequences that follow fulfilment or breach of the obligations” Gottwald, 2009, p.115. It is not clear why the covenant with Israel should be accorded a status eclipsing that of the earlier covenants with Israel’s ancestors. Though the importance of the covenant on Sinai is very great for the nascent nation, there is nothing about this covenant to indicate that earlier covenants were revoked or superseded. The material in them might continue to be important and additional to that of the Sinai covenant.
773 Berit ‘olam in Hebrew.
774 Jeremiah 31:33
775 Jeremiah 31:34.
776 Barker, 2004, p.34.
Numbers 25:11-13 (in an episode about Moses) refers to a covenant ‘for all time’\textsuperscript{777}, or ‘everlasting’ according to various translations of the Bible. Barker says ‘eternal’\textsuperscript{778}, but the dimension of timelessness inherent in this choice of word does not seem to be warranted in this case. The word used in Hebrew ['\textit{olam}'] often translated ‘everlasting’ or, more literally, ‘age-long’ does not seem in most of its applications to have the sense of timelessness, but more of being good for the whole of the remainder of human history; perhaps for human history after a particular threshold has been passed. We are hampered in our understanding here by the absence of a developed future tense in Hebrew. However, God is also referred to as ‘\textit{olam}, and this usage is sometimes translated as ‘eternal’. The Hebrew word used, therefore, is not a conclusive guide. All we can say for certain is that within its original context, the usage refers to something outside current awarenesses of time, but not necessarily outside human history.

We must also consider the term ‘eternal’ and its ramifications for the past. As a covenant is a contract between willing parties, it is really more or less impossible to conceive of it as predating a rational form of life. Therefore, for us, the usage ‘for eternity’ seems wrong for this reason too. The covenant must be a part of human history, and must therefore have a start date, within time. What then, might a covenant be that is hidden, bearing in mind that the etymology of ‘hidden’ in Hebrew apparently has some sort of overlap with ‘eternal’\textsuperscript{779} Is there something about being trapped in time (which humans are), that means that things which already exist in the world outside time, or perhaps before humanity came to exist, are simply not apparent? Is religious Gnosticism involved in any presumed answer to this conundrum, because if it is, then a charge of Gnosticism may be unavoidable for Enoch, or indeed for Barker. However, within this uncertain morass, the idea of a time to come,

\textsuperscript{777} New English Bible.
\textsuperscript{778} Though she does enlarge on the ambiguity world of the term, and refers to its additional meaning of ‘hidden’.
\textsuperscript{779} Barker writes about ‘hidden’ and ‘eternal’ at length. I do not think it would be unfair to say that she just ‘has a hunch’ about a connection between the two, but it is impossible to describe in precise terms Barker, 2002, Ch.2.
rather than a speculation on the remote past, seems a more tempting solution and more likely to have attracted Jeremiah's mind.

This idea of the hidden nature of God's rationality is something Brueggemann also refers to, in connection with the wisdom literature. God's reasoning, which gives rise to the terms of covenant is not obvious or easily guessed by humans. The world, says Brueggemann, refuses to be decoded, and for that reason ethical decisions are "endlessly provisional and open to reformulation". The word 'endlessly' might be questioned, bearing in mind what Jeremiah forecasts. For that reason, one could argue that ethics cannot for the present take the place of the calls of religion and particularly of prophecy, because ethics on their own lack any link to what is decisive but also hidden; hidden, one might add, until new conditions are written on people's hearts. If that time were to come, ethical behaviour would become automatic and outside reference would become largely or completely unnecessary.

Girard and the Context of Covenant: Original Sin and Original Blessing

This may aid a consideration of the relationship of thinking about the Covenant to Girard's scheme. Let us begin with the remote past. He identifies the satanic tendency to mimetic behaviour and the victimage process as something that occurred during 'hominization'. In other words, it is as old as the species. Some recent thinkers have said that essential traits of it can be traced in animals, which means that it may be older than the species, at least

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781 See p. 91, also p.327ff and Ch. 20 of this thesis.
782 Including several speakers including David Barash and David S. Wilson at the Girard Darwin Conference, Surviving Our Origins, Cambridge, May 2011. The papers of this conference are not yet available but known to be under preparation for publication shortly by Prof. Paul Gifford of St Andrew's University.
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in part. Therefore, there can have been no ‘unfallen’ human state before the mimetic tendency exerted itself, as Coakley has observed.\footnote{Coakley, 2009.}

If the fall and hominization are contemporaneous, then innocence was the state of pre-humans or anthropoids. The problem here is that we are imposing theological categories onto what, for Girard, is an anthropological argument. The crucial point here is the idea of an event: a sharp separation from the divine state, whether that is spoken of as a matter of the development of species (‘hominization’), or as a feature of entering time. In either case, one might use the vocabulary of the fall and ‘original sin’. At this point, one might observe that there is a broad compatibility with Barker’s interpretation: that is, the everlasting covenant is predicated on an inaccessible previous way of understanding the world.

James Alison argues that “original sin is known in its ecclesial overcoming”\footnote{Alison, 1998, Chapter 6, p.162ff.}, that is, he finds the reality of original sin delineated through ‘ecclesial hypostasis’ – what we are becoming through ecclesial life. This sophisticated argument from cure to the original problematic state is essentially Girardian, because of its dependence on the hidden nature of mimetic traits. According to Alison, it is the achievement of Christian thinking to reveal what was previously hidden.

Steinmair-Posel, drawing on the work of Peter Sloterdijk, Raymund Schwager and James Alison, also takes up the idea of original sin, and comments as follows:

“Recently the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk called the concept of conflictual mimesis the “scientific version of the doctrine of original sin.” Symbolically the scene of origin is described by the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve in paradise. This story tells us about the serpent, which is traditionally identified as a satanic figure and which Schwager interprets as a symbol for conflictive mimesis. This serpent fallaciously distorts God’s words and thus presents God as a
rival to the human beings. The serpent insinuates that God withholds something from humankind so that they may not be like God.”

“On the basis of the insights of mimetic theory, Raymund Schwager and James Alison have tried to show how the original perversion and distortion of the experience of the divine could have happened historically. Both theologians have drawn up a scenario for this original perversion. Schwager imagines that the anthropoids, who had just attained the capacity for self-transcendence, culpably remained behind their newly bestowed possibilities, that is, that they failed to use them adequately.”

Schwager is of course interpreting the Fall and the story of Adam and Eve in Girardian terms. However, this seems to run into difficulties when he begins to imagine this in a realist way, as an event involving anthropoids. The explanation then seems uncharacteristically speculative, and frankly, a rather lame account of the evolutionary failure of pre-human anthropoids. It may well be that they failed to imagine the mind of God, but the idea that they should have done this, as Schwager suggests, is rather odd, as is the notion that they are (in God’s judgement presumably) to blame for the failing. This seems like a blind alley for any sort of discussion, as there is no source or evidence of any kind to latch on to, and Schwager does not venture into social science or archaeology-anthropology to support his suggestion.

Barker, though, is careful to build upon the source material available. She finds further evidence for her scheme in the book of Enoch, which, as she observes, traces the fall of man to interaction with fallen angels. They taught people the ways of evil, and inculcated them into those ways. This resulted in

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786 Ibid., p.8.
the eternal covenant being broken. Isaiah refers to something apparently similar: angels who rebelled:

"Sons I have reared and brought up
But they have rebelled against me
Ah, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity
Offspring of evildoers,
Sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have despised the Holy One of Israel,
They are utterly estranged."  

We have already noted that Barker, in discussing the significance of covenant, comments that within this subject, theologically what is hidden, is eternal. This is based on the definition in a Hebrew dictionary. Her argument here is that elements of the physical world, with the exception of humans and sea-creatures, are never of wholly divine origin, though ‘hidden things’ may be. She cites the Hebrew word *bara*, and its usage in support of her analysis.

Barker delves into Hebrew to find a link between *bara*, which refers only to divine activity and means create or separate, and *berith*, meaning covenant, with root meaning ‘bind’. The importance of this link is that creation and covenant both involve promoting order by imposing limitations (binding). This terminology has possibly leaked through into some early Christian expression: “I bind unto myself this day the strong name of the Trinity”. In the Hebrew, this motif of binding extended through many understandings of order, including that of kings and rulers: “The LORD and his Messiah must have maintained both the natural and the social order by bonds and weavings and *this was the eternal covenant*. (My emphasis).

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787 Isaiah 1:2, 4 as quoted by Barker
790 Opening lines of hymn by St Patrick, of Roman British origin but active in Ireland, 372-466, church of Scotland, Church Hymnary 4, No. 639.
Though Girard does not particularly pick upon the term ‘binding’, it is not at all difficult to interpolate it into his discourse: humans are bound to a nature which involves desire, imitation and rivalry; humans are also bound to God through Jesus in a commitment to recognise and disempower this bond. Similarly, unbinding can be involved: unbinding of the inclination to rivalry and violence, and unbinding of the relationship to God and the injunction involved in it. When God was unbound from Israel, God’s protection of Israel was withdrawn, and chaos loomed. When it was realised that this is what had occurred, there was an urgent need to mend the relationship.

