

Sacrificial “As-If” and Avuncular Hilarity

Living by *Méconnaissance*

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Dutch Girard Society

INTRODUCTION: THE CURIOUS QUESTION

At my departure for anthropological fieldwork in the Central African Republic (RCA), just after Girard’s seminal work *La Violence et le sacré* had come to upset my structuralist tutors in Paris, I was given a list of penetrating questions to probe in the field, since my research was to be conducted in an area known for its a-cephalous traditions with little or no political or religious centralization.¹ The prime critique concerned Girard’s apparent return to a bluntly utilitarian vision of myth and religion as the mental framework of society’s ritual foundations, in line with Durkheim’s functionalist analysis of archaic religion, which was finely reworded in Lord Raglan’s recent preface to a cluster of Hocart’s articles titled *The Life-Giving Myth*.² The approach had come to dominate, as a way of unraveling outdated transcendentalist claims, and also underpinned Freudian and Marxist attacks on religion. After Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* had given the lie to any claims of access to transcendent realms, the deontological view of religion as society’s functionalist toolbox for orderly

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conduct became dominant. But, inspired also by such “masters of suspicion” in human sciences, structuralism had set out even beyond that utilitarian perspective. In a decisive bolt of relativism, it took myths to be a mere mental ordering of daily observations into a logical frame, independent of any ritual or social utility. So, how could Girard once again declare social control via rituals to be religion’s true aim, allot a prime role to sacrificial rites, and, most alarmingly, thereby raise the suspicion of aiming to rehabilitate Christian dogmas?

I was urged to go and check this theory on sacrifices, scapegoating, social rivalry, and on the shaping of archaic society, its forms of authority, and even sacred kingship. Reflecting on the questions, though, I noted that they overlooked a critical point in Girard’s hypothesis, which I read as reverse functionalism. In fact, Girard viewed religion’s social function and the issuing cultural regulations as rooted in a radical “lie,” or in what he labels *méconnaissance*. Worded in evolutionary terms, he hypothesized not so much a kind of Darwinian utilitarian adaptation, but rather the alternative of “exaptation,” or what has been called an oblique functionalism.

After I had learned enough of the Banda language to start my research, though, my schedules were thrown in disarray on my first evening in the village that was to be my starting point. It presented me with a curious quandary. The village of Wademi, some 25 km north of Ippy, in the sparsely populated wooded savannah, was home to two exogamous patrilineal clans that straddle a little river and sit on a dirt road constructed by the colonial power for the collection of cotton. To oversee this two-clan unit a chief had been appointed with the title of *makonji*, a loanword from the national Sango language. This gentle, friendly man had offered to host me in his own cemented house and organized a welcome for me in the customary way of staging a pleasant storytelling session, punctuated with joyous songs and dances, lasting well into the night. Most of the stories and songs figured Tere, the famous trickster figure, who resembles Ture in neighboring Azande-land, well documented by E. Evans-Pritchard.³ The enjoyable, moonlit session was shot through with outbursts of laughter. It brought the two clans together, including the women and children. Before turning in, the *makonji*’s junior son, who had been assigned my assistant and interpreter, came to convey his father’s sincere but puzzling query, whether Tere actually was the same as Jesus Christ. Actually, his French name in Banda phonetics implied so: *Christ Jésus = Tre se te jesu*; and “*Jesu Christ = Jesu Tre*.”⁴ Taken by surprise and much in need of some rest after a rather demanding day, I politely asked to let the issue rest till the morning.

This question was all the more disturbing, as Christians were wont to call Jesus the Lord, and relate this to chieftaincy, which contrasts with Tere’s

position, notably, as we shall see, in Banda logics, where the *makonji* is readily viewed as the chief witch.⁵ I had no real reason to consider the question a joke on the part of my host. Neither could I expect him to be versed in the intricate issues that Girard addressed concerning the relation between the myths collected by anthropologists the world over and the Western vision of Christ. In Girard's understanding, indeed, anthropologists had been comparing the two either to prove their similarity or even to claim the former's superior sophistication—both of which displayed a similar intent.⁶

Two characteristics of the trickster stories stood out for me that night, as I pondered this association of Tere and the Christ. Tere's spectacular failures in his attempts to capitalize on social privileges proper to his avuncular position caused a constant hilarity that was further heightened by the interspersed dances with explicitly erotic gestures. Moreover, his awkward escapades with references to these avuncular privileges seemed to contradict the idea of myths being a support for the dominant patrilineal setup and the chieftain's authority—let alone that they might be compared to the missionaries' message on the Christ. So, how was I to understand my host's enigmatic question? Having eliminated the idea of it being a practical joke, I faced a basic religious quandary: However preposterous the idea of identifying the trickster and the Christian Savior might seem, the question deserved an earnest reframing as more than an intellectual nosiness about a curious play on words. The issue to face was whether Jesus, whom the gospels report as saying "I am the way, the truth and the way" (Jn. 14:6) and who forbade people ever to abolish a single stroke of the Law (Mt. 5:18), could be identified with the protagonist of the Banda trickster stories. Actually, reading the latter as a support of the social order and its rituals looked totally out of place. So, whatever my answer, it needed to take into account the typical rules of the Banda kinship order and especially the question of whether this storytelling served as a support of the social order, with respect to both its contents and function.

Girard has intensely reflected on the comparison between mythological tales and the Christian Gospel, stressing that the latter unravels the all-pervading scapegoating mechanism, by which myths justify the solution to a runaway mimetic crisis, while hinging on a *méconnaissance* to obfuscate the fact that it ousts a figure arbitrarily blamed for causing the fatal tensions.⁷ This sacrificial mechanism of stabilizing social order at the expense of arbitrary victims, he argues, is at work in all social constructs and the victims' innocence is being veiled in mythic tales. Yet if Girard may have convincingly shown that the Gospel unravels this inculcating route by stressing the innocence of the victimized Christ, who was murdered for consistently taking the side of the marginalized

and thus saved the entire nation from perishing (Jo. 18:14), now I was asked whether the evangelic Savior might be plausibly aligned with a narrative hero, whose exploits openly target the dominant structures and their victimizing effects. Which similarity between these two might my host have possibly perceived? For this, we need to investigate the Banda social order and the *topos* of their storytelling.

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

Before studying the particular rules of Banda society, we note that joviality and laughter are widely viewed as typical human traits that might be defined even as humanity's particularity. Although among animals, notably primates, signs of pleasure resembling joviality and even some gestures of relief from social stress are well known, any purposeful actions to cause hilarity seem absent. Philosophers like Bergson have aptly analyzed the phenomenology of laughter, and many anthropologists have studied in detail the various forms of joking relations. In today's English idiom the term "avuncular" is still associated with these facts, meaning "genial, benign, and kindly." While the terms "hilarity" and "avuncular" are of Greek and Latin origin, they seem appropriate to capture the mood of the Banda trickster story. But they seem far removed from any religious meaning, let alone from sacrificial rituals. The jovial-sounding *avuncular* derives from the Latin for "little maternal grandpa," *avus*, but is rarely linked to the essence of religion, often etymologically explained as a relation (*religare*) with transcendental matters. Although "hilarity" appears even more remote, there is the curious etymological link with *hilasterion*, which the Septuagint commonly uses as the Greek equivalent of sacrificial reconciliation in the Hebrew Bible, and which Romans 3:25 applies to Christ, identifying him as sacrificial *hilasterion*.

