

APOCALYPSE DEFERRED

Girard and Japan

EDITED BY
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A LIGHT SHALL APPEAR IN THE EAST

An Introduction to This Volume

JEREMIAH L. ALBERG

When a book has multiple authors, and when these authors come from several different continents with diverse training and expertise, and when they are addressing such dramatically diverse topics as Japanese anime and typology in the Bible—all of which are true of this volume—then readers can have a difficult time finding their way. To aid readers in their quest, I offer two perspectives in this introduction. First, I will provide some background as to how this particular collection of essays came into existence, or the story of this collection. Second, I will give an account of my own rationale for the structure of the book, or the story this collection tells.

The Story of This Collection

Many of these essays, as can be seen in even a brief perusal, have been deeply affected not only by the place in which the meeting was held, Tokyo, Japan, but also the time at which it was held, the summer of 2012,

when memories of the devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster of Eastern Japan which had occurred in March 2011, nearly a year and a half earlier, were still very fresh in everyone's mind. There was a period in preparing for the conference when we worried whether it could take place in the planned venue at all. It is not surprising, then, that several of the contributors, both Japanese and non-Japanese, touch upon this disaster in their reflections and use it as a touchstone for thinking about apocalyptic realities.

At the time that the conference was first being planned by the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), we obviously had no idea of the disasters that Japan would go through. Instead, the desire was to break out of the tradition of always holding the conferences either in Europe or North America. There was a hope to hear new voices and to see things from a different perspective. The association of Japan with the apocalyptic through the events of World War II in general and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in particular were very much at the forefront of our minds. The events of March 2011 put it all in a much stronger light.

Some more remote background contributed to making Japan an appropriate place for holding a conference that treated such things as the thought of René Girard, mimetic theory, apocalyptic catastrophes, and possible salvation. Although Girard has never been to Japan, his thought has exerted a steady influence in that country through his writings, both in their original languages and in translation.

With a few exceptions, Girard's works were translated into Japanese here in the order of their publication. At first there was a ten-year lag between the appearance of a work in French and its translation into Japanese. *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (published in English as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*), published in 1961, came out (translated literally) as *A Phenomenology of Desire: Romantic Lie and Romanesque Truth* in 1971. *La violence et le sacré* originally appeared in 1972, with its Japanese translation coming out in 1982. Then things began to speed up a bit. There is a lag of only six years between the original publication of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978) and its translation. A translation of *The Scapegoat* was published in 1985, only three years after the original. Girard's book on Job was published in Japanese in 1989, around four years after the original. Even his massive book

on Shakespeare, *A Theater of Envy*, was translated after only a space of four years. There are even two books translated into Japanese well before their English translation: *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* and *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer*. The translations of these works were carried out by Japanese scholars in French, British, and American literature, as well as by a sociologist.

In addition, several significant secondary works by such people as Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Paul Dumouchel, and Andrew McKenna have also appeared in Japanese. In 2015 Mark Ansprach's *À charge de Revance: Figures d'elementare de la réciprocité* was also translated. There has been one book-length study of Girard's thought by Yoshinari Nishinaga, a professor of French literature, titled *The Direction of the "Individual": René Girard and Modern Society*. Finally, Girard's thought has also been employed not just in literary theory but by Japanese historians and ethnologists as well. Thus, scholars in Japan have shown a continual interest in Girard's thought since it first emerged in the early 1960s and have drawn on it in a variety of studies.

This widespread interest received a more concrete institutional form thanks, in part, to funding from a foundation, Imitatio, which supports efforts to expand the reach of mimetic theory. A small group of scholars living in Japan were thus able to meet in 2010 and 2011 to prepare for the conference. By happy coincidence, another scholarly association, the Generative Anthropology Society and Conference (GASC), was also planning to hold its conference in Japan, and so it was decided that the groups should join forces. Eric Gans, the founder of generative anthropology, had been an early student of Girard's, and their thought has much in common.

The actual conference took place from July 5 to July 8 on the campus of International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. The university is located on what was, up until the end of the war, the site of the Nakajima Aircraft Company. During the war, the company was developing and testing designs for advanced long-range bombers. Given its location, ICU identified a crucial part of its educational mission as the conscious effort to "beat spears into plowshares." Mimetic theory's focus on the causes of violence and violence's role in the constitution of culture aligns well with this mission.