The Remedy: Sacrifice

This idea of disruption of relationship and breach of covenant is pursued by Barker in relationship to the ‘priestly covenant’. The priests were the ones who had the ability to make amends to God. Barker gives an extreme example of this, from Numbers 25, in which the high priest Phineas killed a couple (a man of Israel and a woman of Midian), whose mixed marriage outraged the Covenant and brought a plague on Israel as a consequence. The execution carried out by Phineas was enough to protect and restore the Covenant. Barker translates Num. 25:12-13:

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\text{(the LORD gave to Phineas and his descendants) } \text{"my covenant of shalom...the covenant of the priesthood of eternity (or the covenant of eternal priesthood) because he...made atonement for the people of Israel".}
\]

However, once again the use of ‘eternity’ is questionable, and other translations stress permanence or ‘for all time’\(^{791}\), and not an appointment that is timeless. However, this is perhaps a minor point here. More important is Barker’s opinion that a dimension has been lost because of the redactions of the Deuteronomists, which have so greatly shaped the Old Testament to the form in which we have inherited it, and have “no creation theology, no

\(^{791}\) There is a degree of consensus on this form of words in various translations: for instance, GNB and NEB.
Covenant, Lament & Thanksgiving

place for atonement, no place for the anointed kings of the house of David, no place for prophets except insofar as they agreed with Moses, and no place for the wisdom tradition.”

Barker’s point is that priestly theology united past, present and future, in other words what is hidden and what is apparent in the world, and, using the word in what seems to be Barker’s particular sense of it (which we have criticised), ‘eternal’. As has been stated previously, Barker’s argument is selective and often lacks conclusive evidence, and one either accepts it with its limitations as a helpful insight, or not.

Here, it seems helpful. Priestly theology has the key to what the Deuteronomists locked away (the ‘bonds and weavings’ which tie together the Word and the worldly order), and it is the obfuscation of this involved in the Second Temple tradition which Jesus referred to at Matthew 23:29-36: the Pharisees and lawyers had locked up and suppressed something vital to true understanding of the world and of God. Again, an understanding of Jeremiah’s vision of the covenant at Jeremiah 31:31-34 as a future event helps to put this activity of the Pharisees as perpetuating an undesirable but essentially temporary state.

The means of making good the relationship is sacrifice. Phineas sacrificed the couple who had broken the terms of the covenant; W. Robertson Smith considered that the Hebrew term herem (normal meaning devote or destroy) included the execution of criminals in sacrificial form. So, sacrifice in these early examples included an element of setting the house in order, and offering the cause of the outrage of the covenant to God as a way of dissociating the community from them.

Up to this point, the arguments described are largely those of Margaret Barker, interfaced from time to time with those of Girard. Of course, Barker is thought by many to go too far in the assembly of arguments which we have

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792 Barker, 2004, p.35.
793 Including ‘devotion to destruction’ in Joshua 7:12.
heard of into a comprehensive scheme. At best, the evidence to support her claims is incomplete, and there is much induction and some speculation involved in them. She is also somewhat inclined to translate the Hebrew in a way which other scholars would judge idiosyncratic. However, her thinking has several aspects which help illuminate the issues that concern us here.

Atonement and Covenant

However, in instances like the ones mentioned, the community is not truly atoning for the crime, merely identifying, or perhaps even scapegoating, the perpetrators and making them pay the price (that is, unless they see the light and reject this form of mimesis in favour of imitating God). Girard would say this is a classic operation of the victimage mechanism.

Later forms of sacrifice include another element, not necessarily present in the early form: a self-impoverishment, in which the repentant person (or community) gives of their wealth to God. The reasons lying behind this are much disputed, but the suggestion made here is that this is a gesture of negative assertion of self. The person(s) making the sacrifice are not looking to promote their own material interests at this point, or at least not trying to do so by any direct means, but are depleting themselves as a sign of their submission to God and of their acceptance of his understanding of what is good and right and desirable, rather than their own. This is a pivotal point in which lies a criticism of both Girard and Brueggemann; of Girard, in that he gives insufficient weight to this process in his study of desire and its hold on humanity; and of Brueggemann, in that he does not see Israel's assertion of its covenantal rights against God in the Psalms of Lament as basically alien to the underlying, sacrificial, spirit of the Covenant.
The Covenant as ‘Othering’

In a study which relates the developing relationship of infant and mother, in which the child is progressively equipped to carry its own identity, Brueggemann suggests that covenant is analogical to this situation, and derived from it:

“I suggest that ‘othering’ with God and with neighbour is derivative from and informed by this primal othering with mother.”

“One can see the riskiness of this two-fold act of asserting and yielding when a child in the same instant is both angry with mother, so angry that he wants to assault her, and yet desperately wants to be embraced by her. He wants omnipotence over her, and yet wills to cede his life over to her in order to be safe and affirmed. This tricky relation is, as any of us can attest, one that admits of no final closure or settlement, but is the endless work of humanness.”

Brueggemann supports this with references to Psalms 22 & 27, and goes on to suggest that a good relationship with God may depend on having learned ‘to other well with mother’. People who have not got this background, affect the church by othering “excessive conformity or excessive preoccupation – either way, operating as false selves.” He goes on, “if it turns out that mother or father abandon, in demand or in indulgence, we wait yet to be taken up by this God who can complete the unfinished work of valorizing us as genuine selves.” He understands the Psalter as a dialectic of self-assertion as complaint and self-abandonment in praise.

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795 Brueggemann, 1999, p.5.
796 Ibid.
797 Ibid, p.6.
Lament and Its Relationship to Covenant

We have already observed that Covenant is a contract, with rights and responsibilities apportioned to the parties. That is the factual state of affairs, but, as we have also seen, it is subject to the spirit and purpose of the Covenant, and there may be a tension between the two. Nevertheless, let us now look at the remedies open to a people aggrieved by apparent breaches of their rights under the covenant.

This is almost entirely an Old Testament area, and relates to security and well-being. The idea of people having legitimate expectations of God, and a right of complaint when disappointed in such expectations, has tended to be minimised in Christianity. Instead, thanksgiving is the normal mode of address to God, even in times of adversity. It is therefore the case that any idea of ‘covenant as contract’ is weakened by this being the predominant approach.

Walter Brueggemann, in a study of the psalms of lament\textsuperscript{799}, has commented on them as displaying an element missing from contemporary worship now that those psalms have fallen out of use. His angle of approach here is not that these psalms are obsolete, but that they still have potential utility, but tend to be ignored.

In the social construction of reality (an anti-realist understanding), Brueggemann considers, the Psalms of Lament put God at risk.\textsuperscript{800} They resist a theological monopoly, through giving the second party to the covenant (the petitioners) a voice additional to that of praise and doxology. That additional voice insists that things are not right as they are, that things may be changed, that continuation of the present situation is not acceptable, and that it is God’s role and obligation to change things. The underlying principle is that

\textsuperscript{799} Brueggemann, 1986. However, note the reservations of Palaver (following Canetti) in his essay on lament. Palaver considers religions of lament to be dangerous. This might be said to be a Girardian insight which is corrective of Brueggemann’s enthusiastic approach. Palaver (unpub.).

\textsuperscript{800} Brueggemann, 1986, p.59.
justice is required in God's dealings with his people, and that God is accountable under the covenant, just as people are.

In a situation where the lament is absent (through the form having fallen out of use), justice questions cannot be asked of God and may become “invisible and illegitimate. Instead we learn to settle for questions on ‘meaning’ and reduce the issues to resolutions of love”, 801

Brueggemann extends his argument to suggesting that silencing aspects of justice in the dialogue with God deteriorates the relationship and runs the risk of reducing him to a “dead cipher who cannot be addressed and is only the silent guarantor of the status quo.” He contrasts this with the alternative: God as the transformer of what has not yet appeared, who is vulnerable and whose omnipotence is reshaped by pathos.

Drawing upon the work of Westermann 802, he comments on how the situation or attitude of the speaker is transformed, lament is resolved by and corresponds to thanksgiving, and thanksgiving is ultimately transformed to praise. (The point of this is that thanksgiving is fettered and corresponds to benefits received, whereas praise is free of such ties).

Lament, Thanksgiving and Sacrifice

However, when we offer up this template of lament to Old Testament, as well as to New Testament understandings of sacrifice, discrepancies emerge.