While Girard stresses the etymology of sacrifice as *sacrum facere* and emphasizes the violent killing of an (arbitrary) victim as the sacrificial means to halt a greater violence that threatens the community due to a mimetic crisis, many a critic of this theory has slated its one-sided stress on its destructive side. But even if they spell out the rite's peaceable aspect of offering gifts to a divinity, they never come close to describing the sacrificial *hilasterion* and its Paulinian application to Christ in terms of a social *hilarity*. So, what is one to make of Christ's identification with the Banda trickster Tere, who causes boisterous laughter for attempting to outclass, humiliate, or even crush others, and who, after meeting his own defeat, climbs back into the sky as the Orion constellation,

brewing up a new adventure? Surely, my host could not be acquainted with Christ's ancient affiliation to the Egyptian mythic king Osiris, represented by the constellation of Orion, as a symbol of the eternal cycle of (ritual) death and resurrection? The Banda identification of Tere with the Orion constellation is not part of a mythological complex dealing with murder and rehabilitation, death, and rebirth. Even the imagery of the hunter Orion with his dog Sirius hardly rings a bell to them. Orion's belt is not viewed as a sword or weapon, except in a hilariously metaphorical sense, for it counts as the erected phallus figuring prominently in many of Tere's erotic exploits. This contributed much to their amusement and thereby to my bemusement as well. Awareness of some new studies on the historical-Jesus, in which sexual associations are given a psychological twist that could relate to the trickster imagery, could not lead closer to my host's mindset either, as the psychoanalytic framework of that hermeneutics could hardly have been behind his enigmatic question.

By early morning, when I was to offer some reply, I realized that two points had to be taken into account. Firstly, the *makonji* valued highly the religion of the priest and nun, who visited the village regularly with medical and other services, and on whose behest he had bidden me welcome. Second, he knew of their preaching about the holy man Jesus, who ascended into heaven but was believed to be involved in people's life. So if the white man's belief in that Jesus had a parallel in the hilarious Tere tales, there was no reason to treat his enigmatic question as phony or seeking a scandal. Thus, I had come to the conclusion that the suggested identity of Jesus and Tere was to be viewed in terms of the mediation that religion means to offer. But provisionally I wagered on the fact that my host valued the schooling of his son with its stress on written records. While aware of the risky argument, I stressed the historical records showing that Jesus actually lived on earth, whereas nothing of the sort could be said of Tere.

While my host considered this point convincing and left the issue to rest, the reply obviously failed to answer the question. In fact, it rather exposed the true quandary of the mediation. Not only did the written reports on the historical Jesus—whatever their reliability—ignore any point of identity with Tere, but numerous questions about Christianity's scriptural base made Girard expose far-reaching questions we must briefly consider. The issue of writing has been a philosophical topic ever since Plato's Socratic dialogue *The Phaedros* quoted the Egyptian myth on Teuth, implying that written texts as mnemonic aids carried a threat to people's mental abilities by making them lazy. More importantly, Western philosophy has repeatedly stressed the dangerous abuse of (religious) texts by those in power to establish authority and

enforce submission, turning writing into a *pharmakon*, a poisonous medicine that deceptively promises delivery and salvation. While Plato's argument was about the ambiguous effects of writing on man's mnemonic capacity, Derrida has more recently related it to the double quandary of a metaphysical rationality linked to legal authority and to the enslaving effects, rightly lambasted not only by such recent critics as Nietzsche and Freud, but already by St. Paul's letters, in line with old prophetic critique. The writing in biblical tradition, which had developed from the divinely sanctioned law, Paul controversially viewed as a cause of sin and death, as he contrasted it with the faith that was in Jesus bringing freedom and reconciliation (*hilasterion*). Reflecting on this, Girard has pointed out that the Nietzschean and Freudian critique of the enslaving effect of Christian scriptures is beside the point and fails to grasp the true portent of the Gospel.⁸ But even this leaves us with a question.

By making historic documents the differentiating factor between Jesus and Tere, I slid into the very quandary of the (post-)colonial setting. Not only was documentary writing the hallmark of the sacrificial order that Girard discerned as being targeted by the Bible's prophetic critique culminating in Christ's Gospel, but the (post-)colonial conditions had deepened this quandary. Indeed, ever-returning mimetic crises and social tensions are counteracted by sacrificial acts that victimize scapegoats on the basis of fixed criteria believed to be absolutes. While the Banda, no doubt, also use this universal means of settling disputes, by blaming individuals who are unable to defend themselves, their tools of doing so have been greatly boosted by the use of fixed documentation. So, with regard to the oral tradition of trickster stories, I wondered whether they might contain the prophetic kind of critique and awareness of what the biblical exegesis had discovered to be the linguistic link between the reconciliatory sacrifice named *hilasterion* and the social hilarity, due to their common etymological link with *hileoos* (meaning: joyous, satisfied).⁹ Their common play on the "as-if" deserves investigating. But for now, we must accept that my option of opposing Jesus' historically documented life to Tere's imaginary status was a spurious trail, as it postulated an imaginary absolute founded on a historical contingency.¹⁰

Urged to analyze the place of Tere in Banda social-religious life, we remain intrigued by the idea that Christ's historical role was associated with the *hilasterion*, being the sacrifice that cheers up (*hileoos*). How is any enjoyable effect of the sacrifice to be related to hilarity at the storytelling about joker Tere? While examining this mythic figure, we note that sacrificial ceremonies are few and quite sober in Banda society. The killing of a fowl at whatever ritual site may be preceded by palpable tension and be followed by a relief and joviality at the meal that usually follows, but I have never observed such a sacrifice being

directly followed by a hilarious storytelling. Let us, therefore, briefly analyze the Banda society with the pivotal role of its kinship rules and religious traditions, to place trickster Tere within that scheme.

THE JOVIAL ASIDE

The Banda ethnic group forms a very loose agglomeration of patrilineal clans living in small units spread over thousands of square miles of sparsely populated wooded savannah, between North Cameroon and West Sudan, mainly north of the Ubangi confluent of the Congo river. The language is their main connecting factor, but the dialects differ greatly, often reducing the intercomprehension to less than 40%. Tonal registers are linguistically more important than articulation, making drum communication in the savannah quite effective, even between the dialects. Their well-articulated kinship rules, reflected in their storytelling, songs, and dances, form another binding factor, together with a common economic base of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle joined to small slash-and-burn horticulture. Communication by slit drums marks both the desire for independence and a profound sense of togetherness. Since these drums transmit important events such as deaths, ritual inaugurations of newly carved ones are big events that are placed under the auspices of the ancestors, represented by a young, not yet initiated child.

Subsequent to the welcoming session, these drums made me discover a basic paradox of the Banda social order. The dominant, large and low-pitched drum was indicated as the female one (*èyí*), whereas the high-pitched ones were called male. The female or mother, *èyí*, is the word used for anything big, useful, or superior, designating even ownership and mastership. Given their patrilineal order, this obviously puzzled me. But my informer was surprised to see me bemused, and asked, "Didn't I feel the life vibrating in my belly at the big drum's low pitch?" The term *èyí* expresses what makes a thing function and be productive, its maternal fertility. The owner of a hunting net is its *èyí*, and a smith is the *èyí* of the smithy (*ndawo*, house of fire). I was the *èyí* of my bike, and if I had two bikes, the bigger one was *èyíne*, the female, the superior one. I felt mystified by this curious deviation from what is a rather universal way of males marking superiority over women, certainly in patrilineal conditions like the Banda?"