The original conference bore the title *Apocalypse Revisited: Japan, Hiroshima, and the Place of Mimesis*. The title of this book, however, better reflects the content of the papers. The “deferral” of violence plays an important role in both mimetic theory and the generative anthropology of Eric Gans. In the former, greater violence is deferred through controlled violence, or “bad” violence is deferred through “good” violence. In the latter, the object that is both desired and unavailable gives birth to an originary love and resentment that will mark all further development. From a Christian perspective we might say, especially in reference to the Apocalypse, that deferral may be the best that we can hope for.

The Story the Collection Tells

Reviews of an edited collection often contain a moment in which the reviewer confesses to having failed to find the logical key that would grant access to the unity of the various papers collected between the covers of the book being reviewed. Thus, she is reduced to commenting on the few papers that strike her as particularly outstanding or criticizing those papers that fail to achieve what they set out to do. I hope that the *logos* of this collection will stand out on its own. Still, I would like to provide a few signposts to help the reader on his or her way.¹

Catastrophe, Apocalypse, and Japan

The essays of Part 1 are mostly, but not exclusively, rooted in the various events of World War II. The first paper, appropriately enough by Jean-Pierre Dupuy, sets the frame and the premise of this collection. Dupuy focuses on a struggle within Girard’s system. He sees that for Girard, human *méconnaissance* (the misrecognition of the victim as responsible for a given society’s problems) plays a central role in mimetic theory. The generative scapegoat mechanism works only so long as we don’t know what we are doing when we scapegoat the victim. Our increased knowledge of its working contributes to its inability to function. Dupuy points out how the Bomb is known and is, indeed, recognized by Girard as being known. He avers that “nuclear peace” is a new form of the sacred

informed by knowledge that the power of destruction that threatens us also protects us and that this power comes, not from God, but from ourselves. But this, Dupuy astutely points out, undermines the postulate of *méconnaissance*, which is necessary for the sacrificial mechanism to function. Accordingly, Dupuy wants to clarify the situation of the sacred Bomb and our recognition of it, a situation that Girard has termed “intermediary and complex.” At the same time that Dupuy points out our recognition of the reality of nuclear weapons and their destructive potential, he is astounded that “we do not see the moral horror” of the situation. It seems that *méconnaissance* is still operative. Dupuy detects a weakness in every person when his capacity for inventive destruction becomes disproportionate to the human condition. Thus, he recognizes the basis for the *méconnaissance*—the growing gap between the human capacity for making and the capacity for imagining what they have made.

Dupuy concretizes the problem by looking at the writings of Günther Anders and asking, with him, how it is that the Japanese can speak of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima by characterizing it as if it were a natural catastrophe, as if there were no malice involved. He equates this absence of hatred with an absence of scruple, which becomes the most inhuman form of all. Dupuy’s question gets a fuller context and an indirect response from the essays that follow. I will point this out below.

The next contributor, Eric Gans, much like the German novelist G. W. Sebald, lives in the shadow of the war and sees our present existence as the period of the deferral of World War III. Gans makes the case that the Holocaust establishes the basis for our condemnation of all other practices that affirm ontological differences among groups of human beings. Even those whose grievances predate the Holocaust, such as the victims of colonialism, must symbolically pass through it to conclude that such practices are dehumanizing.

Yet Gans is cognizant of the reality that the apocalyptic aspects of World War II were not limited to Europe and to the Jews. He helpfully summarizes and analyzes Girard’s scattered statements about the atomic bomb. He echoes what Dupuy in his essay has already pointed to: Girard’s conviction that the existence of the Bomb raises human awareness about its own power to destroy itself. Thus, we confront the mad paradox of guaranteeing nonviolence through the threat of absolute

destruction. In effect the Bomb has the capacity, as violence often does, of returning us to an original state: mutual destruction or deferral of violence, a kind of brutal equality in which each can destroy the whole. Up until the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, the ordinary dynamic was such that it diminished violence by channeling it toward the common good, but now, as Gans points out, the advantage goes to whichever group is willing to accept suicide.