1. The first is that lament involves self-assertion, and the idea that the deal involved in the Covenant is deliverable in terms of wealth, or conditions of well-being received. That in turn depends upon the assumption that the criteria for good outcomes are something which people, and not just God, can ascertain. There is therefore, a certain vanity in the idea of complaint, of which God might be imagined to be critical, as he was in relation to the complaints of Job.

801 Ibid., p.64
802 Westermann, 1981.
2. Self-assertion is also alien to the spirit of sacrifice, which involves engagement through self-depletion, in other words, giving up resources. Lament is a claim on resources and benefits not received.

3. Within Christianity, the self-depletion involved in sacrifice is extended to seeking benefits for others rather than for the self. The gift of self for others who are hostile, not merely others who are friends or kin, involves a similar inversion of the idea of lament, which becomes not a complaint about benefits not received by the subject, but an intercession on the part of others who are perceived as being unfortunate or standing in need.

Therefore, one might say that the converse of lament is sacrifice, not thanksgiving as is often supposed. Indeed, as Brueggemann comments, thanksgiving is the counterpart to lament, marking the point at which lament is called off because the reasons for complaint have been cancelled. He credits Westermann with this thinking:

“the lament is resolved by and corresponds to the song of thanksgiving. Indeed, the song of thanksgiving is in fact the lament restated after the crisis has been dealt with.”

Therefore, thanksgiving is a calculated response, proportionate to benefits received or promises made good. However, its near-synonym in worship, praise, is an unfettered response, not conditional on such things, and even delivered in circumstances which might, if a different view were taken, give cause for lament. Therefore, Christian thanksgiving is perhaps normally more accurately described as praise. It is a prayer expressing hope, no matter what the facts of the present situation. This reflects the belief that the kingdom of God is already here, amongst us.

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804 Such as that seen in Joshua 24: the people make their covenant with God because he has delivered them from Egypt safely.
805 Luke 11:20 “…if it is by the finger of God that I drive out the devils, then be sure that the kingdom of God has already come upon you.”
18 Covenant, Lament & Thanksgiving

Thus, ‘the kingdom of heaven’ is promoted not only as an element of the future, but also as a condition already available\textsuperscript{[806]}; the knowledge of God is put forward as something capable of experience during human life, similar to the way a father is known by his children\textsuperscript{[807]}. The reality and immediacy of God and his kingdom are a constant theme, and with the availability of the kingdom comes the invitation to enter it and live according to its standards\textsuperscript{[808]}, and participate in its intense, mustard seed-like, growth. The element of present tense in this teaching is powerful, though there is a cultural ambiguity here: Aramaic has an undeveloped tense structure\textsuperscript{[809]}, and it is hard to envisage how the contemporaries of Jesus might have been conceptually equipped by language\textsuperscript{[810]} to think of the Kingdom as a detached future event, in the way that modern westerners might.

One of the oldest Christian documents known to exist is the Didache,\textsuperscript{[811]} a manual for liturgical practice. The two Didache thanksgivings each mention thanks for the ‘knowledge’ made known to us through Jesus. The choice of words is interesting, as the thanks are put forward for knowledge received: the broken bread of the thanksgiving meal was “scattered over the mountains, and was gathered together to become one”.\textsuperscript{[812]} This looks very

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\textsuperscript{[806]} Lk 11:20.
\textsuperscript{[807]} As in the Lord’s Prayer: Lk 11:2.
\textsuperscript{[808]} Green et al., 1992, p.599.
\textsuperscript{[809]} Blomberg, 1990, p. 75: “Inasmuch as Jesus normally taught in Aramaic, a distinction between past and present tenses...would seem to be somewhat irrelevant. The Semitic perfect tense, which regularly characterises Hebrew narrative, can at times refer to past, present, or even future action.”
\textsuperscript{[810]} My point here follows the thinking of Wittgenstein that concepts generally depend on language, rather than the other way round.
\textsuperscript{[811]} A recent account by Draper, drawing on the work of a number of scholars from von Harnack in the late 19th century to van de Sandt, Milavec and Garrow in the last ten years. Garrow (Garrow, 2004) suggests that the Gospel of Matthew depends on the Didache, not the other way round. Draper suggests a date in the “mid-first century”. Draper, 2006.
\textsuperscript{[812]} A thanksgiving from the Didache:

**THE THANKSGIVING SACRAMENT**

1) Now concerning the Thanksgiving meal, give thanks in this manner.
2) First, concerning the cup: We thank You, our Father, For the Holy Vine of David Your servant, Whom You made known to us through Your Servant Jesus; May the glory be Yours forever.
much like a metaphor for knowledge, which Jesus has reassembled from fragments. In other words, Jesus has reassembled key pieces of knowledge into a new entity.

The communion was, therefore, in the view of these earliest Christians, a spiritual meal centred around wisdom regained from fragments\textsuperscript{813}, the “broken bread scattered over the mountains...gathered together to become one”. This is not a point Barker makes, but it is suggested here that it is consistent with her insights, and, as we shall see, is also aligned with what Girard would recognize as the positive mimetic elements of the Christian revelation.

Covenant, Logos and Trinity

It is of course a central Christian tenet that the Word is identical with the second person of the Trinity (“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”\textsuperscript{814}).

Brueggemann, too, picks up on this point. Writing about Wisdom literature, he states:

\begin{quote}
"Much in wisdom instruction is prudential, but alongside the pragmatic is a directly theological strand that is especially visible in Proverbs 8:22-31. In this poem 'wisdom' speaks as a person (a woman!) and is said to be God's primal companion in the process of creation. This remarkable teaching has long been important in theological reflection. In Christian tradition the
\end{quote}

3) Concerning the broken bread: We thank You, our Father, For the life and knowledge Which You made known to us through Your Servant Jesus; May the glory be Yours forever. As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains, and was gathered together to become one, So let Your Church be gathered together From the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for the glory and power are Yours through Jesus Christ forever.

5) But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving, unless they have been baptized in the Name of the Lord; for concerning this the Lord said, "Do not give what is holy to dogs."

\textsuperscript{813} The central focus of the early Christians on the knowledge of Jesus is considered at length in Milavec (2003).

\textsuperscript{814} John 1:14.
18 Covenant, Lament & Thanksgiving

theme of Proverbs 8 appears to be taken up in John 1:1-18 as the ‘logos of creation’, that is, the hidden but decisive rationality of God’s creation that in Christian confession is embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.”

Brueggemann is here focussing on the second person of the Trinity as the identity of the ‘logos of creation’. Here, he does not go on to say that the third person is the means by which this is freely available in the world, but in another place he speaks of spirit as ‘force’:

“the irresistible force of God’s presence and will in the world”.816

Covenant stands in relation to these two entities. We have already commented that Covenant is an aspect of the Word. In fact you could say that the Word defines the Covenant, and the Covenant gives access to important aspects of the Word. The Covenant is an event which occurs in the process of finding meaning (that is, logos), and it is broken when the link is lost, or perverted – for instance, when knowledge is abused. This may be caused by pursuing a false Logos, reflecting the knowledge of those “skilled in doing evil”817. However, this false Logos is not named, but perhaps subsumed in the general category of ‘the devil and all his works’.

The Logos of Heraclitus and the Logos of John

In Things Hidden, Girard pursues the idea of the Logos, or Word, and finds that it has more than one identity, and finds a name for the alternative to the Logos of God: the Logos of Heraclitus, which he draws from the thinking of Heidegger.

“Because in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) logos signifies the word, and what is more, the ‘word’ is the definite meaning of command and commandment; hoi deca logoi are the ten commandments of

817 Jeremiah 4:22.
God (decalogue). Thus *logos* signifies *kery̅x*, the *angelos*, the herald, the messenger who hands down commands and commandments."\(^{818}\)

“Heidegger...defines the Heraclitean Logos – as the violence of the sacred, which keeps doubles in relative harmony and prevents them from destroying one another. By contrast he is blind to the reality of the Johannine Logos. What stops him from analysing this side successfully is his concern to introduce violence not only into the Greek Logos – where it really has a place – but also into the Johannine Logos, which is thus represented as being the expression of a needlessly cruel and tyrannical deity.”

Heidegger obviously means there to be a *difference* between the violence of the Greek Logos and the violence he attributes to the Johannine Logos. He sees the former as a violence committed by free men, while the second is a violence visited upon slaves. The Jewish Decalogue is simply an interiorized form of tyranny...

The illusion that there is difference within the heart of violence is the key to the sacrificial way of thinking. Heidegger fails to see that any form of violent mastery ends up in slavery because the model-obstacle comes into play, dominating thought in the same way that it dominates concrete relationships between people."\(^{819}\)

At this point, it is possible to see a close engagement between Girard’s theory and the problems of the Covenant relationship in the national life of Israel, as described in the Old Testament, as illuminated by Barker. The Covenant is a call to behave according to the divine pattern, to behave as God behaves; to depart from that pattern is also to depart from a mode of behaviour which is mimetic, but mimetic in a particular way – a way which is positive. The departure involves being taken up in another form of mimesis, which is negative and based in violence.

