

# Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution

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## Substitutive Reading

*An Introduction to Girardian Thinking,  
Its Reception in Biblical Studies, and This Volume*

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*He looked up, saw a ram caught in the thicket, and took and sacrificed  
the ram instead of sacrificing his son.*

—Genesis 22:13

Are cultures possible that are not founded upon the murder of one of their members? For as far back as we can construct historical memory, the violence of one member of a group against another in the same group seems to have been a resident feature of human community. Recent reports about the famous cave paintings—for example, those attested in Southern Turkey—suggest that the communities producing them may not have been engaging in funereal rites (as we have long surmised) but in sacrificial rituals.<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that the human species emerged, that it separated itself from the larger animal community, not on the basis of its propensity for violence (which is, with few exceptions, shared throughout the higher primates) but on the basis of its coordination of that violence against one member of the community uniquely? Is it possible that what is distinctive about “the human” is its channeling of that violence upon a victim arbitrarily chosen, one who, in that relative indifference to the motivating trigger of his or her isolation and removal, resolved conflict as a consequence? Could hominization itself be the product of coordinated, unidirectional shepherding

of otherwise disruptive communal energy against a substitute or surrogate victim, a one that may stand alone for many?

Perhaps the practice of exclusionary violence is so ancient, so pervasive, so looming that anthropologists have ignored it not in spite of its enormity but because of it, somewhat in the same manner that children miscount the number of countries in a popular children's board game not because the names of those regions are obscure or hidden but because, like the evidence for a solution to a murder mystery in the Edgar Allen Poe story, they are simply too blatant?<sup>2</sup> Something like this question may have motivated Raymund Schwager when, in the 1970s, he wrote a book with the title *Must There Be Scapegoats?*<sup>3</sup> And a similar question would appear to drive the extraordinary work of literary critic-turned-cultural anthropologist René Girard, who has taken upon himself a systematic interrogation of the relation of sacrifice to exclusionary violence—in all of its multifarious ramifications—as his life's work.

Girard's theory unifies the best of the French and the Anglo-German anthropological traditions. By temperament and conception, Girard's work derives from Durkheim. It was Emil Durkheim who first regarded the sacred (or the social) as something greater than the product of its individual parts, who first proposed that culture could be studied systematically. The work of his student and son-in-law, Marcel Mauss (especially on the form and function of sacrifice and the gift in this connection), and the work of his latter-day successor, Claude Lévi-Strauss, the self-nominated father of structural anthropology, form the soil in which Girard's insights germinate. And the insights themselves—about the role of murder in founding ancient communities and about the role of the scapegoat victim in sustaining those violent origins—are shaped by Sir James Frazer and Sigmund Freud: on the one hand, by Frazer (for example, in *The Golden Bough* and the writings of the so-called "Cambridge anthropologists") in his identification of violent scapegoat myths and rituals throughout known cultures; and, on the other, by Freud (for example, in the early *Totem and Taboo* and the very late *Moses and Monotheism*), who envisioned the explanatory power of such violent acts in engendering group and individual behavior in a manner that is scientifically observable.

Girard's thesis in a nutshell is that all culture is founded upon murder, upon the collective lynching of a surrogate victim or scapegoat whose removal restores peace and tranquility to a previously disrupted community. This insight gives specificity to what Girard calls "the mimetic hypothesis," which is that all culture is organized around the management of imitative desire and the control of its propensity for violent conflict. Human beings desire, Girard suggests, neither objects nor subjects but the desires of others, and that fact—that all desire is mediated through a model one has consciously or unconsciously appropriated—leads inevitably to conflict. In the primitive universe such conflictual potential is managed by a sacrificial mechanism that declares as sacred a violence that has been efficaciously removed from the community, and as violent a sacred that comes down from its segregated place outside of the city and is wreaking havoc upon the citizenry. The modern universe—in possession of the scriptures bequeathed to us by the revealed religions (and, for Girard, especially Judaism and Christianity)—remains the beneficiary of the exposure of this sacrificial system, an exposure that contributes to its disempowerment. But it is beset by its own dilemma, namely, how to continue in a world in which the sacrificial no longer works, in which scapegoating is no longer efficacious and reciprocal violence proliferates not only in spite of but now even because of such sacrificial gestures, and in which as a result the anti-sacrificial, the ethical, is of primary concern.

The volume that follows contributes to the elaboration of Girard's ideas by submitting his theses regarding scripture—and especially the idea that sacrifice is founded upon a logic of substitution and exposed in scripture as such—to the purview of a number of the leading scholars in the field of the study of ancient Judaism and nascent Christianity. The social sciences of sociology and anthropology and the humanistic endeavor of biblical studies have rarely benefited from each other's insights, and it is not overstating the case to say that both seem to have met the challenge posed by the thinking of René Girard with a modicum of caution, although biblical studies—for reasons that will be suggested below—seems to have embraced it somewhat more enthusiastically. In what follows, we have placed an interview with Girard side by side with contributions by Thomas Ryba, Michael Fishbane,

Bruce Chilton, Robert Daly, Alan Segal, and Louis Feldman on biblical sacrificial economies, postsacrificial views in Judaism of reading and prayer, the relation of the Eucharist and martyrdom to sacrifice, and historical assessments of exclusionary practices. We have followed that section with more attentive readings of individual passages from Jewish and Christian scripture. Our hope is that this collection may enhance all three disciplines: cultural anthropology, biblical study of the ancient Jewish and Christian scriptures, and Girardian thinking. To do that, let us turn more fully to Girard's ideas and to these two fields that have curiously (or perhaps not so curiously) resisted both each other and the insights of this maverick French intellectual.

### Reading Girardian Thought

Girard's early work explores the relation of imitative desire to the great literary texts of our culture. The great writers of the European tradition—Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, and Proust (Girard would later add Shakespeare and Molière to this list)—would all appear to agree that desire is not object-based but mimetic, that we desire neither objects of our fantasies nor the subjects of our inspirations but what others desire. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Girard expanded this consideration with the introduction of Greek tragedy. Ancient Greek drama seemed to him to reveal a larger cultural orientation, one that allowed him to ask where mimetic desire originated.

The answer it gave is that older cultures manage mimetic desire as part of a larger system of sacralization, that the sacred and violence are one and the same. The sacred is violence that has been thrown out of the community, and violence is the sacred that formerly occupied a position outside of the city and currently circulates within it, wreaking havoc among its unfortunate participants. What sustains all of this activity is sacrifice, the collective substitution of a surrogate victim. A culture in this framework is understood as a system of differences, a set of distinctions for regulating every aspect of cultural life. And those distinctions may be understood in positive terms as sacrificial. Ritual behaviors govern all aspects of communal life: birth and death, initiation

and marriage, and everything in between. Transitions through cultural life and one's status outside of (or within) the infinite variety of positions that make up cultural life are related by a system of statuses and ceremonies that operate everywhere and at all times—wall to wall, so to speak—in any given cultural community.

But things break down in culture as elsewhere, either through normal wear and tear, or through extraordinary accidental event (an earthquake or tidal wave, for example). And when that happens, the calculated anticipation of failure goes awry. The normal set of sacrificial distinctions that customarily insure the community's health and survival, now, paradoxically, become its greatest threat. In the midst of such a "sacrificial crisis," the very effort to secure a way out of the crisis (a way that inevitably worked in the past) now just as inevitably insures a way back in, compounding the difficulty, as it were, as difference goes wrong and sacrificial behavior turns to violence.

In such circumstances, substitution plays a critical role. The substitutive logic at the heart of the scapegoat mechanism becomes a little more visible than usual. Greek tragedy—in the hands of a Sophocles, Euripides, or Aeschylus—offers in Girard's view a window to such structurative social processes. Girard likes to cite *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example. A malign plague is destroying the land. Oedipus declares he will do all he can to put an end to the plague and calls upon the local seer, Tiresias, for assistance. Although begun in viable distinction, the dialogue between the king and the blind prophet quickly turns sour. The king's counselor (and brother-in-law), Creon, has said (that the oracle has said) that they need to identify and remove the murderer of the former monarch. "I should not have come," the old seer declares, and Oedipus retorts, "What! You would withhold information you have for us! Then I say that you did the deed yourself." "What!" Tiresias replies. "Then I say that *you* are in fact the killer of the man whose killer you are seeking." Creon and Jocasta (Oedipus's wife) quickly enter the fray and very soon it is evident that if the discussion were allowed to proceed unabated, we would anon be beset by a community of doubles, a population of enemy twins locked in a confrontational exchange of (theoretically) endless reciprocal violence, in a veritable Hobbesian war of all against all.