Thus, Gans points out the West's vulnerability to any group that rejects forbearance and a concern for the victim and asserts its own unique religious validity. He also posits that the most successful anthropology is the one that serves as a foundation for the most successful society because this is the highest proof that it grasps the fundamental truth behind human social organization. This is the ultimate test of the struggle between the logos of violence and the logos of peace.

One possible answer to Dupuy's questioning comes to us in the form of a survivor's almost immediate response in faith to the suffering of Nagasaki. But in order to clearly perceive this response *as* an answer to Dupuy, I have placed Anthony D. Traylor's on "Undifferentiation" as a bridge between Dupuy's question and Yoko Irie Fayolle's answer. Traylor's essay is an exegetical offering on one of Girard's last works, *Achever Clausewitz* or, in English, *Battling to the End*. In this argumentative reconstruction of Girard's work, Taylor finds new considerations on the apocalyptic significance of undifferentiation. Girard's earlier view, of which Dupuy is cognizant, was that undifferentiation was the necessary condition for a new, sacrificially generated differentiation to emerge lest the society be destroyed. Girard saw ritual reenactments of the undifferentiated as attempts "to replicate the conditions proven by past experience to be effective in generating communal harmony and renewal." But with *Achever Clausewitz*, Traylor sees a new possibility developing out of an idea that is already present in *Things Hidden*, namely, that there are two forms of undifferentiation—"at once very close and radically opposed." One form is the mimetic crisis that we have already mentioned, in which mimetic doubles escalate their violence to an extreme, thus rendering themselves more and more identical, all the while continuing to assert their metaphysical autonomy from their rival. But there is also a benevolent reciprocity in the unilateral refusal to retaliate. In this state of affairs,

both the dangers of failure and the chances of success are maximal: either violent meltdown or conversion. Violence and love share in the abolition of differences, abolition of difference being a constitutive element of both love and violence.

In *Achever Clausewitz*, the question is how the claim of autonomy will be resolved. An undifferentiation that realizes that it is, in fact, the peaceful identity of the potential rivals is the “secret possibility” at the heart of violent identity. Thus, reconciliation becomes the flip side of violence.²

While the common ground of violent and peaceful identity is undifferentiation, their fundamental difference is in the self’s investment in autonomy. Paradoxically, the violent situation contains the possibility of allowing the protagonists to see “what violence does not want to see.” “What violence does not wish to see is precisely the nothingness which (strangely enough) under normal circumstances succeeds in dividing and distancing us from our fellow human beings.” With this recognition, the other becomes my other self. This involves the elimination of false differences and the giving up of any claims to metaphysical autonomy: “Thus, this divide separating violent from peaceful identity is marked by the presence or absence of autonomous self-assertion.” Girard’s thinking is now focused on the “*continuous . . . the mysterious kinship between violence and reconciliation*, negative and positive undifferentiation, the mimetic crisis and . . . the ‘mystical body.’” The only way from the one to the other is through an internal transformation of mimetism itself.

In her essay on Dr. Takashi Nagai’s funeral oration, Yoko Irie Fayolle gives us the opportunity to intuit the telos of violence that goes beyond a return to differentiation and is predicated on a certain self-effacement. Three months after the bombing, Dr. Nagai’s funeral address was given at the service for the 8,500 Christians of the Urakami Church in Nagasaki who died instantly in the blast. At first it does not seem very promising material for a Girardian reading unless that is meant in a critical sense. Dr. Nagai speaks of a Holocaust offered through the Providence of God. Fayolle’s aim is to understand “both the truth of Christianity and Girard’s theories in the secular context of Japan.”

The atomic bomb that killed so many of the Catholic community of Nagasaki did not inflict death on a random group of believers. This was an ancient community rooted in the Hidden Christians of Japan,

that incredible group of lay faithful who for two hundred and fifty years secretly kept the faith in Christ and his Church and in the prophecies they had heard only to emerge into a world that treated them exactly as it had treated their ancestors before they went into hiding—it persecuted them. This time, however, the persecution posed negative consequences for the world of trade and diplomacy, and so Japan adopted a “freedom of religion” clause to its Constitution in the Meiji period. Still, prejudice and hatred do not die out so quickly. The Christians of Urakami were considered “impure” and were judged by at least some of their Japanese co-citizens as having deserved their fate. The gods were angry because these Japanese did not love their country and worshipped a foreign God. Into this situation, Nagai’s funeral oration proclaims their innocence and our guilt. They were the ones that God found worthy to come into his presence. They were all *alter Christi*, standing in the place of Christ.