This peculiar role of the term *èyí* (mother, female, master) marks a perspective on reality, rooted in a kinship structure, which holds other surprising aspects, while creating a strikingly transparent order in a society without overarching power structures. The Banda system of kinship terms is simple and

quite distinct. Where other peoples typically have between twenty and sixty or more of such terms, the Banda use just three sets of five terms. Only one of these sets consists of nonreciprocal terms and appears to apply to a nuclear family (father, mother, husband, wife, child). However, we must note that any Banda kinship term is classificatory in the sense of designating a whole class of people. Thus, “father” also refers to all men whom the actual father calls a “brother” (*aye*). Similarly, even “wife” and “husband” are classificatory and this applies in a special sense to the two sets of the reciprocal terms. One of these sets indicates consanguinity and the other affinity. The term *àtā* for grandparents is reciprocal and thus also applies to the grandchildren. The same applies for brothers and sisters, addressing each other by the same term *kòbá*, while siblings of the same sex address each other by the reciprocal term *aye*. In these pages we focus on a particular one of these reciprocal terms, *è’ú*, which designates the bond between a man and his sister’s children (m/f). This term figures prominently in the trickster stories, since Tere is the proverbial uncle/nephew, who invariantly uses and abuses the rules and privileges pertaining to this special *è’ú* bond. The term is indeed the epitome of all nonhierarchical relations, be they of age or other grading.¹²

To locate the two pivotal terms of *èyí* and *è’ú*, and their religious connotations, in the Banda mental landscape, we must first consider the dominant patrilineal order and its economic and political base. Before French colonial occupation, the Banda subsistence economy of hunting and fishing mixed with slash-and-burn cultivation of sorghum and vegetables knew only a rudimentary monetary system of cowry shells for the exchange at weddings or to settle feuds. Additionally, there were some fowl in most homesteads, which also served for the settling of such deals, mostly by way of a sacrifice. A valuable source of protein was the yearly flight of edible termites. This type of economy urged regular shifts of hamlets moving through the savannah. Centered around the altar of the paternal ancestors, each hamlet had a patrilineal claim to the surrounding fields. Theft of produce or equipment was a serious offense, on a par with witchcraft and even murder. Real estate rules were rather fluid. So were political structures of authority. The elders of the clan’s patrilineal homesteads formed a council and, if need be, a court. But conflicts usually translated into witchcraft litigations that were settled by oracles, comparable to what Evans-Pritchard famously described for Azande-society.¹³

Two external forces have caused the segmentary patrilineal order to become more centralized. The relentless slaving raids by Arab bands from the Sudan, active even up to the present, occasioned the emergence of a temporary military leadership, which sometimes confronted the colonial armies as well.

Next, the colonial authorities constructed roads and forced hamlets to move and settle along them, to start cultivating cotton, pay taxes, and submit to chiefs, created to oversee this innovation. Although this rigidified the ancient patrilineal order, it did not wipe out the basic ambiguity. Each person belongs to the father's clan, but children born out of wedlock belong to the woman's paternal group. At her wedding a woman typically joins her man's homestead, which consists of mud-and-thatch houses built for each of the incoming wives. But the woman remains a member of her clan. A house is the woman's domain, as is also the area just behind it, where even the husband is not supposed to tread. Until their initiation, both girls and boys are deemed part of the patrilineal ancestors' world and may represent them to bless events such as the carving of new drums or the inauguration of an oven for melting iron ore.

The initiation (*gànzà*) intends to change the children's androgynous state and prepare them for a procreating clan membership. It is done by a surgical operation on what is alleged to block it by removing the other sex's remainder (prepuce and clitoris). Separate for boys and girls, the ceremonies carry also an ambiguous message. While they make the youngsters full-fledged members of their patriclan, they also impose a strict duty to view their co-initiates along the informal *è'ú* line that marks the link to a maternal uncle. Both boys and girls will soon receive their patriclan's protective emblem (*yéwò*), but will also at some other time get a protective ring (*lingú*) from their mother, which only girls will pass on to their offspring. Several such rituals make it clear that the dominant paternal domain has to accommodate a parallel world of the mother (*èyí*), so much so that the deity protecting the female emblem, the *èyílingú*, is often identified with the Christian God, even though the latter is known as God the Father.

Despite the constant references to the maternal world by the use of the term *èyí* to designate ownership, the feminine notion of the house *àndà*, and transcendence of *èyílingú*, the Banda mental scenery and sense of solidarity are strictly patrilineal. The symbols and rituals that stress the patrilineal grip on daily life are manifold. This is not the place to attempt an inventory of the means by which the patriclan ensures its grip on all members, running from offerings at the ancestral altar in the center of the hamlet to the food taboos and scarifications. Solidarity is segmentary, meaning that helping in house building, in harvesting and storing the crop, and in facing conflicts or attacks is expected from those nearest to one's paternal descent line. Yet this patriclan's grip on the members is also limited by the savannah's special conditions that facilitate parting in search of a new location, whenever internal pressures become unbearable.

Patrilineal solidarity is felt especially at events like the outdooring of a baby, the initiation, the wedding, and in the case of mishaps, disease, or death. A few days after birth a baby is brought out into the central space of the hamlet, thereby passing from the maternal to the paternal domain. This passage will be completed years later by the most spectacular of all rites, the *gànzà* initiation, when the child will leave not only the ancestral domain, but dramatically also the maternal realm of influence, to enter totally into the responsibility of the clan. This is cut into the flesh by a surgical removal of the remnants of the rival sex. Completing what may count as the universal psychosocial drama of any child's departure from the womb and the weaning from maternal care, the *gànzà* ceremony of ritual transition to the paternal realm is quite dramatic. Less spectacular than for the boys, the *gànzà* ceremony for girls, while festive too, is very ambiguous and painful, as it marks them to become the group's link to another clan, for whom they will bear offspring, in a servile position that is basically contradicted.

Boys go to a *gànzà* seclusion to undergo not just a painful and potentially fatal operation, but also a symbolic death so as to emerge from the ancestral home as an adult clan member. This will be completed only by their first killing of a hunting prey. *Gànzà* songs speak of a second birth amid the flow of blood, as if the maternal primacy is annulled and replaced by the circumciser. At this rite the boys' mothers and sisters are to stay aloof and sing dirges, as if at a funeral. The separation gets another ritual twist at marriage, when the young man is to fetch a wife from a distant exogamous clan across the dangerous savannah, and finally at the birth of his own child. The rituals of these events suggest a radical option for the patrilineal order and a brutal sidelining of the maternal. Yet this emotional drama leaves a perplexing imagery of a male attempt to compensate "natural inferiority," an "as-if," rooted in a *méconnaissance* of the subdued truth, as if it were a structural recompense in ritual and mythical mode.¹⁴

The patrilineal identity and solidarity capture people patently during the frequent consultation of oracles. When mishaps raise fears of witchcraft, the prime suspects invariably are expected to be the in-laws of the patriclan. Since women remain members of their own patriclan, their brothers will monitor closely how they are treated, leading to suspicions of witchcraft more often than not. Like the Azande, the Banda think of witchcraft as a largely unconscious action of an internal organ near the bile. This allows one's mind to go out and wreak havoc, if one is provoked by an adverse and unkind behavior. Whatever the techniques used to examine this crime, in Girardian perception, the oracles are outspoken cases of scapegoating, shaded by the veiled conviction that the culprit is condemned for a crime that basically is unconscious and also provoked.