Suddenly, the logic of substitution is determinative. As each approaches the condition of being enemy twin of each, any one approaches the condition of being the enemy twin of all, the surrogate victim each dreams of sacrificing. The smallest differences — differences of hair color, hair length, skin hue, physical stature — can in an instant suddenly become the absolute difference trumping all others. At any moment, the paroxysmic violence of all against all can suddenly unleash itself as the unanticipated violence of all against one in a sacrificial substitution. At that moment, the violence against the other is carried out, and the community is suddenly and inexplicably at peace. The violence of the “night before,” the drunken Dionysiac revels turned hideously malevolent, seem like far off mountains as images of Apollonian calm and tranquility return. The first distinction after the storm is peace now, and horrific violence just a moment ago. Poetry, Wordsworth wrote perspicaciously, is violent emotion recollected in tranquility.

And once it does return, all else is organized around it. The sudden unexpected peaceful resolution of hostilities gives way to the second distinction: the genesis of the gods and ritual commemoration. Since the violence has ceased with the introduction of the small difference that made all the difference, the bearer of that distinction — its “vehicle” so to speak — must have been the god all along. And so every year at this time, we will repeat this performance up to a certain point to regain for ourselves its beneficial effects. We cannot of course sacrifice again the same victim or repeat the sacrifice in its entirety, for that would throw us once more into an entirely new paroxysm. But we can substitute someone or something else for the original victim: a relative (a twin, for example), or some livestock owned by the victim or that has been encouraged to act like the victim (a cow or a bull run rampant, for example). “Primitive culture,” a term Girard borrows from Durkheimian ethnology, is made up in its entirety for Girard by such sacrificial substitutions: substitutions of one victim for another across every cultural boundary, but substitution more fundamentally of one potential victim for every other potential victim. Even more than a set of differences, the fabric of culture is for him at this level a series of such substitutions on which such differences are based.

How do we know? Is Girard not privileging one narrative structure over all others, the narrative of difference, of the violent assertion

of difference in its inefficaciousness, of the sacrificial substitution of one of the doubles for all of the doubles, of the new order of differences that includes now a repetition of the former crisis up to a point (which now assumes the place of the new narrative of difference)? Is Girard not outdoing even Hegel in his postulation of a dialectical movement of history from thesis, to an opposition of thesis in contest with antithesis, to a new synthesis (which assumes the new thesis position)? In fact, Girard's description has the status of an Ur-logic. Like the morphology of the folktale described by Vladimir Propp, or like the complete score of a myth described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the system in its entirety exists nowhere. No existent culture or community manifests all elements of the logic. But the logic nonetheless offers an account of the system as such, a hypothetical system, the *langue* after which Lévi-Strauss strives and for which every example is properly a *parole*.

There is another sense in which the question—"how do we know?"—remains to be answered and in relation to which the following volume assumes its rightful place in the discussion. For Girard, we know about sacrifice and its mechanism at the origin of culture because of Holy Scripture. In the primitive sacrificial situation, when the knowledge of the mechanism and the substitutive logic at its heart becomes known, that knowledge determines simply one more sacrificial position. A special status may be woven around it. The individual with that knowledge and the means of manipulating it may become known as the shaman. But the shaman remains a member of the community, always potentially of course substitutable himself for another—for another shaman, for example. But what happens when the sacrificial mechanism is no longer efficacious at all, when a sacrificial crisis breaks out that does more than just repeat the previous crises, when one breaks out that threatens to found a new system in its entirety, but yet one for which no more efficacious substitutions may be found?

Put in other terms, how is it possible, Girard asks, that we know about the sacrificial mechanism in its entirety and yet have survived to tell about it? If knowledge of the system undoes it (and the system functions only in so far as it remains unconscious—no one engaging in scapegoating or arbitrary victimage says, "I am engaging in scapegoating or arbitrary victimage"), then how is it that we are able to talk about it and not destroy ourselves?

The answer for Girard is first the Jewish and then the Christian scriptures. The Hebrew Bible reflects a history that is profoundly anti-sacrificial. Hebraic culture appears among cultures of the world that are as sacrificial as any other. The cultures of the Ancient Near East—Canaanite, Hittite, Syrian, Babylonian, Sumerian, Egyptian—suddenly give way to the appearance in their midst of the culture of Israel. Stories like those of Cain and Abel, the flood, the tower of Babel, the binding of Isaac, the thrusting into the pit and subsequent selling of Joseph by his brothers undoubtedly reflect counterparts in Egypt and elsewhere. But in the Hebrew Bible they are treated differently. Whether the Bible is understood to be uniquely a product of the Rabbinic period (from about 200 BCE to about 400 CE) or to reflect the previous four centuries of reflection, the consideration of these narratives in the Hebrew Bible remains dominated by the concept of Torah, which is to say, the law of anti-idolatry. If we regard idolatry as the name for the moment when the divine is mistaken for the human or, in Girardian terms, when the sacrificial and the violent become irrevocably confused, then the Hebrew Bible is a sustained meditation on the anti-idolatrous and its consequences, a meditation on a way to live when the primitive sacrificial mechanism no longer works, and as a consequence sacrifice and violence are one and the same.

And for Girard, Christianity is the record of the extension of that biblical Hebraic anti-sacrificial reading to the institution of sacrifice itself. Jesus offers himself as the last sacrifice, the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, the sacrifice intended to show us where our sacrifices must inevitably lead, which is to say, to violence and destruction. The writings of the synoptic Gospels, in Girard's view, say little else. And the Pauline letters and other writings extend that insight into the everyday world in which the practicing Christian continues to function. The apocalyptic book of Revelation, for example, extends that insight about the onset of reciprocal violence into our contemporary scene. For example, in his most recent book, *Achever Clausewitz*, Girard identifies in the uncompleted narrative of a nineteenth-century writer, the Prussian officer Hans von Clausewitz, the circumstances already predicted: the runaway reciprocal violence, the mounting to the extremes, that will offer us a choice between owning our own violence and giving it up entirely.<sup>4</sup>

The genius of the modern world—which is to say, for Girard, the world in possession of the Jewish and Christian revelation—is to have imagined for the first time in human history (as Girard understands it) the nature of sacrificial violence in all its dimensions: its origins, its strategies, and its consequences. How did we do that? Did we happen upon it? Did some group of breakaway members of one or another cultures of the Ancient Near East think it up on their own? Or was that knowledge handed to them from the outside, so to speak, through an intervention that can only be qualified as supernatural or divine? Girard insists repeatedly that he is not a theologian, that he is not offering a theory of revelation—Jewish or Christian—but that he is in fact a cultural anthropologist, and that he is offering the distinctly anthropological perspective that he finds the Hebraic and Christian scriptural texts are offering us. These are texts, he argues, that presuppose a sustained critical analysis of the cultural dynamics that have conditioned the context in which we find ourselves but that do not prescribe an ethical solution to their dilemmas, other than the anti-sacrificial itself, sometimes formulated as *refuser la violence*, to refuse (sacrificial) violence at those moments when the two (sacrifice and violence) have become irrevocably confused.

ONE WAY, THEN, OF DESCRIBING THE PROJECT THAT FOLLOWS is to say that we are assessing Girard's claim that scripture is anti-sacrificial and moreover in specifically the way Girard describes it: namely, as substitutive. Substitution here will mean four things. It will mean, in the first place, the logic of equivalency at the heart of the scapegoat mechanism, the very source of its efficacy, the equivalency or exchange that makes possible the instantaneous conversion of the war of all against all into the war of all against one. But secondly, it will mean the second order substitution of a commemorative experience for the original exchange. It will mean the repetition of the conversion—from a Hobbesian war of all against all into a unidirectional unleashing of the war of all against one—upon an independent secondary object or subject, one precisely that substitutes for the original victim.

Thirdly, it will mean the substitution of one sacrificial mechanism for another. If the system of the first two substitutions—the original victimage and its commemorative repetition—breaks down, another

original victim may take its place. If, say, human victimage no longer works (for whatever reason), and even its commemorative repetition fails to engender the desired effects, a new “original” victim might emerge out of such a sacrificial crisis, one that would in turn require a new commemorative ritual duplication.