"If the Father is as the Son describes him, the Word of the Son (as we have just quoted it) is indeed the Word of the Father. It is not a gratuitous representation; it describes the very being of the Father. It invites us to become like the Father, by behaving as he behaves. The Word of the father,

\(^{819}\) Girard, 1987, pp 265-266.
which is identical with the Father, consists in telling mankind what the Father is, so that people may be able to imitate him.\textsuperscript{820}

The two forms of mimesis are characterised as light and darkness. Light enables understanding, but darkness blinds and makes ignorant:

"In him [the Logos] was life;
And the life was the light of men.
And the light shineth in the darkness,
And the darkness comprehended it not.\textsuperscript{821}

Girard comments, "...this text - like the Prologue to the Gospel of John – establishes the relationship between God and humanity in terms of expulsion. The only difference is that in the story of Adam and Eve, God manipulates and expels mankind to secure the foundations of culture, whilst in the Prologue to John it is mankind who expels God."\textsuperscript{822} (Original emphasis).

However, there is an alternative reading. We have already noted that it is apparent from the general history of covenant in action that the effect of a covenant breach has always been to lose touch with God. This may be expressed as God's departure from the scene, or God's expulsion. In support of Girard, it has to be said that there is nothing in the early accounts to hint that when God 'turns away his face' that is anything but his intentional response, and that, of course, has been the usual interpretation of those texts. Indeed, Brueggemann comments that the covenant is grounded only on God's resolve to be part of the relationship\textsuperscript{823}, and this places the initiative firmly on God's side. But if, as Girard comments, in John's Prologue it is mankind which expels God, then it is possible to infer that this is what has been actually happening from the first. In other words, God has not so much changed (by absenting himself), as he has been newly interpreted as

\textsuperscript{820} Girard, 1987, p.269.
\textsuperscript{821} John 1:4-5, Authorized Version. Girard's italicisation.
\textsuperscript{822} Girard, 1987, p.275.
\textsuperscript{823} Brueggemann, 2002, p.37.
absent. Brueggemann, on the other hand, sees this situation as a role reversal by God:

“It is inordinately demanding. It is demanding because in this two-fold drama, we (and this surprising Thou) are always changing position and reversing roles.”

Lament, viewed under this perspective, is behaviour of the primary mimetic kind – the kind based in violence, which begets violence. It starts from the desire of what is not available, and escalates this into a set of demands which it claims are justified by terms of contract. Its processes are basically those of mimetic desire, though there may be no immediate referent, but only reference to a personal past state of felicity. Thanksgiving (which is fettered to the complaint which precedes it, unlike praise which is unconditional) is the truce declared when the hostilities of lament are satisfied.

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824 Brueggemann, 1999, p.18.
This chapter is about God seen as a solitary being, and as an entity interpreted in terms of community and inter-relationship. The perceived identity and nature of God both stem from, and feed into, the models current in society for secular rule, depending on which way you are inclined to look at the situation. In Chapter 8, we considered sacral kingship, in which the king bears all and suffers all, and noted, with Girard, how this role in primitive societies is constructed around the need to transfer blame out of the community. In tribal societies where forms of sacral kingship have been investigated, the king is held accountable for unwelcome events such as bad weather, crop failure, defeat in battle and epidemics, and may be killed; the king may be, Girard has argued, both pre-eminent and a scapegoat, or, as Scubla has it, a prisoner of his people and destined to undergo a violent death. In later society, where traces of sacral kingship remain, God may hold the king accountable.

Kingship in more developed societies, on the face of it, is a very different affair, since except in times of revolution, the person of the king is closely

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825 From Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890) up to contemporary writers like Lucien Scubla, René Girard and Luc de Heusch.

826 For instance, consider the condemnation issued by Elijah against King Ahab at 1 Kings 21:21-22: “The Lord says to you, ‘I will bring disaster on you. I will do away with you and get rid of every male in your family, young and old alike. Your family will become like the family of King Jeroboam son of Nabat, and like the family of King Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have stirred up my anger by leading Israel into sin’.”
19 Mimesis, Monarchy & Trinity

protected and he is unlikely to be sacrificed. On the contrary, at least in its
archetypal, historical form, monarchy has full rein of all forms of violence,
and the mimetic system may be seen in operation in its most extreme form,
unidirectionally, from the king down.

However, a distinctive feature of the history of Israel is that it includes
notable departures from the system of monarchy, and periods in which
prophets called the king’s stewardship of the nation into question. Likewise,
within Christian religion, the two principal forms in which the identity and
mode of God is expressed, monarch and trinity, very much affect and are
affected by the projects of prophecy and sacrifice. Cause and effect may be
interlocked, but one clear outcome is a modification to the concept of God

The suggestion to be investigated is that this interplay of cause and effect
between model of God and model of secular government is useful and the
prophetic process involved makes for a closer approach to the kingdom of
God. To put this in another way, the mimetic systems within society may be
transmuted from the harmful type in which desire and violence are fuelled
by each other, into another type which has more or less the reverse effect827.
Within this movable scenario, there are more or less favourable conditions
for prophecy.

Cuius regio, eius religio

A leader, said Napoleon, is a dealer in hope. Leaders motivate their followers
by painting them a picture of a brighter future, and showing them that it is
possible to attain it.

827 Adams & Girard, 1993.
19 Mimesis, Monarchy & Trinity

God is of course the archetypal and ultimate leader. For that reason, “God is our hope and strength”\(^{828}\). In traditional understandings of his nature, he has the ability to show the future to us, and the power to bring it to pass. God is the leader par excellence, who is just to his subjects, whose wisdom is perfect, and whose power and majesty are unsurpassed. God is a model for all leaders, or at least, for all leaders who have absolute power.

It is hard for anyone who has only ever known a liberal democracy to imagine the extent to which an absolute monarch can define reality, and cut across all boundaries to exert his will and shape the future. At an extreme, a monarch could impose his subjectivity on his realm: he can, at a whim, scoop you up or cut you down, and there may have been be no appeal against it.

Absolute kings were the prime movers, the completely free agents who dominated agency, or at least, agency under God. When something went radically wrong, and there was a defeat, or a famine, or some other calamity, the inference was that God had withdrawn his support from the nation because of their actions, which of course meant to a large extent, from the decisions of the king and the way he had ruled.

Ideas of God’s identity, style, and his action in the world for obvious reasons tend to be patterned according to the experience of particular ages. Monarchy, absolute or otherwise, was a common human experience from the earliest days to which the written books of the Bible can be traced, until the revolutions came in the modern era. There are of course notable exceptions to this, such as the Roman Republic which preceded the Empire, where the democratic (though not egalitarian) institutions lapsed back into monarchy; but nevertheless, in the broad historical sweep, the point remains. It is, therefore, the dominant human experience of power in history. The counterpart to this is a religious world-view in which, like a king, God

\(^{828}\) Psalm 46.
Mimesis, Monarchy & Trinity

donimates agency, but absolutely\textsuperscript{829} and continuously. God reigns above\textsuperscript{830}, he is the king of creation\textsuperscript{831}.

The experience of the modern age is of course the significant exception to this. Nevertheless, even now, ideas of monarchy as all-powerful have proved surprisingly durable and have long outlived the supersession of unlimited monarchy by other forms of government. Therefore, it seems likely that the idea of the king is rooted not only in experience or memory of that form of government, but from a sort of mental predisposition. The human tendency to adopt ego-states ranging from controlling parent (king) to child has been studied at great length within such psychotherapeutic disciplines as Transactional Analysis\textsuperscript{832}.

It may be imagined that such ideas cannot survive unaffected forever once their source has ceased to be active. Nevertheless, despite this, the concept continues to represent the idea of supremacy. It may, in Platonist terms, represent the concept of the ideal with which we are born, which is hard-wired into human thinking-patterns. If Plato is to be followed here, then the idea of a superb supreme commander may be inescapable\textsuperscript{833}.

