PHENOMENOLOGY OF REDEMPTION?
OR THEORY OF SANCTIFICATION?

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Can there be empirical evidence for a universal mechanism of salvation? To take up such a question will require students of both theology and the social and natural sciences to be in serious conversation with one another. Robert Doran suggests a possible beginning by bringing Bernard Lonergan's "Law of the Cross" and theology of conversion into conversation with René Girard's mimetic theory. The result falls well short of a full phenomenology of redemption but is sufficiently promising to allow us to begin thinking about a possible universal theory of sanctification.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF REDEMPTION?[1] The question mark points to the particular challenge of this article. It attempts to bring together two genres of discourse that normally have little to do with each other: the traditional language of theology and the technical languages of the social and natural sciences. Behind this attempt is the general observation that no genuinely human problem or issue can be adequately treated without attending to the myriad complexities that both enrich and bedevil all areas of human life. Thus, the crossing of boundaries that accompanies interdisciplinary research and conversation, however susceptible to superficiality, is necessary. This is especially true when dealing with the mystery of redemption commonly referred to as the atonement.[2]

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[1] I am not using "phenomenology" (hence the scare quotes) precisely in any of the many ways of understanding philosophical or religious phenomenology (see, e.g., Thomas Ryba, "Phenomenology of Religion," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A Segal [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006] 91–121), but rather in the somewhat pretechnical, commonsense meaning of the study of the "phenomena" (i.e., those human experiences that, qua space-time experiences, are subject to sociological, psychological, and scientific analysis) that Christian theologians refer to as constituting the human experience of redemption.

[2] This article extensively develops material that first appeared in two other published works: "A Phenomenology of Redemption?," in *For René Girard: Essays in Friendship and Truth*, ed. Sandor Goodhart et al. (East Lansing: Michigan State

Paul, writing to the Romans, seems to have been at least implicitly aware of this (in modern terms) crossing of boundaries when he penned the verses that mark the transition from the more doctrinal to the more pastoral part of his letter to the Romans:

I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies (*parastēsai ta sōmata humōn*) as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (*tēn logikēn latreian*). Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:1–2).

Immediately obvious to those familiar with both the cultic language of the Bible[3] and the technical language of the philosophers[4] is that Paul is here combining—confusing, his critics might say—things that, in terms of intellectual respectability, are quite different and need to be kept apart. Paul, from his location in Hellenistic Judaism, is not only using the sacrificial ritual language of Second Temple Judaism centered on the very physical, material offerings in the Jerusalem temple; he is also using, in the same breath, the already impressively developed language and concepts of Greek religious philosophy that was aware of the uselessness of trying to offer anything material to a spiritual deity. With his typical boldness regarding human expectations when speaking of life in Christ, and within the few words of one sentence, Paul combines both of these ways of thinking and speaking. First, *by the mercies of God* is a vivid, anthropomorphic image referring, literally, to the bowels of God. It is not something a respectable philosopher would say, but it is the kind of language one might expect from a Jew familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. So too with the words *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice*. But right away, even within the context of Jewish religious language and cultic practice, one begins to feel uneasy over these words. Offer our *bodies*? That stretches Paul's readers

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University, 2009) 101–9; and then somewhat more extensively in "Sacrifice and Girardian Mimetic Theory: The End of Sacrifice?," in *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (New York: Continuum, 2009) 202–22. On atonement, see my "Images of God and the Imitation of God: Problems with Atonement," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 36–51.

[3] See, e.g., Suzanne Daniel, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire du culte dans la Septante* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1966).

[4] For an overview, see Philipp Seidensticker, *Lebendiges Opfer: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1954) 1–43. For English readers, the most accessible treatment of this material is in Raymond Corriveau, *The Liturgy of Life: A Study of the Ethical Thought of St. Paul in His Letters to the Early Christian Communities* (Brussels: Desclée De Brouwer, 1970) 155–85. Much of what we know about this subject builds on the 1913 magisterial work of Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur formgeschichte religiöser Rede*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1971).

to the limit of what they might accept, but once he adds *as a living sacrifice*, he is pulling them far beyond that. For although *holy and pleasing to God* is the kind of reassuring language often found in the Septuagint to refer to properly offered sacrifices that are acceptable to God, the mention of *bodies* as *living sacrifices*, with its human-sacrifice associations, has left many readers uncomfortably close to a conceptual no-man's land. Then, the coup de grace: *your spiritual worship*, unmistakably using the *logikē-thusia* language of spiritualized Greek religious philosophy, abruptly dumps us into the middle of that no-man's land.[5]

What is going on here? First of all, Paul is doing something that he characteristically does when speaking of the mystery of life in Christ: for example, when he mixes organic images from plant life with static images from buildings in order to emphasize that Christian life is both organic and structural: we are both "God's field" and "God's building" (1 Cor 3:9). Nor is Christ just the head of the body that is the Church, he is also (see the deutero-Pauline Eph 2:20–22) the cornerstone and capstone (and seemingly both at the same time) of the building that is the church. So, what part of the mystery is Paul attempting to express here in Romans 12:1? Quite obviously it is the essentially incarnational reality of Christian life, worship, and sacrifice. It is anything but the dematerialized, radically spiritualized worship that Greek religious philosophy had concluded is the only worship worthy of a spiritual god. It is, rather, worship ("sacrifice," if you will) that is incarnated in the very down-to earth, practical, ministerial—i.e., bodily—preaching and living out of the Word of God.[6] And notice how Paul's appropriation of technical philosophical terminology presages what the Church Fathers will be doing at Nicaea three centuries later in appropriating philosophical terminology (*homoousios*) to try to explain the mystery of Christ, what Augustine will be doing in his "use" of Platonism, and Aquinas too in his use of Aristotelianism. Thus, what Paul was doing almost two millennia ago is what theologians have always had to do when "pushing the envelope" of theological understanding. Without implying that I can

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[5] Curiously, the magisterial commentary of Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Inroduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 637–44, gives scant attention to this line of exegesis (though he documents my own use of it in *Christian Sacrifice* [Washington: Catholic University, 1978]), in contrast to many of the German commentaries, most notably that of Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 292–93, who acknowledges indebtedness to the extensive work of Seidensticker in *Lebendiges Opfer* 1–43.

[6] I develop this further in "Offer Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice, Holy and Pleasing to God, Your Spiritual Worship (Romans 12:1): Ethical Implications of the Sacrificial Language of the Church's Eucharistic Prayers," in *"Ahme nach was du vollziehst . . .": Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik*, ed. Martin Stuflesser and Stephan Winter (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009) 151–67.

hold a candle to any of these theological giants, this is also what I am trying to do in this article: to bring together different genres of discourse that have had little to do with each other in order to grope toward a deeper understanding of some aspect of our faith—in this case, to try to begin to answer the question, What is going on in this-worldly time and space when human beings are experiencing "salvation"? What, in other words, is the "phenomenology" of redemption?