And, of course, there is a fourth sense in which substitution is used by Girard in this context. What if the entire mechanism goes bad, turns sour, “goes south,” as they say? What if no victim any longer is able to be identified as viable? Then one begins to imagine the sacrifice of sacrifice itself, the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, the prophetic critique of sacrifice that declares “what good are all your sacrifices?” and begins to imagine an ethical system no longer based upon sacrificial substitution, or based upon sacrificial substitution in entirely new ways. Such a sense of the end of the sacrificial is, we have suggested, at the root of Girard’s view of the modern. Tragedy would seem to have emerged from such “tragic prophetic” critique, and both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian scriptural canon would seem to be the product in significant part if not in its entirety of such prophetic interpretive reading.

Girard’s thinking retains the idea of substitution in all four of these senses: as the logic of sacrifice, as the logic of ritual commemoration, as the logic of neosacrificial structuration, and as the logic of the end of sacrifice in the birth of the modern. No single contribution to the volume that follows, however—with the possible exception of Girard’s conversation with Sandor Goodhart—displays all four, and several contributors introduce new understandings of both sacrifice and substitution, understandings that in turn confirm, critique, complement, or challenge Girard’s own. Perhaps this mix of Girardian and non-Girardian approaches to these common themes will open a place for Girard’s work in fields that to the present have largely eschewed it.

## **Reading the Reception of Girard in Biblical Studies**

Anthropology and biblical studies in English, and American intellectual contexts would seem to have proven strange bedfellows to each

other, and stranger still to the work of René Girard. We draw inspiration in this connection from the article of Gary Anderson (in the prestigious *Anchor Bible Dictionary*), who observes that “by and large, biblical scholarship has not kept up with the theoretical work of recent anthropology,” and mentions Girard’s work in particular.<sup>5</sup>

Although Girard has been writing on anthropological matters since the 1970s, and although a sizeable and increasing secondary literature has by now grown up around his work from within the community of his admiring readers, there has been no major anthropological endeavor to engage it. Robert Hamerton-Kelly attempted to foster one by inviting Walter Burkert and Jonathan Z. Smith to join Girard in a series of presentations and extended conversations in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> And Mark Anspach, in a brilliantly insightful volume, has more recently attempted to explain the idea of gift exchange within the Durkheimian, Maussian, and Lévi-Straussian tradition in a way that makes room for the introduction of Girard’s ideas.<sup>7</sup> In each case, however, these efforts have attracted little or no attention outside of the Girardian fold.<sup>8</sup> The little positive notice Girard’s writing has received tends to link it with Burkert’s as one more “universalist” approach that would reductively focus on one aspect of culture to the exclusion of all others.<sup>9</sup>

The situation in biblical studies is both better and worse. Since *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard has written three books primarily on biblical studies: *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*; *Job, the Victim of His People*; and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (plus numerous essays on biblical topics and on the status of the Gospels vis-à-vis myth).<sup>10</sup> A book and an entire journal issue devoted to his biblical studies work have appeared.<sup>11</sup> And an international organization, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), was formed, an organization inspired less by literary critics or anthropologists than biblical studies scholars, who play a significant role in administering the organization and whose work remains by juridical decision one of its mainstays. Nonetheless, Girard’s ideas have earned him, among his most negative critics, the familiar charges of supersessionism and triumphalism—even antiritualism.<sup>12</sup> How has the constitution of these fields contributed to the reception of his work?

*Sacrifice, the Prophetic, and the Documentary Hypothesis*

The primacy of sacrifice to the study of the Hebrew Bible has, in the eyes of biblical scholars, by no means proved self-evident. The issue of sacrifice, Anderson makes clear, for example, was a touchy one for scholars from the outset.<sup>13</sup> The detail with which the ancient institution exists is undeniable.<sup>14</sup> But the “Old Testament” is read precisely to the extent to which it prefigures the New, and so at best the presence of sacrifice in particular, and ritual in general, has been regarded by biblical studies scholars as a remnant of more ancient cultural styles.

Indeed, sacrifice was hardly dominant in the writings that served as foundational for the so-called “higher biblical criticism.” Having freed itself from pre-Kantian dogmatism, biblical scholarship, under the tutelage of the Kantian historical-critical method, began to identify independent compositional units within the scriptural fabric. The acronym “JEPD” named biblical scripture as a series of distinct documents combining respectively Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomistic compositional traditions (with the possible addition of an editorial or redactor tradition designated as R).<sup>15</sup>

Thus Julius Wellhausen’s magisterial volume *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* is often credited with placing the so-called “documentary hypothesis” on a firm footing. In Wellhausen’s view, the Hebrew Bible anticipates the New Testament, and the books of the prophets are prized more highly than those of Leviticus or Numbers, where much of the writing about sacrificial ritual is contained.<sup>16</sup>

The “documentary hypothesis” as a concept sustains multiple meanings, and other senses of “document” may be at play here. To these older readers of the “Old Testament,” such compositional differences reflected (or “documented”) multiple historical or cultural *realia*, all commonly lacking the moral progress, the evolutionary advantage, with which Christian European culture had been blessed. The anthropology upon which these writers relied supported their position, and it is not entirely surprising that an unabashed evolutionism, ethnocentrism, and antiprimitivism accompanied this thinking.

Thus was invoked the writing of Edward Tylor, who, in *Primitive Culture*, contrasts the modern with the primitive and elaborates sac-

rifice as a ritual gift within a highly opportunistic framework (*do ut das*, “I give in order that I may get”), a practice for him devoid of any significant moral or ethical content. Or these readers invoke the work of James G. Frazer, who in *The Golden Bough* saw the sacrificial death of the king, repeated annually, as a matter of primitive magical, pre-logical thought and superstition. Or they invoke the work of William Robertson-Smith, who in *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* adopted a slightly more positive outlook but maintained the same premises. Robertson-Smith sought for ways in which such practices reflected a modicum of social bonding or unity among the people employing them. He embedded his observations within the nineteenth-century fascination with totemism in which Israel—though differing little from other cultures of the Ancient Near East, all of which were separated by a chasm from modern Christian European culture—continued to strive for a means of acquiring social “communion,” a communion or union doomed necessarily to fail without the benefit of Christian understanding.

The view of sacrifice articulated by biblical scholars followed suit. George Buchanan Gray could write a book in 1929 on sacrifice in the “Old Testament” Priestly tradition in which such ritual material is thought to document historically the *realia* of a less sophisticated, more primitive mode of cultural understanding, citing in his defense among other writers Tylor, Frazer, and Robertson-Smith.<sup>17</sup> “I propose to examine,” Gray writes, in this context, “the extent to which sacrifice was subsumed under the general class of sacred gifts.”<sup>18</sup> Wellhausen’s work on prophetic thinking and Gray’s on sacrifice, though separated by some fifty years, are thus in important ways of a piece. And it is probably not insignificant that it is Robertson-Smith who served as editor for Wellhausen’s book when it was reissued shortly after its original printing.<sup>19</sup>

Their view has sustained a remarkable vitality. In several long and detailed volumes published as late as 1961, the Dominican Father Roland de Vaux outlines the nature and function of sacrifice in the Israelite community in much the same terms as Gray. The same evolutionist writers are cited as support. And if Father de Vaux’s conclusion is slightly different—sacrifice for him is not exclusively gift or social

bond but the vehicle for a host of social functions in a way that Freud would no doubt characterize as “overdetermined”—his strategic alignments are familiar.

By 1970, much had changed in anthropology. Durkheim, Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss had gained prominence in French ethnology. But fifty years after Gray’s original publication, biblical studies made use of virtually none of this new thinking, continuing to rely upon the insights of “anthropologists” from a hundred years earlier, writers who, having benefited from the historical-critical method and its critique of a dogmatic theology, in effect promptly reasserted the supersessionism and progressivism of their theological predecessors within their newly secularized context.<sup>20</sup> When Baruch Levine notes, in the prolegomena to the reissue of Gray’s original volume in the early 1970s, that nothing has changed in fifty years, we understand his claim. On the other hand, the fact that Gray’s book on sacrifice was reproduced at all is itself important. As if detecting a certain prescience, Levine notes that “something appears to be in the wind.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and the Hypothesis of Textuality*

What was in the wind has been called the “hypothesis of textuality” (Gary Anderson recently coined the word “scripturalization”), and this postwar phenomenon has occasioned a renewed interest in Durkheim. To understand his position (and Girard’s in relation to it), we need to glance at Durkheim, Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss.