This situation applied in the earlier days of Israel as a settled community in their own land. Brueggemann comments:

“Israel appropriated from its cultural context both the idea of divine kingship and the institution of human kingship. YHWH, the God of Israel, is affirmed as ‘maker of heaven and earth’ (as in Gen. 14:19), as ‘God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome’ (Deut.10:17), who

\textsuperscript{829} Cupitt, 1987, p.93.
\textsuperscript{830} Hymn Sing praise to God who reigns above by Joachim Schutz 1640-90 United Reformed Church, 1991, No. 75.
\textsuperscript{831} Hymn Praise to the Lord by Joachim Neander, dated 1680 Church of Scotland, 2005 No.124.
\textsuperscript{832} Stewart & Joines, 1987, Part 2.
\textsuperscript{833} Plato’s scheme extends down to real examples. For instance, Socrates in Plato’s Apology is identified as the perfect example of a supreme commander.
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presides over all earthly affairs, and in a polytheistic world, over all divine affairs as well. The divine kingship of YHWH, moreover, is regularly celebrated in the hymnic liturgies of the Jerusalem temple."834

More mundanely, kingship may also be an analogy of parental power and the traditional patriarchal position of the father within the family. The child’s perspective is that of a junior member of an organisation in which others hold overwhelming power, and the natural response to overwhelming power is awe. In its time, monarchy encouraged such responses, which reinforced its own position. Some would say that the Church and established religion rest their whole scheme on a similar model.

Awe is the emotion likely to be triggered by any such pre-programmed reaction. And monarchy (or empire) is the setting for the definitive form of all the books of the Bible. As identifiable documents, it is generally agreed by scholars that the books of the Bible all date from the period following the institution of monarchy in Israel835. The work of those Deuteronomic editors has left an impression or idea of a religiously unified Israel, unswervingly monotheistic, as a sort of national epic. Yahweh, according to their description, is in lots of ways as we are, but much more powerful. He is kingly in character, and the language of monarchy is used to describe him.

However, this is not the whole story.

Polytheism and the Queen of Heaven

It has already been recounted how Yahweh was seen in the earlier Old Testament period as not the only god, but a god amongst gods, of whom he emerged as the chief and the most authentic, before eventually being

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835 But some conservatives, including orthodox Jews tend to hold that the Torah was written by Moses.
836 Gottwald, 1979, p. 77.
recognized as the most effective and therefore supreme god, and then as the only god.\footnote{Barker, 1991.}

Amongst the other gods in the regional pantheon, and within Israel itself, was Asherah, otherwise known as Ashtart or (in Greek), Astarte. Her presence is recorded only marginally in Old Testament texts\footnote{Brueggemann, 2002, p.10. The subject is covered more fully in Becking, Dijkstra, Korpel \& Vriezen, 2001, pp.17ff.}, but archaeology has revealed many figurines of her in Israelite settlements\footnote{Barker, 2004, p.79.}. Brueggemann comments that her cult was linked with Yahweh as his female counterpart: “Yahweh and his Asherah” according to graffiti found in the excavation of a ninth-century southern caravanserai\footnote{Brueggemann, 2002, p.10.}:

“...the actual religious practice of ancient Israel was intensely varied and contested. The Old Testament as we have it is unmistakeably a highly partisan, one-sided presentation of ancient practice; the framers of this canon in their Yahwistic advocacy\footnote{A reference to the Deuteronomists.} took care to exclude from the textual tradition what they regarded as untrue or harmful...

...insofar as Asherah is a goddess, attention to her (even by condemnation) likely indicates the incorporation of the character and functions of feminine divinity into the faith of Israel and perhaps into the character of YHWH. The classical tradition of monotheism has no doubt excluded, as much as possible, hints of the feminine in the character of God. The presence of Asherah in the Old Testament (or repressed hints of that presence) may indicate an awareness that a feminine dimension of the divine is absorbed into the character of YHWH.”\footnote{Brueggemann, 2002, p.11.}

Polytheistic schemes tend to involve much rivalry between gods, as is amply demonstrated in Greek, Roman and Norse mythology. Mythology like this is, according to Girard\footnote{Girard, 1986. This point is the theme of the book.}, a dramatization and demonstration of the mimetic process, involving stereotypes of persecution and ‘the crimes of the gods’.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{837} Barker, 1991. \\
\textsuperscript{838} Brueggemann, 2002, p.10. The subject is covered more fully in Becking, Dijkstra, Korpel \& Vriezen, 2001, pp.17ff. \\
\textsuperscript{839} Barker, 2004, p.79. \\
\textsuperscript{840} Brueggemann, 2002, p.10. \\
\textsuperscript{841} A reference to the Deuteronomists. \\
\textsuperscript{842} Brueggemann, 2002, p.11. \\
\textsuperscript{843} Girard, 1986. This point is the theme of the book.
\end{flushright}
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The monotheism of the Gospels disposes of this, and of any question that the kingdom of God is divided against itself; that situation is ascribed to the devil, and to the works of the devil.\textsuperscript{844} In other words, it is the method of the devil to divide, and the process of rivalry involved is the visible demonstration of this. But God ‘ties up the strong man’, the mimetic process, by ‘being a stranger to the violence of persecution’\textsuperscript{845} and by doing so, renders it powerless.

The nature and practice of God, then, is anti-mimetic, or, more accurately, reverse mimetic, but the monotheism involved is a difficult and surprisingly complex issue.

Monotheism

Monotheism, as it is now thought of in the West, is largely a philosophical concept coming out of Greek, not Hebrew thought. Brueggemann comments on this, saying that intellectual claims for the singularity of God (he seems to have in mind the thinking of Aquinas and his followers) are of “little interest for the Bible”:

“The reason that such a claim, from the perspective of the Bible, is uninteresting and mischievous is that the Bible articulates YHWH as a fully functioning person marked by immense complexity and interiority that are characteristically excluded in conventional rational understandings of ‘the one true God’. The biblical question is not the number of Gods [one!], but the practice and character of God in an assumed world of contested polytheism...The Old Testament, in its final form, certainly ends up with an affirmation that ‘YHWH alone is God’. This affirmation is clearest in exilic

\textsuperscript{844} Matthew 12:25.
\textsuperscript{845} Girard, 1986, p.187.
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Isaiah (43:11, 48:12). That confession made in doxological form is not an intellectual or rational conclusion.”

In a polytheistic world, Yahweh’s was a prophetic voice heard above a clamour of other voices. Initially, according to Brueggemann, he was one amongst others in a pantheon headed by the High God El, in the common religion of the region. Gradually, Yahweh emerged not only as the particular god of Israel, but as a unique model, quite different from others in the pantheon:

“Israel, in its interpretive traditions, continued over time to reformulate its testimony about YHWH; the subordinate god of Israel began to be assigned greater and greater domains of governance, until YHWH was assigned, in Israel’s testimony, the preeminent place, occupying the role in theological imagination that El long held as presiding officer of the divine council.”

Yahweh is then apparent as different, more powerful and more worthy: the only true god. From that point there is an evolution to his recognition as the only god:

“The rich metaphors of monotheism offered in the text mean that Israel attests to one God, but this god will not be slotted in or domesticated by conventional theological formulations. This monotheism is the articulation and enactment of a God who comes and goes, who wounds and heals, who judges and heals in ways that defy all preconceived patterns. Such a restless God, evident in the texts of doxological monotheism, is often too rich and wild for institutional faith, which thrives on control and certitude. Institutional forms of theology thus endlessly yearn to limit, narrow and

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The extraordinary nature of Yahweh, therefore, lay mainly in what Brueggemann calls his “rich and wild” nature and his “covenantal exclusiveness in relation to Israel”\(^849\). The ramifications of this point are very interesting for us in this study. If Yahweh requires Israel to behave in one way (that is, be bound by a covenant), that presumably occurs in the face of other gods setting a different example and expressing other requirements. Yahweh, considered alongside other gods, is not of earlier origin, so with the emergence of Yahweh and an understanding of his particular requirements for behaviour is the memory of a previous state, in which the injunctions of other gods had inspired different forms of behaviour.

The force of this argument is not only as historical reconstruction, but as a metaphor of how the memory of Israel recorded the dawn of its history. Ordinary human life, based on mimetic structures, was confronted by the emergence of a model of God which questioned those structures; yet the model of God was itself, apparently, one based to some extent on human patterns of government in which mimetic traits play a strong part.

However, the other model of God, Elohim, to which we referred earlier, which survives in a number of key passages in the earlier books of the Old Testament is of interest here. The shadowy source of all ethics (Elohim) and the King of the Universe identified as a person (Yahweh), have, of course, been merged in one in Judaeo-Christian belief for thousands of years\(^850\). The expression of their merged state has naturally tended to be dominated by the

\(^{848}\) Brueggemann, 2002, p.139.
\(^{849}\) Ibid, p.138.
\(^{850}\) It is arguable that the Christian concept of the Trinity revives and resolves in part the Yahweh-Elohim dilemma, in that something of Elohim may be found in the Holy Spirit.
later form, Yahweh, because mentions of him are overwhelmingly dominant in the Bible. Again, some\textsuperscript{851} would say that this is because of the circumstances under which the text which has come down to us has been edited. Indeed, the specific circumstances of the wandering life in the desert, which seem to have given rise to the Elohist model, are far from applicable to any age of settled existence. In the eighth century BCE, the prophet Hosea provides an interesting insight and memory of how life was different when the temptations of a settled life economic self-promotion did not exist\textsuperscript{852}: “I will make you live in tents again”. In other words, relationship with God cannot truly be sustained in circumstances where human institutions have become dominant, and tend to direct society on a route inconsistent with God’s preferences.