While this witchcraft belief causes tensions between the patrilineal groups, it is thus known to rest on an "as-if" that may easily backfire in various ways. The suspicion of witchcraft is typically about daily worries and conflicts. Because the capacity to act as a witch is inborn from birth and may lay dormant unless provoked, the first one to be blamed should, in fact, be the person stricken, or some kinsmen. But since this would sow discord within the clan, the blame is projected outside. The oracles focus on the in-laws, thereby placing women in an awkward position. But they put the patrilineal relations under strain as well, making the scenes of witch-hunting a most divisive feature in Banda society.

This divisive role of oracles in the kinship order takes us indirectly back to the question about Tere, the hilarious and avuncular figure. The ambiguity surrounding witchcraft accusations, subconsciously known to be the outcome of previous provocations, often creates animosity between paternal and maternal links. To find your father's kin accusing a maternal relative is a rather traumatic experience, which not only occurs frequently but is also structurally built into Banda social order, where the in-laws are the first suspects. The violent rivalry Girard describes notably in the ninth chapter of his *La Violence et le sacré*¹⁵ is typical of the painful clashes between patrilineal relations and the *è'ù* bond of uncles with their sister's children. Yet the maternal group that is always suspected by your paternal kinsmen actually offers you a haven of kindness free from whatever restrictions. It is this jovial *è'ù* subterfuge that indeed features in numerous Tere adventures.

Girard has famously commented on Levi-Strauss's study of elementary kinship structures that highlights the so-called atom of kinship, opposing the brother-sister relationship to the marital bond, and comparing paternity to the avuncular bond. Although this structuralist approach has often been accused of being too exclusively male-focused and failing to account for the primacy of the mother-child relation, Girard rather targeted a more basic flaw. He praises the choice of viewing the marital exchange mechanism as the motor of the kinship systems, but points out that this is not a matter of irenic social contracts, but rather part of the dramatic response to an original mimetic crisis. Among Girardians, Lucien Scubla and Martha Reinecke have fittingly called for a more explicit application of his views to the gender issues. Their shared critique of the structuralist approach seems well focused within Banda context, where the quandary of the systematic tension strikingly surfaces as an "as-if" that finds its outlet in storytelling with a huge array of songs, dances, and comic gestures. But what is one to say of the outlandish proposal of identifying the avuncular Tere with the Christ?

EQUIPOISING THE PATERNAL

The *gànzà* initiation is arguably the summit of patrilineal rituals, with a massive display of symbols, songs, and an impressive display of horn orchestras. Yet an avuncular logic invades even the heart of this event, as the *gànzà* initiates are told to treat the co-initiates not so much as brothers but as *è'ú*, because “they have shed blood together.” In this respect they are assimilated to people who enter into a “blood pact” (*mbükü*), often incorrectly termed blood brotherhood.¹⁶ The logic of the reciprocal *è'ú* relationship is the very opposite of the strict rules that govern lineage discipline and is immune to any suspicion of witchcraft. The *è'ú* relation between a man and his sister’s children is totally relaxed, joyous, and without any restriction, ignoring notably all ownership rules. Actually, there are strict rules to exclude anything that might cause tension. An uncle may call his niece a beloved wife, while sexual intercourse is prohibited. Whole clans or even tribes may contract blood pacts and become like *è'ú* to each other. It means that marital exchanges are excluded between them, even if erotic joking is quite normal. As a corrective to the dominant model, anything goes in such *è'ú*-type relationships. That is how Tere is also perceived, as one who challenges the usual order. Yet on the other hand, he characteristically faces defeat, time and again, only to restart the same in the following tale.

With the fear of witchcraft pervading Banda daily life (as in many other parts of Africa), we need to draw a brief sketch of the mental landscape of the youngsters who, at their paternal ancestors’ behest, are to descend from the transcendental mother (*èyílingú*) to come and play an adult role in the patri-clan. Their social scenery is structured around four centers stretched between two extremes. The coordinates of the earthly maternal and paternal domains mark all occasions where stress arises due to mishaps, deemed to be caused either by malevolent spirits or, more scarily, by witchcraft attacks that originate within their direct ambience. We first note the authority of the paternal order and the muted rivalry between the clan brothers, as the two-pole patrilineal center of their mindset; next there is, on the one side, the in-law group offering a partner that allows them to engender offspring, and on the other side, we find the maternal kin, offering them a link to the protective *èyílingú*. The latter, summarized in the avuncular symbol of *è'ú*, represents joyous liberty, whereas the opposite in-law (*mbeya*) is clouded by suspicion of malevolence.

The Banda have various means of protecting against witchcraft, most of which are assimilated with the avuncular link. In extreme cases a person may even change identity radically, by choosing adoption (*mbala*). Space does not permit us to explore the intricate rituals surrounding the strategies to cope with

these threats, which pervade Banda life without, though, rendering it gloomy or morose. In fact, since witchcraft is believed to be triggered by provocations, some elderly persons may even deliberately pose as witches to bid for respect. Grudges that grow within this complex lacework mostly show a male–female dimension, which typically also marks the Banda's perception of time and space.¹⁷ Among the institutions symbolically linked to the *é'ú* pole and deserving a special mention there is also the blood pact (*mbükü*), offering a typical safe haven in this wide savannah, where the small units spread far and wide for ecological reasons, because the limited resources make distancing necessary. With the critical in-laws lining up on one side of the patriclan's core and the benevolent maternal *é'ú* group on the other, we see the latter further expanded by such artificial units that may or may not have religious attachments. There are groups that surround a deity and its priest, who may be a person that fell sick and recovered after obeying an oracle ordering some sacrifice or taboo observance to honor the deity or a spirit of natural feats, such as a rainbow or a rare event.¹⁸ Social groups that gather around such a deity follow a pattern of total relaxation, free of any rivalry, backbiting, or witchcraft concern, comparable to *é'ú* kinship, and to all groups based on ritual initiations. Among these, a blood pact (*mbükü*) is the most open form, imposing unreserved assistance. These pacts may be contracted between entire clans or just individuals. It even happens that a husband and wife enter into such a blood pact to promise enduring fidelity. Any rivalry is frowned upon and subject to harsh penalties, spelled out during the blood ritual. Such bonds actually enable life in the wide savannah, where absence from home occurs regularly, and hospitality is often lifesaving.

These various forms of bonding modeled on *é'ú* kinship are reminiscent of the adventures of the avuncular hero *par excellence* Tere, who endlessly tries out variants of the freedoms they imply. Although often dubbed joking relations (*plaisanterie*), structurally they involve more than carefree enjoyment.¹⁹ When blood pacts are contracted or someone is initiated into a religious group, warnings and curses are pronounced against any infidelity, stating that mishaps may befall the family or patriclan as well. Jokes point at the conjugal and patrilineal duties and customs and make fun of tensions that ensue from them. Labeling this a cathartic purification, G. Calame-Griaule explains that laughter and fun within such groups are as water and oil cleaning a person's organs, implying that this removes the tensions incurred in lineage life.²⁰ As observed on my first evening at Wademi, a cathartic relief from tension and rivalry is sought after in that figure of Tere. Simultaneous assertion and an undermining of the social order blend in theatrical ways. This makes the question about Tere and Christ

an intriguing one that I wish to examine with reference to Girard's view on mimetic tension and its remedy.

