Making Disciples the Way Jesus Did:

René Girard and the Future of Catechesis

by John W. B. Hill

A presentation at the Annual Gathering of the North American Association for the Catechumenate at Niagara Falls, Ontario, July 22 – 25, 2004, by Canon John W. B. Hill, pastor of the Anglican Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury in Toronto.

Part One

Introducing a controversial thinker like Girard and his 'mimetic theory' may seem an odd thing to offer to a gathering of practitioners; so let me try to explain.

The thing that brings us together is the work of making disciples; and I think we realize that discipleship is inseparable from the vocation to mission. And yet, the nature of the mission in which we are involved is itself a controversial issue today. What kind of a project is it anyway? Are we persuading people to join us in order to save their souls? How does joining us confer salvation? Is this the only access to salvation? What does salvation mean anyway? And why has our project fallen into such huge disrepute? How did our involvement in mission get us into such a moral morass? In short, what is God up to in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and what would it look like in today's world for us to be cooperating in God's project?

Perhaps especially in our time – with its anxieties about growing alienation from the church, our own embarrassment about so much that passes for evangelism, our realization that we are paying the penalty for the authoritarianism of the centuries of Christendom and suffering the consequences of our former alliance with colonialist powers in the missionary movement and our more recent alliances with corrupt regimes – it is not surprising that serious catechumenal formation is yet to become a priority for our churches. We're just not clear what business we're in, so it's hard to agree on what we're inducting newcomers into.

And so I want to share with you my excitement in discovering the work of Girard and his colleagues. What Girard offers is a cluster of insights which seem to unlock many of the Bible's treasures more profoundly, and answer the very question I started with: What is God up to in the Gospel, and what would it look like in today's world for us to be cooperating in God's project?

Along the way, these insights will, I hope, provide new ways of appreciating the method that Jesus used in making disciples, and suggest what the function of a renewed catechumenate might be in our own time.

So let me tell you about René Girard. He was born on Christmas Day in 1923, in Avignon, a Roman Catholic (though a nominal one, I think); and he studied medieval history in Paris. Then he emigrated to the US, where he completed a doctorate in history. But his first academic appointment was teaching literature (he claims he was seldom more than a few chapters ahead of his students). He was a bit unorthodox; he said he was pursuing a hunch that what made great literary works great might consist not so much in what made them unique (as other critics assumed) but in what they had in common.

He claimed to find the deepest significance of the world's great works of fiction in their common identification of the nature of human desire. Contrary to the romantic myth of the heroic individual whose desire springs from some deep inner vision, Girard noted the recurring theme of imitation in the great novels and plays. His insight was that all desire – above the merely instinctual – flows from imitation of a model. Don Quixote sets out to be a brave and chivalrous knight, in imitation of some ancient knight he has read about. In Shakespeare's play 'Julius Caesar', Brutus is an avid admirer of Caesar and wants to be what Caesar is. And so on.

I am not a literary scholar; so I move along quickly to Girard's analysis. Whereas we commonly assume that I desire something because it finds some deep resonance in my own soul, Girard observes that what I desire is the result of observing the same desire in someone I admire and would like to imitate. I have this voracious appetite for imitation because of the awful void in my own sense of being: "I could really be someone if I could be like him". And to be like him would mean liking what he likes, having what he has. Girard uses the word 'mimesis' for this kind of imitation; and the desire it generates he calls 'mimetic desire.'

There is nothing strange about this pattern, of course; this is exactly how a new-born child begins to mature: by imitating – or miming – those around it, chiefly its parents who take delight in teaching it to imitate. It learns language by imitating their sounds,

and discovering what happens as a result. The child finds its being in their love and delight, and learns to like what they like.

Girard observes that there are two kinds of model I can imitate: first, the model who belongs to a category completely different from myself – a parent, a teacher, a hero of old, a monarch, etc.; and second, the model who is another like myself.

The first kind of model can never be my rival (I can never belong to my parents' generation; if I ever get to be a teacher myself, the teacher I so admired won't be my teacher anymore; I cannot be my hero's rival because my hero is long dead; and much as I may envy the royal family's glamour and wealth, I know I will never wear the crown).

The second kind of model will almost inevitably be my rival: if I imitate him to be what he is, and desire what he desires, we will soon find ourselves in competition for the same things. Even children exhibit this kind of rivalrous imitation: put two toddlers together in a room full of toys, and watch what happens. 'Mimetic rivalry.'
And indeed, modern western culture and commerce seems to based on this dynamic. Most advertizing sells me stuff I didn't know I wanted until I saw someone else depicted who was enjoying it, someone who was as glamorous or happy or sexy as I would like to be. Perhaps the most notorious – and effective – advertisement of all time was the Marlboro Man, in his many incarnations. What on earth is the link he makes between me and tobacco? It is my sense of needing to become something macho like him.

Much of the time, this envy is seen as a good thing – a force propelling society to higher and greater achievement or productivity. It is commonly held in the west that envy, which may be a private vice, is also a public good: it is the engine of our economic system.

But sooner or later, it leads to conflict. And here, Girard offers a stunning observation. What began as shared desire between me and my model soon leads to a double bind. My model may have been luring me to be like him, to desire what he desires; but if I become his competitor, he will begin fending me off. "Become like me; but don't become like me" – that is the mixed message I get. My model has become my obstacle. So for example, I may be my boss's prize protege, stroking his ego by my admiration and my eagerness to learn from him. But when I am promoted and step up to the position of colleague, our relationship suddenly changes and begins to look more like conflict.

And once conflict is the name of the game, both of us become obstacles to each other, and the original object that we both desired becomes less important than the conflict itself. That, in fact, is the story of Adam and Eve. In the beginning, neither of them actually desire the forbidden fruit; but they are tempted to see their model as their obstacle (that is, to see God as their rival), and they begin to desire what God has prohibited. Adam desires what Eve has acquired, only to begin accusing her once the deed is discovered; and accusation leads to further accusation. Distorted desire, generated by their rivalry of a non-rivalrous model, leads to conflict between them.

This is the huge new insight, then: that what began as envious desire quickly turns into a competition to outdo one another in violence. The more we see ourselves as adversaries, the more alike we become. Each of us imitates the other's accusations; each of us imitates the other's violence. Watch any bar-room brawl; listen to any domestic argument; think of any civil or international war. What we end up with is a cycle of violence, a mimetic crisis, Girard would say.

Girard points out that because of this built in mimetic pattern in our relationships – the fact that desire shapes who we see ourselves to be, and yet desire leads to rivalry and conflict which all too often turns into a contagion of violence – because of this pattern, human society has always been threatened by immanent destruction: the violence of all against all. If some means of controlling or quelling such violence had not been found, no human society, no stable cultural existence would ever have been possible.

But Girard lays out the evidence that a means of dealing with this threat of mimetic contagion had in fact been discovered in virtually every ancient society – by accident. This constitutes perhaps the most profound insight he offers us. Because of the magnetic power of imitation of one another's violence, the violence of each against each finally coalesces into a violence of all against one; as soon as any accusation against one person surfaced, mimesis would quickly draw everyone into making the same accusation. Some poor devil who had always seemed suspicious, or repugnant, suddenly becomes the focus of the violence – a mob violence in which all the accumulated feelings of animosity are projected onto the one individual – and he or she is driven out of town, pushed off a cliff, stoned to death, burned at the stake, lynched, or some such thing.

But here's the important thing: the thrill and shock of all this is wondrously cathartic, leaving everyone in the mob with a sudden sense of release, a miraculous sense of calm, a divine gift of peace. I say 'divine' because its miraculous and inexplicable power would clearly be such as no human agency could have created. The victim, whom everyone had spontaneously recognized as the complete embodiment of all the evil

afflicting their society, would suddenly prove to be a divine saviour as well, a veritable deity.

And this, Girard proposes, is the origin of the primitive sense of the sacred, and therefore of religion itself. The myth that arises out of this experience usually tells a story of how people were afflicted by a terrible plague; how they discovered the culprit – whose identity was indicated by his or her suspicious character – and how this evil creature was sacrificed, bringing an end to the plague. Only then would it be revealed that the victim was indeed a deity who had intended this sacrifice from the beginning.

If such a phenomenon lies behind ancient mythology, it also lies behind the foundation of stable societies. Social order is established through lynching, through some form of violent exclusion. Sacred murder is the foundation of human culture. Note that the very word 'culture' hints at this phenomenon: 'cult' is the root of 'culture' because culture becomes possible with the advent of a peace and solidarity generated by sacred violence.

This is what the sequel to the story of Adam and Eve suggests: the story of Cain and Abel. Note that the stories of Genesis two to eleven are all about the emergence, the founding, of civilizations. Cain is the founder of the first city; and it is founded in his brother's blood.

Girard notes that the seemingly universal evidence of human sacrifice in ancient societies around the world, cultures many of which could not possibly have had any cultural contact, points to this method of generating cultural stability and well-being.

The cathartic effect of the initial mob violence would not, however, last for ever, and would need to be repeated. And thus the emergence of ritual sacrifice, as distinct from spontaneous violence, can be explained as the stabilizing method of containing violence.

Of course, the powerful effect of this all-against-one violence only holds as long as everyone believes the lie – that the victim was actually responsible for the suffering and strife. And so Girard began a pioneering study of ancient mythology, looking for signs of this sacred murder as the foundation of culture. What he claims to have discovered was that, to varying degrees, mythology always serves this function of concealing the innocence of the victim.

For example, the obvious parallel with the story of Cain and Abel and the founding of the first city is the story of another pair of brothers who founded the city of Rome.

Romulus and Remus, the cast-off twins who were left to die by the river and were suckled by a wolf, grew up to be adventurous fighters who decided to build a city. But they couldn't agree on which hill should be the centre (in other words, they become rivals), and each began building in a different place. Romulus marked out the boundaries of his city centre, and began building walls. But Remus mocked him, and violated his boundaries in jest (which turns out to be a grave mistake, within that ancient perspective). Romulus attacked him and killed him for this violation of boundaries, and so became famous as the founder of the city of Rome.

These stories have much in common, and both serve as mythical explanations of how cities came into being; but in one detail they are radically different: Romulus is implicitly justified for killing his brother by the very logic of the story, whereas, Cain is held to be guilty of murder.

This, Girard observes, is the most important characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures: although they are filled with stories that take the form of myth, they are nevertheless de-mystifying the one most essential feature of myth: they are revealing the innocence of the victim, for they are told from the perspective of the victim. It is a gradual subversion of mythology from within.