The Flight from Monarchy

Gottwald, in his study of the early development of Israel, refuses to restrict himself to the period in which the surviving documents originate:

".. it is necessary to rebut the contention that the history of Israel begins with the monarchy...the main outlines of a pre-monarchic, and in critical aspects and anti-monarchic, form of Israelite life conflict so fundamentally with the presuppositions and impulses of the monarchic traditionists that we cannot possibly understand them as a late fabrication. Such a body of traditions about old Israel make sense only as the direct product of a premonarchic form of and thought which carries on in the monarchy in part as an archaic cultural survival, in part as a religio-national norm, and in part as a continuing social struggle within Israel."\textsuperscript{853}

If Gottwald is to be followed here, there was for centuries an alternative model in the minds of Israelites, as a rival to that of monarchy. This means

\textsuperscript{851} Including Brueggemann and Barker, who lay this charge at the door of the Deuteronomists.

\textsuperscript{852} See p.140 for the quotation from Hosea 12:7-9.

\textsuperscript{853} Gottwald, 1979, p.41-42.
that there must have been a tension, at least for some, between single god and a somewhat diffuse model of state rule, in contrast to the norm in the region, which was the converse. Gottwald goes on,

"Israel chose a course of decentralizing, nonstratifying, essentially antipolitical development in deliberate contrast and opposition to its immediate neighbours and in doing so was propelled to a level of eventful struggle and inordinate self-consciousness that have all the hallmarks of a striking historical consciousness."

That is, Israel defined itself and continued to do so in the historical long term by reference to its one-time social and governmental form, enshrined in the collective memory.

The tension between the actualities of monarchy and settled life, and the memory of life ‘in tents’ seems to provide a fertile ground for prophecy of a certain kind; which is, as Brueggemann frequently asserts, subversive.

Trinity

Putting a date on the concept of the Holy Trinity is not easy, as it comes into the existing records as a theory in about 170[^854], but there are phrases in the gospels which imply it[^855], and it is widely accepted within Christianity as a fundamental truth: the understanding of Jesus as to his position in relation to God, and of the nature of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is not only a wisdom teacher, but "he is the embodiment of the wisdom of God that provides the coherence and visibility of God’s creation. Thus, Paul

[^854]: By Theophilus of Antioch.
[^855]: As in the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19.
can write of Jesus as ‘the wisdom of God’ in a way that echoes the teaching of Proverbs 8: 22-31”. In other words, the theological status of Jesus is found by reference to existing scripture, and more or less reiterated in Christian texts. In subsequent philosophical reflection in the church, moreover this wisdom-logos theme of God’s pervasive presence in the world is articulated as the Second Person of the Trinity, a theological claim larger and deeper than simply the historical Jesus."

Moreover, to borrow Hosea’s words, Jesus is a tent-dweller. He, unlike the nation in general, has not lost touch with the relationship established with God in the desert wanderings, but remains rooted in them.

The Second Person of the Trinity: Logos

In the previous chapter, we considered the logos, the essence of God, and the identity of the Word with the second person of the Trinity, as a central Christian tenet. Wisdom, therefore, is the second person, and is communicated by the third person, the Holy Spirit.

Brueggemann comments on wisdom literature in the Bible, as prudential, not merely pragmatic. He states, “the discernment and articulation of recurring patterns of behaviour and outcome permit the wisdom teachers to insist that God’s world is reliable, though the claim is related in experience not revelation.” He traces the configuration of the wisdom tradition through the simple closed statements of Proverbs and the exposure in Job of the weaknesses of any such attempt to codify wisdom in the face of new experiences; and in Ecclesiastes the tone of protest gives way to resignation. Jesus’ teaching, Brueggemann asserts, is a continuation of this tradition. He

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856 Paul does this in 1 Cor. 1-2.
858 Hosea 12:9.
860 Ibid., p.233.
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picks up particularly on proverbs 8:22-31, in which ‘wisdom’ speaks as a woman, God’s partner in creation.

The contemporary German protestant theologian Moltmann states that

“Creation is a Trinitarian process: God the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit...For a long time the tradition of the Western church stressed only the first aspect, so as to distinguish God the Creator from the world as his creation, and in order to emphasise his transcendence. By doing so, it robbed nature of its divine mystery and delivered it up to desacralization through secularization...What helps most here is the Christological act of creation through God’s Word, and the pneumatological understanding of creation out of God’s Spirit.”

He goes on to say that according to Proverbs 8:22-31, creation came about through something so closely related to God that it is of his person, his ‘daughter’ Wisdom, which might otherwise be termed God’s Spirit. Language struggles with this concept; Barker observes in the early history of Israel a different attempt to relate Wisdom to God, as his partner, wife or consort.

Creation, then, under Moltmann’s Trinitarian understanding is a co-operative venture, in which the parties do not rival one another, but build upon one another’s role. The same thinking is apparent in Paul’s description of the individuals making up the Church in a complementary way, similar to the way the parts of a body complement each other to form an entire functioning person.

Returning to our previous point about divine rivalry, it will immediately be apparent that the idea of complementarity is incompatible with the idea of rivalry. The whole perceived structure of divinity under Trinitarian

862 ‘Daughter’ is perhaps controversial, though Proverbs 8:22 states that God created her.
863 Barker, 1992, p.48ff. She also investigates Wisdom as a recurring type of female goddess.
864 1 Corinthians 12:27.
understanding is a counsel against rivalry, which Girard would say, comes out of the human mimetic tendency.

The Third Person of the Trinity

Brueggemann is quoted as saying that “inasmuch as God creates by word, by wisdom (Jer. 10:12) and by spirit (Gen. 1:12), there is a faint insinuation of Trinitarian dimension in the process of creation.” Moltmann comments,

"If the experiences of the Holy Spirit are grasped as being a 'rebirth' or a 'being born anew', this suggests an image for the holy spirit which was quite familiar in the early years of Christianity, especially in Syria, but got lost in the patriarchal empire of Rome: the image of the mother. If believers are 'born' of the Holy Spirit, then we have to think of the Spirit as the 'mother' of believers, and in this sense as a feminine Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, as the Gospel of John understands the Paraclete to be, then she comforts 'as a mother comforts' (cf. John 14:26 with Isaiah 66:13). In this case the Spirit is the motherly comforter of her children. Linguistically this brings out the feminine form of Yahweh's ruach in Hebrew. Spirit is feminine in Hebrew, neuter in Greek, and masculine in Latin and German.”

The power of language being what it is, one wonders if Greek-speaking believers in the earliest church were disinclined conceptually to think of the

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865 The Trinity Guide to the Trinity, William J. La Due (ed) http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=0WvgLJSKW7oC&pg=PA10&lpg=PA10&dq=brueggemann+trinity&source=bl&ots=q3RFS2KzZP&sig=3iCMo HvHtKjLA_TPfu1W65tUoA&hl=en&ei=e6mKTtP5H6i_0QXexK3ABQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CE0Q6AEwBjgK#v=onepage&q=brueggemann%20trinity&f=false Accessed 26 October 2011.
866 Moltmann, 1997, p.35.
19 Mimesis, Monarchy & Trinity

Spirit as ‘mother’, because of the gender of the word in that language (which is?).

The spirit as a force making for collective unity, defined positively in relation to the internal characteristics of the group, not defined over against some external alternative (that is a negative definition made on the basis of what we are not).

“in the Spirit, God is present in us like a husband, wife or partner. He accompanies us and shares our suffering. The Holy Spirit does not deal with us in a domineering way, but tenderly and considerately – in fact, in the spirit of fellowship. This fellowship or community with God in the Holy Spirit is not merely related to persons; it is also objectively related, for the presence of God in the Spirit here and now is the hopeful anticipation, and the beginning in history, of God’s presence in the kingdom of his glory.”867

“Spirit is an attempt to speak about Israel’s conviction that the world is YHWH’s area of governance beyond human explanation or control. Old Testament formulation about the spirit is dynamic and has nothing of the Spirit as The Third Person of the Trinity, a Christian formulation arrived at when the faith of the Bible was transposed, in the early church, into the substantial categories of Hellenistic philosophy. In general, Trinitarian Christian theology has not resulted in a well-developed sense of the Spirit, perhaps precisely because the force does not lend itself to such cerebral articulations...In any case, the spirit is said in the Old Testament to operate in ways that put the decisive governance of human life well beyond human control or explanation.”868

Put into Girardinian terms, spirit as the discernible force which flows in the opposite direction to primary (negative) mimesis, and sets up a pattern of its own, which Girard and Rebecca Adams have termed ‘good mimesis’, or (in Adams’s case) ‘creative mimesis’.