INSTITUTIONALIZED MÉCONNAISSANCE

The logically well-balanced set of Banda kinship terms and corresponding social roles cannot hide the underlying and often puzzling contradictions. What is one to say of a patrilineal setup, rich with copious signals to back up its logic, which nonetheless chooses to use the word *èyí* (for "mother" and by extension "female") as the epithet of mastership, superiority, and ownership? Calling the smith a "mother" of the "house of fire" (*ndawo*) beset with taboos urging women to stay aloof cannot but strike as a schizophrenic option, notably since these types of contradictions are rife across the board. This shows an institutionalized will to bluntly ignore a tension that is hardly hidden, even outspoken, yet slickly rationalized. It jauntily covers up a collective choice to hide the social lie that pervades the entire kinship structure, however well-ordered and limpid it may seem. Its simple system of three times five terms built around the marital exchange apparently supports the structuralist thesis of a society rooted in the basic will to exchange. But that cannot prevent Girard's pointed critique that a repressed violence lies at the structure's very roots. What Girard has exposed as prime *méconnaissance* is written all over its setup, as it ignores the violent truth, which all know about ever since their initiation.

Apart from the use of *èyí* in a patrilineal setting, numerous signifiers of this misrecognition straddle the social scenery. For outsiders they are glaring. The male priest of the patriclan's protective spirit *yewo* coming to bless initiated youngsters is called the *èyíyewo*, "mother" of the *yewo*, whereas the maternal protective spirit *lingú*, transmitted in female line and invoked on children in danger, has no priestess. Actually, *èyílingú* is the spirit itself, considered as the supreme divinity. Even more puzzling is the link between brother and sister. While same-sex siblings are often rivals, they call one another *aye*; meanwhile, brother and sister are *kóbá* to each other. Yet the former relates to the verb *yí*, to love or to link, while the latter is akin to the verb *ko*, to cut. The separation at marriage cuts the brother-sister relation, thus gainsaying the enduring emotive bond between them. The violence of such an institutional separation is painfully and ritually expressed in the surgical *gànzà* initiation, when, to finalize their exit from the ancestral home and transcendent mother and to start their sexualized role, the boy and girl are surgically deprived of the physical sign of the other gender in an ambivalent, both joyful and sad, ceremony.

Their sexualized social role is to be played out between the two opposite poles of the in-law clan (*mbeya*), always the first to be suspected of witchcraft whenever mishaps occur and, on the other hand, the maternal group (*é'ú*), symbol of total freedom and carefree bliss. Although everything oscillates between these opposites, life under the paternal authority and within the fraternal setting seemingly exudes a happy ignorance of such tensions. The suave surface of village life may owe its apparent tranquility exactly to the indifference or immunity to these barely hidden paradoxes that pervade the social order. People deal gently with neighbors they know to have been caught in the ugly crime of witchcraft, or who even denounced themselves to be a witch, due to the basic belief that people may be unaware of their witch potential and only activate it if they are provoked by aggression, either consciously or unawares.

Although this belief offers a safe security against mishaps, if one's conduct is blameless, life proves to be quite different. And here enters the large array of protective means modeled on the *é'ú* bond of a man with his sister's offspring, to ensure relief from those threats. Structurally, these escape routes counterbalance the threats from the in-laws (*mbèya*), but basically they are a relief from their own clan pressures. And this unveils a further contradiction. The escape institutions that offer relief, be they the mother's kin, co-initiates, or blood pact groups, are themselves bound by their own patrilineal limits. The societal codes, therefore, can be circumvented for only so long, offering only a limited vent. There is no matrilineal alternative, as the hilarious failures of Tere's adventures make amusingly clear.

This structural outlet is essential, given the backdrop of the dramatic event that marks each person's existence and is embodied in the kinship order. The mental landscape is characterized by the dramatic imagery of an idealized existence to precede the violent *gànzà* initiation. I briefly recall two signs of this imagery. At important events such as the carving of new master drums, the blessing of the ancestors is symbolized by an uncircumcised child, specially adorned with a ribbon. It may be either a boy or a girl, since they are as yet undifferentiated before the *gànzà* operation that sexualizes them by removing the sign of the other sex. A second element we find in the kinship terms themselves. In the set of nonreciprocal terms, the term for child (*ègbèlè*) is without sex differentiation.²¹ Among the reciprocal terms the same occurs with the word *átà*, by which grandparents and grandchildren call each other without sexual differences, creating a most relaxed bonding linking a child to its forebears.

What emerges from the logic of Banda societal rules and imageries is the tension of a prebirth condition that must be disrupted for a sexualized role in the exogamous patrilan. This overrules the maternal preeminence and

oscillates between the two extremes of suspicion and indulgence. The latter, typically, finds its outlet in the Tere stories, expressing the mental freedom of *è'ú* relations, which remains under the scrutiny of the reality principle, however, calling the hero to task and making him a flauter, over and again.

THE ENIGMATIC SET OF PARADOXES

To a superficial observer, Banda society may seem a bunch of willfully ignored contradictions. To call a superior or leading figure *èyínè* (the mother), while sternly keeping to patrilineal rules, suggests either an abortive bilinearity or some structural schizophrenia. But apart from the passing of the protective *lingú* ring in matrilineal line, there is no hint of bilinearity or two separate lines. Girls are members of their father's clan, follow its taboos (*mara*), and receive protection from its clan spirit (*yewo*). So the question arises, what is one to make of that linguistic role of *èyí* throughout daily life? If a modern hunter possessing two guns asks his son to fetch *èyínè*, he means the bigger gun, not his mother. While this use of *èyínè* sounds perfectly logical to Banda ears, outsiders are surprised to see a wizard being called *èyíòndrò*, and the male priest of a protective female spirit fighting it, the *èyí* of the deity. In the circle of a homestead, each house is constructed for one of the wives, while the man usually has none of his own. Still, when asking for the *èyí* of a certain house, one is commonly directed to the husband, rather than to the wife who occupies it.

A striking tension also affects those using the reciprocal term *àyè*. In domestic jobs and in the field they help each other. Brothers build collectively the house for their newly wed brother's wife. Sisters also help in making vegetal salt and brewing beer together. Strict solidarity is a law and, as mentioned, the term *àyè* is akin to *yí* (to love or bind). Yet rivalry is never far away, notably if the siblings hail from different mothers, often acting as rivals in polygamous homes. The term *àyè*, therefore, is far from synonymous to affective love. By contrast, the equally reciprocal term *kòbá* for brother and sister (or cousins of opposite sex), which is akin to the verb *ko* (to cut), lacks any negative overtone. Marriage will cut the two *àkòbá* apart, but their bond will endure, whatever the term *kòbá* may suggest.

A third amazing paradox is in the matrimonial sphere. We saw that children stay "asexually" linked to the ancestral domain until the *gànzà* ritual stops their androgynous life, making them enter reproductive life via the surgical operation.²² While they start this life geared toward a wedding with a distant partner, the enduring *kòbá* link of brother and sister and the structural suspicion of the

in-laws to be witches suggest an almost schizophrenic perception of life. This implies that both enter a marital bond carrying a fatal danger that may be triggered by adverse actions of any clan member, meaning that one's own patrilineal roots are beset by an existential insecurity, for which the *é'ú*—the maternal bond and associated artificial links—form a relief.²³ Moreover, we recall that the threat of witchcraft is internally contradicted, as a witch is believed to remain calm, unless provoked, typically by the victim or clan relatives.