While Tylor, Fraser, and Robertson-Smith pursued anthropological research in one fashion, French theorists Durkheim and Mauss examined the sacred and gift in another. Durkheim, as noted, pursued the importance of the sacred beyond the sum of the individual parts comprising it. Mauss continued that pursuit, combining an interest in the intentional structure of the sacrificial gift that Tylor had noticed with the social bonding benefits Robertson-Smith observed.

Thus in *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, Mauss and Hubert also saw sacrifice as a gift but one with precisely a unifying moral and ethical role in the community.<sup>22</sup> Later in the postwar period, Lévi-Strauss would continue to articulate this structuralist move. In his book on

totemism, he exposed and undid nineteenth-century antiprimitivist and evolutionist presuppositions.<sup>23</sup> If he strategically eschewed consideration of the category of the sacred (the problem that started it all in France, and an exclusion for which Girard would later challenge him), he undertook this defense of Rousseau-ism from within a scientific perspective, one that grounded itself in concrete quotidian realities experienced by members of a primitive culture.<sup>24</sup> Borrowing models of structural linguistics from Roman Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss developed Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* (or system and execution) and the study of culture as a system of signs (understood as the difference between *signifiant* and *signifié*—sometimes translated as “signifier” and “signified”—or between the sensible and the intelligible), and extended the work of Mauss to all of culture. He put anthropology on a firm new scientific footing, one that Girard among many others would utilize.

Thus Gary Anderson's neologism as a reference to textuality. For Anderson, scripturalization refers to the consideration of biblical phenomena neither as dogma nor as document but as text, and it is his contention that this new conception in biblical studies replaced the nineteenth-century interest in the Old Testament as a historical document to be examined within critical (which is to say nontheological) method. The interest of biblical scholars of the old school, he argues, was never really in *realia*. Although they spoke that way, when push came to shove, they relied upon texts, which is to say, upon narrative accounts in which the biblical tradition was necessarily passed to us.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, one way to understand sacrifice as an integral part of the Old Testament, Anderson suggests, is to regard it as writing. Just as Mauss suggested that social structure could be studied and Lévi-Strauss suggested that one way to do that was through its consideration as a system of signs (à la Saussure), so biblical sacrifice could be studied alongside prophetic thinking and the opposition between these two modes of thought could be overcome, much as Lévi-Strauss had overcome the objection that culture was either objective or subjective (and that one had to choose between two mutually exclusive alternatives) by studying it as language, and moreover language conceived as a system of signs. The “hypothesis of textuality” has replaced the “documentary hypothesis.”

Where is René Girard in all of this? René Girard came along and globalized this analysis, extending it to all culture as the problem of the sacred.<sup>26</sup>

*René Girard and the Mimetic Hypothesis*

It is not often acknowledged that Girard fairly liberally adopts the structuralist postulates of these thinkers. Culture for them is a system of differences, and Girard often cites the account of difference he attributes to Emile Benveniste in his volumes on *Indo-European Vocabulary and Institutions* as walking away from the sacrificial altar.<sup>27</sup> The difference between these thinkers—Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida—is that, for Girard, difference is one moment of a diachronic process. Culture functions as a system of difference. Then a crisis of difference appears. Difference is asserted in its inefficacy, and the more it is asserted, the more inefficacious things become and the more it is asserted. Difference has now acquired the name of violence, and the process is described as one of “undifferentiation.” Violence is difference asserted in the extreme, and difference is violence that is working, that is effective in generating separation. Violence is difference “gone wrong,” and difference is violence “working well.” It is with the absence of an account of the breakdown and recovery of differential systems that Girard challenges his structuralist and poststructuralist colleagues.

Although Girard rejects Lévi-Strauss’s insistence on a kind of wall-to-wall structuring of social reality to the exclusion of the sacred (and turns instead to Freud for an instance of what he calls “the real referent” and to Frazer for a counterexample to the way he conceives of his own project—namely, as operating at the level of real human relations), he nevertheless remains curiously within the same Durkheimianism of his interlocutors. It is the same Durkheimianism from which Lévi-Strauss’ and Mauss’ work hail, insofar as he (like them) is interested in the sacred for its singularity within the social fabric, a singularity to which he assigns the origin of culture itself, an origin that he will identify as sacrificial substitution.

In this way, Girard’s theory answers the problems posed by the two major traditions of understanding of the origin and function of

culture: the structuralist ethnological tradition in France (from Durkheim and Mauss to Lévi-Strauss), on the one hand, and the mythic or psychological tradition in England and the Continent (from Frazer to Freud), on the other. To the French structuralists for whom difference is all, Girard offers a theory of crisis and of the origin of difference. And to the Cambridge ritualists and Viennese psychoanalyst, Girard offers an account of culture at the symbolic level of real human relations, no longer the product simply (or uniquely) of either fear-governed superstition or the imagination of primal hordes and their libidinal desires. Girard finds a real referent for such behavior in sacrificial victimage, and a real origin for culture (and its conditions of order and disorder) in the primitive and modern community. As such, Girard's theories of social formation provide the basis for a theory of hominization within the evolutionary biological sphere.<sup>28</sup> Girard's insight is primarily and above all anthropological. It offers a hypothesis regarding the origin and function of human community within the contexts in which other such proposals are made or fail to be made.

### *Girard and Biblical Scholarship*

It is perhaps not without irony that Girard's poststructuralist position should lead him back to an anti-sacrificial position that was already there at the outset of the higher biblical criticism. Sacrifice for him is readable as a text, even though the text for him is founded upon real sacrificial gestures. In fact, his understanding is precisely that, to the extent that it is readable, we progressively move away from the efficacy of the sacrificial gesture.

Given this complexity of thought, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that biblical scholarship has for the most part not known what to do with Girard's work.<sup>29</sup> The overt response for the most part has been four stratagems of avoidance. His work has been excluded by silence, implicitly by mild reproach, or by inverse exaltation, or his work has been forthrightly dismissed. And yet, one has the impression that in a curious way, Girard's influence has been more pervasive than has been customarily acknowledged. Few are willing to go on record as affirming his influence—hence, the strategies of avoidance—but even the

most negative of his critics (see the discussion of Klawans below) regard that influence to be “unmatched.”<sup>30</sup>

The work of Roger Beckwith and Martin Selman reflects the first approach, ignoring Girard, even though COV&R had been meeting for five years and James Williams’s book had already appeared.<sup>31</sup> David Janzen’s book is an example of the second: mild praise. Janzen notes that “of all the more recent universal theories it is Girard’s which has drawn the largest following within Biblical studies.”<sup>32</sup> James Watts’ approach is slightly more positive and promising.<sup>33</sup> Observing that “the view that human sacrifice is basic to society has circulated . . . widely in the form developed by René Girard,” Watts also notes, “Girard’s best evidence . . . comes from stories of executions, lynchings, and pogroms, including Jesus’ crucifixion (which, for Girard, exposes scapegoating to criticism and resistance).” These are all “stories,” he says, “only distantly associated with ritual acts, if at all. The application of [Girard’s] theory to Temple rituals is strained” (177).

More respectful (if equally distant) are Christian Grappe and Alfred Marx.<sup>34</sup> “Does God agree to or require the putting to death of human beings?” these authors ask. “With regards to the Old Testament, the response is clearly negative. The God of the Old Testament resolutely refuses all human sacrifice. . . . What is at stake in these different narratives is the origin of violence” (83).

Girard, in their eyes, has clearly arrived. “According to the definition that is given in *le Robert*, the scapegoat is ‘a person upon whom one causes to fall the wrongs of others.’ As René Girard has magisterially shown, this function is of capital importance for society” (78). Girard’s reflections in *The Scapegoat* are not far removed from these. The work of Grappe and Marx is entirely positive. They invoke the “magisterial” demonstrations of René Girard to talk about a topic they now take to be *de rigueur* in biblical scholarship: namely, the origins of violence.

But therein lies the difficulty. All of these writers—the silent, the negative, and the positive—exclude implicitly. Girard is no less distanced in Grappe and Marx than he is in Janzen, Watts, Beckwith, and Selman. The major engagement has not yet occurred in their work.