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The Spirit, then having come out of the Father and the Son in accepted Christian doctrine, does not depend on the name of the Father and Son, but has a life of its own in the world. In this connection, Girard quotes Matthew 25:31-46, and comments that Jesus’s expectation that reaction to the anonymous poor is tantamount to a reaction to him (that is, anyone hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison) – depends on the Holy Spirit to be active in all people, because if it were not there to provoke a reaction, blame could not be involved.

"Henceforth, it is not the explicit reference to Jesus that counts. Only our actual attitude when confronted with victims determines our relationship with the exigencies brought about by the revelation which can become effective without any mention of Christ himself."\(^{869}\)

Proponents of this point may ascribe the world wide abandonment of sacrifice at the same time to the anonymous action of the Holy Spirit. Girard quotes John 16:12-15, referring to the jumbled collection of texts on the Paraclete to which it belongs as apparently “the incoherent fruit of mystical schizophrenia”\(^{870}\):

“I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself, but will say only what he has learned; and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine.”

Actually, says Girard, it is our own schizophrenia which obscures its clear meaning. The mimetic principles and methods which we use prevent us from seeing the Paraclete.

\(^{869}\) Girard, 1986, p.203.
Trinity as a Mechanism for Prophecy

Therefore, a situation arises in which the Trinity is a mechanism for resisting the progress of the mimetic system, and which structurally incorporates the contrary principle of good mimesis in itself; but at the same time, the agent of the virtuous process, can and does remain invisible to a proportion of people.

Nevertheless, the Spirit is at work in history, and progress has been made. Kirwan neatly summarises Girard’s understanding of the effectiveness of the Paraclete, or Holy Spirit, in history:

"The history of the West's move away from scapegoating (such as it is), and of our desacralized world, which effortlessly sees through scapegoating processes and makes us instinctive partisans for the victim – this history is the product not of an Enlightenment rationality, banishing the darkness of religious superstition, but of the evangelical impulse itself. It is the Paraclete, the advocate for the defence, at work in history, informing and transforming culture and institutions, who has effected and continues to effect this stupendous change." 871

The Lamb of God before whom the Nations will Bow

Something which has a resonance of ‘good mimesis’ and of the religion of the period of ‘living in tents’ may be found in contemporary scholarship in Burton Cooper’s idea of the ‘disabled God’. 872

872 Cooper, Burton 1992.
Cooper begins by questioning traditional perceptions of God's nature which are built upon human experiences of earthly power, and ideas of God's perfection which are derived from human notions of completeness. Cooper observes that in the Book of Leviticus onwards, these ideas have taken hold within Judaeo-Christian religion. To be eligible for priesthood, you have to be unblemished\textsuperscript{873}; Matthew exhorts us to be perfect, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect".\textsuperscript{874} The natural reaction is to look for conformity to a standard, to paint God in human terms and then stress that he is complete and without fault. The same applies even more to Jesus, who is characteristically depicted in much Western art as a beautiful, elongated figure with a face unaccented by expression, suffering or age.

But the lesson of Christ's suffering, and God's gift of Christ to suffer for mankind, is that God, despite his divine nature and any arguments one may choose to accept of his necessary 'completeness', has made himself subject to mankind to some extent. God suffers with and for mankind, and thus is changed. This very different understanding, which

\begin{quote}
"holds that we find the meaning of divine perfection through the life and teaching of Jesus and that we move to perfection in our own lives through Christ and by relating to others as he did. Perfection, here, is not first of all, or ever, a matter of independence or completeness."
\end{quote}

"Most human suffering arises out of human selfishness or ignorance or indifference or the fragile finitude of the human body and psyche. But in the life of Christ, we can see that God's love finds its perfect expression in suffering love. Again, I am not saying that all suffering is suffering-love, but that a life formed by love for others inevitably leads to one's own suffering, and this is true in Jesus' life and in the history of God."\textsuperscript{875}

Cooper quotes Moltmann, who makes use of the image of the "crucified God" to express the suffering-love of God, extends this to make his own point:

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{873} Leviticus 21:16-23.
\textsuperscript{874} Matthew 5:48.
\textsuperscript{875} Cooper, Burton, 1992, p.176.
\end{footnotes}
“Jesus on the cross is God disabled, made weak and vulnerable to worldly powers because of the perfection of divine love.”

This Christological understanding of God’s power is captured by Bonhoeffer:

We turn to God when we are sorely pressed;
And pray for help, and ask for peace and bread;
We seek release from illness, guilt and death:
All people do, in faith or unbelief.

We turn to God when he is sorely pressed,
And find him poor, scorned, without roof and bread,
Bowed under weight of weakness, sin and death:
Faith stands by God in his dark hour of grief.

God turns to us when we are sorely pressed,
And feeds our souls and bodies with his bread;
For one and all Christ gives himself in death:
Through his forgiveness sin will find relief.

Cooper draws the conclusion that, from a Christological perspective, “God’s perfection, God’s goodness, God’s identity are so far from transcending the suffering of the world that they participate deeply and unavoidably in that very suffering.”

This is a radical change to the concepts of God’s power which depict him as king of the universe (Yahweh), and much closer to the Elohist model of the source of all ethics, who wrestles with man, but does not win outright. But there are also differences. It is not rooted in the memory of the founding of a nation, nor in a journey from bondage to freedom, though it may be anchored in a journey out of bondage in another sense. Certainly, it involves

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876 Moltmann, 1974, Foreword In Explanation of the Theme, pp xvii ff.
877 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich from Letters and Papers from Prison translated by the Compilers of Church Hymnary 4, Church of Scotland.
a decoupling of God from the power structures of this world, which are built upon rivalry (Girard), and on a predisposition to think oneself into the mentality of the ‘tent-dwellers’ whose social world was distanced in nature from that of the settled world, and whose mentality was therefore naturally inclined to hear prophecy (Brueggemann).
We began this thesis with a statement of purpose:

“This project has a pastoral purpose: to identify the forces for a positive energizing of community, freed from the destructive forces which mire the world in its old ways.”

Put another way, that means an attempt at discovering potential for changing the world in the work of these two authors. The ‘reclamation’ of which the title speaks is a creation or rediscovery of forces which can be applied in this way, to provide positive energising of community. It is important that this is not a survey of effects; we did not set out to assess the impact of Girard and Brueggemann, so the effectiveness of any reclamation lies beyond the scope of this thesis. The terms ‘prophecy’ and ‘sacrifice’ may have fallen into neglect and disrepute, but there is no way that this thesis can certify that that situation has been reversed. The most that is said is that the work of the two authors provides a basis for thinking about these concepts and acting in relation to them which is enlivened or enlivening and relevant to the conditions of the present day.

Our introduction continued,

“Such forces are not contemporary in origin; they are present in voices from biblical times which have often been misheard, unheard, or ignored within Christian ministry. The understanding of this process of re-energization is the project of both Brueggemann and Girard...”

In other words, Girard and Brueggemann write with long-existing negative societal forces in mind, and ways of resolving those forces a part of the scheme they set out. This has certainly been borne out by our research. In the case of Girard, the “destructive forces which mire the world” are ascribed causally to the process which has formed mankind as it is, which have become established and developed invisibly, according to Girard, in every society and nation.
Sacrifice

Sacrifice has been held to be the effective process for dealing with mimesis in its ‘negative’, characteristically human, dominating form; but according to prophetic voices, and under the regime of Jesus, sacrifice does not work unless accompanied by a change of heart. The action in itself is not enough. However, according to Schwager, sacrifice is defined by prayer; and according to Brueggemann, sacrifice may amount to action pre-loaded with meaning, and therefore inclined to be effective. Sacrifice also needs to be considered together with its converse, lament, which challenges God.

The definitions put together make an interesting composite. In Coakley’s and E O Wilson’s ecologically-related commentaries, sacrifice is essential for the survival of the world; a situation in which intention and effect are inter-dependent, and reflect (in Coakley’s case) an abandonment of rivalry with God. Taking all of these together, sacrifice is essential for the healthy future of the world, is defined by prayer and uses prayer to align itself with the will of God; and it is configured as action pre-loaded with meaning. It is therefore explicit in a number of ways, and is thus able to express itself in the world beyond the sacrificial community.

An extra element brought to the discussion through the correspondence between Girard and Schwager is an openness to Lutheran thinking. Whilst it is true to say that Schwager’s main interest in this was focussed on the transfer of the burden of sin on to Jesus and his voluntary role in this; and the contrary tendency in humans to transfer their sin onto victims, it is also true that the excursion into Lutheranism can barely avoid consideration of ‘the priesthood of all believers’, and what this might amount to when the concept of sacrifice has changed and the priestly role of mediation in the sacrificial role has changed with it. There is a general re-ordering of roles here, not only for the subject who becomes the sacrificed as well as the

sacrificer, but also in relation to any intermediaries in the situation. We have already observed Brueggemann’s surprising insistence (surprising for a protestant, that is), that the priestly role is a necessary one in mending the relationship with God, which is the main purpose of sacrifice in his estimation. He says the individual cannot accomplish the process on her own, and needs the help of someone (or some people) in the role of priest.