As an example Girard offers a comparison of the Greek myth of Oedipus the King, and the story from Genesis about Joseph and his brothers. At first such a comparison seems ridiculous; and Girard does not suggest that there was any literary dependence of one story on the other, only that both are tapping into universal themes in mythology. He notes that the story Oedipus begins when as a child he is abandoned in the forest and carried off to Corinth by a shepherd (Joseph is abandoned by his brothers to the Midianite traders, and carried off to Egypt). Later, Oedipus becomes king in Thebes by solving the riddle of the sphinx (Joseph becomes prime minister of Egypt by solving the riddle of the Pharaoh's dream). Both of them face suspicions because they are immigrants. Ultimately, Oedipus is undone by accusations that he has murdered his father and married his mother (Joseph is accused of supplanting Potiphar by seducing Potiphar's wife, which is next thing to incest and patricide because Joseph had been virtually adopted as Potiphar's son). In the end, Oedipus acknowledges that, without even realizing it, he has indeed committed these crimes, and is therefore guilty of causing the plague in Thebes; and so he pokes out his own eyes and goes into exile.

But it is here, of course, that the Joseph story is different; for Joseph refuses to blind himself to what is going on and insists on his innocence. God finally vindicates him; and this gives him the opportunity to make peace with the brothers who had victimized him in the first place. The Bible's stories are typically told from the perspective of the

victim; and this undermines the whole point of these ancient myths which was to preserve the power of sacred murder as the foundation of society by showing how the victim was in fact guilty and needed to be sacrificed.

Of course the supreme story told by the Hebrew scriptures is the story of the Exodus: God defending the cause of the victims, and rescuing them from looming genocide. It seems there actually was an Egyptian version of this story, which comes down to us through Josephus: about a group of people living in Egypt who were infected with some terrible disease. Because of the danger of the contagion spreading through the land, the people were gathered under a certain Moses and expelled from Egypt.

But the version we have in the Bible is told from the perspective of the victims whom God rescues from their oppressors, taking them off into the desert where they can be reconstituted as a different sort of civilization. They are to become a new kind of social reality, without any dependency on rivalry, violence or murder. The covenant God makes with them is emphatic about this; and Girard points in particular to the first and last of the Ten Commandments (the two bookends of the law, if you will) for their clarity.

The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods to rival me": what you worship will of course be the model you imitate, and I will brook no rivals nor will I be a rival. Imitate me alone, and you will live without rivals. This is the definition of positive mimesis.

The tenth commandment is a definition of negative mimesis. It says, "You shall not covet [or set your heart on] your neighbour's house, or wife, or servant, or donkey, or – well, or anything at all that belongs to your neighbour"; in other words, don't imitate your neighbour, don't seek your sense of importance by comparing yourself with your neighbour, don't let your neighbour be your model. After all, I'm making you into a new kind of people; your foundation is not an achievement of your own but a gift from me. You will be a kingdom of priests, because your very existence will be a sign of my intention of liberating the world from envy and violence. You will not need to victimize anyone, for you will remember that you were victims in Egypt. So all the likely candidates for victimization – strangers and aliens – you will treat with kindness; for you yourselves were strangers and aliens in Egypt.

You will remember how long this lasted; as soon as Israel became fixated on its conflict with other peoples, it demanded to have a king so it could be exactly like the other nations and compete on a level playing field. Rivalry and conquest were again the defining realities of their life.

In other words, this rescue from the realm of envy, rivalry, and conflict was certainly not complete. Changing a socially formed consciousness is a very long process. Indeed, the story told by the Hebrew Scriptures is a story of God patiently wooing this people into a relationship in which they would love God alone. But it takes many centuries, and it is filled with many setbacks and much divine disappointment. Along the way, we see hints of what Israel could become; but in the meantime, the social order founded on sacrifice continues to provide the basic cohesion of the nation.

There is even evidence of Israelites resorting to human sacrifice (something apparently common amongst neighbouring nations) though the law prohibited it. Girard speculates that the story of the Binding of Isaac bears witness to the conviction that God actually prefers animal sacrifice (since it was God who provided the ram as a substitute for Isaac). And by the time of the prophets, Israel is being told that God does not desire sacrifice at all. "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord." "I hate, I despise your solemn assemblies, and the offerings of your fatted animals . . . let justice roll down like waters . . . ." But sacrifices continued into the time of Jesus.

It was from the Israelite practice of sacrifice that Girard's most powerful symbol is derived: the scapegoat. In the Day of Atonement ritual described in Leviticus 16, it is clear that the scapegoat is believed to carry off into the desert the sins of the people that had been placed on its head. Our contemporary pejorative sense of the word scapegoat was not what Leviticus has in mind at all; it is only the slow but inexorable impact of the Bible's decoding of the ancient myths and de-sanctifying of violence that finally exposes the secret behind such rituals. The term scapegoat was never used in its modern metaphorical sense until the eighteenth century, and it was only Sir James Fraser's book, 'The Golden Bough' which first recognized the link between this metaphorical use and the apparently universal pattern in ancient religion of using sacrifice to expel the evil of all by projecting it onto one victim. Girard goes on to show how the Gospels may be read as the final de-legitimizing of scapegoating.

The Good News announced by Jesus is that God's kingdom is at hand; and clearly this means that the project begun with God's people of old is now being brought to fulfillment. A new creation will be brought to birth out of the dying body of the old one. Jesus' mission begins after his Baptism when he hears the voice telling him he is the beloved, in whom God takes delight. Think of this in relation to what I said earlier about the way a young child's sense of self and values is formed: a child finds its being in its parents' love and delight, and learns to like what they like. In other words, Jesus is being presented as one who is free of mimetic rivalry because his only mimetic desire is what he learns from his 'Father' in heaven. "I love to do your will, O God." And so

he is the one God sends to lead us into God's kingdom, God's original and ultimate dream for this world from the beginning.

Thus Jesus is able to offer the world a new way of being in the world, based on imitation of a God "in whom is no darkness at all", a God of unlimited compassion, a God untainted by the religious mythology of the past, a God who will never be our rival, never inspire envy. Jesus invites us to be like the heavenly Father he knows, "who makes his sun to rise on the just and the unjust."

But it is precisely at that moment when Jesus finds his destiny in the Father's affirmation that the Gospels introduce the other major player in the story, giving him a prominence that is quite new in the story of God's people: Satan, the Accuser, sometimes called the Devil, sometimes, the Prince of this world. Why does Satan have such a large role in the Gospels?

The word Satan means Accuser; and Satan is the personification of the spirit of accusatory relations. Now according to mimetic theory, accusation is the trigger by which the violence of all-against-all is transformed into the violence of all-against-one: a scapegoat is found and sacrificed, and peace and unity are established. As long as this continues to be the way peace is maintained in the world, Satan will continue to be the Prince of this world, as Jesus calls him. Satan is the organizing principle of conventional culture, the one who keeps the peace by inspiring accusation against those who will be scapegoated. Remember Jesus final promise to his followers: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. But not as the world gives."

So you see, when at his Baptism Jesus is anointed as Son of God, Messiah, Prince of Peace for God's new creation, it is no surprise that the reigning Prince of this world comes calling. He wants to know if Jesus is up to the challenge. This is all mythological stuff, to be sure; but stay with me for a moment while we follow it through. "If you are the Son of God, if you are the Prince of Peace, then why don't you let me show you how it's done?" In effect Satan is inviting Jesus to be his disciple: "Imitate me, and you'll do just fine! For example, we princes don't have to wait for our daily bread, like the hoi polloi; we just order in. So turn these stones into bread. We princes need to know that we have God properly domesticated, that we can count on God's loyalty in this great work of ours; so why not just test that right now? Throw yourself down from this parapet, see if God will keep his promise to catch you. We princes have a daunting task, ruling over all the kingdoms of the world; but I have a proven track record here, so let me show you how. Just imitate and worship me." Notice that Jesus does not challenge Satan's claim to have all this authority or to be able to give it to whom he pleases. But he refuses to imitate Satan, insisting that he will imitate God alone; and

thus he throws down the gauntlet for a titanic struggle.

But if Satan has been the Prince of this world all along anyway, why do we hear so much more about him from Jesus? Remember what I said about the Bible and traditional myths: the human order established by scapegoating only really works if the lie about the scapegoat can be maintained; and that is the function of our mythology. The Father of Lies must stay out of sight; for, the moment he is exposed, the gig will be up, and the old problem of rivalry and the contagion of violence will return. Or rather, the old violence will overwhelm us again if we refuse the offer of peace that Jesus is now making.

We also hear a lot in the Gospels about demon possession – something else we never heard about before in the Bible. Today we tend to play this down, suggesting that ancient people didn't have the medical categories available to us, so they resorted to this mythical diagnosis of demon possession to account for things like mental illness or personality disorder. That may be true; but that also misses the point. When someone has a condition we find disturbing, we try to avoid that person; and when everyone avoids you, you are being locked out, excluded. We maintain our 'sanity' by projecting our fears on you, calling you 'insane' and forcing you to live on the streets. We demonize you. We cast you out. And you are truly demonized when you start to believe it yourself, when your sense of yourself is displaced by the 'demon' that we have projected onto you. But Jesus reached out to such people and drew them back in.

There is a certain irony in the notion of 'casting out demons'; those who have been demonized, or written off as demon-possessed, have, of course, already been cast out. So when you are exorcized, you are 'un-cast-out.' Demon possession may be a myth; but it is a myth of the Master of Myths, the Father of Lies.

And so, when the disciples return from their mission telling Jesus that even the demons submit to them, Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning!" Unseating Satan is a fundamental piece of Jesus' mission, unseating him from the heavenly throne that he will have only so long as we put our trust in the kind of peace he brings. And unseating him means exposing his method, revealing the lie, so that it no longer has any power over us. Thus the force of Jesus image, "like a flash of lightning"; as soon as Satan is illuminated by the flash of Jesus' exposure, his power is broken – and the flash is over. Not that this happens once and for all, if unconsciously we keep putting him back on the throne, relying again and again on his form of peacemaking.

On one occasion, Jesus' focus upon Satan and demons is challenged, and Jesus is

accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus responds by pointing out that if Satan is casting out Satan, his kingdom is going to fall. Now this can have a number of meanings, coming from Jesus. First, it must mean, "if my power comes from Satan, then Satan's house is divided, which would be very foolish of him; so you must be wrong." But a second possible meaning is this: Jesus is pointing to the way Satan maintains his power, which is precisely by 'casting out Satan' – that is, by inspiring us to demonize those we fear or hate, so that we can feel justified in expelling them. Of course we do this in ignorance, not realizing we are being used by Satan to consolidate his power – and that's why it works. But once his strategy is exposed, then, Jesus says, people wake up an realize that it is Satan who is casting out Satan; and then, you can be sure that Satan's kingdom really is falling. But a third possible meaning is hinted at: Jesus is acknowledging that 'casting out' is indeed Satan's style, and if Jesus himself were ever to resort to casting out anyone as a way of establishing God's new kingdom of peace, he would be using Satan's method. Instead he will stick to simply exposing Satan. How he does that, we will see later.