Theologians have spilled vast amounts of ink, indeed sometimes quite bitterly as in the infamous Jesuit-Dominican grace controversy of some 400 years ago, arguing about the ontology of grace.[7] Millions of pages have been written, and are still being written, about the practical, spiritual, and sometimes mystical experiences of conversion and the life of grace. Preachers, spiritual writers, and theologians are constantly talking about what it means to be "saved"—i.e., about the mystery of atonement. But they have generally been doing this mostly on a devotional, non-scholarly level; or, if as scholars, then generally in traditional biblical, historical, and school-theological terms that have little or no connection with contemporary scientific and social scientific thinking. There are some fine contributions to a still somewhat inchoative conversation between science and theology.[8] But on the topic of redemption, few theologians even begin to ask about what is happening psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically, culturally, politically, when people are in the process of being "saved."[9] And on the other side, most natural scientists and social scientists never get around to connecting their research—which is, in fact, uncovering some of the actual raw data of a "phenomenology" of redemption—with theological questions. Or, more typically, loyal to the positivist presuppositions of their discipline, they classify such questions as irrelevant or beyond the scientific principles and methods of their field.

One of the scholars of our own day who has tried to break out of this disciplinary narrowness, and, although himself not a theologian, has invited

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[7] For brief background, see "de Auxiliis," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L Cross, 3rd ed., ed. E. A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University, 1997) 459. For more detail see Consuelo Maria Aherne, "De Auxiliis," in the article "Grace, Controversies on," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols., 2nd ed. (2003) 5:401–5, at 403–4; or Friedrich Stegmüller, "Gnadenstreit," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 10 vols., 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1960) 4:1002–7.

[8] There come to mind the impressive body of work produced by such authors as John Polkinghorne, Arthur Peacocke, William Stoeger, and John Haught; the dialogues sponsored by the Templeton Foundation; and the ongoing topic session "Theology and Natural Science" of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

[9] This question does not get raised, not even in passing, in, e.g., Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, S.J., and Gerald O'Collins, S.J., eds., *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer* (New York: University, 2004).

biblical scholars, theologians, and others also to do the same, has been René Girard.[10] It was, in fact, when I was invited to be part of a panel discussing Gil Bailie's *Violence Unveiled*,[11] one of the more successful attempts to communicate the insights of Girardian mimetic theory to a wide reading public, that I first began to formulate the specifically theological question of the possibility—indeed the necessity—of a "phenomenology" of redemption. Thus a few words are in order about how mimetic theory can serve as a serendipitous entry into this theological question. But first a few words about Lonergan and Girard on redemption.

LONERGAN AND GIRARD ON REDEMPTION

Early in 2010, several years after I began asking my question but, happily, before the completion of this article, Robert Doran published in this journal an article that takes up the very questions I am asking and locates them methodologically at the heart of the Christian theological endeavor.[12] Having stated that "it is in the realm of soteriology that Girard will make his greatest contribution to theology,"[13] Doran goes on to state his "thesis that Lonergan provides a heuristic structure for the systematic understanding of the doctrine of redemption, while Girard contributes a great deal to filling in the details of that structure." Doran immediately adds a question that he repeats several times in the course of his article, and that I am trying to answer in this article: "How thorough is Girard's filling in of the structure?"[14] By "heuristic structure" Doran has in mind Lonergan's famous image of intellectual development as a scissors action:

The upper blade is the set of heuristic notions needed to arrive at the desired conclusion, while the lower blade provides the data that will be clarified by the

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[10] See especially René Girard's groundbreaking *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972); ET, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977); and also *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996). In his later work Girard has begun to make explicit what was at first (and perhaps also to him as well) only implicit: that behind his basic theory is a fundamentally Christian sense of things. This became (scandalously to some) clear with the publication of his *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort (Paris: Grasset, 1978); ET, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* [see Mt 13:35], trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Matteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1987). See also the more recent *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).

[11] Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

[12] Robert M. Doran, S.J., "The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 46–61.

[13] Ibid. 49.   [14] Ibid. 50.

meeting of the two blades. . . . In the present case, Lonergan's "Law of the Cross" is an upper blade, while Girard's notions of acquisitive mimesis, mimetic rivalry and violence, and the victim mechanism provide at least some of the data that the upper blade allows the theologian to organize into an understanding of this particular doctrine.[15]

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. A few words on Girardian mimetic theory are now in order.

INTRODUCTION TO GIRARDIAN MIMETIC THEORY[16]

The claim has been made that René Girard has been one of the seminal thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He provides the beginning of what could be called a unified field theory on the issue of religion and violence. Compare his achievement with, e.g., that of Sigmund Freud. Until Freud, a significant array of human phenomena had persistently resisted attempts to explain them in a coherent way: the meaning of dreams, infantile sexuality, the activity of the subconscious, hypnosis, hysteria, and humor. Then, in the space of little more than a decade, more or less by 1905, Freud had provided a coherent, rational explanation for all these. Though many disagree with some of the details of Freud's theory, few deny that his insights have changed the face of Western cultural history.[17] A similar claim can be made for the influence—at least the potential influence, for he is not yet as widely known—of René Girard. As the philosopher Paul Dumouchel put it, Girardian mimetic theory—in its mobilization of the disciplines of ethnology, history of religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, and literary criticism—has completely modified the landscape in the social sciences, and has begun to exercise significant influence on what have been called the intellectual and moral sciences, including theology.[18]

The comparison with Freud helps us contextualize Girard's achievement in providing something that is lacking in traditional biblical theologies: a coherent, rational explanation for the pervasive presence of violence not just in history generally but also in both testaments of the Bible. If we look clearly, we find that the history of Christianity cannot be separated

[15] Ibid. 50–51.

[16] The most comprehensive and convenient source for material is the website of The Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), the international organization of scholars devoted to the study of Girardian mimetic theory: http://theol.uibk.ac.at/cover/.

[17] See my further development of this point in the foreword to Raymund Schwager, S.J., *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (New York: Crossroad, 2000) v.

[18] Paul Dumouchel, *Violence and Truth* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1988) 23, as reported in Bailie, *Violence Unveiled* 6.

from the history of human violence. Yes, normatively, apart, of course, from certain fringe elements and in terms of its preached ideals, Christianity is a religion of peace and nonviolence. Descriptively, however, and right from its earliest roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, the history of Christianity is a history of violence.[19] How can we explain this? Girardian mimetic theory can help the theologian begin to do this.