The support people seek from the avuncular and associate relations is manifold. It happens that adversities multiply and a person appears targeted by inimical acts of witches provoked by his kinfolk to the extent that he has to resort to adoption (*mbàlà*), because protection from maternal kin or associates of a blood pact (*mbükü*) is insufficient. The person will give up his clan membership and is ritually integrated by the adopter's (*èyimbàlà*), an adopter who, together with his entire clan, will henceforth act as a reliable *é'ú*. Such arrangements indicate a social pattern consisting of a dangerous if not violently dominant realm that is counterbalanced by mental and social refuges, as escape routes that imply a constant logic of "as-if."

AVUNCULAR HILARITY

By their contents and entertainment role, the Tere trickster stories both undermine and yet confirm the social order of Banda society. The *makonji* acted as the official host, when he welcomed the white scholar by staging an evening of entertainment that allowed the villagers by song, dance, and scabrous stories to identify with Tere, firing farcical arrows at the rigid rules of daily life. But, given that setting, what is one to make of his question about the identity of Tere and Christ? Was it to express subversion or rather endorsement of the official order? Given Tere's avuncular position in the Banda context, both readings were possible, bringing to mind the main criticism of my Parisian tutors, reacting notably to the last chapter of his 1972 book, where Girard describes the universality of all rites and myths rooting in a similar sacrificial scapegoat mechanism. So, can we relate Tere's adventures to that chapter's lead example of the Brazilian Tupinamba's cannibalistic ritual in which a prisoner is made to cheerfully integrate into the village life, only to be subsequently sacrificed and consumed after a brutal process of dehumanization? Are the boisterous jeers at Tere's failures of the same sacrificial kind? They comically use the same formula of applauding his *é'ú*-type liberties and social infringements, next to be followed by ugly botches earning him commiserations. The Girardian scheme arguably fits these

stories, taken as myths covering up the hero's murder. But who is the victim? Tere's own clumsy tricks comprise untenable and often cruel crimes, and his unashamed scapegoating of various targets is adjudged by a pitiful downfall. He is disowned for rude demeanor. Thus, there is a doubling of the victim, which might seem to contradict what Girard holds to be the core of myths as a justification of society's scapegoat mechanism. The laughter deriding Tere's clumsy breaches of the social rules thus adds a second dimension. They admonish and rebuke the beloved *é'ú* for his rude violation of what anyone knows to be decent behavior. What sort of hilarity does this imply?

Tere's fiasco tends to get an ambivalent applause. While it confirms the social order he sought to challenge, the hilarity purveys regret and a collective feeling that the beloved *é'ú* deserved a better lot, since his dodging of the harsh social limits is the entire audience's hidden *é'ú* dream. It means that the audience is sucked into the hero's indecent yet hilarious adventures. Keeping in mind Bergson's study on the social role of laughter, the question of the identity of Tere and the saving Christ now asks the question of how the catalytic hilarity of the storytelling relates to the evangelical notion of redemptive "reconciliation."

Given that the *makonji* was not pondering theological subtleties, we shouldn't engage in a debate on reconciliatory salvation. Yet we may wonder whether he didn't see some parallel between the joyous singing at the missionary church and his congenial welcoming session. What is one to say of their common hilarity and the biblical notion of saving sacrifice, which the 70 authorized Greek translators rendered as *hilasterion*? Was Tere sacrificed by the nocturnal audience, and was that akin to what church hymns cheerfully celebrate? The question seems appropriate, even if the Indo-European etymology of the Greek *hilasterion* has no place in Central Africa. The famous Kittel dictionary of biblical Greek stresses that the word *hilasterion*, which the Septuagint uses to translate the Hebrew propitiatory sacrifice *kpr*, is etymologically related to *hileos* (joyous, content, glad).²⁴ In popular understanding this refers to sacrifices that pacify God's wrath caused by human sins following the original Fall in Eden. But Girard adamantly rejects this "one-sided" vision. After having originally backed the reading of the Eden event in Genesis 3 as a case of human rivalry with God, the lucid chapter 9 of his work on Satan falling as lightning explicitly states that the social order is the true focus of that episode.

However, if the joyful rallies at storytelling and church services share some appearance, can the gleeful laughter at Tere's mishaps be truly what the biblical notion of reconciliation intends? Is the avuncular relaxation and perky hilarity what atonement pursues? Storytelling sessions, in complex ways, actually confirm the Banda social setup via what Girard pictures as myth's main function.

While Tere typically tackles others, in breach of many social regulations, he tends to get himself into trouble and pitifully falls victim to his own devices. The performance of such stories, songs, and gestures at the *makonji's* place to welcome a guest about to study their traditions couldn't fail, therefore, to carry an ambiguous confirmation of the official rules. As the sacrificial side of the event was hard to ignore, the question about the identity of Tere and Christ pointed to a fundamental issue. Whom does the hilariously cheering audience actually sacrifice? Is it the beloved *è'ú* himself? But if so, given the reciprocal side of the *è'ú* relationship, the stories imply an amusing form of self-immolation, a mocking of one's own frustrated desires for freedom. What is this symbol of an avuncular safe haven, ridiculed and sent off into the stellar heavens as Orion, only to reappear at the click of a finger to make fun of the social order once again, sardonically poking his phallus to what thwarts the audience's desires and designs? Was my host actually asking if Tere was a self-immolating *hilasterion*, in the way the church community speaks of Christ?

THE MIRTHFUL OR EVASIVE "AS-IF"

The analysis of Banda society revealed a willful denial of various paradoxes. It recalls the sacrificial practices' gleeful denial of their killings to be murders, declaring them rather to be a joyful deliverance.²⁵ This is as if Tere sat overhead as stellar Orion willfully ignoring the painful injustices, such as the deceitful use of the terms *èyí* and *kòbá*, the clan identity being cut into the *gànzà's* flesh and carved as facial scars, the weird witchcraft ploy, the many *è'ú*-type counterbalances, and similar arrangements, all pivoting on a basic "as-if," which is carefully hidden from sight, but regularly exposed via trickster Tere. The willful denial, however, never prevents the rules from counting as anything but a farce, as they seem curiously strengthened by this hidden challenge. What Girard labels *méconnaissance* appears to be the engine of the system and its actual fuel, with Tere acting as its joking charioteer.²⁶

Each of these cases of "as-if" may be said to involve a sacrificial move that favors the ruling patrilineal order and its marital exchange system to ensure the clan's reproduction. As men closely monitor how their sister (*kòbá*) is treated by her husband, while giving favors to her offspring (*è'ú*), the patrilineal interest obliges them to curtail such affective leanings. And in contrast to the linguistic prominence of the term *èyí* (mother/female/owner/superior), the mothers' position is far from dominant. After their children have gone through the *gànzà* ritual, the maternal role is much reduced. In fact, a widowed woman may lose

her house and be forced to join her father's clan and brother's homestead for livelihood. The "as-if" behind the basic paradoxes hides a rather callous, let us say, sacrificial slant that is not only edged against the in-laws as suspects of witchcraft, but notably against the women, despite their recognized claim to being society's ultimate foundation. The joker-like Tere and all *è'ù*-modeled social institutions function jovially in an ideological way to cover up these hidden sacrificial schemes. A subdued "as-if," or substitution, pervades the system, with joker Tere formally presiding from his stellar position in Orion on high, while the miserable role of Tere's wife and the virtual absence of his sister in the stories epitomize this quite puzzling contradiction in Banda life.