Jesus has a lot to say as well about one of Satan's most important tools – something he calls scandal. The word means stumbling block; and we become a scandal to one another as we find ourselves locked in mimetic rivalry.

So, for example, Jesus warns against causing "one of these little ones to stumble"; children, who learn everything by imitation, need to know that those they are imitating love them unconditionally, that there is no rivalry in their relationship; for only in this way can the mimetic desire through which their very being is formed be good desire, undistorted by Satan's envy.

(Or another example: you might say that the itch you get when you read the ads for the new fashions in clothing or in computers is an experience of scandal: it's the itch of a desire for something that you probably don't need, except that if you don't get it, you'll feel like a loser. You're torn between envy of those who are 'with it', and shame that you can be so easily manipulated. Comparisons of yourself with others has become a stumbling block, a scandal.)

So, when Peter takes Jesus aside to reassure him that his predictions about the coming crisis in Jerusalem are unnecessary, Jesus reacts very strongly, calling Peter 'Satan', and saying, "You are a stumbling block to me." Why this reaction? Because Peter is tempting Jesus (just as he was tempted before) to follow the same old strategy for success that Satan has perfected over the centuries. "I have a lot of confidence about our project," Peter says; "Trust me." In other words, we'll make a good team. (Though of course that would mean that Jesus and Peter soon would be in competition for the

leadership; and then nothing would have changed in the kingdom of Satan.)

So Jesus' mission turns out to be not merely opening up for us a new way of being in the world, but also the undoing of Satan's kingdom. He reaches out and restores those who have been cast out, written off, hated as heretics, despised as sinners. He also exposes the way the tradition has been co-opted by Satan, to bestow on a religious elite the power to expel those who threaten our control, and to make of God's law a device for proving ourselves before others rather than for focusing our life on love of God and neighbour. Jesus' work is a work of deconstruction, continuing the subversive work that we saw being launched in the Hebrew Bible.

But this deconstruction threatens to unleash the old mimetic crisis of violence; for if Satan's peace can no longer be counted on, what will become of the world? This is clearly a major concern of Jesus; he foresees, better than any of his contemporaries, the disaster looming for his nation. On his final entry to Jerusalem, he laments the fact that this people still clings to violence and the struggle for security against their enemies as the only way to sustain their shaky grasp on peace. "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed the days will come when your enemies will set up ramparts around you . . . ."

One of Girard's most controversial insights has to do with the way he reads the apocalyptic elements of the Gospels, and indeed the apocalyptic elements of the rest of the New Testament. It is very easy for us to hear in these predictions of gloom and doom the threats of the old god of mythology who not only offers us salvation but brings upon us plague, famine and war as well. But Girard insists that the threat comes from us ourselves: once the deconstruction of Satan's peace has begun, we find ourselves without any effective way to stem the violence that arises from our escalating rivalries. We find ourselves gripped in spasms of intensifying mimetic conflict. We may still be able to quell the violence momentarily by dumping it all on some convenient enemy we can demonize and scapegoat; but because the ruse has been exposed, no one will really believe it anymore, and it will soon backfire, fomenting a reactive violence greater still.

This, of course, is what we have been watching over the past year, as we try to root out terrorism with terror. Thus far all we have achieved is more terror. Apocalypse fills the media.

But the word apocalypse only means the uncovering, the revealing of the secret. On one occasion Jesus described his work as "proclaiming what has been hidden from the foundation of the world." How then did Jesus accomplish this?

The one most obvious feature of the Gospels from the Girardian point of view which I have not yet mentioned is the fact that in the end Jesus himself was scapegoated. There are intimations of this from the beginning: Jesus' homecoming to Nazareth ends abruptly when the local congregation tries to throw him over a cliff (a standard metaphor for scapegoating); and the reports of John the Baptist's execution serve in the Gospels as an anticipation of the way Jesus' own story will end (the drunken feast and the hypnotic dancing are powerful metaphors of mob ecstasy).

What happens is that Jesus summons people to turn away from the kingdom of Satan, which is secured by the threat of death, and welcome the kingdom of God, which has only God for its security. Those who have been victimized by Satan's regime seem to be able to see what Jesus is doing: the blind, the lepers, the prostitutes, the tax-collectors are drawn to him like iron filings to a magnet; and the demonized see even more clearly what Jesus is, but because they have lost their identities to the demons their society has projected upon them, they express their society's antagonism to God's kingdom in the most explicit fashion. "We know who you are, Jesus! Have you come to destroy us?"

The trouble is that those who have benefitted from the kind of peace that is only won by excluding people cannot see how God's kingdom can mean anything for them other than loss and chaos. What Jesus is trying to show them is something they are incapable of seeing precisely because their whole consciousness has been formed by rivalry with the aim off survival through the exclusion of everything and everyone that threatens.

And Jesus' response to this obstacle, this scandal, is not to resort to Satan's way of winning, but to announce the necessity of his own victimization. "The Son of Man must suffer...", he tells his disciples. How can Satan's reign be dismantled? Not by casting out Satan, but only, one might say, by subverting it from within, continuing the strategy already so well developed in the Bible, the strategy of entering the world of mythology in order to demythologize it. Jesus will become Satan's victim, Satan's scapegoat; as Caiaphas speaks for Satan when he says, "It is better that one man die for the nation than that the whole people should perish." But Satan's power will not thereby be solidified one more time because Jesus will defy the status of victim by offering himself willingly. He will accept the death that is being prepared for him not as Oedipus did (in other words, not by agreeing with the verdict), but in silent protest; and so Satan's horrible secret will be exposed once and for all: that the victim is innocent.

This is why Jesus is identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The prophet of the exile saw quite clearly what only victims can see: that the one despised and rejected by others, whom we accounted stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted, was in fact

wounded for our transgressions. The challenge, however, is how will those who are not victims come to see this?

Part of the answer is to be found in the story of Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is important from a Girardian perspective because it announces God's reversal of our verdict upon Jesus and his cause. But it is even more important because the one who rises from death comes to us not as an avenger but as the forgiver; he reveals a God who is utterly alien to mimetic reciprocity, the scope of whose forgiveness can only now be measured by the forgiveness he offers to his murderers and their collaborators. He returns to us not as Accuser but as Advocate, the one who can indeed deliver us from the mimetic contagion that engulfs our world, because he refuses to bow to the rule of death. As the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, "Through death he destroyed the one who has the power of death – that is, the Devil – and set free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death."

But that is only part of the story. The other part I will focus on in part two when I try to show how Jesus made disciples, and what exactly he had in mind for them. For the moment, let me just sketch it out in the way Girard does by pointing to the central role given to Peter in the telling of the Gospel story.

Peter is often misrepresented by preachers as a boisterous and fickle disciple who proved himself a coward when Jesus was facing his crisis. This is not what the Gospels intend us to see, Girard insists. Peter is portrayed there as someone who is prepared to stand up to Jesus (think of that argument with Jesus that I talked about before); he is brave enough that when all the other disciples had forsaken their master and fled, he at least followed at a distance to see what would happen. But he soon found himself drawn into the vortex of the crowd's angry fascination with the hapless prisoner.

He warms himself at the fire in the courtyard. Girard sees this fire as deeply symbolic: it is the fire where all are drawn together (except for those who are excluded and left out in the cold; Peter almost found himself excluded when someone picked up on his accent – just the thing that might get you unwanted attention from an angry mob looking for a scapegoat.) It is also the fire that evokes old memories of the immolated victim around whom the crowd gathers as if drawn by a magnet. But Peter can't actually see what is happening to him – nothing new, of course, for the Gospels tell us that throughout their time with Jesus, none of the disciples were capable of seeing what was going on. If Jesus had not actually predicted Peter's denial, Peter might never have realized what had happened that night; he might have disappeared for ever into the safety of the unanimous crowd.

But then the cock crowed, and Peter remembered; and he began to awaken from the anesthesia of social unanimity, from the social system which is grounded in collective murder; and his shock, regret, and contrition are the moment of conception, if you like, that will lead to a new birth into a new way of being in the world for those who, like Peter, had always before been the beneficiaries of such a system. If we can appreciate what happened to Peter, then we can begin to recognize ourselves as people formed by a culture of death, a culture of scapegoating; and so we will know that we are all implicated in the killing of Jesus.

James Alison, one of the best interpreters of Girard, puts it this way: "What the new unity of humanity looks like is the beginnings of the gathering of penitent persecutors around the body of the self-giving victim, whose forgiveness made their new perception possible . . . ."

In part two, I will try to talk about the larger picture of Peter's formation as a disciple, and the formation of all the disciples.

Part Two

In this segment, I want to talk about the way Jesus made disciples, and what it was he had in mind for them.

But first, let me begin by quickly recapping what I said yesterday. Human beings according to René Girard, are fundamentally imitative creatures. We copy each other's desires, and are in perpetual conflict with one another over the objects of our desire. We become a scandal, a stumbling block to one another. In early human communities, this conflict created a permanent threat of violence, and forced our ancestors to find a way to unify themselves. They chose a victim, a scapegoat, an evil one against whom the community could unite. Biblical faith, according to Girard, has attempted overcome this historic plight. From the unjust murder of Abel by his brother Cain to the crucifixion of Jesus, the Bible reveals the innocence of the victim. It is on this revelation that modern society unquietly rests.

Now, I must acknowledge that yesterday I skated over the Gospel evidences in a rather cavalier fashion. So I think it is important to start in this segment by acknowledging the assumptions that underlie these observations regarding the way we read the Gospels.

First of all, I assume that we were given four of them for good reason, even though they often seem to contradict one another. The four together teach us, in effect, how to read any one of them.

Second, you will probably be aware that there is much debate today amongst scholars who study Christian origins about why we have only these four. Ever since the discovery in 1945 of another batch of gospels in the sands of the Egyptian desert, people have been asking what are the criteria for a genuine Gospel? Anyone who has read *The Da Vinci Code* will be aware of the Gospel of Thomas, one of the ones found in the dessert sands, which consists simply of a number of free-floating wisdom sayings of Jesus, some of which have clear parallels in the canonical Gospels.

I mention this because it confronts us in a new way with an old question: what kind of thing is a Gospel, and could there be different answers? It appears that there are, since we now have two radically different Gospels – plus some combination efforts. The Gospel according to Mark, as you know, is the shortest of our canonical Gospels, and contains relatively few of the kind of sayings that characterize the Gospel of Thomas. Some have even called it a Passion Story with a long introduction. By contrast, the Gospel of Thomas contains no Passion Story at all, only sayings.