Although Girardian mimetic theory, like almost any theory, can be presented in misleading oversimplifications, those attempting to understand it well can find it to be forbiddingly complex.[20] Raymund Schwager, however, suggests that its fundamental insights can be summed up briefly:

1. Fundamental human desire is of itself not oriented towards a specific object. It strives after the good that has been pointed out as worthy of effort by someone else's desire. It imitates a model.
2. Imitating the striving of another person (who is also one's model) inevitably leads to conflict, because the other's desire aims at the same object as one's own desire. The model immediately becomes a rival. In the process, the disputed object is forgotten. As desire increases, it focuses more and more on the other's desire, admires and resents it together. The rivalry tends finally towards violence, which itself begins to appear desirable. Violence becomes the indicator, and hence worthy of imitation, of a successful life.
3. Since all human beings have a tendency towards violence, living together peacefully is anything but natural. Reason and good will (social contract) are not enough. Outbreaking rivalries can easily endanger the existing order, dissolve norms, and wipe out notions of culture. New spheres of relative peace are created, however, when mutual aggressions suddenly shift into the unanimous violence of all against one (scapegoat mechanism).
4. The collective unloading of passion onto a scapegoat renders the victim sacred. He or she appears as simultaneously accursed and life-bringing. Sacred awe emanates from him or her. Around him or her arise taboo rituals and a new social order.
5. The sacrifices subsequently carry out in strictly controlled ritual limits the original collective transfer of violence onto a random scapegoat. Internal aggressions are thus diverted once again to the outside, and the community is saved from self-destruction.[21]

Quite obviously, this is a "grand narrative," one of those broad-ranging, broad-brushed cover stories that claim to explain the way things are (or are supposed to be), the way things work (or are supposed to work).

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[19] Developed at greater length in my article: "Violence and Institution in Christianity," *Contagion* 9 (Spring 2002) 4–33, at 5–6.

[20] This complexity has been discovered by many who have tried to get a "quick fix" on Girardian mimetic theory by thumbing through *The Girard Reader*.

[21] Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?* 46–47. One of the most helpful introductions to Girardian mimetic theory, this book first appeared as *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?* (Munich: Kösel, 1978). It was first published in English by Harper & Row, San Francisco, in 1987.

In a postmodern age of deconstruction, we are conditioned to be suspicious of such stories.[22] Experience tells us that another story eventually, indeed sometimes quickly, comes along and shows us that our favorite story is all wrong, or that there is a better way of explaining things, or at least one that is more "politically correct," more attuned to the prejudices of our age. Some of the more influential of these grand narratives in the age of Western modernity we associate with figures like Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900).

Although suspicious of these grand narratives, we still learn from them. Those who told these "stories" are giants on whose shoulders we stand. Further reflection also quickly tells us that, suspicious as we may be of any *grand recit*, we also cannot do without them. They are part of our human nature. Even the most radical of deconstructionists has a story, albeit a story of radical deconstruction. In other words, I, like everyone else, have a story, a story to which, in this article, I am attempting to make a contribution. My story, of course, is my own understanding of the story of Catholic Christianity and, especially as I work on this article, the contribution being made to it by the mimetic theory of René Girard.

In this theory, especially as summarized by Schwager in the above five points, one cannot miss the central role played in it by *desire*. This flows from, but does not depend on, the total accuracy of Girard's particular "great story" about the origins of human culture. Gil Bailie's unforgettable account of a nursery scene illustrates the general validity of Girard's story despite arguments one may have with particular aspects of it. Bailie asks us to imagine a nursery scene in which a small child sits dreamily in a room filled with toys. Another child enters, surveys the scene, and reaches for one of the toys. What toy does he reach for? Precisely that toy in which the first child seems to be expressing some, but until then only mild, interest. What then happens is something that everyone experienced in the care of young children can tell us. The second child's interest in that particular toy in which the first child had hitherto expressed only mild interest,

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[22] In addition, Girard seems to play into postmodernity's suspicion of grand narratives by the way he cavalierly—as even his supporters will admit—and against the current scholarly sense of "political correctness" cuts across the fiercely defended boundaries of the different disciplines. A perceptive, sympathetic, but also honestly critical discussion of this can be found in Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009). For those first looking into mimetic theory, his *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2004) can also be recommended.

now awakens in that first child a strong desire for that same toy. As Bailie describes it:

The two children simply feed each other's desire for the toy by demonstrating to each other how desirable it is. Each further intensifies the desire of his rival by threatening to foreclose the possibility of possession. As the emotions rise, the opportunity for parental compromise declines rapidly. Each child treats the suggestion that he take turns playing with the toy as a betrayal by the adult who makes it. . . . As long as the conflict remains unresolved, the suggestion that both children bear some responsibility for the squabble will be resolutely rejected. Each child will be certain that the other is the sole cause of the conflict. Already in the children's nursery, therefore, we have the basic dynamic of scapegoating fully manifested . . . the same dynamics—writ large—that operate in religious or ethnic or nationalistic conflicts.[23]

Mimetic desire (not just desire pure and simple) is fundamentally central to how we act as human beings. Once alert to this, we are able to notice how the Ten Commandments culminate in the prohibition of desire. The previous commandments in the second half of the Decalogue have been prohibiting acts of violence against one's neighbor. As Girard, following Williams (see below n. 25), puts it: "The tenth and last commandment [in the version found in Exodus 20:12–17] is distinguished from those preceding it both by its length and its object: in place of prohibiting an *act* it forbids a *desire*. "You shall not covet the house of your neighbor. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbor, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him" (Exod 20:17).[24]

The Hebrew word *chamad*, which we translate as "covet," means "desire." Williams, whom Girard is here following, had previously pointed out that this final commandment articulates in a kind of *conclusio* the ethical principle underlying the previous four commandments.[25] This is the background for what I will now say about original sin as disordered desire.

ORIGINAL SIN AS DISORDERED DESIRE[26]

The story of the primordial sin of Adam and Eve recounted in Genesis 3, as it is now understood by most mainline Christian theologians, is not to

[23] Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled* 116–17.
[24] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* 7.
[25] James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: Harper 1992) 108–13.
[26] Many readers will be reminded of the work of Sebastian Moore: *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) and his recent *The Contagion of Jesus: Doing Theology As If It Mattered*, ed. Stephen McCarthy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). In the first of these brilliantly insightful books, Moore had apparently not yet encountered Girard but, on a parallel track, so to speak, was coming up with

be read as a literal description of a historical first sin, but as a psychological description of all sin, reminding us of what is repeatedly happening in our own sinful existence. When read this way the question arises: What is God forbidding? The answer seems to be that God can give everything to us *except* that we do not owe. For, by nature, as creatures, receivers of gifts is what we *are*. Take that away and we do not even exist. Deny that (or attempt to deny it) and we are denying what we are; we are sinning. Sin, and specifically the "original sin" that perdures in us and bedevils our human condition is, fundamentally, the sin of nonreceptivity. It is denying what we are and wanting to be, desiring to be, or to have, or to take by whatever violent force may be needed, something else. This is precisely what is prohibited at the end of the Decalogue.

