

this misstep, Sims ably demonstrates the ongoing and underappreciated theological importance of the lynching era.

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*René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology.*  
By Grant Kaplan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016. xii + 268 pages. \$50.00.  
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Grant Kaplan has done the field a great service by systematizing the often nonsystematic thought of René Girard and deftly answering critiques of Girard's work (from John Milbank to Sarah Coakley) along the way. The book's striking cover, featuring Spinello Aretino's *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, reinforces Kaplan's belief that conversion is the most effective category for constructing "a mimetic fundamental theology in a Pascalian key" (10). After an opening chapter that introduces readers to the grammar of Girard's thought, chapter 2 turns to Girard's own religious conversion as evidence that mimetic theory *involves* its students and thus mitigates the supposedly neutral stance of a modern secular rationality and its sharp bifurcation of faith and reason. Chapter 4 invites readers to see Christianity not as one religion among others but instead as an ever-challenging hermeneutic of religion. Chapters 6 and 7 propose that Girard's project supplements the insights of Charles Taylor and Michael Buckley by confirming a genetic over a dialectical account of Christianity's relationship to secularization and atheism respectively. In particular, chapters 3 and 5 stand out for their clarity, insight, and originality.

Kaplan specializes in theologies of revelation, a talent on clear display in the third chapter's construction of a hermeneutical notion of revelation. According to Kaplan, while postconciliar Catholic theology has moved beyond neo-Scholastic accounts of revelation as exclusively propositional, a residual subjective-objective polarity has hindered further reflection on the nature of Christian revelation. He relies on Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and (albeit a bit eclectically) Walter Ong to criticize this tendency and the truncated anthropologies and perceptualist epistemologies that undergird it. As Girard's project confirms, revelation instead involves conversion, "a reconstellation of horizon" (84) that "compels a re-reading of all of history" (88). Seeing one's own complicity in the Crucifixion—and scapegoating more broadly—means undergoing the startling transformation of one's entire worldview. The chapter comes highly recommended; no future scholarship on revelation should neglect its argument.

Chapter 5 develops Kaplan's previous praise of the rich ecclesiological potential of James Alison's thought. Kaplan writes, "Just as the Eucharist ... is the sacrifice that undoes sacrifice, so the Church is the community that radically reorients community" (139). Over an older triumphalistic ecclesial apologetics, Alison's ecclesiology correctly points to the joyful sacramental witness to God's gratuitous forgiveness that being church entails. Kaplan correctly points to the intimate connection between soteriology and ecclesiology—the enduring (eucharistic) presence of this Forgiving Victim enables the construction of a "nondefensive," noncontrastive, and "indifferent" identity (143, 146). To belong to the church entails a unity born out of the common conversion wrought by utterly gratuitous forgiveness rather than a common enemy of "the world" or particular groups of people. Alison's ecclesiology will become most relevant as the Catholic Church in the United States continues to grapple with a post-Christendom, diasporic identity and an ever-increasing polarization within its own ranks. This chapter can contribute much to these burning ecclesiological questions.

At least two further questions remain. First, *Gaudium et Spes* spoke of a "legitimate autonomy" of world and culture. How might this claim square with Kaplan's attempt to develop a Girardian apologetic largely dependent on a Pascalian dialectic of sin and grace? Kaplan occasionally hints at the importance of this question (e.g., 11, 128) and thus implicitly points to the need for further work on Girard's place in contemporary debates concerning nature and grace. Second, Kaplan's book raises the question of what a Girardian catechetical program, undergraduate theology class, or academic curriculum might look like. Alison's *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* (Glenville, IL: Doers, 2013) is the first such attempt, and Kaplan's work will hopefully spur further reflection on the fruitfulness of this approach.

The latter question indicates the rapid growth in the rightful appreciation for Girard in Christian theology. As one of the first analyses of Girard's work to be published since his death, *Unlikely Apologist* takes seriously the full scope and maturation of Girard's thought (a point, Kaplan adds, Girard's critics often miss; 203). As such, this book would be useful for a graduate seminar on the theological implications of Girard's thought, a seminar that programs will inevitably soon offer. Moreover, Kaplan's theological literacy and clear writing style—both of which helped this reader to understand or to rethink the topic anew—make the book as a whole, but especially chapter 1's clear exposition of mimetic theory, helpful for introducing even novices to Girard's work.

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