This brings us to a crucial point in this ‘mutually critical correlation’. How does it help to assemble the Girardian view that sacrifice is an effective process for dealing with mimesis, with that of Brueggemann which holds that sacrifice is a way of mending the relationship with God? The answer, in the eyes of this writer, is that negative mimesis (tied to violence and self-interest) can only be transformed into positive mimesis (imitation of God) through an act of personal sacrifice. This is a point made by Coakley in relation to ecology and the common good. Brueggemann would add that the reform can only be made with assistance, a priestly role in the traditional sense, but modified in this writer’s eyes by a post-Reformation view on where the identity of the priest lies. It may often be assumed that the ‘priesthood of all believers’ transfers that status to each believer, and that in that situation are contained the destructive elements of individualism and self-righteousness, that have so often been laid at Protestantism’s door. But another reading is suggested here: not that we are each of us priests, but that we are collectively a priest. It is not the priesthood of each believer but the priesthood of the people of God. Further, that some of the key failings of Christians over the centuries are that they were content to limit their efforts to live sacrificially to the individual level, but applied other criteria when acting in a group or expressing their expectations of a group to which they subscribe. The effect of that was to cancel some of the effects of positive (self-sacrificial) mimesis already existent at a personal level by being content to allow negative mimesis to apply at a group level. So, to take the example of what happens in wars, individuals may give all and sacrifice themselves ‘for their friends’, whilst nations take the gift and spend it on the destruction of others to whose possible identity as ‘friends’ they are blind. In such a
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scenario, there is no priest to be found. This effect will be found to apply in many walks of life with great regularity; government, commerce, even in the competition between charities which exist for essentially similar beneficiaries.

Acting self-sacrificially as a community, says Coakley, we can save the planet from destruction; acting self-sacrificially as a community, it is asserted here, we may mend the relationship with God. However, what a revolution it would take in conventional appreciations of ‘success’ for this to be brought about. It is daunting, but perhaps no more daunting than the challenge set at a personal level for those who first set out to follow the ‘way’ of Jesus 2000 years ago.

What is meant by sacrifice here the renunciation of revenge and the practice of the teachings of the kingdom of God that are advocated by Girard.

Prophecy

The idea of prophecy as an authentic call from the ways of this world to the ways of truth is played out in expositions of Hebrew Bible texts, which then inform observations on contemporary life. This is how Brueggemann paints it, particularly with reference to contemporary America.

An active sense of ‘ways of truth’ as a reality or set of realities in the world, is something which our two writers could agree on. In Brueggemann's scheme, the realities are multiple because everything is relative to the community, in which there is always the opportunity for a ‘new song’. The context of the community is therefore generative of reality. In Girard’s scheme, the ‘ways of truth’ are multiple, because one set relates to causal influences which control violence through systems of myth and religion. Another set exposes the first set to challenge individuals and groups not to participate in a self-deceiving process that direct violence upon victims. Girard’s work may be essentially prophetic in itself in drawing attention to this. The effect of the prophecy is consistent with the conclusions on sacrifice above: effective
The potential for what we might at this stage call priestly action is therefore distinct from, and to a degree exists in opposition to, the general, established world-view prevalent in the West today, the DVR.

To Brueggemann, this observation would present not the slightest difficulty, because his understanding of prophecy is that it exists as an external perspective: the stance is outside society, but utterance is made from within society. Girard, too, claiming that his scheme is consistent with that of Jesus, sees it as a call to society to reform; further, he sees the unmasking of the scapegoat process and the mimetic mechanism that lies behind it as certain to disarm the process and the mechanism\(^\text{882}\); and as it is a feature of that process that it holds violence under control, the world tends to become a more dangerous place in the Christian era. The corrective for that situation, it is argued here, is for the groups, of any size up to and including the United Nations, to understand themselves according to positive mimesis. The 'priestly action' involved becomes actualised in a prayerful commitment to the common good.

Of course, attempts have been made already, some of them very notable. Methodism in the nineteenth century was very influential on public policy. There is no equivalent to this in the present day, though advocacy is widespread, from the public statements Archbishops of Canterbury to the collective action of the church as expressed in Christian Aid, CAFOD or Tearfund. Another major example is the United Nations, and the world-wide acceptance of its existence as a moderating influence on the mimetic violence of states inclined to conflict. But the existence of the UN and in fact of all forms of mediation is a form of medicine in human affairs. It originates externally to the problem area, and thus like prophecy, offers and external perspective. We also see, perhaps for the first time since World War 2,\(^\text{882}\) Girard, 1987, p158ff.
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government asking people to act self-sacrificially by not taking their legal entitlement to benefits.

What is missing at present is a unifying call which ties these two phenomena together. The synthesized approach we sketched out earlier is a commitment to internal re-orientation away from the negative mimetic model. This brings us to the pastoral motive of this study. The two authors are each legitimately described as a resource for influencing contemporary attitudes, and therefore, available to deploy as a force for the positive energising of society. This is a point about sense of identity in relation to the priestly role referred to earlier.

With Brueggemann, there is little difficulty in the claim, as he is applying a concept, and re-enlivening it, without essentially changing what it is. By his own admission, he is preparing the ground, fertilizing the soil with material favourable to new prophetic growth. Girard, on the other hand, is not really reclaiming anything, though he may be explaining both past and current usages. He is in fact making new claims, which are for universal truths borne out in the life and message of Jesus, which he finds illustrated in literary works from earlier society’s mythologies through classical to modern literature. There is something essentially external about his call to human societies, but the call to the reform of societies is not developed.

We have also noted that Tim Gorringe\textsuperscript{883} provided an insight of profound importance for this study, in the application of a short phrase, “God [who] is only known in the journey from bondage to freedom”. This insight applies, we have found, to both authors in a broadly similar way; they equip their readers for a journey from old understandings to new. The old understandings, according to the arguments of both writers, amount to a kind of bondage, and the loosening of the bonds is the process in which understandings of God dawn on the consciousness. In the steady state of the old attitudes, God is hidden. This is explicit in Girard, when he writes of

\textsuperscript{883} Gorringe, 2005.
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*Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*[^884], and in Brueggemann when he speaks of talk of God (the Bible) “redescribing reality”[^885].

Outcomes of this research

Let us look again at the section summaries and bring their interim conclusions together.

Part 1: Concepts and versions of reality

Investigate ‘biblical concepts’, the ‘dominant version of reality’, and relate to prophecy and sacrifice.

*What is at stake here is recognizing the DVR for what it is, and overcoming it.*

Part 2: The fading concept of sacrifice

Investigate the Christian concept of sacrifice and place it in its context; examine its effectiveness.

*For reasons to do with the DVR and the mimetic tendency which is its mechanism, Christian sacrifice remains confused, apparently unable to construct a coherent model from the components of traditional sacrifice of a third party and self-sacrifice. The historic models of the OT are partly problem here, partly solution, because within them lies an understanding of the priestly function which Brueggemann insists is the key to moving forward from what is otherwise an impasse. Girard apparently does not notice this issue.*

Part 3: Prophecy: outdated and never outdated

Examine the meaning of prophecy, ancient and modern, its relationship to the dominant version of reality, and the meaning that might be found in it.

[^885]: Brueggemann, 2008. The title of the book is “Redescribing Reality – what we do when we read the Bible”.

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The prophetic element is present in contemporary society, but lacks a current conceptual model which supports it as having a reality and credibility. The link between a corrective call and the mind of God is hardly there. That may be because another link - that between prophecy and sacrifice has decayed, and needs to be regenerated.

Outcomes: the longer term

The process does not stop here. Although the potential for transformation has been established, much remains to be done if the projects of the two authors are to be realised as a change in the shape of Christian witness. What is now needed is an extension into a new vision for prophecy-sacrifice as an active part of Christian life, witness and influence. These two writers have prepared some, but not all, of the required raw material, but what is needed by communities and practitioners in ministry is not only a clearly articulated, digestible version, but a sort of practical handbook. That is not something that either Brueggemann or Girard has attempted. This is not envisaged as yet another enthusiastically-worded manual on how to fill the church, but an aid to reflection on what sort of influence the people of the church can bring to bear on the public and commercial life they are involved in – both jointly and individually. The influence in question is understood in the intertwined terms of prophecy-sacrifice.
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Note: the dates given for Girard’s various works are the publication dates of those works in English

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