The case is different with the response of Jonathan Klawans, which is more directly negative.<sup>35</sup> “It is fair to say,” Klawans notes, “especially

with regard to [Mary] Douglas and Girard—that their impact on Biblical studies has been unmatched” (17). But then he quickly adds: “it is difficult to imagine two books more fundamentally different than *Purity and Danger* and *Violence and the Sacred*. . . . *Violence and the Sacred* is nothing short of an indictment of sacrificial rituals” (22). Girard’s approach is “not unlike Robertson-Smith’s approach to ritual impurity,” or “like Frazer.” And, for Klawans, the “supersessionist nature of Girard’s project” is evident in the claim that the truth is revealed “only in Christian” texts and that Christianity is the “necessary completion of Judaism.” Girard “blames Jewish authorities” for Jesus’s death. Moreover, that “all sacrifice involves killing *innocent* victims which must mean guilty priests.” Girard’s “anti-ritualism” in Klawans’ view, “drives his evolutionism.”

Conflating Girard’s view with that of Frazer and Freud, Klawans’ position is understandable, if ill-spirited, and bound by an agenda linked to the promotion of the work of Mary Douglas to Girard’s detriment. More interesting in the current context is a recent engagement of Girard’s work by Bruce Chilton, whose essay on the Eucharist is included in this volume.<sup>36</sup> Chilton touches upon many of the same issues as Klawans but in a manner that is respectful and constructive, one that perhaps offers—despite its disagreements—the best chance for a future serious engagement on these matters.

What concerns Chilton is Girard’s assertion that the sacrificial mechanism “was played out in *each and every* society that has ever existed, when there is no direct evidence to that effect” (35). Moreover, Chilton criticizes Girard for linking his analysis of sacrifice “with a full-fledged defense of Christianity as the *sole* religion that can get humanity past its violent origins. Having posited that all sacrifice originates in violence and perpetuates violence, Girard then announces that Christianity is the only cure for violence” (37).

This second point, according to Chilton, Girard derives from Jesus’ innocence, the fact that “Jesus was executed without cause.” “He was an innocent victim, and by asserting his innocence the New Testament reveals that human violence against scapegoats was unjustified. By stripping away the violent origins of humanity and all its religious institutions Girard claims that Christianity did what no other religion

did or could do” (38). Moreover, the claim is brought up in contexts in the New Testament that “justify animosity toward the Jews,” for example, Matthew 27:25 where “all the people” of the Jews are blamed. Such passages, Chilton argues, “provided a charter for violent Christian pogroms against the Jews in the Middle Ages” (39).

There is no place here to answer at length any of these charges. But perhaps in concluding this introduction it would be interesting to sketch the root (in our view) of their misunderstanding. Chilton’s claim, that Girard sees the sacrificial mechanism as the motor force of all societies although no one society displays all the evidence for it, is accurate enough. But that is hardly an odd rhetorical strategy. Saussure uses it in distinguishing *langue* from *parole*, as does Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*, and Lévi-Strauss in his discussion of Ur-mythology in the *Mythologiques*. It is the staple of a structuralist position. Perhaps Chilton’s discomfort is more with structuralism than Girard.

And what if Girard’s point is accurate? What if his theory *does* account for all instances of the ways in which cultures manage runaway mimetic behavior—across the board? What if it discloses the foundation of hominization? Should we cast it aside because it is too successful, because it works every time we invoke it? What if there is something distinctive about human communities and Girard has put his finger on it?

Chilton’s second criticism—that Girard’s position is supersedionist and triumphalist—is more complicated. Girard never claims “Christianity [is] the *sole* religion [to reveal culture’s violent origins or] that can get humanity past its violent origins” but the sole religion for “us,” for citizens of European history, which is to say, the history of the Holy Roman Empire. Girard’s theoretical position is not normative but descriptive (whatever his personal adherence to a Christian ethical position). He is describing a reading, the anthropological interpretation that Christianity in his view makes of the cultures preceding it. We might appropriately argue that Judaism makes similar readings, or Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam, within the cultural contexts in which they speak. Girard never places himself outside of all culture, from some position (Christian or other) where he might make judgments about it. He always lodges himself squarely within it, commenting

on the texts that speak to us in the most honest and most forthright manner about our own violence. In the Western universe, that position is necessarily (and exclusively for Girard) the one articulated by Greek tragedy, Hebrew scripture, and Christian scripture. And the innocence of the victim in all instances of these texts is the innocence of the charge for which the scapegoat is made uniquely culpable, although the scapegoat has often become a double, an enemy twin, of his persecutors. Jesus enacts the innocence of every scapegoat of the crime with which he is charged—namely, with being the source of all violence in the culture.

Nothing, moreover, prevents the revelation of the truth of our own sacrificial violence from slipping into neosacrificial behavior, even (or especially) among those closest to the revelation. Girard never tires of citing the ways in which the apostles themselves display mimetic behavior of the very kind under examination. The history of Western Christianity in Girard's view is not the history of a peaceful culture but of an intensely violent one struggling to free itself from mimetic entanglements that have become only more evident by virtue of its scriptural possessions. If historical Christianity becomes at times neosacrificial in its relation to Judaism in the Middle Ages, or to other groups during the Crusades, or to women during the witchcraft trials, that history for Girard is less reflective of any species of cultural arrogance endemic to the Christian revelation than of its efforts to eradicate behaviors that have plagued all cultures at all times in the history of the human community, abuses that we also know about because of that revelation and that a document like *Nostra Aetate* in the last century goes a long way toward acknowledging.<sup>37</sup>

What Girard requests (and in our view certainly deserves) is simply scholarly engagement. Here is where and why we agree. Here is where and why we disagree. This helps us to explain that. That other thing remains to be explained. Why has this kind of engagement been so difficult to generate? Why has his work either been ignored or invoked or indicted (mildly or forcefully)? Is the fate of Girard's work the fate of all important thinkers? Do we, for example, really engage Freud's work? It would seem to be appropriated or dismissed in accord with the dynamics Girard describes so well. Is it not our ethical responsibility as

scholars to go beyond this kind of mimetic appropriation? Mindful of the difficulties of the task, that is what this book is attempting: to reserve a place for Girard's work in the ongoing scholarly discussion of sacrifice and scripture.

### Reading This Volume

The collection is divided into two parts dealing with sacrifice and scripture, respectively. The first contains nine essays by the writers mentioned above. The second contains twelve essays on specific texts in each scripture (Genesis 22 and Job in the Jewish tradition, the Gospels and Epistles in the Christian tradition). The collection coheres around the notion of "substitution" in four ways: (1) as the logic of sacrifice or scapegoating at the heart of the victimary mechanism; (2) as the logic of its ritual repetition; (3) as the logic of the exchange in the "sacrificial crises" by which one system comes to be replaced by another; and (4) as the logic of scripture in the face of the crises from which Rabbinic Judaism and nascent Christianity have come and within the logic of critical reading of sacrifice and scripture since then.

The book opens with a conversation in which René Girard and Sandor Goodhart explore the relation between imitation and violence as a way of understanding sacrifice in primitive religion. In one way, we have always acknowledged the relation of imitation to conflict, Girard suggests, since both our great literary writers and our great religious texts — the Bible, for example — speak about little else (which is why the appearance of instances of unconscious scapegoating, for example, in medieval witchcraft trials or in certain political cases like the Dreyfus trial, trouble us in the first place). But at least since the ancient Greeks, in our more formal nonliterary writing, we have felt it necessary to separate them. We may understand religion more scientifically, Girard suggests, if we recognize in religion a way of managing this relation of imitation to conflict, with sacrifice (and sacrificial scapegoating) playing a decisive role. We may even be able to talk about the process of hominization in this fashion, since the appearance of human groups from among animal groups may derive from this capacity to control crisis with substitute victims.

The discussion with Girard opens up dialogically the topic of the origins and historical development of biblical sacrifice. In “Bloody Logic: The Biblical Economy of Sacrificial Substitution and Some of Its Eucharistic Implications,” Thomas Ryba extends Marcel Mauss’ anthropological theory of the gift and Michael Polanyi’s definition of “economics” in order to identify “the form of exchange [sacrificial economies] imply, the form of substitution they allow, and the commensurable standard that makes both substitution and exchange possible.” Assuming that “sacrifice did change from the form and significance it had in ancient Israelitic religion to the form and significance it had in ancient Christianity” and providing a formal, schematic description of those changes, Ryba nonetheless discovers in Eucharistic theology important continuities with the Judaic tradition of sacrifice. In particular, he argues that blood, as a symbol of the very gift of life, “signifies the commensurable standard behind biblical sacrificial practice.”