These observations steered my reading of the *makonji's* question as my research advanced. What may seem a liturgical similarity between the Tere storytelling and the church services, with their singing and uplifting Jesus stories, might perhaps have inspired my host's question about both heroes, but the mirthful hilarity connecting them called for a scrutiny in Girardian terms. The evasive, sacrificial patterns, which Tere stories ridicule yet merrily confirm, clearly imply what Girard dubs a *méconnaissance*, a willful denial of an underlying violence. But if so, Girard's claim that Christ's Gospel unmasks this makes my host's query about hilarious Tere a true quandary, given that the Christian liturgical ritual is called *hilasterion*, meaning a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the joyful reconciliation and liberating beatitude. Are both joyful and sacrificial in the same sense? And is there a similar obfuscating at work in both cases?

Space does not permit me to analyze Banda structures any further. But some aspects of the data just described deserve to be compared to their counterpart in the biblical message. The sacrificial role of several customs, while not unknown, is facetiously ignored. This reminds us of two pivotal texts of St. Paul's letters in relation to what Girard names Christ's prophetic anti-scapegoating message. As mentioned before, in Romans 3:25 Paul calls Jesus the *hilasterion* bringing the joy of redemption and reconciliation in his blood. This is undoubtedly Paul's basic understanding of Jesus' place in the plan of salvation and corresponds with the *Letter to the Hebrews*, which initially caused Girard serious hermeneutical difficulty but came to figure prominently in his reading of the Gospel's message. Prior to this text, however, in 1 Corinthians 7:29ff, Paul terms the new existence in this joyous faith an "as-if," suggesting a basic and willful *méconnaissance*. Should we read this "as-if" or "as though not" in the sacrificial mode similar to what appeared in the preceding discussion as the Banda type of *méconnaissance*? In other words, how does Tere's obfuscating role relate to Christ's mediation according to Paul?

MÉCONNAISSANCE REVISITED

Paul's description, in Romans 3:25, of the crucified Jesus as reconciling sacrifice or *hilasterion* is the boldest statement imaginable for him as a Pharisee, with its echo in *Hebrews* claiming that Christ's death is the final and all-surpassing sacrifice, as Girard eventually confirmed.²⁷ It seems well established that Paul's metaphor refers directly to the central atonement ritual of *Yom Kippur* as described in Leviticus 16:13–15.²⁸ But Girard repeatedly stresses that the ritual's purpose tends to be mistakenly read as aiming to change God's mood, rather than mankind's return to God's initial design, precisely by a rejection of victimizing practices. Reconciliation basically means that humans find blissful joy in complying with that initial plan, or as Girard defines it, by abandoning the fatal path of mimetic rivalry. By admitting that an excessive focus on the violent side of sacrifice needed nuancing with the idea of Christ's self-offering gift, Girard also foresaw additional alterations that bring us to Paul's second text, of 1 Corinthians 7:29ff. The etymological link of *hilasterion* to the Greek *hileos* and the very notion of hilarity remind us that cheerful happiness is the true aim and focus on the present life rather than on the hereafter. When Girard stresses Christ's victory over mimetic enmity, he clearly also intends to refute the idea that the coming Kingdom is primarily to do with some remote hereafter. The saving bliss or hilarious reconciliation is meant for the present life, as it was ever since the paradisiac Eden.

The enigmatic text of 1 Corinthians 7:29ff, advocating an evasive "as if" or "as though not," is mainly read in apocalyptic terms, since Paul spells it out referring to end times. But in Girard's view the evangelic ordinances are primarily, if not solely, focused on matters that concern life in the present state. Jesus' own care for people's well-being gainsays any different conjecture. Paul's idea that the time is running out may no doubt be read in reference to "futuristic" expectations (cf. Rom. 7:2; Ez. 7:12–13) that also figure in the gospels. But the statement on being married "as though not" has always been understood as affecting present life rather than a hereafter, where, in Jesus' words, there will be no "giving in wedlock." We must come back to this, even though here is not the place for an elaborate exegesis of these biblical texts. Still, in line with Girard's vision of the Gospel's radical plea for converting from traditions of covetous rivalry and sacrificial violence, we need to reconsider this in reference to the role of *méconnaissance*, which he perceives as an integral part of culture's response to the mimetic crisis. When, as he argues, the killing of an arbitrary

group member stops the mimetic crisis from escalating and this limited form of violence subsequently develops into a ritual safeguard against all-against-all hecatombs, a hidden “lie” is playing a crucial role. But given that the original crisis returns and goes on—as Girard insists and our brief analysis of the Banda society confirms—the *méconnaissance* of that lie explains why new cases of a scapegoating “as-if” keep occurring on daily basis. This leaves us with the question of how Paul’s “as-if” conceives the Gospel’s conversion and Jesus’ central message, if we put aside the focus on a hereafter.²⁹

In Banda life, we see numerous cases of collective and personal “shying away” from probing insights that reveal the truth about the “original condition,” as Paul Dumouchel names it.³⁰ Although this *méconnaissance* may often hide glaring injustices, it functions well in the social setup, which raises the question of whether there might also be a way of using this human capacity of living with hidden truths in a positive way, without causing such injustices. Does Girard discern an evangelic inversion on this level as well, and could Paul’s letters be hinting at it? That Paul was doing more than giving practical advice for some eminent end and its cosmic turmoil must have been increasingly presumed after the belief in a speedy end dissipated. The Kittel dictionary and most recent studies about Paul’s and John’s views on the transient world (*kosmos*) and era (*ainos*) indicate that they contain advice about more than only time-related affairs. They focus precisely on unjust regulations kept alive by a *méconnaissance* that causes scapegoating. Prominent among them, indeed, are the complex marital rulings constituting the core of most ancient cultures, as is obvious in Banda society, and as still resonates strikingly in the English word “wedlock.” Their biblical warnings seem to contain a specific “as-if” and a modified *méconnaissance*.

By designating the Christ as the *hilasterion*, while referring both to the ancient temple rites and the final times of apocalyptic bliss, the former Pharisee Paul must undoubtedly have heard, in his mind, the invigorating hallelujahs of the pilgrim psalms that were so dear to both Jesus and the first Christians. But the psalms’ sacrificial connotations were soon to take on other overtones, due to the rising anxieties of pious souls during the harsh persecutions, wanting not to fail God’s final test. The eschatological judge soon turned the opposite of an avuncular joker by requesting an ascetic life with its “as though not.” While Girard argues that Jesus unmasked the hateful mechanism of mimetic rivalries, he also admits that there was decreasing evidence of redemptive hilarity. In fact, his final book on Clausewitz is rather prone to signal a variant of the primary *méconnaissance* that rose due to a misreading of Paul’s “as-if.” The sacrificial understanding of Jesus’ saving act as pacification of God’s wrath has drawn

historical furrows that finally lead to a purely utilitarian vision of truth, holding that truth is only what functions.