Notice how accurately this is unveiling what is happening in the Genesis story. "You will be like God, knowing good and evil," the serpent temptingly and with perverse irony promises in Genesis 3:5. For the culmination of the first creation story in Genesis 1:26 has proclaimed that humankind, male and female, *already is* in the image and likeness of God. Adam and Eve already are *like* God. But they desire more. They want to *be* God. The use of the Hebrew word *chamad* in this Adam-and-Eve story (Gen 2:9 and 3:6) is telling: it is the same word that is translated as *covet* at the end of the Ten Commandments. "The verb seems usually to express a desire that strongly impels one toward acquiring the object of attraction."[27] That is what was going on "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be *desired* (*chamad*) to make one wise" (Gen 3:6).

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remarkably similar insights. The *Contagion* book (a play, perhaps, on the title of the Girardian journal, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*) joyfully appropriates Girardian theory as contributing to his own *approfondissement* into the mystery of human—ultimately Christian and even trinitarian—desire. Some pregnant quotes: "Once we understand desire—all desire—as solicitation by the mystery we are in, we understand something that is often noted in spiritual writings: that whereas desire that is simply a felt need ceases once the need is satisfied, vital desire *increases* with satisfaction" (*Jesus the Liberator* 11); "I have long been persuaded that desire is not an emptiness needing to be filled but a fullness needing to be in relation. Desire is love trying to happen" (*Jesus the Liberator* 18); "The Christian story is the story of desire becoming love through all the violence and pain of history, the pioneer of this evolution being Jesus the willing victim of our violent way of association, which, with his resurrection and the explosion of the Spirit, issues in the new humanity whose polity is of love, the politics of the Kingdom" (*Contagion of Jesus* 131); "Now God is love. This is why desire, which is the creator's dangerous mark in the conscious animal, 'is love trying to happen'" (ibid. 143).

[27] Williams, *Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* 112. Williams cautiously notes that there could be some question about this precise meaning.

This suggests that original sin, which here and now lives on in us—i.e., the *effects* of original sin normally referred to in Catholic theology as *concupiscence*—is the sin-inducing, violence-inducing attitude of *nonreceptivity*: the sinful condition of what Girardians call *acquisitive mimesis*. While ultimately, it is the sin of wanting to be like God, we hide from that reality and play it out by wanting to be like those who have what we want to have, by wanting to have what they successfully want and have—and by being willing to do whatever may be necessary, even to kill, in order to get it. And indeed the next episode in what has been called this "ingenious psychological description of all sin"[28] is the story of the first murder: Cain killing his brother Abel. Notice how tellingly appropriate are the words in which the author of Genesis sums up this section of his narrative: "The earth was corrupt and full of lawlessness/violence" (Gen 6:11). God is going to fix that. But the solution—the divine solution let us not forget—was also violent. For this is the lead into the Noah flood story.

Let me now shift perspective and look at this narrative from a modern, scientific—and thus potentially "phenomenological"—point of view. Our human nature seems to be, in religious terms, relentlessly sinful or, in colloquial terms, all messed up. In other words, according to the story that we are telling, Rousseau's brilliant and charming story of the natural goodness of the human species is hopelessly optimistic. We are constantly struggling to keep from killing each other. Most of us, when we honestly look into the mirror, seem to be willing and ready to use whatever force may be necessary to get, to be, and to remain "number one." Are we sinning when we do this, or are we just doing what comes naturally as top dogs in the food chain, perhaps even occupying some unique position there as the "great stories" of Hobbes, Locke, and numerous others have conditioned us to assume? Or, are we human beings actually above, or at least called to be above all that? It is not sufficient, I am arguing, to answer just in traditional religious language; we must also do so in the language of modern science. The Girardian story of human origins, and above all the Girardian understanding of the effects of that story, begins to do that in a sober, but basically optimistic, way.

To focus the question: Are human beings actually being called to be more than just the top dogs in an essentially violent food chain? Is not this what Jesus was attempting to communicate in his call to restore to their senses those who had eyes, but could not see, and ears but could not hear (Jer 5:21; Matt 13:13–15)? Yes, healing diseases did involve an apparent suspension of the "laws" of nature. But that seemed to be the easy part of

[28] Sean Fagan, S.M., "Original Sin," in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, rev. exp. ed., Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004) 597–99, at 598.

Jesus' mission. It is what he used as easily recognizable signs of his call to the hard part of his mission. As Bailie put it:

Softening the human heart or refashioning the human self requires that social and psychological reflexes relied upon and reinforced "since the foundation of the world" [see Mt 13:35] be overridden. So tenacious are these reflexes that they have often enough been thought synonymous with "human *nature.*" Transcending these reflexes, or suppressing their influence, is at least as arduous a feat as manipulating objects in the material order, and vastly more spiritually significant.[29]

Recall how sadly insightful is Hobbes's story of a humankind in which all are equal because, given the chance, even the weakest can kill the strongest. And note how sadly accurate a description it is of our present world-political situation in which world order and peace so often seem to depend on a power strong enough to impose it by lethal force. Girard's story is similarly revelatory of our self-destructively violent human condition, and of how we manage to survive this by way of the culture-saving scapegoat mechanism. Its dynamic is all too familiar to us. That is, when mutually self-destructive urges tend to get out of hand, we (1) find a convenient victim; (2) gang up on that victim; (3) discover that this results in a certain amount of peace and harmony; (4) which causes us to sense that there may even be something "sacred," even "divine," in this victim; (5) and then notice that, in the next crisis, this process seems to repeat itself, and again a measure of peace results; (6) so that this process gets repeated again and again, and eventually it is just ritually repeated with surrogate victims (animals instead of humans).

   Oversimplified, yes. But after all the fine-tuning, after all the qualifications, we have to admit: it works! But it does involve a deception. It depends on the participants believing in the guilt of the victim. Actually, whether or not the victim is really guilty is irrelevant, as long as one *believes* that the victim is guilty, or *assumes* that the victim is guilty, or assumes that the victim has little or no value except to serve as the needed victim . . . or . . . whatever one believes about the victim, we think, we assume, we take it for granted (usually without reflecting much on it) *that this process works*. Deception is integral to the effectiveness. And remember, we are talking about a life-saving, culture-saving effectiveness. Recall the scene toward the end of the film *The Wizard of Oz*: Once the wizard is unveiled, his power is gone. Such an unveiling is now going on in our human world, and as this unveiling goes forward, the scapegoating mechanisms on which human culture has learned to depend become less and less effective.

   One reason why this is happening is that we live in a world—even when secularized—that has been, and remains, deeply affected by the Christian story. The center of that story is, of course, Jesus Christ, a victim. When we

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   [29] Bailie, *Violence Unveiled* 216.

tell our Christian story truthfully—and many are still doing that—it is *from the perspective of Jesus Christ the victim*! Do we believe in the guilt of Jesus Christ the victim? Is it irrelevant whether Jesus is guilty or innocent? Can we believe or assume that Jesus Christ is guilty? Or, even regardless of all that, should this have happened to him? Some Girardians make the claim—difficult to prove, of course—that our culture's instinctive identification with the underdog, the persecuted, the oppressed, the abused, is a learned and specifically (though perhaps not exclusively) Christian response. In other words, take away Christianity, and that response is significantly weakened. Conversely, take away that instinctive siding with the victim, and Christianity is eviscerated. Hence the outrage in recent years, when so many church authorities failed to side with the victims of clerical sex abusers.