What Nagai saw in the flames of the fires caused by the Bomb is what Girard posited one might see: “the light of peace, . . . something beautiful, something pure, something sublime.” Nagai mourns their death while also rejoicing that they have entered eternal life.

There are voices who accuse Nagai of exempting both the Japanese and the United States from responsibility and thereby opening the way for future use of nuclear weapons. They see in Nagai’s speech the exact opposite of what it is. They see a logic of sacrifice when in fact it is a logic of mercy. Nagai, in good Christian tradition, is rehabilitating the victims, relieving them of their reputation for impurity, restoring to both those who perished and the Christians who survived their human worth and dignity. He frees the survivors of resentment.

It is here that the idea of *méconnaissance*, which Dupuy had questioned, returns: “Nagai reveals the *méconnaissance* of Japanese society by calling the victims of the atomic bomb ‘pure lambs’ and appealing to their innocence in public.” He puts the victims in Christ’s place and thus he becomes their Paraclete. As Fayolle astutely points out, in Japanese society there have been many martyrs, many witnesses, “but no one had ever come to their defense.” Nagai, by witnessing to their innocence and the truth of Christianity, became united to the victims in this witnessing. His witness has a power—the power “to persuade survivors to abandon all plans of mimetic retaliations.” This may help to explain the behavior

of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the war as noted above by Dupuy and Anders.

At this point, our essays branch off into two streams. The first stream explores Japanese culture using mimetic theory as well as tests mimetic theory using Japanese culture. The second stream develops some of the theological implications of mimetic theory.

Mimetic Theory and Japanese Culture

The essays in this part cover a wide range of topics within Japanese cultural history. The first essay, by Shoichiro Iwakiri, goes back to the source of Japanese literature in reading the *Tale of Genji* with an awareness of mimetic theory. At the same time, Iwakiri challenges Girard not so much on the grounds that mimetic theory does not apply to Japanese culture as on the grounds that Girard is too negative about the Dionysian elements of culture and that the Christian emphasis in his thought limits his appreciation of non-Christian values.

Mizuho Kawasaki's essay represents the kind of reading many Girardians engage in when they look to their own culture, guided by the insights of mimetic theory. Kawasaki analyzes a ritual dance that takes place annually in Hide city in Gifu prefecture. What is fascinating about this study is not so much the discovery of traces of the stereotypes of persecution such as scapegoating, accusations, and violence in the ritual, but how close to the surface the historical events that underlie the ritual are. Kawasaki's research has ramifications for our understanding of traditional Japanese mythical figures such as Tengu. If one digs a little deeper, beyond the mythical figures and the comparative analysis that mimetic theory makes possible, one also finds real victims. Although Japanese culture is quite old, many of its myths, even the oldest, only go back in their written form to the eighth century CE. Many of the stories and rituals are much more recent. This allows historical references to be much more easily traced and lends credence to Girard's somewhat controversial claim that behind our myths lie real victims, real violence.

Kawasaki is able to record the oral tradition in the community in which the ritual dance is practiced that preserves the name of the victim. The oral tradition that accompanies the ritual speaks of mimetic rivalry,

growing antagonism between two groups, and a murder. Further, the place of the murder became a shrine. Kawasaki suggests that the relationship between the murder of Gorube and the ritual dance, the *Sugoi-shishi*, “is identical to the relation between generative violence and ritual as sacrifice in Girard’s usage.”

