

RENÉ GIRARD
AND RAYMUND
SCHWAGER

Correspondence 1974-1991

Translated by CHRIS FLEMING
and SHEELAH TREFLÉ HIDDEN

Edited by SCOTT COWDELL, CHRIS FLEMING,
JOEL HODGE, *and* MATHIAS MOOSBRUGGER



Raymund Schwager (L) and René Girard (R), Wiesbaden, 1994 (Photo courtesy of Herlinde Koelbl)

Violence, Desire, and the Sacred

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René Girard and Raymund Schwager

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Edited by

Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge,
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In Memoriam

René Girard, 1923–2015

Raymund Schwager, SJ, 1935–2004

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Editors' Introduction

This correspondence provides a window into the formative years of René Girard's mimetic theory and Raymund Schwager's dramatic theology, in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It takes place between two convinced Catholic intellectuals. The older man was a French-American genius whose powerful synthesis of psychology, culture, and religion impressed and shaped the younger man—a Swiss Jesuit theologian, who built a base for developing and commending the mimetic theory at Innsbruck that is still going strong. Not only did Girard influence Schwager's project, which gradually developed into a systematically fully rendered model called dramatic theology,¹ but Schwager was a major influence on Girard as well.

Our volume presents all of the letters that have come to light. The essay "Beautiful Minds in Dialogue" sets out the provenance of these letters and the story of how a critical edition of the French originals was first published, with parallel German translation. We know that this set of extant letters does not represent the complete correspondence, and you will notice gaps in the flow of communication where some letters are missing. However, what we do have represents a sufficient tranche to establish the strong collaboration, mutual influence, and personal friendship that developed between Girard and Schwager.

In one of his deservedly well-known little treatises on the virtues, German philosopher Josef Pieper wrote that friends do not look at each other as lovers do. They hardly talk about their friendship as such, but focus instead on matters of mutual interest.² The correspondence between Raymund Schwager and René Girard represents, in this respect, more than the dialogue between a cultural theorist and a theologian, or simply a new resource for scholars of

¹ For this see Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

² Josef Pieper, *Über die Liebe* (München: Kösel, 1972), 171; *About Love* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974).

mimetic theory and theology. It is, above all, the documenting of a very rare thing: real intellectual friendship. Indeed, we have here a model of high-level intellectual exchange that is respectful but does not minimize differences. That said, the letters are also marked by a genuine expression of deepening mutual affection, from the first meeting at Avignon in 1975, to mountain walks in Austria, to Schwager's travels in the United States. What makes the letters exemplary from a scholarly point of view is the fact that, not only are we able to access (more or less clearly) the results of their dialogue in many articles, essays, and books, but we are able to observe the intellectual process. There are real questions, misunderstandings, controversies, and, from both men, a constant willingness to engage in finding answers to vital questions. It is a privilege to observe their ideas in the process of formation.

This correspondence covers the period in which mimetic theory came to be fully articulated for the first time, as set out in Girard's *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978),³ and began to wield its influence. The reception was initially marred by incomprehension, resistance, and various practical problems to do with translation and publishing, all of which make for interesting reading. There is a sense that Girard was relying on Schwager as a support and champion for his work, not least in theological circles. The Innsbruck honorary doctorate awarded to Girard in 1988, which his friend labored to bring off, is an important sign of how Schwager saw himself contributing.

A great deal of personal information is contained in the letters, which adds immensely to the picture that emerges of the times in which they were written. Schwager mentions stressful academic politics and Girard the settled happiness of his family life. They reflect ruefully on the plight of theology in general and, in particular, on postconciliar Catholicism both European and American. Both men regard the development of mimetic theory, in which they see themselves very much as collaborators, as of great potential benefit to theology. Nevertheless, Girard is as clear here, as elsewhere, that his eye is on the world and the future, not on any narrow church agenda. There is also some