Like Ryba, Michael Fishbane endeavors to trace and explain change and continuity in the historical forms of sacrifice. In “Aspects of the Transformation of Sacrifice in Judaism,” Fishbane explores the logic of substitution within the Rabbinic tradition in the aftermath of the collapse of the Second Temple. He argues that sacrifice continues after the catastrophe in the form of study, prayer, and their attendant ascetic activities. The study of Torah for the rabbis, Fishbane notes, is equal in merit to doing all the commandments. Even in as late a work as the eighteenth-century writing of Hayyim of Voloshin, the *Nefesh Hayah*, the legitimacy of the substitution continues.

Bruce Chilton argues that, before the destruction of the Second Temple, Jesus of Nazareth also offered up forms of sacrifice that substituted for, and were perceived to rival, those offered in the Temple precincts. In “The Eucharist and the Mimesis of Sacrifice,” Chilton turns to the question of the Eucharist as a premier instance of the treatment of sacrifice within the Christian text. Chilton proposes that there are not one but several traditions of Eucharistic sacrifice within Christianity. Outlining six types of Eucharist, he discerns their generative moment in an anti-sacrificial gesture on Jesus’ part, a moment of mimetic substitution or surrogacy for Temple ritual practice.

Responding in different ways to Chilton’s account of Eucharist are the following two essays, by Robert Daly, S.J., and Alan Segal.

In “Eucharistic Origins: From the New Testament to the Liturgies of the Golden Age,” Daly reviews twentieth-century research into the origins of the Eucharist. He observes that many of the Church’s theologians have yet to appropriate the significance of what is commonly accepted as historical fact by exegetes and liturgical theologians, namely, that there is no clear line of development from the Last Supper of Jesus to the theologically rich Eucharistic prayers of the patristic golden age. Daly discusses the implications of Chilton’s account for methodology in systematic theology and ecclesiology, for liturgical and ecumenical theology, and for pastoral theology and homiletics.

Whereas Chilton underscores the Christian understanding of the Eucharist as a meal in preparation for the self-sacrifice of martyrs, Alan Segal notes that the death of martyrs has often been understood to be a sacrificial offering. In “Life after Death: Violence, Martyrdom, and Academic Life in Western Religions,” Segal pursues the question of violence in connection with martyrdom and the afterlife. He argues that the modern idea of the importance of the immortality of the soul finds its counterpart in the ancient world in the Platonic tradition, and that resurrection was in fact imagined in more specifically bodily terms by ancient Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Although these two ideas of the afterlife—resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul—have often been combined in Western history, they do not, in Segal’s view, form an easy synthesis. Taken together they have often been invoked by religious martyrs, and sometimes co-opted by the state itself to the furtherance of its own ends. Belief in a bodily resurrection has been used, Segal suggests, to justify both the self-sacrifice of martyrs and the state’s sacrifice of its citizens.

Like Segal, Louis Feldman is interested in the relationship between the state and the religious community—in particular, the status of the Jewish people under Roman rule. Were they scapegoated (in the Girardian sense) by the empire? In “Anti-Judaism, Josephus, and the Hellenistic-Roman Period,” Feldman examines the historical context (to the extent we can know it) with regard to the question of anti-Judaism during the ancient Hellenistic-Roman period, paying particular attention to the writings of Josephus. Feldman surveys the available ancient references to Jews within the Greco-Roman sphere and suggests

that “it is time to revise the lachrymose view of [ancient] Jewish history.” Jews in the ancient world were envied but also protected, accused of dual loyalty but also doing well. The pogroms that did occur (for example, in Alexandria) did so in communities where boundaries or structures of differences were unstable. The terrible anti-Semitism known to the medieval and modern world in Europe was, he concludes, for the most part absent from the ancient world.

In the essays that conclude the first part of this book, Feldman’s position receives the endorsement of two other historians of the ancient world. Erich Gruen applauds Feldman’s refusal to subscribe to “the lachrymose version” of Jewish history and suggests that Jews in the diaspora (which existed in his view since the time of Alexander) were singled out neither for special condemnation nor for special disdain but accepted—for good or for bad—among many other peoples in a pluralistic polytheistic economy. Perhaps because of their distance from the religious center in Jerusalem, he suggests, they lived within a community in which substitutions played a critical role, allowing them (in the eyes of the dominant culture) a variety of alternative civic practices, in keeping with their singular identity as Jews.

Stuart Robertson similarly approves Feldman’s refusal to accept modern constructions of anti-Semitism as applicable as such to the ancient world, and compares Feldman’s take on philo-Semitic attitudes with Girard’s notions of the sacrificial consequences of runaway mimesis and conflict. Could supersessionism be founded upon obstructed admiration, he wonders? If the similarities between Feldman’s view of emulation and Girard’s of mimesis are not apparent, perhaps it is because of the differences of their epistemological models, he suggests: Feldman writing as a positivist empirical scholar, Girard as a theorist of cultural anthropology and crisis who understands the great literary and scriptural texts of our tradition as interpretive readings of these matters.

In the second part of the volume, a number of writers take up Girardian (and other than Girardian) ideas about sacrifice and the sacrificial as they are reflected within specific texts in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Two writers examine the pivotal moment of Genesis 22 (a passage that Chilton has studied elsewhere from a Girardian perspective) when the question of the *Akedah*—the “binding” of Isaac to

become an *olah* or burnt sacrificial offering upon Mount Moriah—is raised: Matthew Pattillo from within the context of blessing and creation, and Steven Stern in the context of Kierkegaard’s questions about the potential for Abraham to engage in murderous violence.

In “Creation and *Akedah*: Blessing and Sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures,” Matthew Pattillo explores the themes of creation and blessing. Refuting both of the charges often leveled against Girard—namely, that Girard ignores the biblical theme of blessing and that his thinking is supersessionist—Pattillo argues for a “relationship of interdependence for mutual blessing between Israel and the nations,” one that is “ultimately intrinsic to God’s revelation to the world.” The anti-sacrificial thrust of the *Akedah* forms a new model for sacrifice, one that relies more upon obedience than upon the offerings of the victimary mechanism that Girard describes. “God’s invitation,” Pattillo notes, extends “from Israel to all the families of the earth to embrace the self-sacrificial character of the innocent victim and to join the family of God in submission and obedience to God. . . . The differentiated unity of the *Akedah* and the Gospel mirrors the divinely intended and enduring relationship between Israel and the nations.”

Drawing upon Levinas’s notion of our infinite responsibility for the other human being, and our access to that responsibility through the face of the other individual, Steven Stern argues that if the *Akedah* in Genesis 22 does not reject sacrifice entirely, it rejects killing Isaac as a demonstration of faithfulness. Qualifying Kierkegaard’s radical individualism through the Jewish tradition of anti-idolatry, Stern argues that the Hebrew text remains profoundly anti-sacrificial. He examines the famous test in Genesis 22:1 “through an analysis of the three people directly affected by the test, [namely,] Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah,” finding the passage to be “about Abraham’s learning to take responsibility for the Other.” His reading thus joins Pattillo’s as a move away from the sacrificial postulates by which primitive culture would organize itself and looks forward to a world founded upon ethics and leading to justice.

The essays of Matthew Pattillo and Stephen Stern, Sandor Goodhart suggests, offer a fruitful basis for comparison and contrast. Pattillo examines the whole of Hebrew scripture in relation to Girard’s

reading of the Christian Gospel as an exposure of the scapegoat mechanism, while Stern focuses in upon one key moment of the Hebrew Bible from which all else in his view may be deduced. Although these two writers are diametrically opposed in their view of that one text, their views reflect divergent angles of approach to it that remain consonant, Goodhart argues, both with Hebrew scripture as the rabbis read it and with the thinking of René Girard.