Kunio Nakahata turns to the work of the Japanese novelist and essayist Ango Sakaguchi as a way of bringing mimetic theory and Japanese culture together. Nakahata sees that one of the difficulties with mimetic theory in terms of ethics is the following: if sacrificial structures are the matrix of the cultural world, then how is it ethically possible for someone to step out of that matrix? In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard makes clear that he thinks it is not possible without help from outside, without having someone who “owes nothing to violence.” In fact, this comes in the context of Girard’s “proof” that Jesus Christ is of divine origin. Conversion thus becomes a leaving or going out of the structure of sacred violence. Nakahata finds an analogous thought in Ango’s work on *karakuri*. This is a difficult term to translate, and so Nakahata leaves it in the original but explains that *karakuri* are systems in a broad sense which include not only visible but also invisible systems, or a sort of second nature realized in the mind of Japanese, for example, which they transform into the external realities surrounding them. It is similar to Hegel’s notion of “objective mind.” Ango’s point is that although *karakuri* are constructed and therefore are, in a sense, arbitrary, they are not experienced as such. For most people most of the time it is simply reality. For the Japanese, the Imperial system is one such *karakuri*.

This is not a form of conspiracy theory in which evil priests or politicians have consciously constructed a false reality to control the masses. However, Ango nevertheless sees these *karakuri* as historical realities.

It was the experience of the total violence of the war that broke through the *karakuri* for Ango. It freed him to glimpse the truth. Unfortunately, after the war ended, Ango experienced not a communal or national facing up to the truth but the quick and silent reconstruction of *karakuri* as another way of ignoring the moral horror, referred to above by Dupuy. The pressing question for Ango became how one avoids such self-deception. The path for Ango was not Christian conversion but “the possibility of finding a root of humanity,” which “means to fall outside of

the ‘*karakuri*’ at the same time.” Ango calls this consciousness “a radical intentionality toward life.”

Ango saw the falling away from “wholesome morals” of prewar and wartime Japan as being a hopeful sign. It was a fall into decadence he could support because it represented a recovery of true humanity.

Whether the recovery occurred is contested in the next essay. Andreas Oberprantacher turns first to an analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the state of abandonment and then uses the dystopian Japanese anime *Vexille* as a vehicle for exploring the apocalyptic possibility awaiting us. *Vexille* presents the end not as an apocalyptic bang but as a slow-motion, violent contagion. In addition to the usual scenario of escalating mimetic rivalries resolved through a double sacrificial gesture that both restores order and veils the violence, *Vexille* also presents the nameless Tokyo slum dwellers as living in a state of abandonment. The slum dwellers’ lives are a representation of Agamben’s notion of “base-life”—life that is both unworthy of being saved and unworthy of being sacrificed.

Again in this essay we come to the point of undifferentiation. The sacrificial crisis is such that “purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community.” What Oberprantacher observes is that our latest art forms as well as our latest theoretical considerations represented in such figures as Nancy and Agamben both suggest that the sacrificial crisis may not resolve itself. It may, in fact, give way to a “lasting crisis.” Like Traylor, Oberprantacher calls for a reexamination of the focus in mimetic theory on typical scapegoat mechanisms. Oberprantacher raises the question of whether the preference for the scapegoat “may distort one’s critical attention and sensibility to the extent that one hardly notices all the excessive violence that is not bound and structured by mimetic rivalry.” Thus, a new strategy of concealment is revealed. Not only is the truth of the scapegoat mechanism being concealed, the bloodless, but nonsacrificial bio-political violence involved in slumification and desertification is equally blocked from view. Oberprantacher calls us to direct our attention to the margins to understand that when we move the scapegoat mechanism to the center of our attention, we have not done away with the phenomenon of *méconnaissance*, since the margin of our attention, where the surplus of violence may be playing out, still exists.

It is at the moment when these essays reach the point at furthest remove from “mainstream” culture, be it Japanese or Western, that we find ourselves paradoxically before the most revelatory—Matthew Taylor’s analysis of the cult film *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma Monogatari*). This analysis of the film is revelatory in several ways, one being that it reveals what a supple instrument mimetic theory and generative anthropology are for analyzing contemporary Japanese culture. It also demonstrates that mimetic theory and generative anthropology call for no less attentive viewing, critical response, and background knowledge than any other method of cultural analysis. Taylor’s analysis shows the way in which such things as scapegoating, myth, and sacrifice are handled in contemporary Japanese film, and by extension in Japanese culture itself.

Perhaps uniquely in this volume, Taylor gives us real insight into Gans’s theory that not just sacrificial violence, but also symbolic representation in myth or as language itself can *defer* violence. If the original myth allows for and covers up violence, its reworking is more capacious, saving the intended victim while allowing everyone to feel purged of the need to sacrifice.