³ An English translation of this book, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, was published in 1987 (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

fun to be had at their expense. Both demonstrate the learned helplessness of a generation of male academics who—in their case, for much if not all of the time—had the luxury of secretarial assistance. We eavesdrop when, in the early 1980s, Girard becomes an initially reluctant but soon enthusiastic convert to word processing:

Imagine a typewriter without a fixed spatial reference. You can work at any time on any part of the text, in all directions, add, delete, modify, correct as much as you want, add an entire book to the third line of the first, if that appeals to you, and everything is reformatted and organizes itself right before your eyes
(Girard to Schwager, September 12, 1983)

The intellectual dimension being of foremost importance in this correspondence, we note some important aspects.

There is a phase of adjustment as Schwager, who was clearly impressed with Girard's *La violence et le sacré* (1972)⁴ and eager to work through its theological implications, pursues various questions with Girard. Does the work of the cross bring not only *knowledge* of the scapegoat mechanism, but also incorporation into a new form of life? St. Paul and the law is another early focus. Questions concerning the precedence of the law are debated: does the law emerge from the sacrificial mechanism, as Girard would have it, or does it provide the seed of rivalry with God from which original sin and then sacrifice emerge?

In one form or another the issue of sin and freedom at the point of human origins resurfaced throughout the whole correspondence, receiving a resolution of sorts only in the important final letters of October 1991. There, we find tantalizing reflections about Henri de Lubac's *desiderium naturale videndi dei* and how such natural yearning for God might underpin Girard's account of "metaphysical desire," focused on the being of a model—albeit a yearning aborted by original sin. Schwager's important essay "Mimesis and Freedom," based on a presentation made in Provo, Utah, provided a focus as this conversation proceeded.⁵ Here one sees Girard either finally answering

⁴ An English translation of this book, *Violence and the Sacred*, was published in 1977 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

⁵ Raymund Schwager, "Mimesis and Freedom," *Contagion* 21 (2014): 29–45.

his critics about the ontology of violence in his work, affirming the goodness of creation and the primal innocence of human beings, or else adapting his presentation of mimetic theory to gain acceptance in Catholic theological circles, depending on one's perspective—perhaps both. Schwager's attention to original sin in his own work, and Girard's sustained interest in questions of hominization, with one eye on Darwin and the other eye on theological orthodoxy, might indicate a mutually formative role in this exchange.

Another major issue between the two men concerned the category of sacrifice, and whether Girard ought to view it more positively. The development of their approach to this question, often in agreement, yet often not, is especially interesting for Girardians. Schwager wants to be able to reassure theologians that Girard does not dismiss this important soteriological and sacramental category. And, indeed, Schwager helps convince Girard that there is a difference between texts *structured* by sacrifice and others that *name and reveal* it. Hence a sacrifice of forced immolation is not the same as a sacrifice of voluntary consecration and self-giving. Girard was keen to preserve Christianity's anti-sacrificial distinctiveness against the then-fashionable homogenizing of religion. Schwager helped him achieve this while honoring an important dimension of Christian proclamation that Girard had neglected. A significant turning point for Girard was his admission in a 1993 interview that, in order to maintain his total dismissal of sacrifice, he had scapegoated the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁶ In the correspondence we see this issue being pressed on him by Schwager some fifteen years earlier. There are, of course, other issues pursued: the relationship between science and religion, the structure of philosophical inquiry, and the charge brought against mimetic theory that it posits a "mono-causal" explanation of all cultural and religious phenomena.

Our thanks go to Karin Peter and Nikolaus Wandinger for permission to use their essay "Beautiful Minds in Dialogue,"⁷ which is reproduced here in modified form. A more extensive German version of this essay, in two

⁶ René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard" (with Rebecca Adams), *Religion and Literature* 25(2) (Summer 1993): 11–33. See also Girard's essay, published for the first time in German in a 1995 festschrift for Schwager, "Mimetic Theory and Theology," in *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 33–45.