In the next section, Chris Allen Carter, William Morrow, and Sandor Goodhart read the book of Job in light of Girard's analysis: Carter from within the wisdom tradition, Morrow from within the complaint tradition, and Goodhart from within the rabbinic tradition.<sup>38</sup> In "Mimesis, Sacrifice, and the Wisdom of Job," Chris Allen Carter argues that Girard tackles one of the more recalcitrant interpretive problems of the Bible. Surprisingly supportive of the documentary thesis, Girard develops his ethical critical position by comparing and contrasting the scriptural treatment of Job with the Greek tragedian treatment of Oedipus, thus positioning Job within a larger ethical and historical context than that engaged by other critics. Carter highlights Girard's position by contrasting it with three others, those of Moshe Greenberg, Robert Alter, and Stephen Mitchell, in which the documentary hypothesis is refuted in favor of new critical organic interpretations.

In "The Expulsion of Complaint from Early Jewish Worship," William Morrow also examines René Girard's thesis that the book of Job registers a sacrificial crisis in Israelite religion. Using an account of its literary history more accepted in biblical scholarship, Morrow notes that Job marks an important moment in the unveiling of the scapegoating mechanism, although he differs from Girard in his account of how this happens. The opposition between the God of the victim and the God of the persecutor, which Girard discovers in Job's speeches, Morrow derives from a preexisting tradition of lament. The opposition, he asserts, is not original to Job. In Morrow's view, however, Girard is correct to claim that the spirit of complaint is part of the larger cultural drift in the Judaism of the time. The book of Job attests to the emergence of social and theological dynamics that worked to suppress the complaint against God in Second Temple times. The expulsion of

protest prayer from early Jewish worship took place, Morrow explains, under the aegis of what Karl Jaspers dubbed the “Axial Age.”

In “The Book of Job and the Problem of Evil: Reading from Theodicy to the Ethical,” Sandor Goodhart argues that René Girard’s view of the book of Job is successful in unexpected ways. Girard’s thesis—that apart from the remote or bullying God in which we usually frame the book, there is another drama afoot with more in common with the scapegoat dynamics of Greek tragedy than the scriptural dynamics of the Hebrew Bible—allows us to make sense of the rabbinic claim that Job is “not Jewish.” The narrative, for Goodhart, traces the consequences of a perspective in which the law of anti-idolatry—the Jewish law—has been obscured: namely, that suffering and creation are irrevocably severed from each other. As a result, the four customary means of relating the realms of the divine and the human—myth, institutional ritual practice, the work of human justice, and cosmology—are now no more than free-standing explanations, arbitrary sacrificial theodicies moving independently amidst a sea of such sacrificial explanations, with no more contingent power than any other view in the ancient world. Girard’s view helps us to understand the rabbinic advocacy that we move from such theodicies to an ethical perspective in which the law of anti-idolatry retains its province.

The next grouping of essays in part two features analyses of Gospel passages that sound themes important to Girard: mimesis, rivalry, and sacrifice. In “Luke and the Opportune Time: Reading the Temptation Story as Preface to Kingdom and Prologue to Passion,” Martin Aiken calls attention to Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness as uniquely dramatic in the way it stages the conflict between Jesus and the devil. Drawing upon N. T. Wright’s summary of the three “identities that were available to a Jew of first-century Palestine”—that of the Essenes, the Herodians (inclusive of the Sadducees), and the Zealots (inclusive of the Pharisees)—Aiken argues that “the temptation story provides a Lukan synopsis of Jesus’ encounters with these three identities . . . with an emphasis on the Essene-like community at Qumran.” Driven out into the wilderness “as an outcast,” a scapegoat belonging to none of the existing parties, Jesus is tempted to assume an identity defined through an earthly (and diabolic) mimesis, but

chooses instead to derive his very self as God's Son from the Father, in obedience to his unique vocation.

In his account of the Gospel of Matthew as a "Gospel That Preaches Nonviolence and Yet Provokes Violence," Gérard Rossé also points to the singularity of the Matthean Jesus, who "explicitly distanced himself from movements advocating the use of violence, such as that of the Zealots," while proposing a "social revolution" that would begin "in the heart of the human being." "What particularly interests me," Rossé writes, "is the fact that, in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, the demand to love one's enemies is tightly bound up with the novelty of the *proximity* of the kingdom of God." Jesus' "solidarity . . . with the marginalized was certainly provocative in the eyes of both the political elite and other religious movements," Rossé asserts. At the time of the Gospel's composition, the expulsion of Christian Jews from the synagogues no doubt also intensified the Gospel's criticism of Jewish leaders. Characterizing the historical situation as a quarrel among brothers, Rossé argues that "the polemic against the leaders of Israel" is also and perhaps primarily intended as "a warning to the Christian community. . . . It is, above all, infidelity to the divine will that Matthew indicts, whether it be Jewish or Christian."

Complementing the essays by Aiken and Rossé, Ann W. Astell's "Exilic' Identities, the Samaritans, and the 'Satan' of John" complicates the question of identities available to Jesus by calling attention to the Gospel according to John, where the Samaritans are featured alongside Jews as members of the house of Israel. Astell describes Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 as a Johannine substitution for the accounts of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness recorded in the synoptic Gospels. "While the Samaritan woman of John 4 is decidedly not the 'devil' of Luke 4 and Matthew 4 (or the 'Satan' of Mark 1:13)—indeed, she is emphatically human and ultimately becomes Jesus' disciple—she does have a shadowy, apparently promiscuous past (her five husbands perhaps representing Samaritan idol-worship)," Astell observes. She goes on to argue that "John uses the episode consciously to comment on the satanic nature of mimetic competition (the very theme to which Aiken has drawn attention in his masterful exposition of Luke 4)." She concludes that "the Johannine

community, which almost certainly included Samaritan members, was struggling toward the realization of a more capacious, pluralistic understanding of Israel—an Israel composed of Jews and Samaritans united in Christ and welcoming to Gentile believers.”

In the final section of this second part, in which the Christian Epistles are considered, Christopher Morrissey looks at a text from Colossians, and Poong-In Lee examines the famous sacrificial passages of Hebrews for the possibilities of an anti-sacrificial view. In “Aristotle’s ‘Natural Slaves’ and Colossae’s Unnatural ‘Scythians’: A Generative Exegesis of Colossians 3:11,” Chris S. Morrissey unpacks a mimetic rivalry at work among Greek Christians, some of whom have adopted Jewish customs to the dismay of their fellow Greeks. He finds in this rivalry a generative possibility for the use for the derogatory word “Scythian” in a famous passage from St. Paul.

Noting René Girard’s early response to the sacrificial theology expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Poong-In Lee asks, “Is an Anti-sacrificial Reading of Hebrews Plausible?” He responds in the affirmative, first, by noting Girard’s own revision of his earlier stance and Raymund Schwager’s brilliant, Girardian interpretation of Hebrews and, second, by calling attention to the epistle’s many exhortations addressed to a Christian community that has clearly suffered persecution. Investigating “the tension between anti-sacrificial and sacrificial stances in the epistle,” Poong-In concludes that “new, anti-sacrificial notions of sacrifice and of covenant result from this creative tension,” making Hebrews, in the end, “one of the New Testament books that is actually most supportive of Girard’s evolutionary theory.”

And finally, in “Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and René Girard: A Response to Christopher Morrissey and Poong-In Lee,” Anthony Bartlett suggests there are two ways readers of biblical texts can go wrong: by applying Girardian theory either too strongly or too weakly. The goal he says is to let the apocalyptic nature of the Girardian insight speak for itself: “To be true to the dynamic of Girardian thought,” he writes, so that “the [biblical] text is released in its authentic apocalyptic force,” a force personified in Jesus. Citing Girard, Bartlett characterizes this apocalyptic force as “capable of undermining and overturning the whole cultural order of humanity and supplying the secret

motive force of all subsequent history.”<sup>39</sup> Morrissey and Poong-In offer us, in their respective Girardian analyses of Colossians and Hebrews, in Bartlett’s view, the possibility for making significant headway into the release of these apocalyptic forces.

## Reading, Substitution, and the Ethical

Taken together, the essays in this collection engage in what might appropriately be called “substitutive reading.” They reflect directly or indirectly a reading, with Girard or in his context, of the cultural logic that allows one victim to substitute for others and culture to be generated (or regenerated) as a consequence. They reflect a reading, with Girard and the anthropologists, of sacrificial offerings as substitutive within specific historical, narrative, and religious contexts, a reading in some cases of cultural breakdown or sacrificial crisis, in which one sacrificial system comes to be substituted for another. But they also, finally, reflect a reading, in one other sense, a sense that occurs historically in two different versions, both relevant to biblical scholarship. On the one hand (following Fishbane’s account of the rabbis’ view of study and prayer), they reflect a reading of reading itself as a substitute for sacrifice and therefore as an anti-sacrificial means of sacrificial practice. And on the other, they reflect a reading (in the Christian sacramental context) of the Eucharist as a personally transformative sacrificial practice.