Matthew's and Luke's versions of the Gospel are attempts to combine these two very different forms, by using Mark's version (or something like it) to provide a framework, and then by adding sayings of Jesus (for some of which Matthew and Luke may have shared a common source, maybe even something like the Gospel of Thomas).

Now John's version of the Gospel, as you know, is very different again; nevertheless, it too uses a Passion Story as the basic ingredient, and combines with this teachings and stories that bear only a remote resemblance to anything in the other three versions.

What then do we learn from the fact that only these four have been included in the canon, and not, say, the Gospel of Thomas?

First, all canonical Gospels include a Passion Story. The phenomenon that we call Gospel confronts us with a crisis in the career of Jesus that cannot be avoided. The modern rationalist quest which hopes to find the significance of Jesus within his teachings alone is out of touch with thrust of the canonical Gospel.

Second, the Gospel according to John challenges us to recognize a broader category than we would have imagined, had we received only the first three versions. This is part of what I meant when I said that the four together teach us how to read any one off them.

And third, since there are many disagreements both in order and detail amongst these four versions, we cannot be sure that anything in any one of them describes what really happened; and yet, these are our best witnesses to what happened, and each has a literary integrity that we should honour. So if I seem to be implying that we know exactly what Jesus said or did, be assured I am simply trying to take the individual witnesses seriously in their attempts to give us a trustworthy account of the good news.

In this part, I want to focus on the first three, what we call the 'synoptic Gospels' because they have so much in common.

I will turn to the fourth Gospel in part three, treating it as a version belonging to a later generation, a version meant to be heard as commentary on the by-then-familiar story known through one or another of that earlier generation of Gospels. But you'll have to wait to discover how this approach might pay off for us in this quest for the way Jesus made disciples.

One of the things to notice in all the synoptic Gospels is their unanimous insistence that

the disciples of Jesus never understood what Jesus was up to till after he was risen. For example, although Peter recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, he immediately demonstrates that he has no concept of what this would mean for Jesus. Peter and James and John see Jesus transfigured but have no idea why. They all hear Jesus predict his Passion, but can't make head or tail of it and are afraid to ask. They assume that Jesus is about to launch a new political regime, and argue about which of them will get cabinet positions. They tell mothers in the crowd to take their children away and stop bothering Jesus. They have no idea that one of their number is plotting to betray Jesus. When they sense Jesus' anxiety, they all swear they will stand by him; yet as the anxiety mounts, they all fall asleep. When Jesus is arrested, they all desert him and run away. And all this, we must assume, comes from their own subsequent testimony! What were they trying to tell us?

Girard's answer is that although Jesus is trying to show the disciples how to live a life free of scandal or stumbling, that is to say, a life without envy or rivalry, a life of gratitude without anxiety because it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom, nevertheless his own death proves to be for them the greatest scandal of all, the thing over which they do stumble.

And yet the ultimate destiny of these disciples is to be witnesses to this scandalous thing. Therefore, one way of describing Jesus' agenda with his disciples is to say that he must prepare them to surmount the scandal of his own violent death. And the reason his death is so scandalous to them, of course, is that their consciousness, like ours, has already been formed by the very system that Jesus' death and resurrection will begin to deconstruct. And so, if Jesus is to prepare them to deal with the scandal of his death, he will have to enable them to see themselves as formed by death.

But Jesus' agenda with his disciples is something more even than this. Yesterday, I pointed out that the Bible is largely written from the perspective of victims; and it is from this unique perspective that it becomes possible to recognize what all the world's mythology has so cleverly concealed: that, time after time, the victim is innocently suffering the penalty for sins that have been projected onto him or her by the crowd because it cannot find any other way to rid itself of these things. Scapegoating. The challenge however is, how will those who are not victims ever come to see this? That is the real issue, because nothing will change in the world until they do. Unless the victimizers can come to see what is happening and how they are a part of it, and there is some reconciliation between victims and victimizers, the likeliest outcome of any rescue of the victim will be a reversal of roles: the victims will break free and become victimizers themselves. No need to appeal to the example of modern Israel here; it's exactly what we see in the story of ancient Israel, whom the prophets assail for their

war games, their rivalry with other nations, their greed in daily life, and their oppression of the poor. The victims became the victimizers.

And so, although the story of Jesus' Passion may be a source of comfort, hope, and faith for the oppressed of the world, that does not by itself bring to birth the new creation. The challenge Jesus faced was not merely exposing by his self-offering the terrible secret that human culture is founded upon the murder of innocents; he needed to leave behind a body of witnesses who could recognize the meaning of his self-offering, who could be a constant sign of his self-offering, and who would be ready for the kind of impact this would have upon the world.

And so he called disciples, and prepared them to do just this. I will try to trace for you how this is portrayed in the synoptic Gospels, starting with Mark's relatively limited picture because it will give us an outline.

In Mark, as soon as Jesus returns from the wilderness after his Baptism, he begins inviting the peasant population of Galilee to welcome God's coming kingdom; and soon after, he is calling disciples to share his work of gathering (or fishing for, or harvesting) these lost souls. What it is specifically he has in mind for these disciples they must discover first of all just by being with him, having him as their model, the one they are supposed to imitate, as he travels around drawing in all the folk who have been left out – or pushed out – of the 'in' crowd.

Recent archaeology has highlighted the importance of the city of Sephorris, capital city of Galilee in the first century, situated only a few miles from Nazareth, a city of wealth, power, and culture. Yet amazingly, in all the stories of Jesus' mission in Galilee, we never even hear of Sephorris; Jesus apparently saw himself as sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" – not a designation that the good folk of Sephorris would have been happy to wear. This just helps to clarify the nature of Jesus' mission in Galilee.

But very soon he gives his new disciples another clue: he designates twelve of them as emissaries, around whom will be gathered a reconstituted Israel. The number twelve cannot mean anything less than this. And just as the Israel of old had been constituted to stand in the greatest possible contrast to all other nations – a people formed from victims rather than by excluding victims – so, presumably, a reconstituted Israel would again be grounded in God's unbounded love, offered to those who found themselves victims yet again in another desperate era of oppression.

Before long, Jesus sends out the twelve on an expedition; now it is they who are to

invite people to welcome God's gracious reign; now they are to challenge all the demonizing in their culture and heal all the sick. They are to cast themselves entirely on the generosity of those they meet – while still expecting to be turfed out in all too many cases. In effect, they are being sent off to experience the same disturbing encounter with people in their need – and in their stubborn resistance – as Jesus had himself been experiencing.

Finally Jesus withdraws the team altogether; they leave Galilee, and Jesus begins to share with them his astonishing vision for the rest of the mission. First, he asks them what people make of him and what they make of him, and then he tells them that it is his destiny to face even greater resistance, for they are going to Jerusalem, where he will be expelled and executed, and then raised to life. He is very clear that he wants them to understand this: he tells them about it repeatedly. But it is this announcement, apparently, that sets in motion that succession of revealing disagreements between the disciples and Jesus; the sheen of romance about their mission has finally been scuffed off, and they begin to show their true colours. And all the while, Jesus is dragging them up to Jerusalem.

We're not told what they thought about that final week which Jesus spent talking to the crowds and arguing with the authorities in the temple courtyard. But they do realize that the point of this visit is sharing Passover with Jesus. It just hasn't dawned on them what kind of a Passover it will be. And so as the trap closes on Jesus, they melt into the heartless crowd, as if their entire training had been for nothing.

What can the point of all this have been?

Well, first of all, it was clearly meant to begin a reordering of their desires. Spending time learning to imitate someone means learning to appreciate and value what your model appreciates and values. And what Jesus was passionate about was the plight of those neighbours who were invisible to everyone else.

But we learn mainly by doing; so the disciples are not only to watch Jesus, they are sent out to do what he does – to urge people to welcome God's reign of peace, and to challenge the reign of fear and hostility. In the process, they are going to suffer expulsion from people who resist their mission; and yet expulsion is to have no place in their own mission strategy, for they are to work with everyone who welcomes them.

Above all, they are to learn something about themselves, something they could never have discovered in any other way: namely, that they are just as enmeshed in the rule of scandal, and just as powerless before the force of mimetic contagion, as the people they

are trying to liberate. Thus the arguments about who would be the greatest; thus the inevitability of their defection when the crowd turned on Jesus. This part of the discipling process was definitely 'core curriculum.'

Mark tells us that there was one more lesson Jesus gave his disciples; and it's one that he could not have expected to sink in at the time, though it hinted at the purpose of all the rest of their training. On the night he knew he would be betrayed, Jesus carefully arranged a secret rendez-vous with them to celebrate the Passover Seder, uninterrupted by Judas' plot. And what he did was to recast the traditional Passover ritual to become a definitive and lasting interpretation of this death. Just as he was soon going to give himself into the hands off his enemies, so now he gave himself into the hands of his friends, saying, "This is my body; this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many."

The Passover ritual, of course, included a sacrifice: the lamb was a substitute for the ancient sacrifice of the first-born. But Jesus had come to expose the primal sin of founding a society on murder; for the life of God's people can only be grounded in the unbounded love of the Creator. Nevertheless, this people was about to try, once again, to reconstitute itself through murder, the murder of Jesus himself. What was to be done? He would freely give himself into their clutches as an act unbounded love, providing a new grounding for their new existence and liberating them from the old existence founded in death.

At table, then, he substitutes a human sacrifice – himself – for the animal sacrifice – the lamb. Except that this time it will not be a sacrifice in the old sense, but the end of sacrifice in that sense; for it will not be a another triumph of victimization but the undoing of victimization by the divine generosity of self-offering love.

His friends could not have been expected to take it in at that moment; but the ritual was intended as something that would start to sink in later, a kind of time-bomb of revelation.

I'll come back later to the dynamics of this outline Mark has given us as he describes Jesus' way of making disciples. But let's look at what Matthew and Luke add to this picture first. I will be quoting exclusively from Matthew, as it happens, because virtually all of the things I want to point to can be found in Luke, as well.

As you may remember, the new material which Matthew uses to fill out Mark's outline seems to be arranged in five blocks of teaching material – after all, Matthew reckons, if Jesus sees his work as the reconstitution of God's people Israel, then Jesus himself must

be the reconstituted Moses; and so Matthew provides us with a reconstituted Torah, five books of teaching.

The first of these five Books is probably the most familiar: chapters five to seven of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount (again, a Moses motif, a teaching emanating from a mountain). Let me just skim this material, to show you some of the ways in which a Girardian perspective can illuminate it.