⁷ Karin Peter and Nikolaus Wandinger, "Beautiful Minds in Dialogue," *Contagion* 21 (2014): 23–8.

parts, helped introduce the first publication of these letters in 2014, in the aforementioned version of the French text with a German translation, which was accompanied by expansive notes and critical apparatus. That publication constitutes volume six in the Herder edition of the *Collected Works* of Raymund Schwager (*Raymund Schwager Gesammelte Schriften*), which is being edited by a research group at the Innsbruck Faculty of Catholic Theology, following Fr. Schwager's untimely death in 2004.⁸ Dr. Wandinger and Dr. Peter are the editors of that volume, and the critical edition of the correspondence in its original French that it incorporates forms the basis of this English translation. Our volume would simply not have been possible without their meticulous work.

The three editors of this Bloomsbury series, *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*—Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge, who cofounded the Australian Girard Seminar—are honored to have the opportunity to publish this correspondence. A great debt of thanks is owed to Fr. Józef Niewiadomski, Schwager's successor as Dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Innsbruck, who is also head of the *Gesammelte Schriften* research group, and Keeper of the Raymund Schwager Archive, in collaboration with Mathias Moosbrugger. Dr. Moosbrugger agreed to join our editorial team in a show of friendship and as a sign of fruitful synergy between our two centers of research in mimetic theory. In Girardian circles, Austria and Australia are close in more than name!

The English translation emerged in two stages. In 2010, Sheelah Treflé Hidden, from Heythrop College in London, produced a first rendering privately for a gathering of Girardian scholars, covering the letters that were in hand at the time. With this publication in view, Dr. Chris Fleming, whose *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* remains the standard critical introduction first published in English,⁹ translated the letters that had come to light subsequently and reworked the earlier translation. He and Sheelah Treflé Hidden have jointly provided "Notes on the English Translation." Mathias

⁸ Raymund Schwager, *Briefwechsel mit René Girard*, ed. Nikolaus Wandinger and Karin Peter (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014).

⁹ See Robert Doran, "Editor's Introduction," in *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005*, ed. Robert Doran (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 294 n.6. See also Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

Moosbrugger kindly adapted supporting documentation from the German edition, including the “Beautiful Minds” essay. Rosamund Dalziell and Scott Cowdell thoroughly reviewed the translation. For a grant supporting Dr. Dalziell’s contribution, we thank the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre at Charles Sturt University, Canberra, and its Director, Bishop Stephen Pickard. We are grateful to Herlinde Koelbl for her kind permission to reproduce two fine photographs of René Girard and Raymund Schwager that “bookend” the present volume, reminding us of Josef Pieper’s aforementioned insight about friendship. Christopher Brennan has once again adorned our Bloomsbury series with his meticulous copyediting and indexing. Thanks, too, to Kim Storry in Fakenham for her project management. Finally, we owe a debt of gratitude to Haaris Naqvi at Bloomsbury in New York for his continuing interest and support.

Last but not least we express profound gratitude to our friends at *Imitatio*, a program of the San Francisco-based Thiel Foundation, for the financial support that made the preparation of this volume possible. To Lindy Fishburne, Jimmy Kaltreider, and to Dr. Trevor Cribben Merrill—who negotiated the arrangements during the 2015 COV&R Conference in St. Louis (involving some memorable sessions in a motorcycle memorabilia-themed bar)—we give a heartfelt thank you, and of course to Peter Thiel. We hope that the efforts, intellectual engagements, and new friendships that this volume represents are a sign that the Schwager–Girard friendship is extending its mimetic influence to the next generation.

As we were preparing the manuscript of this volume for press—indeed, while this Introduction was first being drafted—news came through from California that René Girard had died peacefully in his sleep early on the morning of November 4, 2015. It is a fitting thought for Christians that he and Fr. Schwager can now renew their friendship in that trinitarian embrace where all friendship will be perfected, every injustice will be put right, and every tear will be wiped away.

Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge, and Mathias Moosbrugger
Canberra/Sydney/Melbourne/Innsbruck, April 2016

Beautiful Minds in Dialogue: The Correspondence between René Girard and Raymund Schwager and the Story of its First Publication (with German Translation) in 2014¹

Karin Peter and Nikolaus Wandinger

René Girard died in early November 2015, just short of his ninety-second birthday. It seems hard to believe for those of us who knew Raymund Schwager, SJ, the Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Innsbruck and first President of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), that he has been gone now for twelve years. After his sudden and untimely death in 2004, Fr. Schwager's office had to be cleared out and, soon after this sad work had begun, it became clear that there were treasures to be retrieved: letters, typescripts, drafts for a book and several articles, along with other academic material. Józef Niewiadomski, who was Schwager's successor as Dean of the Faculty of Theology, decided to establish a Raymund Schwager Archive, and Niewiadomski's students Stefan Huber and Mathias Moosbrugger compiled the first inventory.²

One discovery was especially interesting: among the material were fifty-four letters from René Girard, dating from 1974 to 1991. It was obvious that they were half of an extensive, sustained dialogue, and the question was whether the other half of the correspondence could be obtained, too. That was not easy. At first, Girard claimed that he had none of this correspondence. Only after some thinking and searching did he find thirty-seven letters from

¹ This is an updated and edited version of an article published in *Contagion* 21 (2014): 23–7, based in turn on an essay in the 2014 French-German Herder edition of the Girard–Schwager correspondence.

² Cf. <http://www.uibk.ac.at/systheol/schwagerdrama/schwager-archiv/> (accessed August 27, 2015).

Schwager in his garage in California—and he entrusted those to Wolfgang Palaver, who brought them to Innsbruck. Later on, Benoît Chantre, who is compiling the personal archive of René Girard at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris, discovered more letters and delivered them to us. Finally, in March 2014, another ten letters were found. In the end, we have fifty-five letters that Schwager wrote to Girard, in addition to the fifty-four letters from Girard to Schwager. All of them are published in this volume. It is still evident that this is not their complete correspondence; especially from the years 1982 and 1983, when Girard lived in Paris, several letters are obviously absent. Nevertheless, what we have is a large chunk of the correspondence—and it contains enough material to make it worth examining more closely and presenting to the public.

Background

When we realized the importance of Schwager's academic estate, we set to work to formulate an application for a research grant to the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). This application was drafted by Józef Niewiadomski and Nikolaus Wandinger, with valuable input from the Innsbruck dramatic theology research group; the application was accepted on the first submission. This provided us with the necessary funds for a research project from January 2010 to August 2013. Mathias Moosbrugger was hired as the project's coordinator, assisted by Karin Peter and Simon de Keukelaere. Józef Niewiadomski directed the whole project, and Nikolaus Wandinger played a small part in the editing of the letters. We were happy that negotiations with the German publisher Herder were successful, so that the letters and Schwager's final, unfinished monograph *Dogma und dramatische Geschichte* ("Dogma and Dramatic History") could be published there. These are part of an eight-volume *Collected Works* (*Raymund Schwager Gesammelte Schriften*).³ In 2014, two books resulting from the research project were published, followed by a

³ Cf. http://www.herder.de/theologie/programm/index_html?par_onl_struktur=704728&onl_struktur=4092753 (accessed August 27, 2015).

separate volume with insightful commentaries from several authors on the correspondence as well as Schwager's last monograph.⁴ In 2015 and 2016, four more volumes from the *Collected Works* series have appeared, consisting of critical re-editions of his most important books.⁵ The final two volumes of the series, including important essays and yet unpublished material on creation and evolution, original sin, the theology of the Holy Spirit, several smaller pieces of correspondence, and political statements, are due for publication in 2017.⁶