The effectiveness of the scapegoat mechanism—i.e., the channeling of acquisitive, conflictual, self-destructive mimesis onto a convenient victim—depends on the innocence of the victim being veiled. Unveil the victim, identify with the victim, and culture is in crisis. Notice how pervasively this mechanism is to be found in all aspects of human life, from the most serious down to the most trivial. For example, in the Cold War, the Western democracies needed Communism to unite them; but with Communism no longer a threat, the West now seems to be replacing it with radical Islam, which, in turn, "needs" the Americans to gang up against. The Nazis "needed" the Jews. Homophobic people "need" the gays. But it also comes right down to the relatively trivial, like Boston Red Sox baseball fans "needing" the New York Yankees to "hate," Boston College football fans "needing" Notre Dame to cheer against, etc. This list could go on indefinitely, for we are talking about a deeply fundamental human need. But in all these instances, and in order for the mechanism to have its unifying, culture-forming and culture-preserving effect, it seems to be necessary for the innocence or at least the nonguilt of the scapegoated victim to remain veiled.

ORIGINAL SIN: A "PHENOMENOLOGICAL" VIEW

Before I directly address the "phenomenology" of redemption, which means refocusing attention from the negative to the positive aspects of our subject, it will be helpful to examine some recent attempts to explore the experience of original sin—i.e., the experience of its effects in concupiscence—from a modern scientific perspective. Raymund Schwager has done this in a very helpful way, and has suggested that theologians should not wait until they have worked out their understanding of sin and of original sin from a traditional doctrinal perspective, and only then look over to the social and natural sciences to see how they measure up to or challenge their achieved doctrinal positions. Instead, theologians should *from the outset* be

trying to understand the findings of the sciences on their own scientific terms so that they are not looking to the sciences only to find out whether or to what extent the scientific findings might agree with their theology. That is neither taking science seriously nor respecting those aspects of truth and reality that only science can uncover. Instead, most theologians need to be more attentive than they usually are to the light that science can shed on religious or doctrinal data. The path to truth is not a one-way street.[30]

This approach is analogous to the difference between traditional approaches to the scientific study of the religions of the world and the newly developed approach called "comparative theology." Comparative theology includes faith-understanding in its object of study. For example, Christians studying Hinduism do not, as their only methodological approach, bracket out their own faith stance in order to study objectively the contents and practices of some branch of Hinduism. Rather, while beginning with their own Christian faith-understanding, they attempt to study honestly and respectfully the faith-understandings of the other religion in order to see what light that knowledge and experience might cast on their own under-standing, indeed their own faith-understanding of Christianity.[31]

One of the findings of modern biology and microbiology, Schwager reminds us, is that all organisms, from the most simple to the most complex, have memory. Whatever happens to an organism remains in a kind of mem-ory bank influencing the later life of that organism. One might question whether this is true of all the most minute of microorganisms—although it does explain why antibiotics, after repeated use, tend to lose their effectiveness—it is clearly one of the characteristics of the higher organ-isms, especially, as Freud pointed out, of that most complex of organisms, the human being. When, in the context of Girardian mimetic theory, we take this scientific finding as the starting point of an attempt to understand the phenomenology of original sin, some excitingly illuminating results, as Doran, for example, has already begun to point out,[32] begin to suggest themselves. In doing this, we are, of course, beginning to tell another "great story." Let this one, like the others, be judged by the extent to which it helps us understand who and what we are as human beings.

The focal point of this story is the "moment" or, more precisely, the process we call "hominization," the term that philosophers, theologians,

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[30] See Raymund Schwager, S.J., *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolu-tionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, trans. James Williams (Leominster Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2006); ET of *Erbsünde und Heilsdrama: Im Kontext von Evolution, Gentechnologie, und Apokalyptic* (Münster: LIT, 1997).

[31] I have in mind specifically the work and the influence of Francis X. Clooney, S.J. See his article "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 521–50.

[32] See above, the section "Lonergan and Girard on Redemption."

and evolutionary thinkers give to the process of "the development of the higher characteristics that are thought to distinguish [humans] from other animals."[33] Philosophically, it was the process of moving from animal instinct to human reason as the principal source of human action. Theologically, it was the process of becoming a free subject capable of relating to the transcendent. Whether conceived of as a kind of knife-edge event (as most premoderns have thought), or as a long process extending over thousands of generations, and perhaps even still going forward (as most scholars now assume), it is the point where, however inarticulately, the now-becoming (or still-becoming) human beings became aware of themselves as capable of acting in a way that transcends animal instinct. From all that we can reconstruct from our prehistoric past as well as from the past few thousand years of recorded history, our forebears usually chose the path of violence, might makes right, survival of the fittest, etc. In other words, both in its origins and in its (still ongoing?) continuation, hominization has been the story, with its endless sad variations, of human beings receiving the gift/offer of self-transcendence and, more often than not, turning it into (usually violent) self-assertion.

Thus, an integral part of our historical and psychosocial memory is a memory of violence. The choices made by our human forebears, choices that first constituted us as human, choices by which we have managed to survive until now and still manage to survive, and that we will probably continue to make as we struggle toward our future, are, characteristically, violent choices. We are conditioned to rely on the violence of the scapegoat mechanism to get what we desire and to save our skins. In that sense, violence is our original sin. However, largely (but not exclusively) through the influence of the Christian ethos of identifying with victims, the scapegoat mechanism is being progressively unveiled, leaving us, increasingly, in crisis.[34] Can we be healed of the violence (sacred sacrificial violence, it is called in the Girardian great story) that used to save us, and that now, increasingly unveiled, threatens to destroy us?

Scott Garrels has offered helpful background to the way in which scholars can contribute to a possible positive answer to this question.[35] He points out that "the combined efforts of developmental psychology, neurophysiology,

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[33] *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) s.v. "hominization" 1252.

[34] This is the meaning of the subtitle "Humanity at the Crossroads" of Gil Bailie's *Violence Unveiled*.