Taylor’s exploration is not a hazy mimetic analysis. He goes beyond Girard’s “brilliant interpretative concept” of pseudo-narcissism—that is, a narcissism that is de-established once the admiration is cut off, to explore in the film the relationship between the narcissism and the sacred. The reader learns from Taylor how the Lolita figure, the rococo style, and much else in the film and in the subculture go back to a popular manga series, *The Rose of Versailles*. As is often the case, the key to understanding this phenomenon is both present and absent from the film. Massively, if implicitly, present through the images and colors, *The Rose of Versailles* is never explicitly mentioned in the film. Taylor’s striking conclusion is that the subcultural Lolitas are modeling their identities on Marie Antoinette through the mediation of *The Rose of Versailles* while denying the influence of these mediators. The hidden mediation of Marie Antoinette is significant because it moves the Lolita’s identity from being pseudo-narcissistic to being pseudo-sacrificial. The sacred ultimate saves.

Taylor’s analysis not only shows that mimetic theory does not allow the interpreter to slight the hard work of becoming conversant in another culture and understanding the culture’s subcultures, but also has the added

advantage of showing precisely that mimetic theory allows one to put such knowledge to significant use. Who would have thought that knowledge of a 1970s manga could be used to show how a twenty-first-century Japanese cult continues to hide its own sacred and sacrificial tendencies?

Mimetic Theory and Theology

The following three essays, especially the second one, by Thomas Ryba, should be read as a kind of retrospective view of all that has gone before. In other words, these essays tell us something more about all the articles that precede them and cast the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition over the whole collection in a more intense form.

We turn, then, from Japan to a more familiar conceptual landscape for Western readers—the Judeo-Christian one. The first essay, by Sandor Goodhart, not only illuminates in a new way the relationship between the prophetic and the apocalyptic in their Jewish and Christian setting, but also allows a backward glance or even a hopeful glimpse at the Japanese writings that are examined.

Goodhart succeeds in a reading of the prophetic that combines a prospective viewpoint with an absolute and specific interpretation that frees the prophetic text to be fulfilled and yet not completed. I want to cash out this notion of “not completed” in a more robust manner.

Goodhart claims that Girard’s strong apocalyptic reading of Clausewitz’s understanding of reciprocity “conforms to the deepest prophetic insights of Christian scripture.” In an analogous way, I would propose that the analysis of Japanese culture in terms of mimetic theory shows that it too is open to both receiving and being received by this same prophetic insight. Goodhart concludes his essay by saying that Girard’s reading “opens new doors for us.” He specifies these doors as being not only a renewed appreciation for Judaism, Christianity, the prophetic, and the apocalyptic but also for their interaction throughout the history of Western Europe, because it is there that the dynamics of mimetic behavior, sacrificial violence, and their exposure in the religious texts of *our culture* play themselves out. Earlier essays have opened other doors in the same way, showing that in the history and culture of Japan, these same dynamics have been operative.

Goodhart suggests that “Girardian research of the future” orient itself to this Western European history of “the mimetic, the sacrificial, and their violent conflation in the context of biblical scripture and their prophetic and apocalyptic understanding,” but in our conference setting and in this volume we have opened a new door to a different culture, different religion, and possibly different scriptures. The next two essays show us ways in which this might be possible.

Ryba’s essay is a master class in how to read biblical “type” in general and the Antichrist in particular. He delineates the way in which a scriptural type is “in dialectical relation to the salvation history that contextualizes it.” The fulfillment of an apocalyptic announcement is the emergence of new meaning so that types predict vaguely and are fulfilled concretely. The apocalyptic is a call to anti-idolatry in the hope that we might defer its fulfillment. In this sense it becomes a perennial optic for social criticism, that is, for anti-idolatry.

Ryba sees the possibility of a correct reading of the type, Antichrist, in the recognition of what he calls the negative mimetic double of Christ. This consists in recognizing the kind of perverse imitation of Christ that does the opposite of what he does and so is completely reactive toward Christ. Not surprisingly, this kind of perverse mime is traditionally associated with Satan. A reading of this type implies that one is situated in a history in which these things have occurred in the past and are occurring now, with the ultimate fulfillment yet to happen.