First, note that the Sermon on the Mount is addressed specifically to disciples. In the beatitudes Jesus offers disciples a portrait of those who are able to welcome the Kingdom into which he is inviting them. These are people who are not caught up in competitive pursuits; they have already been scandalized by this world of scandal, and are probably excellent candidates for scapegoating in a society looking for scapegoats. They are the poor in spirit (Luke simply says the poor), the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. But Jesus does not say that if you abandon rivalry and set you heart on what God desires, all will be well for you; for the beatitudes end with the pronouncement of a blessing on those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and on those who are scapegoated on account of Jesus! Already he is teaching them to expect suffering for the cause of the kingdom, since this has always been the reaction to any prophetic vocation.
He goes on, therefore to describe what it will mean to live as citizens of that Kingdom in the meantime: you will be like salt mingled into the world (though you have to stay salty); you will be the light that exposes what has been hidden in darkness since the foundation of the world, like a city set on a hill that is not competing to build the world's tallest skyscraper, but is content to be a model of peaceable justice.

He continues with a revisionist reading of the law, the Torah: it's not enough, he says, just to desist from murder as the law commands; do not even hold someone in contempt. It's not enough to avoid adultery as the law says; do not eye your neighbour's partner covetously. In fact, if your eye is causing you to stumble, pluck it out; better to enter the kingdom of God maimed than to be locked in the kingdom of Satan. If someone accuses you, don't use the law to defend yourself, but make peace with your accuser. And so on. In other words, the law was not given as a way to justify yourself before the community, nor as a weapon to beat up on other people; for it's the desires of your heart that God was trying to reshape by giving you the law.

And then there's the stuff about not retaliating. I remember a friend's story about his six-year-old coming home from school in tears: he said he tried turning the other cheek, but it didn't work. Well, turning the other cheek was never meant to be a new social strategy; it's simply a warning about getting caught up in the vortex of mimetic conflict

in which retaliation takes on a life of its own. A disciple cannot be too careful to avoid that path, for it will take you right back into the world of scandal, accusation, and the spiral of violence.

The real strategy, Jesus says, is loving your enemies. That is what it means to be "children of your Father in heaven," he says, imitating the one model who saves us from this mimetic contagion; "for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous." "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" he asks; that is to say, whose approval did you want anyway? Comparing ourselves with one another all the time to justify our behaviour, or to reassure ourselves of our social standing, is imitation of a model who will only become a rival and a stumbling block.

Jesus is making the same point in his advice on almsgiving, prayer and fasting. How easily even my spiritual devotion gets diverted into mimesis, the imitation of other people. And if I let that happen, Jesus says, I have my reward already (and I have forfeited the reward of my Father's 'well done').

And he teaches them the Lord's Prayer. Prayer begins with setting our hearts on God; prayer is the way disciples sustain their focus on God as their true model. It is the way we let go of scandalous desire and cultivate the desire for what God desires. So we are to pray for God's kingdom, for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. (Praying for God's will to be done is not a form of fatalism, nor is it a matter of being resigned to the fact that I don't actually know what God wants. No; if my desire is being shaped by love for God, then my desire will tell me, more and more truly, what God wants.) Then we are to pray for bread – not cake – for we must place ourselves again in God's hands, rather than living a life of anxiously contending for what we need. (In that way I will also learn the freedom to share my bread with the hungry.) But the big issue is forgiveness: asking to be forgiven the way we forgive others. (There is only one way to avoid being hooked on the evil done to me by others, or seduced into the cycle of accusations and recriminations: I must learn to forgive so that I am not defined by the evils done to me. And God is more than ready to forgive me; but if I choose to live in a divided world where God forgives me, but I can still hold a grudge against you, then I am merely using my religion to justify staying within the kingdom of Satan.) And then, last of all, we are to pray to be spared from the time of trial and delivered from the Evil One. (In my praying I must always remember where I am: living still in the midst of a world defined by distorted desire, wracked in conflict, and built on the backs of the poor and vulnerable; and I will be tempted to seek the safety of its protection rather than trusting myself to God. That is what we are to pray to be delivered from, not from suffering itself.)

Another big issue Jesus names here and on many occasions is the love of money. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be," he tells the disciples. "You cannot serve two masters, God and wealth." Now, the only desirable quality to be found in money is the amount of it; and how much is a lot? I can only tell by comparing my pile with everybody else's. Money and greed are hard to separate; and together they make money the supreme symbol of life governed by rivalry. Those who serve money are so locked into relationships of competitive security and mutual scandal that they do not have the freedom to enter a kingdom based on trust in God's generous care for his creatures. Least of all will they be able to see what is going on in the world from the perspective of the victim.

Then another oft repeated concern of Jesus: he tells disciples, do not judge. This is not about judgement in the sense of discernment, but judgement in the sense of accusation and condemnation. If I adopt the posture of the judge, I am presuming that I am blameless; and in order sustain that presumption, I shall always have to blame others for the bad stuff that happens. And then the accumulated blame of everyone doing this together is what amounts to scapegoating. Thus, when I judge you, I am taking the first step toward scapegoating. We always have to find someone else to blame. And when we do, our world feels that much safer and solider – for a moment, anyway. If that's the world I construct by my judging of others, then that's the world in which I will be judged. So Jesus says, "With the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." The only alternative he recommends is, "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye."

So you see, Jesus is doing two things in this first Book of instructions: he is teaching the disciples what a life centred on God is like, a life that is therefore immune to scandal, a life that is able to welcome the reign of God. But he is also teaching them to expect persecution by those who fear that such a way of life undermines the usual order of society; and they are right, for that is what it does.

I move on to the subsequent Books of teaching in Matthew, wherever they bear directly on making disciples. In Book Two, found in chapter ten of Matthew, Jesus returns to the topic of the persecution that disciples should expect. He makes it clear that this will be more than merely suffering ridicule; there will actually be arrests, and charges laid. But, he says, don't worry about what you will say, "for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." This probably means something more than getting special inspiration on the witness stand; it's more a matter of the way their very being will speak; and in fact it sounds very much like what the fourth Gospel calls

the work of the Paraclete – more about that in part three.

He also predicts that this enterprise is going to cause a lot of division and betrayal – brother betraying brother to death, that sort of thing. "Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth," he says; "I have not come to bring peace but a sword." This is definitely not something people usually associate with Jesus. But remember Girard's theory about the way social unanimity is won – by turning all the hostilities that divide the community against one victim: social unanimity is an achievement of a community founded in the expulsion of dissidents. So if Jesus' mission succeeds in undercutting this strategy for generating unanimity, then the divisions he describes are to be expected. Disciples have to understand that this is what they are precipitating.

So his encouragement to them is crucial: "Have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known...what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." This gets to the heart of their task: not just announcing the coming kingdom, or telling the story of Jesus and his resurrection, but consciously and intentionally bringing to light the very thing that the old world-order, the old mythology, has so carefully concealed. The victim was innocent. All victims used in this way have been innocent of the crimes of which they were accused. And those who speak the truth need have no fear, even though they may lose their life, for – paradoxically – those who stand firm to the end will be saved. I can't even guess what the disciples made of that!

Book Three, found in chapter thirteen of Matthew, consists of a number of parables which are clearly offered as instruction to disciples. The parable of the sower says, be patient, and don't get discouraged; not all of your efforts will bear fruit. The parable of the weeds sown amongst the wheat says, sorting people out is not your problem. The parable of the mustard seed says, this is going to take time. The parable of the yeast says, you may think your efforts are paltry, but it's really all that's needed. And so on. These are themes I will also try to pick up on in part three.

Book Four, found in chapter eighteen of Matthew, contains more warnings about causing scandal, causing another to stumble. For Jesus, this is clearly a core teaching to his disciples; if they slide back into the old mimetic rivalry, they betray everything he stands for. It is in this Book that Jesus also returns to the central importance of forgiveness, with the parable of the unforgiving servant. Only a community founded upon forgiveness is truly free to experience the unbounded grace and forgiveness of God.

Book Five, found in chapters twenty-four and -five of Matthew, is the apocalyptic

section of the Gospel, about which I spoke briefly yesterday. Let me just repeat Girard's view that the threat of catastrophe in these apocalyptic passages comes not from God, but from us ourselves: once the deconstruction of Satan's peace has begun, we find ourselves without any effective way to stem the violence that arises from our escalating rivalries – unless we turn and welcome the peace Jesus offers. Otherwise, we will find ourselves gripped in spasms of intensifying mimetic conflict. We may still be able to quell the violence momentarily by dumping it all on some convenient enemy we can demonize and scapegoat; but because the ruse has been exposed, no one really believes it anymore, and it soon backfires, fomenting a reactive violence greater still.

What we hear in this version of apocalypse is that the woes befalling the world are really the beginnings of the birth pangs of the new creation – think of those old images that were once used to mark the turn of the year: the doddery old man with his cane, chased by the infant in its vigour. That's the sort of image Jesus evokes here.

He also tells the disciples that there will be false Christs in the days ahead, and not to be taken in. I shall come back to this in part three; but suffice it to say that a false Christ is an imitator of Christ who nevertheless misrepresents him in some way. And he foresees the day of the coming of the Son of Man as another flash of lightning, which, given the earlier use of that metaphor, suggests a sudden unveiling of the secret so long suppressed which breaks upon the world as a moment of frightening illumination. It will be a moment of supreme remorse, he says, for all the tribes of the earth. And then the final gathering of the elect, from the four winds, will take place.

So: what can we learn from all this additional teaching material about the way Jesus went about making disciples?

One of the things Jesus seems to have wanted for them is that they should learn to see the world and its machinations from the unique perspective of the victims of this world. This would certainly help them, after his resurrection, to recognize what had happened to Jesus himself; but it would also help them grasp what a transformation of the world Jesus' death and rising would cause – what a tectonic shift it would set in motion in the way the world sees itself.

Another thing he wanted for them was that they should be sharply aware of the subtle ways in which they could be lured back into the old system all over again – through the temptation to retaliate, through love of money, through passing judgement on others.

And finally, he wanted them to develop a discipline of prayer through which their hearts would become rooted in God's love.

So let me now return to Mark's outline of the way Jesus made disciples. I left off at the point of the disciples' desertion of Jesus in his crisis. As I said earlier, there was something inevitable about this desertion, and this proved perhaps the greatest lesson of all for them; for Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution had presented them with impossible alternatives. One was to stand by Jesus in his arrest and trial, expecting to be executed themselves – something he seemed to have been preparing them for, and yet that made no sense to them at all. What was the point of dying?

The only other alternative was to slip back into the world they had known before, the world of unthinking unanimity where all their distress could be overcome by doing what they had always done – blaming it on someone else. Except that, in this instance, they would have to blame it on Jesus. Judas Iscariot was prepared to try that; but he found to his dismay and horror that he couldn't do it.

But then they met Jesus again, risen from the dead; and at last they could see what it all meant, not only for themselves but for their world.