In the primitive religious community, in Girard’s view, the substitutive economy of sacrifice is not readable. Those who begin to read it are quickly sequestered into shamanistic enclaves. If we in our own culture can read the sacrificial mechanism as its filigree, there must be a source for its legibility. The prophetic texts of the Jewish tradition and later the plays of the greatest of Greek tragic writers begin to formulate this move away from sacrificial origins, and the Christian Gospels, in Girard’s view, complete this disclosure. But it is the entire complex of these texts—scriptural, anthropological, and literary in the widest possible sense—that opens the door to what we are calling substitutive reading.

Can we go further? Is there another sense of substitution that can take us beyond the senses we have enumerated (namely, the internal logic of sacrifice, the logic of ritual commemoration, the logic of sacrificial crisis whereby one system transforms itself into another, and the logic of the end to sacrifice and thus what we might call the scriptural anti-sacrificial)? Is there a sense of substitution that develops this anti-sacrificial further, into what could properly be called the ethical? Reading was already understood, among both the rabbis and the church fathers, as a continuation of the practice of sacrifice.<sup>40</sup> Would not an understanding of the anti-sacrificial or anti-idolatrous founded upon an unlimited non-indifference to the other individual (standing face-to-face before me) constitute an ethical continuation of substitution in an entirely new and fertile dimension? Would not the “take me for him” articulated by Yaakov’s son, Yehuda, at the conclusion of Genesis, or the “I am guilty—responsible—before all, for everyone and everything, and me more than all the others” articulated by one of Dostoyevsky’s characters (and cited repeatedly by René Girard and Emmanuel Levinas), serve such a purpose?

Such an infinite “one for the other” or substitutive reading would of necessity be descriptive before it was prescriptive. It would found itself upon persecution rather than reason, suffering rather than sacrificial structure (which is to say, radical abiding, passivity rather than distinctive action, a passivity more passive than the opposite of active), and it would confer upon us, upon me, the status of a hostage rather than that of an independent observer (within a consciousness newly understood as a heteronomy rather than an autonomy).

Such a constitution of an ethical would thus answer, if Girard is right, the oldest demands made upon our species: that we sacrifice another in order that human community become possible. It would provide a responsible foundation for interhuman groups by refusing violence in an especially egregious fashion: by reversing sacrifice, by acknowledging in its place an infinite responsibility for the other human being, and by abiding an obligation or election that has been available to us in the West for some two thousand years now and that continues, in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, to go by the unlikely name of love.

## Notes

1. René Girard delivered a talk, “Scapegoating at Çatalhöyük,” at the annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, “Catastrophe and Conversion: Political Thinking for the New Millennium,” on June 20, 2009, at the University of California, Riverside, on this topic.

2. Cf. Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” one of his Auguste Dupin mystery stories, which refers to this game.

3. Raymund Schwager, S.J., *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

4. For an English translation of this book, see *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009).

5. See Gary A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Friedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:872.

6. See Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

7. Mark Rogin Anspach, *À Charge de Revanche: Figures Élémentaires de la réciprocité* [*On Condition that You Allow Me to Do the Same: Elementary Forms of Reciprocity*] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

8. Hamerton-Kelly’s book has been largely ignored, and Anspach’s book has not been translated.

9. See David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

10. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* appeared in English in 1987, *Job* in 1987, and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* in 2001. An essay on Salome, “Scandal and the Dance: Salome in the Gospel of Mark,” appeared in *New Literary History* 15 in 1983. And an essay on the mythical status of the Gospels, “Are the Gospels Mythical?” appeared in *First Things* 62 in 1996.

11. See James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), and Andrew McKenna’s “René Girard and Biblical Studies,” *Semeia* 33 (1985).

12. Jonathan Klawans makes those charges in *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford, 2005).

13. See Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” 5:870–76.

14. Consider, for example, Roland de Vaux’s work on the intricacy of sacrificial ritual: *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961).

15. For a contemporary survival of this “documentary hypothesis,” see Richard Elliot Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), and later, his *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

16. See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Reimer, 1883), trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, and with a preface by W. Robertson Smith, as *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1985). For an exposition of the differences between this Wellhausenian tradition of the prophetic and the more properly sacrificial traditions of blessing, see Hans Jensen, “Nature, Bible, Priestly Theology: A Reply to Sandor Goodhart and Charles Mabee,” *American Academy of Religion / Society of Biblical Literature*, Chicago, November 18, 1994. For an account of this talk, see <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/bulletin/xtexte/bulletin08-4.html>. Jensen sees sacrifice in this context as a kind of kitchen and the activities associated with it a kind of food preparation. On that idea, see also Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT).”

17. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches in the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Arts, and Custom* (London: J. Murray, 1871); Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., 12 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1906–15); and William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1889).

18. See George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (1925); reissued in 1971 with a “Prolegomenon” by Baruch A. Levine, from Ktav Publishing House. The quote is from Levine, “Prolegomenon,” 2.

19. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*.

20. Gary Anderson’s comment, at the outset of his article on sacrifice in biblical studies, that biblical scholarship to date has not benefited significantly from anthropological research, would seem trenchant.

21. Levine, “Prolegomenon,” 2.

22. See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

23. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (New York: Beacon Press, 1963).

24. On Lévi-Strauss’ anti-Durkheimianism, see *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Penguin, 1992). On his articulation of his method as a “science of the concrete,” see *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1–34. It is significant that he wrote one of the longest and one of his best texts as an *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge, 1987).

25. In a conversation with Norbert Lohfink that followed my presentation in 1983 at Cerisy on the Joseph story, Sandor Goodhart made that point. What about those texts in Deuteronomy that call for Israel to take possession of the lands of Canaan? The same principle of textualization applies there, I argued, and the fol-

lowing day over lunch he agreed. Historical reality and ritual practice are important in so far as the biblical scripture perceives them as textual phenomena.

26. See Andrew McKenna's *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) on this point. For more discussion of Girard's role in upsetting the traditional boundary between criticism and literature, see Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrificing Commentary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), and, more recently, Robert Doran's introduction to René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), i–xxvi.

27. See, for example, Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions Indo-Européennes, Tome I: Économie, parenté, société*; vol. 2: *Pouvoir, droit, religion* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1969 and 1980).

28. A posthumous English translation of a work by the Jesuit Father Raymond Schwager attempts to discern a parallel between a Girardian account of hominization and theological discussion of “original sin.” See *Banished From Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, trans. James Williams (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006).

29. This observation, of course, does not take into account the hundreds of books and articles written on Girard's work in general (on a yearly basis) by his devotees in (or around) the Colloquium on Violence and Religion and other groups taking Girard as their focus, writings that are not part of the mainstream disciplines.

30. Girard's general reputation has had some odd turns. He started as a historian of medieval marriage conventions. Upon writing *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, he was hailed as the premier thinker of “triangular desire”; see Lucien Goldman's commentary, for example, in *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). When Girard started writing about sacrifice and violence, his literary critical audience diminished somewhat, but his importance as a cultural anthropologist, religious studies thinker, and general essayist was affirmed in his admission to the French Academy and echoed in Michel Serres's introductory presentation at the l'Académie française (December 15, 2005), writing that Girard “invented the most fruitful hypothesis of the age”; see “Receiving René Girard into the l'Académie française,” in *For René Girard: Essays in Friendship and Truth*, ed. Sandor Goodhart, Jørgen Jørgensen, Thomas Ryba, and James Williams, 1–17 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), at 15.

31. Roger Beckwith and Martin Selman, *Sacrifice in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995).

32. David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 79.

33. James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.

34. Christian Grappe and Alfred Marx, *Sacrifices scandaleux? Sacrifices humains, martyre et mort du Christ* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2008).

35. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*.

36. See Bruce Chilton, *Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Random House, 2008).

37. *Nostra Aetate* is one of the central documents of Vatican II. See *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, Proclaimed by his Holiness, Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965*.

38. For Girard's analysis, see *Job, the Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

39. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 209.

40. Origen is cited in this context within the Christian fold, and Hugh of St. Victor might be added to that group. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vols. 1–2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998–2009), on this idea.