Our reading of scripture equips us to read reality. Thus, it is not just a question of how to read the apocalyptic in scripture (Goodhart and Ryba) but how to understand this place, Japan, which for so many of us is so far away, and to be drawn near to it through its apocalyptic sufferings, that is, how to come near to Japan without rivalry—“a kind of nearness . . . prepared by preliminary distance,” as Richard Schenk so eloquently puts it. What Schenk is gesturing toward is a way to understand a world that has such diverse places but are still connected, even radically connected, via suffering, and to avoid nationalism and racism.

First, the real primordial distance is the path to true nearness, whether you live in Japan or not. This involves an opening to other, non-Christian, religions. Girard teaches a “path to a kind of closeness” that still allows for a limited rivalry of allies and friends because it presupposes

the initial distancing of lasting acknowledgment of the other as other. This reverence of the other requires self-restraint as a sacrifice, a sacrifice that is at once an affirmation of and an intercession for the other that can be fulfilled only by a coexistent.

This implies a conversion, a conversion that is a completion of Heidegger; it consists in finding “the real primordial distance that the human in his transcendence establishes for all beings,” which in turn is the path to the true nearness of things: a nearness without rivalry, a nearness of forgiveness. As Schenk sees it, it is Girard rather than Vattimo who acknowledges the greater distance that is needed for the path to genuine newness.

How do we draw close to the Apocalypse without bringing it on? How do we draw close to Japan without obliterating its uniqueness? The two questions seem unrelated but are not. Schenk gives us some reasons why mimetic theory might not so much provide a definitive answer to the questions but rather illuminate the path one must travel in answering them and in this way extend the illumination by faith from the standpoint of the ending. “By faith” because, as Schenk points out, it is faith that provides the “opportunities of productive non-contemporaneity” so necessary for this distance. Only this, “at first more distant faith could still today generate new rationality, the proximity of new experience, and the widespread renewal of social change.” This new rationality is not completely discontinuous with the old; rather, it allows for the morally troubling aspects of our society, the remnants of sacrificial structures to become visible and, as they become visible, to be done away with.

Thus, Schenk’s approach can leave one troubled. Sacrifice is not totally done away with, but rather is as limited as can be: limited both in practice and in imagery. Limited up to the point where its evasion leads to great harm or the forfeit of a greater good.

Conclusion

The collection ends with an essay that is intended to open up even more horizons, both geographically and conceptually. Mario Roberto Solarte Rodríguez and Mery Edith Rodríguez Arias reflect and theorize on the experience of conflict resolution in their native Colombia. The

developing world has in many ways been the missing element in the story being told so far. Very few voices from those places that suffer the “state of war,” not as an apocalyptic anime but as hard reality, are heard in this collection. This last essay is not meant to “make up” for that so much as to underscore it—whole regions of the world have been left out in this story and they too need to be heard. Many native cultures and peoples have been implicitly ignored in our focus on Japan and mimetic theory and that fact should be acknowledged.

It is in this spirit that the last essay comes to us as a kind of challenge to look at our neighbor who is suffering. Mario Solarte and Mery Rodríguez’s work is rooted in the particular but speaks a universal language and issues a universal call. Their work shows both a great respect for the culture of Colombia and a willingness to examine the violent roots not just of the dominating powers but also the indigenous cultures. The cumulative result is that Solarte and Rodríguez lead us to the desert and its silence. It seems to me an appropriate place, and state, with which to end this story.

René Girard died during the time that I was doing the final preparation of these pages for publication. Accordingly, the book is being dedicated to his memory. This book is just one example of the fruitful way his theories can be used to help us understand people, places, and events that are otherwise either too near and thus lead to rivalry, or too distant and thus lead to indifference. Girard’s thought provides the “*proximity that places us at a distance*.”³ The more closely we imitate him the less we will be in rivalry.

Notes

1. As will be seen, I use quotations from the essays in this collection (including the authors’ quotes of other sources) in explaining them. All quotations are taken from the essay that is being commented upon.

2. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoit Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2010), 72.

3. *Ibid.*, 120.