Girard points out that the risen Jesus did not appear to the crowd. In a world that knows itself through its mythology, the risen god always appears to the crowd, for it is the god of the crowd. The god of myth embodies the crowd, or rather is the crowd in a projected form. But the risen Jesus only appears to those who are no longer part of the crowd. For example, Mary Magdalene and Jesus' other women friends from Galilee, those invisible people who had nothing to lose by their association with someone the world had abandoned; they were there at the cross, and they followed the body to the tomb. And they were the first to see the risen Jesus, according to the Gospels. Then there was Peter, who had already begun to awaken from the anesthesia of social unanimity after hearing the cock crow; he was the next to see the risen Jesus, according to Paul. Now the rest of the disciples had tried melting into the crowd, but clearly they were still afraid for their own lives, because they were hiding in an upper room; and there, they saw the risen Jesus. Girard observes that only those who had seceded from the crowd, only those who could not deny that the victim was innocent – only they saw the risen Jesus. The story of Jesus differs from all the world's other myths of a dying and rising god in these two important ways, he notes: the dying victim is clearly represented as innocent; and the rising victim appears only to those who have broken with the crowd.

And so the upshot of all this work of Jesus, in calling disciples and forming them through sharing with them his life and his death, is the emergence at last of a reconstituted Israel; an Israel which knows itself truly called by God to stand in the

greatest possible contrast to all other peoples: called out of a life imitating others – which always leads to rivalry, conflict and a plague of violence, and ultimately to the sacrifice of a victim; and called into a life imitating God by imitating Jesus, even taking up a cross to follow him as victims. And now they are free to do this, for in Jesus' resurrection God has revealed that it is not death that provides the foundation of our world, but God's own indestructible faithfulness and unlimited forgiveness. Henceforth, this reconstituted people of God will be the living sign of this truth; in this people, the world will see the sign of a God who is related to the world not in a reciprocity of mimesis but in a reciprocity of forgiveness. In this people the world will see the risen Christ, whose Passion continues both to scandalize and to liberate the world. In this people the world will see the sign of the dawning of a new creation and the dying of the old.

In part three, I will try to say something about the function that a renewed catechumenate needs to have in our time.

Part Three

In this last segment, I want to suggest what the function of a renewed catechumenate might be in our own time, in light of Girard's understanding of the Gospel and the Gospel's impact upon our world; but I need to take you a little farther into this understanding in order to do that.

But first, let me begin by quickly recapping what I said in part two. From the point of view of the synoptic Gospels, the challenge Jesus faced in making disciples was that their consciousness had already been formed by the very world that he was trying to deconstruct. He could show them what a life lived out of the experience of God's unbounded grace and forgiveness was like, but they wouldn't get it. Above all, they could not conceive of his reason for willingly offering himself up to death at the hands of his enemies. So his approach to making disciples needed to be an introduction to the perspective of the victim, and preparation for understanding the significance of his death after the fact. It also needed to lead them through their own crisis of loyalty so that they could find, in his resurrection, the freedom to take up their own cross and follow him.

In part two, I described the Gospel according to John as a version of the story belonging to a later generation, a version meant to be heard as commentary on the by-then-familiar story known through one or another of that earlier generation of Gospels such as Matthew, Mark and Luke. This seems to me the easiest way to account for some of the most curious features of John's version of the Gospel – for example his omission of such important episodes as the Baptism of Jesus, or the Transfiguration, or the Last Supper. These are all referred to, of course; for example, we actually hear about the gathering on that last night in the upper room, but the supper itself is never mentioned. Apparently John simply expected his readers to be perfectly familiar with those bits anyway, and chose to provide a rather startling commentary on them instead.

And so, as a Gospel for a later generation, this version gives us some important indications of the trajectory along which the Gospel message will travel as it penetrates more and more deeply into the consciousness of the world.

So let me begin by pointing out other unique features of this Gospel. I start with chapter nine, the story of the healing of the man blind from birth. Commentators often point out that although this chapter contains elements that may indeed originate in the ministry of Jesus (like the healing of a blind man), it also contains elements that clearly belong to a later generation (like the blind man's expulsion from the synagogue – we

know roughly the point in time at which followers of Jesus did start to be excluded from synagogue). Now we have always been taught that the healing of blind people in the Gospels is not merely a matter of fixing a physical malfunction; invariably, the Gospels communicate at deeper levels than this, and so blindness is always a symbol of our human inability to see what God is really up to. But in this story, blindness becomes a symbol of the world's refusal to see what God is up to, because of the scandal of the cross and resurrection.

This is a story of inclusion and exclusion. The man's blindness is a ritual defect that excludes him from the sacred community; and so, by healing him, Jesus restores him to that community. But as the leaders of the community begin to realize that this healing had been carried out by Jesus, they become more and more abusive in questioning the man, accusing him, and finally throwing him out of the community again. Now the blind man never saw his healer, because Jesus had sent him off to bathe in the pool of Siloam (a hint of Baptism, perhaps); and yet it is during the process of his brutal interrogation that he is gradually coming to see more and more clearly the nature of his healer: first he says it was a man, then he was a prophet, and then he was a man from God, greater even than Moses. So you see, he is gradually emerging from some deeper blindness. At the same time, his attackers are also becoming more intransigent in their attitude to Jesus and to the man himself. They are descending into blindness.

So the episode ends with a stunning dialogue between Jesus and the leaders of the community. Jesus says, "I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." They ask him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus replies, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Notice one more intriguing detail: in his self-defense and his ever-more-daring defense of his healer, the man says to his suspicious interrogators, "Never since the world began has it been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind." He seems to imply that there has been a form of blindness afflicting the world from its foundation that is only now being cured.

Here, then, is a classic illustration of a basic Girardian insight: that it is not sin that prevents us from experiencing God's grace, for God has no problem forgiving sin. Rather, it is the practice of excluding others and claiming to do so in service to God: that is what prevents us from knowing the true God. This is precisely the definition of the kingdom of Satan: a world whose very foundation is an act of expulsion regarded as a moment of divine revelation. Which might lead us to wonder, how close is this to a contemporary definition of the Church? A religious society that defines itself over

against other competing religious societies on the basis of the revelation given in a founding act of human sacrifice? I'll come back to this later.

John uses this story, of course, as one of the series of stories with which he will prepare his readers to recognize what it is that is happening in the Passion; for it is not the expulsion and murder of Jesus in and of itself that constitutes the world's judgement but the insistence by his murderers that this was the only way to defend God's honour. Those who accept the forgiveness offered by the risen one do not come under, says John, but have passed from death to life.

Let me move on to consider some other peculiarities of the fourth Gospel. According to the synoptic Gospels, the outrage in the Temple when Jesus overturned the stalls of the temple merchants took place during the final week of Jesus' life; and according to Mark, it was this event which finally pushed the enemies of Jesus over the edge and convinced them to have him done away with. But in John's version of the Gospel, that incident is moved back to chapter two, where it is linked to the claim Jesus had apparently made that he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days – a prophecy of his resurrection and his replacement of the Temple. From a dramatic point of view, this episode, coming so early in the story, no longer serves as the trigger for the events of the Passion. So John introduces an entirely new episode in chapter eleven as the straw that broke the camel's back and persuaded the authorities to kill him, namely, the raising of Lazarus! What could possibly justify such a cavalier remodeling of the tradition?

John seems to be suggesting by this alteration that what solidified the opposition against Jesus wasn't just his critique of the Temple as a place of sacred exclusivity or a foundation of oppressive power. Remember that the Temple was, above all, a place of sacrifice, a shrine to the sacred power of death. As long as the cult of death could be maintained, the unity and security of the community was hopefully assured.

So John picks up on the tradition of Jesus' raising the dead to life – there are a few such stories already in the synoptic Gospels – and out of this he fashions a more elaborate story about Jesus as the Conqueror of Death. "I am the resurrection and the life," says Jesus. "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." Jesus is portrayed as the one who brings death to its knees; Lazarus, he tells his disciples, is not dead in the way we think of death; he is sleeping!

If Girard is right about the real nature of the revelation in Christ, then John is also right in taking us deeper into the motivations of Jesus' opponents with this story of their reaction to the raising of a dead man. Clearly, it was as the Conqueror of Death that

Jesus posed the ultimate challenge to a psycho-social system founded upon death.

One more peculiarity to note in this Gospel: in contrast to the synoptic Gospels which prominently feature Jesus' ministry of exorcism, this Gospel has no exorcisms whatsoever! Or rather, the only exorcism it describes is the exorcism of the world.

So if you thought I was going too far in part two in demythologizing the exorcism stories, I can only appeal to the fourth Gospel for justification. Let me show you.

In chapter eight we have one of the long discourses so characteristic of this Gospel; and in this discourse, Jesus announces the promise inherent in the revelation he brings: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answer, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be made free?'" To which Jesus replies, "No, your real ancestor is the devil, which is obvious because you're trying to kill me. He was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies." To which they respond, "You obviously have a demon," and then they try to stone him.

I am compressing the chapter a lot, but that is essentially the way the conversation goes; and it is another perfect example of the social process at the heart of Girard's theory. Note that the people resisting Jesus are trying to demonize him, while he is trying to lay bare the roots of their resistance to him. He uses the mythological terminology of the devil while simultaneously decoding it by his appeal to their motives.

The theme returns in chapter twelve, when we hear about the plot to assassinate Lazarus; and this is the moment when Jesus proclaims that the whole Satanic process is coming to a head. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," he says. "Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

So you see, this Gospel has understood the whole demon-possession business as really one of the lies that comes from the father of lies, and insists that the real exorcism has to be the exorcism of the world, dethroning the ruler of this world, decoding the ancient mythology, de-sanctifying violence, de-legitimizing scapegoating.

The last element I want to point to in this Gospel is Jesus' teaching about the Paraclete – a word usually translated "the Advocate". Jesus say to the disciples, gathered in that upper room on the night before his death, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive . . . . I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the

Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you . . . . He will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning . . . . It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the Ruler of this world has been condemned. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth . . . he will declare to you the things that are to come . . . ."

In ordinary daily use in the first century, the word 'paraclete' meant something like a defense attorney. In a court of law you would expect to see both a prosecuting attorney and a defense attorney. Well, we've already heard Jesus talking about the prosecuting attorney, the one who presses the charges, the Accuser: that is, Satan. If Satan is the Accuser, the Spirit is the Advocate, who defends the accused by exposing Satan's lies, by accusing the Accuser. The greatest lie of all is that the victim of our scapegoating actually deserved what he or she got; so Jesus is the original Advocate because he exposes this lie in his death and resurrection.

And Jesus' death and resurrection also releases into the world the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth. So now, the Spirit, whom Jesus calls "the other Advocate", continues to expose the lie by "testifying on [Jesus'] behalf." "And," Jesus says to the disciples, "you also are to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning."