[35] Scott R. Garrels, "Imitation, Mirror Neurons, and Mimetic Desire: Convergence between the Mimetic Theory of René Girard and Empirical Research on Imitation," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12–13 (2006) 47–86.

and cognitive neuroscience have produced a dramatic array of data elucidating the role and mechanisms of imitation." This research, he says,

demonstrates the profound significance of reciprocal imitative phenomena at both neural and behavior levels. Imitation is no longer seen as a mindless act expressing simple mimicry, but rather a fundamental and inherently positive mechanism stimulating the individual mind to develop through its relationship with another mind. The congruence of such reciprocity of minds, along with the ability to delay imitation, is understood as the basis for the emergence of more diverse and complex behaviors and representations, including human language and the development of a theory of mind.[36]

Garrels goes on to point out that only recently has empirical research begun to support what mimetic scholars have long known about "the primordial role of psychological mimesis in human motivation and social relations," and to "account for and support such reciprocity of experience, even at a level as basic as that of individual neurons."[37] I began this part of the article by insisting that theologians in general, and not just the relatively few who have already been bringing science and religion into conversation with each other, need to be attentive to the relevant findings of science. Garrels points out that this also needs to become a two-way street:

The developing fields of developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience are influenced by and dependent upon disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, literary analysis, and theology, all of which approach similar or unique questions from differing sources and points of view. Without these other disciplines, neuroscience would not be able to ask the questions that it does, or apply its findings in a meaningful preexisting framework of knowledge. For example, the broader implications relevant to mimetic theory did not originate within the empirical sciences but from literary, anthropological, and historical investigations. At the same time, Girard's entire corpus of work rests on the primacy of human imitative behavior, the significance of which must be measured against the unfolding and revolutionary research in the fields of developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience.[38]

Garrels then concludes his article with the following prognostication, which ends up echoing Lonergan's "Law of the Cross" and presaging Doran's "Nonviolent Cross":

When imitation research is viewed through the lens of mimetic theory, one sees not only the building blocks of relatedness, mindfulness, and meaningfulness but also the mechanisms of distortion, disillusionment, and violence. If a reciprocating feedback loop between mimetic scholars and imitation researchers can be established—and I believe wholeheartedly that is inevitable—the social sciences may begin to better appreciate and understand the incredible nature of human life,

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[36] Ibid. 68.   [37] Ibid. 79.
[38] Ibid. 79–80.

culture, and religion, an appreciation that is essential in transforming human culture and relationships through infinitely more imaginative and nonviolent ways of learning.[39]

This article began by assuming that, to move toward a "phenomenology" of redemption, the disciplinary fields that needed to come into more extensive conversation with each other were theology and the social sciences. We can now see that the natural sciences, most specifically the biological sciences, also need to be included. With that in mind, we are now, finally, able, to approach more directly the main theme and object of this article.

A "PHENOMENOLOGY" OF REDEMPTION: IMITATE THE DESIRE OF JESUS

Whether what we are working toward is a "phenomenology" of atonement, or of salvation, or of redemption, or of conversion/metanoia, or simply of "buying into" the kingdom of God/heaven—or perhaps, more modestly, as I will suggest below, simply a theory of sanctification—for my purposes here it is all the same. Whatever terminology we use, redemption means being saved/redeemed *from* something *to* something. So far, I have been attending mostly to what we must be saved from. Now I will try to attend more directly to what, phenomenologically, we are to be saved *to*, or *for which* or *by means of which* we are to be saved. I turn from the negative to the positive. The reader will, of course, notice, perhaps with knowing bemusement, that my account of the negative has been much longer than will be my account of the positive. Yes, it has always been much easier to talk about the bad than about the good.

In beginning to formulate a "phenomenology" of redemption, we are now, thanks to Girard and his followers, more deeply aware that integral to this formulation is the fact that human beings are ineluctably mimetic beings. We become what we are, whether individually or in common and as groups, both by imitating the desires of others and, whether consciously or not, "remembering" everything that has ever happened to us. This is what is happening as babies learn from their parents, children from their teachers, students from their mentors, apprentices from their masters, athletes from their coaches and heroes, fans from their superstars, smaller nations from larger, more powerful nations, and so forth. And, perhaps most sorrowfully of all, this is what victims learn from their abusers.

[39] Ibid. 80. Garrells's "faith"—or hope—in such a development seems to be in the process of becoming reality: see the impressive collection of papers in *Mimesis and Science: Empirical Research on Imitation and the Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion,* ed. Scott R. Garrells (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2011).

Sexual abusers, almost without exception, seem to have been introduced to abusing by first being abused themselves. Mimetic activity can be a devilish, truly satanic vicious circle. But it can also be—and that is what I now want to emphasize—a truly blessed, divine, and yes, even divinizing circle.

To focus on the central point, the central dynamic, we become what we are, we grow into what we will be, by imitating someone's desire. So, if it is a Christian story that we are trying to tell and by which we are trying to live, the only way to do that is by imitating the desire of Jesus. But first, two comments: The first is to recall in paraphrase what has been attributed to Einstein: "I want to know the thoughts of God; everything else is just dotting the i's and crossing the t's." For if we are actually imitating the desire of Jesus, then all the ways and means by which we do that, ways in which we will be replacing victimizing mechanisms with their opposites, i.e., with a nonacquisitive, nonrivalrous mimesis that does not scapegoat victims but identifies with them, in all these ways and means we will, in fact, be dotting the i's and crossing the t's.

The second comment is to note, with a certain amount of humble embarrassment, that I am aware of now beginning to slide—or should I say "rise"?—from one literary genre to another, from theological exposition and reflection toward (Christian) preaching. In other words, a truly complete treatment of this subject would require that I bring together not only the genres of discourse that characterize theological reflection and the social and natural sciences, as I pointed out at the beginning of this article, but also the genres of preaching and exhortation.[40] The word "Christian" (a few lines above) is in parenthesis because, although what I am doing is Christian, and specifically Catholic Christian, I will be attempting to do it in a way that is sufficiently open as to make whatever insight I can offer into the "phenomenology" of atonement accessible to all, Christian or not. And, while on this point, it is appropriate to point out that much—indeed quite possibly most—of the effectively redemptive i-dotting and t-crossing now going on in this world is not being done by Christians, or from an explicitly Christian motivation.

So then, aware that what I am trying to do is to reverse our "memory-banked" biological/sociological/cultural conditioning to act, grow, and

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[40] Remember, from Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 355–68, that the eighth and last functional specialty, without which the work of theology is not complete, is Communications. And notice, too, how Lonergan and his followers describe the "mechanism"—really the mystery—by which we try to replace victimizing mechanism as the "Law of the Cross" (Doran, "Nonviolent Cross" 51; see above under the section "Lonergan and Girard on Redemption").

survive by violence, we come to the question, How—since this is the specifically Christian way to do this—can we imitate the *desire* of Jesus? That would involve, first and foremost, "thinking" as Jesus thought. Is not this precisely what Paul was groping to express in Philippians when he says, indeed pleads: "Make my joy complete!" (Phil 2:2) or, in colloquial terms: "Make my day!"? Paul then goes on to explain what he means, but in doing so he quickly breaks into song (as he sometimes does when attempting to express the ineffable),[41] quoting the hymn that Christians around him were apparently already singing:

Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.[4] Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. [5]*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

[6]who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

[7]but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave
being born in human likeness. . . . (Phil 2:2–7)

Verse 5, here italicized for emphasis, has the key words (they come remarkably close to the wish expressed by Einstein): *the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.* In other words, think like Jesus, so you can desire like Jesus, so you can act like Jesus.