This all comes by way of background to the focus of this essay and volume: the correspondence with René Girard. The first publication of these letters (with their translation into German) posed legal problems. A letter belongs to its recipient; the copyright, however, remains with the author. René Girard kindly granted us the right to publish his letters. For Schwager's letters, we had to negotiate with the beneficiary of his estate, the Swiss province of the Society of Jesus. We were lucky that the collaboration here was very positive. However, we were obliged to make sure that the rights of third parties mentioned in the letters would not be infringed upon. This was especially important when it came to deciding if including the names of such parties—whether living or dead—was advisable. Luckily, neither Girard nor Schwager ever wrote derogatorily about others, so this was, in fact, no problem. Telephone numbers and

⁴ Raymund Schwager, *Dogma und dramatische Geschichte: Christologie im Kontext von Judentum, Islam und moderner Marktkultur*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski and Mathias Moosbrugger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014); Raymund Schwager, *Briefwechsel mit René Girard*, ed. Nikolaus Wandering and Karin Peter (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014); *Auf dem Weg zur Neubewertung der Tradition: Die Theologie von Raymund Schwager und sein neu erschlossener Nachlass*, ed. Mathias Moosbrugger and Józef Niewiadomski (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2015).

⁵ Raymund Schwager, *Heilsdrama: Systematische und narrative Zugänge*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2015); both reprinted in this volume are available in English: *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). Raymund Schwager, *Der wunderbare Tausch: Zur Geschichte und Deutung der Erlösungslehre*, ed. Nikolaus Wandering (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2015). Raymund Schwager, *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften*, ed. Karin Peter and Mathias Moosbrugger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2016); this book is available in English: *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). Raymund Schwager, *Frühe Hauptwerke*, ed. Mathias Moosbrugger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2016).

⁶ Raymund Schwager, *Beiträge zur Schöpfungslehre, Erbsündenlehre und zur Pneumatologie*, ed. Nikolaus Wandering (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, forthcoming); Raymund Schwager, *Kirchliche, politische und theologische Zeitgenossenschaft*, ed. Mathias Moosbrugger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, forthcoming).

addresses that are mentioned in the correspondence have been omitted in the current volume; the omissions are indicated by ellipses.

The correspondence was conducted in French, Girard's mother tongue and Schwager's preferred foreign language. The Herder edition of this correspondence in Schwager's *Collected Works* contains the original French text alongside a German translation.

The letters are diverse in nature. Some are typed, most are handwritten; some are long academic treatises, some short personal notes, while others are more organizational or pragmatic in content. Some letters are clearly dated, some undated, some are incompletely dated, and some are certainly dated incorrectly, because digits have been accidentally switched, or a date that will later be mentioned in the text of the letter occupied the mind of the writer to such an extent that he also placed it at the head of the letter. Thankfully, these mistakes can be detected from the contents of the letters with a high degree of certainty. Not all letters have been completely preserved. Some are missing a page, so that we have only a truncated version.

One might ask why the correspondence ends in 1991. There are probably two main reasons for this. One is the foundation of COV&R. Because of COV&R and its regular annual conferences, Schwager and Girard met personally at least once a year and thus could probably conduct their conversation directly. The other reason might be the rise of email. What they had to write between meetings, they probably sent by email. When Schwager died suddenly in 2004, nobody thought of securing his email account, and the IT division of the University of Innsbruck deleted it promptly and thoroughly. Nevertheless, we are confident that the letters we have cover the most important period of that conversation.

Content of the correspondence

Let us now give you a short overview of topics in the correspondence. One element of the letters that impresses itself upon the reader is being witness to a scholarly relationship turning into a friendship. It was a relationship between two people who had not met before commencing their correspondence.