Note that this is just another way of saying what I quoted in part two from Matthew: "When you are handed over," Jesus says to the disciples, "do no worry about how you will speak or what you are to say . . . for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." The defense which a disciple makes when he or she is arraigned because of loyalty to Jesus is not going to be some clever argument to wiggle out of the charges, but simply testifying to the thing God has done through Jesus; and it is the Spirit whose testimony will give the testimony of the disciples its force.

But the work of the Paraclete is more than that. For of course everyone is tempted to become an accuser, blaming someone else to avoid taking responsibility ourselves; but the Spirit of Jesus, the Advocate who accuses the Accuser, accuses us when we play Satan's game, teaching us to be self-critical rather blaming or judging others, or shuffling off responsibility onto others. Satan, after all is the mythological name for an anthropological reality, the human habit of blaming someone else. And according to

Girard, this Spirit of self-criticism is one of the most important fruits of the Passion, for it continues to work, down through our post-Easter history, transforming the world.

Girard also notes that this process through which the Paraclete teaches the world the importance of being self-critical proceeds ever so slowly. Even for disciples, it happens slowly; "I still have many things to say to you," Jesus says to them, "but you cannot bear them now." You will remember from part two how Jesus also taught his disciples not to be impatient, using parables like the sower and the mustard seed and the yeast.

Girard offers an intriguing example of this process at work in history, of decoding mythology by uncovering the lie. He describes the medieval phenomenon of the burning of witches. Whenever a plague struck the town, or the crops failed, someone had to be to blame; and so everyone would start to think about that old woman who lived alone in a shack at the edge of town. The rumours would begin – she acts strange, she has an evil eye, she eats babies, whatever. (Oh, and she was probably Jewish, too.) So they drag her in, and perform certain ordeals to prove that she is in fact guilty of witchcraft, and then they burn her. Next year, the plague has ended, or the crops are good, and so life goes on.

Today we shake our heads and call that superstition. We like to point out that with the coming of the Enlightenment, people began to look for better explanations for things like plague or crop failure, and so the old solution of burning witches was abandoned.

But, Girard says, people didn't stop burning witches because they invented science; they invented science because they stopped burning witches! What he means is that the spirit of self-criticism launched by the death and resurrection of Jesus eventually began to make people uneasy about that sort of accusation, for they were slowly learning to recognize the thing that Jesus had brought to light. And so burning witches became more and more controversial, until finally people couldn't do it anymore. The spirit of self-criticism compelled them to look for better solutions, and empowered them to be more skeptical of the old solutions. Indeed the spirit of self-criticism was the very germ of the Enlightenment and the womb of science.

And so today, we look back and ask, very arrogantly, how could such a thing as burning witches have been tolerated in a Christian society? But, Girard insists, it was the Gospel itself which empowered us to ask such a question. Of course, people learned from the Enlightenment to pass judgement against Christianity, blaming the Church for the gross and cruel superstitions that have been such a blemish on human history. And they turned back to what they thought to be a wiser tradition than Christianity, the ancient wisdom of the Greco-Roman culture. This Renaissance of

classical culture had restored to us the memory of Greek art and architecture of which the dark ages of Christianity had remained ignorant. And not just art but mythology too, which proved such a rich source of inspiration for the literature and painting of the Renaissance. Things like the tale of Oedipus the King, for example, which I talked about on the first evening.

Girard points out that the old pre-Christian myths came to be held in such respect that no-one would dare to subject them to Christian scrutiny. If they had, they would have immediately realized that a story like that of Oedipus is based on a superstition just as ghastly as the superstition that led to burning witches. When the plague falls on Thebes, Oedipus asks the oracle why they are suffering; and the oracle says it is because the old king's murder has never been avenged. Well, this sets Oedipus off in search of the killer, only to discover that it was he himself, unwittingly fulfilling his fate; and so he accepts that he himself is to blame for the plague, and puts out his own eyes; and thus the plague is ended.

People look for deep symbolism; even Freud was fascinated. But Girard says, if we had heard a story like that for the first time and imagined it to be medieval, we would have treated it as another tale of scapegoating. It is only by isolating such a tale from the Gospel do we miss the obvious.

In other words, the Gospel has begun to awaken in our world, ever so slowly, a new moral consciousness and a growing intellectual awareness of the human situation. The Gospel seems to have launched us upon an irreversible course of historical development marked by increasing freedom of inquiry and a withering of hierarchical and sacrificial institutions. This is the work of the Paraclete: through the testimony to Jesus and his resurrection, the world is slowly being awakened from the slumbers of a mythological consciousness.

But the Enlightenment was not the only time we tried to suppress this thing that had been uncovered by the death and rising of Jesus. Half a millennium earlier, Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, proposed a new understanding of the death of Christ which was the origin of the doctrine called 'substitutionary atonement.' According to this doctrine, God is unable to forgive us, no matter how badly he wants to, until the penalty for our sin has been paid; this is just divine justice. But if we were to pay the penalty, that would be our destruction. So God found a substitute to pay the penalty for us, namely his own Son. This could only work because his Son was sinless and therefore owed no penalty himself. The measure of God's love for us is that God would punish his own Son so he could forgive us.

This doctrine comes to expression, for example, in one of our popular hymns: "There is a green hill far away": the fourth verse says, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gates of heaven, and let us in." The trouble with this is that it makes God responsible for the death of Jesus; God has made Jesus a scapegoat on our behalf. Worshiping such a god entitles us to believe that all sin must be avenged; and if someone refuses to accept the atonement offered through Christ, then they are damned. Indeed, the only hope for any of us is heaven – some other world far away. Meanwhile, this present world is merely the battle field where the armies of Christ advance the true faith and subdue the infidels. Is it mere coincidence that Anselm's theory was gaining popularity just at the time the first crusade was being launched?

But even earlier than Anselm, Christians had learned to blame someone else for the death of Jesus; and so the Jews became Christianity's supreme scapegoat over many centuries. The appeal of such distortions of the Gospel, of course, is that scapegoating seems to work so well to restore unity and end violence. That's the way it worked all those years when lynching was an accepted way of dealing with the race problem. It usually happened after a white girl had been molested; and lynching a black man had the multiple effect of making someone pay, restoring the sense of moral order, and relieving the tension of wondering who really raped her. Girard calls this blessed result "sacrificial protection": it is the spell that falls over a us when we act together against a victim, the aura of sacredness that the victim's death confers on our way of life.

We still experience it to this day: the rush to judgement that gives us such a sense of catharsis when we have someone to accuse for a disturbing act of violence.

A more insidious form of sacrificial protection today is that bestowed upon us by the idol of the free-market economy, a deity who will brook no rivals. The victims of economic scapegoating today are perhaps more numerous than any other kind. But the voices of dissent are getting louder.

Modern warfare has typically been sacralized by the posthumous honour bestowed on the men who have willingly (or so we tell ourselves) 'sacrificed' their lives for freedom, and by the unspoken understanding that dissenters are guilty of treason. We even resort to demonizing to make it work: what soldiers in training have to learn is how to see the enemy as sub-human. But this idol isn't very healthy today. The lie about the enemy's guilt has been exposed; we are being divided, not unified, by war; and the bodies of fallen soldiers are being furtively shipped home under cover of darkness.

What is happening?

Remember the analysis I described in part one. Ancient societies overcame the peril of escalating mimetic violence by sacred murder, committed by all against one, in an unconscious projection of everyone's violence upon a single scapegoat; this is what Jesus called the kingdom of Satan, the rule of the Prince of Darkness. But at least it brought peace – of a sort. Then Jesus announced the dawn of the Kingdom of God, where the only law was love, and unity could be found through forgiveness; and he set about exposing to the light Satan's dark secret, our unconsciousness of the victim's innocence; and so he was able to announce the immanent collapse of the rule of Satan. But he warned that unless we repent and welcome the kingdom of God, we will be left without any strategy for quelling the contagion of mimetic conflict, and the world will again be engulfed in escalating violence. So here are the options: the Kingdom of Satan, the Kingdom of God, or the Apocalypse: we must choose. Except that, because of the revelation of Jesus and his resurrection, it becomes harder and harder to choose to return to the Kingdom of Satan.

In short, there are really only two options before us: we must love one another or die.

Years ago, the biblical images of this apocalyptic combustion were too extreme to fathom; and it was easier then to read them as supernatural outbursts of divine recompense. Most Christians learned to ignore this dimension of the biblical witness, leaving it to the lunatic fringe in the Church. But with the advent of weapons of mass destruction, stateless terrorism, and the weaponization of space, apocalypse begins to look like an all-too-human conflagration.

Another lurid element of the biblical witness that we have tended to set aside because we perceived it was part of the early Church's mistaken expectations about the end of history is the figure of the anti-Christ. We touched on this briefly in part two when it arose in Matthew's last Book of instruction to disciples. Jesus is telling them about the days of great suffering that are coming for God's people; and he says, "Then, if anyone say to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!' – do not believe it. For false messiahs...will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."

Now clearly a false messiah would have to be a good imitation, good enough to "lead astray even the elect." And that is what Girard believes he can see in our time. He notes that the Gospel's vindication of the victim is something that has truly begun to sink into the consciousness of the modern world. Ever since the Enlightenment, people have been blaming the Church for the evils of history, and, more recently, blaming every sort of institution for victimizing someone or other: the state, the police, the

banks. But apparently the individual stands above these guilty institutions in his and her innocence. Girard calls this the primary myth of our time; and it has led to the cult of the victim. People reject Christianity, because it only pretends to defend victims, they say. And so the new creed of political correctness claims to be the real defender of victims. The world is reduced to a sphere of multiple oppressions and the machinations of power. Even morality is considered oppressive. Freedom means the unfettered dominance of the individual. You accuse your opponent of victimizing you to get 'one up' on him or her. It is you human right to be able to claim your identity as a victim. There is even a kind of rivalry for true victim status – a new form of mimesis. My son, for example, who is a policeman, clearly feels victimized by all the talk about the police victimizing racial minorities. This myth of the innocent individual, Girard says, is anti-Christ in our time: a rival to Jesus that has taken over a central part of Jesus' mission. And it is able to lead astray even the elect.

And it arises, Girard says, from the loss of the spirit of self-criticism. In the rush to judgement, we presume to stand outside of the systems of our society, and blame our parents, our leaders, our ancestors, as if we could never understand why they would behave the way they did. Although Christianity provided the invisible foundation of the modern world, the source of our capacity for self-criticism, and the cause of our sensitivity toward victims, once Christianity is disposed of and blamed for the evils of our world, people are dislodged from that foundation; they cut themselves off from that source. The result is the collapse of responsibility: both a moral and an intellectual collapse.