Those who buy into this, admitting, in one way or another, that it all comes down to this, are already moving toward what Lonergan has called moral conversion.[42] Intellectually, they have achieved a basic understanding, if not of all the details of the problem, then at least of the main route to the

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[41] See, e.g., Romans 8:38–39 and 11:33–36.

[42] Analogous to the somewhat simplistic, common-sense use of "phenomenology" with which I began this article, my remarks here have grown out of a similarly simplistic understanding of "conversion" as *intellectual* (seeing and understanding things correctly), *moral* (being committed to act and live accordingly), and *religious* (so imbued with love that one can actually live out that commitment). This does not do justice to Lonergan's description of authentic and full conversion as simultaneously intellectual, moral, and religious (*Method in Theology,* passim, but esp. 237–44), nor to Doran's exposition "What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by Conversion?" (http://www.loneganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard %20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf [posted on June 29, 2011]). Serendipitously, however, as the next few pages will point out, the meaning of conversion toward which I am groping comes close to what Lonergan (and Doran) mean by moral conversion. See also the extensive study of Lonergan on conversion by Walter Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York: Paulist, 1998).

solution. One of the meanings of intellectual conversion refers to what is taking place when, historically, culturally, philosophically, socially, politically, etc.—i.e., on the level of their presuppositions, attitudes, and opinions—human beings come to see through the deceptions of the scapegoat mechanism and begin to demystify its workings. When authentic, this process flows into moral conversion that, in Lonergan's words, "changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values."[43] For that is when human beings begin to draw in their own lives the logical and practical conclusions of that demystification. This demystification— "unveiling" if you will—may or may not (and in most cases probably does not) include a specifically Christian theological understanding of how and why the Christ-event is a critical turning point in this process. And ironically, but often necessarily, this can also occasion in some individuals a personal distancing from traditional religion, especially when religion has been experienced as simplistic or fundamentalist.[44] Intellectual and moral conversion alone, however difficult to achieve—if indeed there is such a thing—for in Lonergan's view it usually presupposes a significant amount of religious conversion), can be an empty achievement. For there can be a veritable chasm between thinking rightly and acting rightly. Because, however difficult intellectual and moral conversions might be, they are still relatively accessible for many people, especially educated people of good will who are not afflicted with "organic mendacity" (see below n. 45). In other words, many of us, including probably most of those reading this article, are more or less where Paul was when he complained in Romans 7:14–20 about his own, or at least the common human, inability to do the good that one wants to do and avoid the evil that one wants to avoid, or, as the Roman poet Ovid expressed it: "I perceive what is better and approve of it, but I pursue what is worse" (*Metamorph*. 7.19). Paul and Ovid had the same fundamental human insight: knowing the good can still leave one far away from actually doing it. In terms of Lonergan's scheme of conversions, people at that point are simply not (or not yet) *religiously* converted. However strongly Plato and Aristotle (and countless others of the great thinkers on whose shoulders we stand) may have wanted to push us in that direction, knowledge alone is not enough; knowledge does not equal virtue.

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[43] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240.
[44] For example, if the image of a fiercely judging and condemning God is what is proposed for belief, then a true Christian, in relation to that kind of a god, has to be an "atheist." This is analogous to the traditional biblical argument against the pagan gods: they simply do not exist. Socrates, remember, was accused of atheism; the early Christians, because they did not offer sacrifice to the gods, were sometimes accused of being irreligious.

Our contemporary first-world attitudes toward the problems of poverty and malnutrition powerfully illustrate this. We actually do have the scientific knowledge and access to the technological expertise needed to eliminate extreme poverty and malnutrition across the world. We can call that, at least in a simplified sense, intellectual conversion. We know basically what the problems are and how they might be solved. We also seem to be morally committed to do that. For apart from self-serving demagogical rhetoric, which carries with it its own refutation, and apart from those afflicted with "organic mendacity,"[45] practically all the respected and respectable moralizing rhetoric that we can hear on television or read in newspapers and journals of opinion, to say nothing of scientific journals, also seems to flow in that direction. We can call that intellectual-plus-moral conversion. But, as Paul and Ovid sadly point out, we do not do it, we do not act on it, we do not make it real. Scientifically, technologically, it is there to be done, but we are not willing to pay the price, not willing to make the "sacrifices" (using the general, secular meaning of the word[46]) to do it. We are not *religiously* converted. Year by year we receive the reports of international commissions and meetings called to deal with problems of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and economic and ecological exploitation. Year by year we read how distressingly nugatory are the actual steps taken to solve what is solvable.

Doran's exposition of moral conversion helpfully illustrates this necessary interpenetration of the intellectual, moral, religious, and the psychic when conversion is full and authentic:

Problems that emerge at the more basic levels can often be met only by changes at the higher or more complex levels. Thus, the global maldistribution of vital goods can be offset only by massive technological, economic, and political restructurings at the level of social values. But these are impossible without a transformed set of meanings and values at the level of culture. And only persons of integrity will be willing to pursue these meanings and values and accept their implications for social structures. But personal integrity depends for its consistency on the gift of God's grace [i.e., religious conversion].

From above, then, the gift of God's grace is required for sustained personal authenticity. Persons of integrity are required for the cosmopolitan collaboration that takes responsibility for cultural values. Genuine cultural values, measured by the transcendental intentions of the intelligible, the true, the good, the beautiful, are required for a just social order, and a just social order is required for the equitable distribution of vital goods.

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[45] That is, "whenever a man's mind admits only those impressions and feelings which serve his 'interest' or his instinctive attitude" (Doran, "Nonviolent Cross" 49, quoting from Max Scheler's *Ressentiment*).

[46] See my chapter, "The Many Meanings of Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice Unveiled* 1–5.

I am proposing then, that Lonergan's category of moral conversion includes conversion to collective responsibility, and that the scale of values enables us to get some idea of what that might require.[47] In other words, a certain amount of religious conversion, being in love with God and neighbor, whether or not one is conscious of this in religious terms, is not only the initial cause but also the ultimate empowerment that enables one to live by the "Law of the Cross" that can transform the evil effects of "acquisitive mimesis, mimetic rivalry and violence."[48]

This inevitably raises the question: how does one come to religious conversion? I can suggest three ways to begin to respond. First, ask whether we really want to pursue that question. Most of us probably do not. At least not in the sense that would make us ready to pay the price or make the sacrifices that would be necessary for our world to make real progress toward solving these massive human problems. To put it bluntly and in the most challengingly provocative of terms: most of us do not really want to be Christian. For if—following the argument of this article—being a Christian means identifying with the desire of Jesus, identifying with Jesus the victim (which means identifying with victims generally) is something that very few of us really want. Most of those able to read this article live quite comfortably insulated from the experience of victims. We are quite happy to accept intellectually, and even preach enthusiastically, the Christian message as, admittedly, I am trying to do at the end of this article. But actually live it? Actually enter into a Christic identification with victims, as Matthew 25, as the whole preaching and message of Jesus, as the example of so many saints seem to be demanding that we do? We tend to shrink back from that.