Table 1 Overview of the correspondence in the current volume (as can presently be determined)

Year	Schwager to Girard	Girard to Schwager
1974	March 18	
		April 8
1975	December 6	December 18
	April 7	April 12
	September 16	November 2
1976	January 25	June 13
	June 30	August 19
	August/September	December 6
1977	January 31	February 12
	March 3	May 18
	May 26	June 2
	July 4	September 1
	October 12	
	January 1	January 14
1978	January 28	February 22
	March 29	April 17
	April 22	May 19
	May 28	July 6
		July 18
	August 9	
	December 20	
1979		February 10
	June 27	August 1
	August 19	
	November 27	December 10

Year	Schwager to Girard	Girard to Schwager
1980	March 4	
	April 20	May 7 June
	August 3	Aug 18
	September 3	
	December 8	December 28
1981	letter missing	
	May 24	May 13
	August 30	Aug 9
	October 26	September 29
1982	January 10	
	letter missing	January 26
	letter missing	June 20
		November 2 November 13 December 11
	letter missing	
1983	June 27	May 12
	August 12	July 16
	December 4	September 12
	December 21	December 7
		December 28
		January 8
1984	January 28	
	February 26	April 13
	April 22	May 8
	September 30	
1985	letter missing	February 23
		July 2
	September 20 December 23	

Year	Schwager to Girard	Girard to Schwager
1986	letter missing	January 10
	May 18	January–May
	August 1	
	October 12	August 21
	December 24	October 19
1987	February 4	January 2
		February 25
	April 16	
	December 20	
1988	February 22	January 6
		June 27
	July 31	
	December 25	
1989	December 19	
1990		January 24
1991	January 4	
		January 24
	October 3	October 30
	November 21	December 7

Schwager made the first step and initiated the correspondence in March 1974. The letters testify to an academic exchange over a long period of time that was supportive and appreciative, yet always intellectually lively and critical. The respect that both thinkers had for each other's work permeates all the letters—they are characterized by a mood of mutual gratitude, with each sharing the concerns of the other. Still, they used the formal *vous* (you, in French) for ten years, until—in 1984—they eventually settled on the more relaxed alternative *tu*.

The letters also clearly reveal the authors' different starting points. Girard explains several times that he works in a mostly a-religious environment, which leads him to argue anthropologically, even if his final aim is theological

insight. Schwager speaks as a full-blooded theologian and Jesuit, bringing the Catholic dogmatic tradition to the table. These differing starting points are evident in several areas—for example, in the question of the meaning of the cross. Initially, Girard sees the cross primarily as a source of *knowledge* about sacrificial thinking. Schwager emphasizes that Christianity also—and more importantly—regards the cross as a source of *life*. Yet, after some explanation, Schwager comes to understand Girard's point of view and his concern—namely, to make the insights of the gospel, and of the cross in particular, acceptable to nonreligious readers of his books. Similarly, Girard could appreciate the point made by Schwager not to yield to the intellectual's temptation to reduce the gospel to gnostic knowledge.

Mimeticism is another important point of discussion, especially in the early 1980s: Girard has to defend himself against accusations that he construes mimeticism as leading to violence with an almost mechanical necessity and that, consequently, he adheres to an ontology of violence. Schwager supports him in the defense. He agrees that mimeticism cannot be understood mechanically. To this end Schwager emphasizes human freedom, probably more than Girard does. Schwager connects Girard's anthropological ideas on mimesis and violence with the theological doctrine of original sin, thereby emphasizing that violence is not ontologically necessary but, rather, comes out of a certain kind of abuse of human freedom. Following this line of thought, Schwager sees freedom essentially as a consequence of faith. Girard later takes up this line of argument himself. All indications are that he found it helpful for defending his theory against the accusation of mechanistic necessity.

The theme occupying most space in the letters is sacrifice. Every so often the letters take up the question of a sacrificial or non-sacrificial interpretation of certain biblical passages. While both thinkers basically agree on the meaning of archaic sacrifice and also on biblical hermeneutics, they profoundly disagree in the beginning over how to interpret the Letter to the Hebrews. Girard views it as a sacrificial text; Schwager concurs that Hebrews' *language* is indeed sacrificial, but subversively so—sacrificial language is used to transform sacrificial thinking. In the context of this discussion, Schwager finally succeeds in convincing Girard that the dogmatic tradition of the