To conclude this paper, then, I want to pose the two questions I think are most important for us here today, and offer some suggested answers.

First: what is the calling of the Church in such a time as ours? And second: what should the role of the catechumenate be?

First: the role of the Church. Obviously we have been called to be participants in God's mission in Jesus Christ. But in light of this Girardian perspective, I want to sharpen that. I think that the role of the Church can be expressed in a paradox: we must learn to see ourselves as the embodiment of the risen victim within our world, the victim who reveals not just the truth about the nature of God but the truth about humanity, too. But we can only do this insofar as we see ourselves also as the penitent persecutors of the risen victim. The Church's must learn again how to see the world from the perspective of the victim, but not in judgement. Jesus offered his life willingly to undo the judgement of his enemies and to win them over: "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Every expression of Christian belief that demonizes others,

every form of sectarianism, every form of complicity with the conventional notion of Christianity as simply one of the world's competing religions, every act of complicity with nationalism or militarism, is a betrayal of the Gospel. We need to learn all over again what Jesus was up to, when he announced the coming of God's kingdom and put his own life on the line.

And second: the role of the catechumenate. It is worth recalling that catechumenal formation, which evolved over the first five centuries or so of the Church's life, actually served some very different purposes at different times within that period. In the first three centuries, Christians were often condemned as 'atheists'; for they were understood to be opposed to the religion of the empire, and dismissive of its gods; and this was no small matter. For as Girard reminds us, religion is the foundation of culture; and those who dismiss the religion of the empire are clearly guilty of treason and enemies of the empire. But the one saying of Jesus most frequently quoted over those years was the command to love your enemies: it sounded so outrageous, and yet these Christians actually did it! People were dumbfounded, fascinated, and horrified; and some were even attracted. So the catechumenate provided a way of slowly bringing those who were intrigued but frightened into an awareness of the one true God who was so utterly different from the mythological gods, and bringing them into the experience of solidarity with their new brothers and sisters. And it worked: by the time of Constantine, something like ten to twenty percent of the empire had joined the traitors, the 'atheists.'

But finally the empire caught on: this was exactly what it needed to unify the its far flung realm and build a new peace. Christianity could be co-opted to serve the Kingdom of Satan. That's not how the Church saw it, of course; and subversion from within was an old trick with biblical roots, as have been pointing out. So while Constantine undertook to imperialize the Church, the Church undertook to christianize the empire – a job which initially fell largely to the catechumenate. This was a radical change of agenda: now it was a matter of slowing down those hordes, the converts-of-convenience, and challenging them to see how radically different was Jesus' perspective on the life of the world. I could go on; but suffice it to say that 'catechumenate' does not mean any one thing; and we need to be clear today in defining what ends we believe it should serve.

What I propose should not be heard as contradicting the vision of the catechumenate that has re-emerged over the past century, but merely as an attempt to sharpen it. Obviously, those who come to the Church in our time come with some pretty wildly distorted notions of what the Church is supposed to be; and we need to remember the caution with which Jesus treated those who asked to join his team. "Foxes have holes,

and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

So if nothing else, the catechumenate must provide newcomers an opportunity to begin to see what Jesus was up to. In the initial time of inquiry for example, as we try to listen to people and help them discover what the Spirit is awakening within them, we need to help them recognize whatever resonances these stirrings may have with the story of Jesus. But we must not betray Jesus' agenda in our anxiousness to win new members. Least of all may we exploit the Gospel to draw people into an in-group where they can have a new sense of pride in learning a insider language and a secret knowledge, where they can content themselves with the assurance of personal salvation. That is not what the Gospel is about.

The work of Jesus with his disciples had two thrusts. The first was showing them how their desires could be purified and protected from the allurements of the tempter. So he taught them to pray, so they could set their hearts on God and imitate their Father in heaven; and he taught them to beware of habits that draw us back into the maelstrom of mimetic contagion: the love of money, the allure of retaliation, the passing of judgement. This is not moralism but wisdom, the wisdom of true spiritual freedom that Jesus nurtured through prayer. We need to share with new disciples the ways in which this wisdom of Jesus comes to be embodied in Christians through prayer, both liturgical and personal.

The second thrust in Jesus' work with his disciples was teaching them to see the world from the perspective of the victim – not so that they could take sides against the oppressor, but so that they could understand why the world's violence could only be ended by Jesus' own willing submission to that violence.

One aspect of this must be helping new disciples to identify with the people of God, not as a body of disciples which has consistently stood with the world's victims, but precisely as a body of folk who, like those first disciples, didn't get it, most of the time. I know I find it very tempting to say to inquirers or to new Christians, "You may be scandalized by the Church's distasteful history – the pig-headedness of its dogmatism, the horrors of the Crusades and the Inquisition, and so on; but we're not like that, we're no longer that evil Constantinian Church," etc., etc. But note that Jesus does not say, at the river Jordan, I don't need to be baptized, because I am not a sinner; he refuses to dissociate himself from his people's sins. And so must we. Passing judgement on the Church of the past is merely repeating its error of passing judgement on others. That is what Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees: "You say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the

prophets.' Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors" (a not-so-subtle allusion to their intention to have him murdered).

And so, as I said before, I don't think the Church can be the embodiment of the risen victim in our world unless we also know ourselves to be the body of the penitent persecutors of the risen victim. As we share with new disciples our experience of being God's people, we need to acknowledge how the history of our scandals has been part of our own conversion to the way of Jesus and to the perspective of the victim. This is how we can bear witness to the work of the Paraclete in the world, and refuse to be led astray by the anti-Christ, the myth of the innocence of the individual, even our own innocence.

Another aspect of learning to see the world from the perspective of the victim needs to be involvement in the Church's mission to the poor. Those first disciples began to learn this perspective by being with Jesus and then by venturing off on their own, in pairs. What better way for sponsor and catechumen to work together than by the sponsor involving the catechumen in his or her own ministry to the poor, whatever that may be. This is something that the tradition of the renewed catechumenate has stressed from the beginning: that a catechumen must become involved in the community's mission – above all in serving the poor. The purpose of this is not to be converted to some kind of liberal optimism about how we're going to change the lot of the poor, but to learn to see from the perspective of the poor, from the perspective of the cast-offs of our society, from the perspective of the demonized of our world.

I think it is when a catechumen begins to look at the world from this new perspective that the inner conflict is likely to erupt; and he or she will have to come to terms with the scandal of following the way of Jesus. This may be the time when the support of the community is most crucial. For we know that this struggle never ends for any of us; and faithful Christians can offer understanding and encouragement in this crisis of priorities. This is the point in a person's life when the question about 'putting one's hand to the plow' becomes uppermost; and the ultimate resolution of this crisis would properly be a decision for or against Baptism. Once that decision is made, and the wounds of that struggle are laid bare, the subsequent time of preparation for baptism can truly become a time of illumination and purification.

Thus, when the moment of Baptism itself arrives, the candidate will be ready to die with Christ into a new way of being in the world, participating in the embodiment of the risen victim, ready to share Christ's suffering for the transformation of the world. The continuing expression of this new being is the Eucharist. One colleague of Girard

has described this as the gathering of the penitent persecutors around the body of the risen victim to show their resolve never to do it again. Whether the actual celebration of the Eucharist, overshadowed as it seems to be by a contradictory understanding of the atonement, can really be such a sign remains for me a huge question.

In case it is not already obvious, let me say that this understanding confirms the view so often articulated by the architects of the restored catechumenate: that the revival of the catechumenate is more about the conversion of the Church than the conversion of its converts. I have long been convinced that the reintroduction of the catechumenate cannot work without the simultaneous conversion of the community of believers. Those who come to us to be formed in the way of Christ need to see in us a model they can imitate because they see us imitating Christ, who is the very image of God. They need to see that we are learning to take up our cross to follow him.

Book List *(in order of publication)*

Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1965 (first published in 1961 as Mensonge romantique et verité romanesque)

Feodor Dostoevsky: The Resurrection from the Underground, edited and translated by James G. Williams, Crossroad, New York, 1997 (first published in 1963)

Proust: a collection of critical essays, Greenwood Press, 1977.

Violence and the Sacred, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1977 (first published in 1972 as La violence et le sacré)

To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978.

The Scapegoat, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986 (first published in 1982 as Le bouc émissaire)

Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987 (first published in 1978 as Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde)

Job: The Victim of his People, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987 (first published in 1985 as La route antique des hommes pervers)

Collective violence and sacrifice in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar (Bennington Chapbooks in literature series), Bennington College Bookstore, 1990. (Out of print)

A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare, Oxford, New York, 1991 (out of print). Republished by Gracewing Publishing, Gracewing House, 2 Southern Ave., Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 OQF

The Girard reader, edited by James G. Williams. Herder & Herder, 1996.

I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, Novalis, Toronto, 2001 (first published in 1999 as Je vois satan tomber comme l'éclair)

Oedipus unbound: selected writings on rivalry and desire, (with Mark R. Anspach), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.

Secondary Sources *(books about or influenced by René Girard)*

James Alison, **Raising Abel: the Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination**, Crossroad, New York, 1996

James Alison, **The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes**, Crossroad, New York, 1998

Gil Baillie, **Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads**, Crossroad, New York, 1995

Cesáreo Bandera, **The Sacred Game: The Role of the Sacred in the Genesis of Modern Literary Fiction**, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994

Golsan, Richard J. **Rene Girard and myth** (Theorists of myth), Routledge, 2001.

Sandor Goodhart, **Sacrificing Commentary: Reading to the End of Literature**, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996

Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly. **Violent origins: Walter Burkett, Rene Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on ritual killing and cultural formation**. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988.

Robert Hamerton-Kelly, **The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark,** Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1994

Robert Hamerton-Kelly, **Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross**, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992

Andrew McKenna, **Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida and Deconstruction**, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1992

To Honor René Girard, Anima Libri, Stanford, 1986

Violence and Truth: On the Work of René Girard, ed. Paul Dumouchel, The Athlone Press, London, 1988 (first published in 1985 as Violence et verité)

Online purchasing of book titles:

Most titles on this list are in print (many in paperback) and available for purchase at www.amazon.com

For out of print titles or for used copies, consult the following two online booksellers:
Abebooks www.abebooks.com
Alibris www.alibris.com

The Scapegoat (CBC Ideas series), René Girard's Anthropology of Violence and Religion; Produced and presented by David Cayley. Originally broadcast on IDEAS March 5 - 9, 2001.

Audiocassettes only (no CD version as yet) available for purchase from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation c/o Georgetown Terminal Warehouse www.gtwcanada.com

TEL: 905-873-2750

FAX: 905-873-6170

ISBN 0660184966

$39.95 CAN

$29.95 US