A second way to take up this question is to remind ourselves what religious conversion, the conversion that is the central key to the solution, really is. Religious conversion is not something that, in Pelagian fashion, one can earn, or merit, or achieve simply by choosing it, willing it, or desiring it. For religious conversion is, first and foremost, like grace, a gift: the gift of divine love that is indeed offered to all. "In Lonergan's theology, as Frederick Crowe has made very clear, the mission of the Holy Spirit is universal."[49] But the gift has to be received, lived, nourished, and cherished. For although religious conversion is gift, indeed the both originating and ultimately culminating gift, our acceptance of it is anything but passive. For as Doran puts it:

The basis of distinguishing the varieties of conversion lies in what Lonergan calls the different levels of consciousness: experience, understanding, judgment, decision, love. Intellectual conversion has something to do with understanding and judgment,

[47] Doran, "What Does Lonergan Mean by Conversion?"
[48] Doran, "Nonviolent Cross" 50–51.
[49] Doran, "What Does Lonergan Mean by Conversion?"—the section "Religious Conversion *from* and *to*" 9–13, at 13.

moral conversion with decision, religious conversion with love, and psychic conversion with the empirical consciousness that penetrates all these other dimensions and that is changed as we move from one level to another.[50]

A third approach this question is to qualify the priority implied—but also warned against by Lonergan himself—by listing the conversions as first intellectual, then moral (and psychic), and finally, culminatingly, religious. Such a prioritizing seems clearly suggested by my own statement, a few pages above, that we can begin to imitate the authentically sanctifying and redeeming desire of Jesus by "first and foremost 'thinking' as Jesus thought." But any necessity of beginning only with knowledge, only with the "intellectual," is directly challenged by the obvious truth of the words of an anonymous referee of an earlier version of this article: "I think that we work our way into thinking like Jesus also, and perhaps primarily, by acting like him." This reminds me of what sometimes happens to college students in the course of engaging in volunteer work, or in the social-service component of an academic course: they experience conversion, and in some cases end up devoting themselves to a Dorothy-Day-like life of self-giving service. As one professor put it with ironic awe: "They get ruined for life."

CONCLUSION: A THEORY OF SANCTIFICATION?

Do we have, as my title teasingly suggests, a phenomenology of redemption? Certainly not in the full sense of the word. But Girardian mimetic theory, as Doran has methodologically explained, using Lonergan's image of the two blades of a scissors, especially when it is brought into conversation with the social and natural sciences, as Raymond Schwager and Scott Garrells have undertaken, can begin to provide the basis for such a phenomenology. Such approaches spur us on not only to imagine and conceive the need for a phenomenology of redemption but also, in working to meet that need, to identify phenomenologically the practical ways, the i-dottings and t-crossings, in which this—the replacing of victimizing mechanisms with nonrivalous, nonacquisitive, nonviolent mimesis—can be achieved. Doran's thesis is that while "Lonergan provides a heuristic structure for the systematic understanding of the doctrine of redemption, . . . Girard contributes a great deal to filling in the details of that structure."[51] But as Doran and many others ask, how thoroughly do Girard and his followers fill in these details? Certainly not well enough to convince most scholars that mimetic theory is *the* solution.

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[50] Ibid. 6.
[51] Doran, "Nonviolent Cross" 50. See above, the section "Lonergan and Girard on Redemption."

The empirical evidence for such a totalizing solution is lacking. In fact, there may be more empirical evidence for mimesis of behavior than, more narrowly, for a Girardian-type mimesis of desire. For when all is said and done, mimesis of desire is "(1) only one of many elements of evolutionarily stabilized human cognitive-emotional architecture, (2) possibly exaggerated in its centrality and importance by Girard, and yet (3) still promising in its application to theology."[52]

If, then, the theory of redemption via mimesis of desire sketched out in this article falls short of being a full, empirically verified—or even empirically verifiable—phenomenology of redemption, and therefore does not adequately unveil the fundamental mechanism of salvation, what, then, do we have? A more modest claim of a "theory of sanctification" seems to fit the bill. Such a claim allows me to step back and push this theory and its possible implications toward its theo-logical conclusions to see what openings or problems might ensue.

First, this theory obviously implies at least a groping toward a solution to the problem of religious pluralism. Further, it is a solution that does not require Christocentrism in the customary exclusive and excluding sense of that word. And, still further, it seems to do so by insinuating a certain degree of separation between the fundamental mechanism of salvation and the work of Christ.

In other words, consistent with what I have tried to do in *Sacrifice Unveiled*, i.e., unveil something of the "mechanism" of Christian sacrifice, I am here trying to unveil something of the "mechanism" of redemption. For here, as well as there, I try to pursue resolutely the implications of the theological *convenientia* that, ultimately, there is a common-to-all fundamental "mechanism" of salvation by which the universal salvific will of God is actually being realized not only in those who are practicing Christians but also in the countless billions who are not. Can one imagine a "mechanism" of salvation, i.e., imagine something at least inchoatively susceptible of empirical verification, that both remains within the trajectory of Christian theology and my own Roman Catholic doctrinal and ecclesial allegiance, and that also begins to explain or at least point toward this mystery? Can one assemble empirical evidence that can support the existence, or at least the possibility of the existence, of such a mechanism?

I close with the same question with which I began: Is there a phenomenology of redemption? Or, to put it more precisely, can one assemble empirical evidence to support at least the possibility of the existence of a universal mechanism of salvation? The faith and love that requires us to hope that all will be saved impels the Christian theologian to reach, and

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[52] Professor Wesley Wildman, Boston University School of Theology, personal communication via email, February 10, 2012.

indeed strenuously stretch, toward a positive answer. But for this "theory of sanctification" (as I now more modestly call my "thesis") to be more than just impractical dreaming or something that a Christian can hope for only in the future end-time when all things are restored in Christ, we have to be able to point to places where such a mechanism of salvation is actually at work. And we can point to individuals (we call them saints) and communities (among them monasteries[53] and a whole panoply of religiously inspired works of mercy and peacemaking). We can point also to secular groups like Amnesty International, Bread for the World, Doctors for the Third World, and various UN-supported programs that are at least beginning to do an effective job of living this ideal and witnessing it to the world. And when that witness—most of which is probably not being done by Christians or by specifically Christian organizations—is effective, it is so because it speaks to us and to the world in the social-scientific terms in which we experience our identity. We do have, therefore, however weakly and inchoatively, but also prophetically, a phenomenology of redemption actually at work in our world.

And who knows? Thinking apocalyptically, without that work and witness, our human world might already have destroyed itself.

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[53] Notice how this challenges us to rethink Christian asceticism. Traditionally, Christian asceticism has been associated with self-denial, denial of the world, and flight from the world. But if the basic thrust of this article is sound, it will impel us to think of Christian asceticism in a much more positive way. We can no longer think of authentic asceticism in terms of denying the world, especially the human world, but primarily in terms of transforming it.