After Christianity's ritual and intellectual life had focused, for ages, on satisfying the Creator's wrath via sacramental rituals that applied the graces of Christ's ultimate sacrifice to ensure man's passage to the hereafter, a severe backlash had come, primarily against the powers it gave the clerical class. Gradually, all sacraments had turned into a kind of *viaticum*, a rite of safe passage to afterlife, including the priesthood that counted as the administration of those graceful rites. No more. The sacramental matrimony had become a ritual of freeing sexuality from its satanic aspect of carnal sin, and even the Eucharist, which topped and united all these means of salvation, lost its joyful and gracious nature of *hilasterion*, as it came to exclusively focus on the blood of the Lamb shed for human sin.

Most significant, here, is the shift in the notion of punishment for sin. Presuming that the Genesis 3 originary event was basically about a human breach of God's eternal law, there was the idea of a divine penalty involving the earth's disarray and man's eternal sweltering. But this text itself betrayed a hidden lie. Given that the forbidden fruit was named "knowledge of good and evil" and that its eating resulted in differentiation and discrimination, it is obvious that the true evil is in the mutual adjudication that engenders rivalry and abuse of power. Still, the event's outcome was read as God's wrathful penalty, even though the biblical account describes this mainly as sexual conflict, which clearly obfuscates the basic insight in sin's inherent effect. The Satanic idea of Adam's rivalry with God is a basic "as if" lie that made earthly tensions look, not like man's judgmental manipulation of the "knowledge of good and evil," but rather like the wrath of a God, turned into the chief scapegoat. This is not without recalling the Banda paradoxes we recognized as *méconnaissance*, fake denials that result not from intellectual failures but from sacrificial choices with emotional roots. The evangelical undoing of these basic lies requires a conversion of man's mindset, which implies more than just a positive kind of mimetism that urges an amiable imitation of each other's laudable qualities.

FROM IRATE TO GRACIOUS MIMESIS

Challenged by the enigmatic question about the identity of Tere and Jesus, we found, on the one hand, the Banda avuncular hilarity of Tere, whose model lets the society function through the denial of its all-pervading sacrificial logic, and on the other hand, Christians also living by what Girard labels a *méconnaissance*.

The Banda society pivots on the denial of basic insights that Tere gaily seeks to circumvent. That the female (*èyi*) is boss, yet in curtailment, and that the in-laws are presumed guilty of evils that originate near ego self, resemble the Christian age-long abhorrence of God's punitive wrath, which Jesus had to come and still by his self-immolation. If Tere and Jesus both ended up in spectacular failures, in order to grasp their difference we may resort to the "as if" that steered Paul's reading of Jesus as *hilasterion*, a concept that etymologically mediates between the secular notion of a relieved reconciliation and the sacred dimension of God's redemptive act.

The structural denials by which both societies live and function constitute an operative "as if." When in 1 Corinthians 7:29–32 Paul recommends a social application of Christ's salvation by such an "as-if" it sounds to many like feigning while awaiting the imminent end event of the *parousia*. But a closer exegesis reveals a striking affinity with other texts about the new dispensation that arrived in Christ and is yet to be fully revealed. This theme of "already-and-not-yet" relates to a more basic imbrication of a secular and sacred, a horizontal and vertical, dimension. Like Jesus, the sinless servant, who is sent to live the conditions of sin, Paul himself already lives in an "as-if"-situation of "mourning as though not" (see also 2 Cor. 6:8–10). This recalls Jesus' words about the evangelic renewal establishing the divine reign as being both present and yet to come. Girard speaks of an apocalyptic process in the conditions of *katechon*.³¹ In this context, the Paulinian "as-if" means living the earthly conditions while promoting the God's reign, not by denying or neglecting earthly rules, but by counteracting the victimizing and prejudicial mode. It means neither gleefully ignoring social evils, nor expiating them by ritual gestures, but descending into their excruciating pains to let redemption pervade.

To see what this means, let us focus on the marital order. The Paulinian "as-if" accords with the gospel passages that focus on marital and gender conditions. His advice to be married "as though not" recalls Jesus' words on being unwedded for the divine reign (Mt. 22:30), which made a deep impression and were linked to the imagery of a prophetic renewal. It imports to note that Jesus' discussion of the celibate option, like Paul's recommendation, replies to the actual conditions of marital rules and rights. Anthropologists have filled libraries analyzing the often intricate rules of marital exchanges and the settlement of their breaches. What Jesus and Paul propose is a freedom beyond this framework of restrictions, thanks to the kingdom's new conditions. Their advice implies a strategy that both embodies and yet reverses the condition of *méconnaissance*, which in Girard's hypothesis resulted from the sacrificial resolve of the mimetic crisis during the hominization process.

What Girard described as the mimetic crisis halted by a murder that was transformed into the sacrificial scheme has often been associated with the original sin of the Eden story and its usual reading as a breach of God's law by Adam's mimetic craving for divine status. But as we saw, Girard revisited this by stressing that interpersonal human rivalry rather than God's provoked wrath is what the story focuses on. While this makes the gender conflict the pivotal issue, Girard chooses to ignore the description of the story's ugly outcome and the disturbed relations between the two protagonists. The text clearly suggests that this is not so much God's penalty as the sin's very own effect. In this light, the hypothesis on the original crisis calls for some specification as to the murder and the resolution it presumes. Given the primatologists' reports that apes wage combats mostly over sexual rights, Girard's hypothesis may plausibly move slightly closer to Freud's idea of a murder over sexual rivalry. By using Eric Gans's argument that the halting of a runaway crisis presupposes a semeiological input, it may argue that the original victim was one of the sexual pretenders and that a leading female uttered a scream at his death to stop the fight. In line with Girard's idea of bifurcation, one may then assume that the cause of the bloodshed and its beneficial effect were ascribed to two different protagonists. While the killed (male) victim was elevated to divine status, the female got blamed for being the culprit who caused the rivalry in the first place. And she accepted this to make sure that the killing stopped and her offspring was safe.³²

This gender-related reading of the originary event may align Girard's vision with the various forms of *méconnaissance* pervading the Banda cultural patterns that, like most systems the world over, pivot on the male/female dichotomy. Its implication for the mimetic theory's aim of unmasking all cultures' sacrificial base is profound, while it also explains the Paulinian "as-if." Sexuality, either openly or surreptitiously, constitutes a central issue in numerous mimetic scenes, in literature especially, and needs to be given some basic thought. Whatever the basic reason for sexuality's emergence in the natural evolution, mimetic theory notes the curious tension between its valued role in reproduction and the bitter rivalry it provokes in so many life forms. The same applies to mimesis itself as a socializing tool. While the discovery of mirror neurons highlights the crucial role imitation plays in the species' survival, the mimetic rivalries the discovery evokes dim any cavalier valuation. These two ambivalent evolutionary assets of communication relate directly to the pervading call for a saving at-one-ment, and they ask for a theological reappraisal of the evangelic reversal of mimesis in the light of Paul's claim that Jesus is the ultimate offer (*hilasterion*) of gracious joy (*hileoos*).

Where Tere frivolously abuses his *è'ú* privileges, Jesus devotes himself to converting the mimesis from bitter rivalry to a mirthful communion by undoing the primordial Eden drama. In the Bible's prophetic line, he not only halts competitive impulses and insists on mutual respect, but specifically urges a new way of being each other's servant, while stressing that this is an apocalyptic twist of the present condition (*kairos*). John's gospel stresses this by the frequent use of the I-am formula and by constructing the text in reference to the beginnings of Genesis. After a salient prologue, he highlights the reversal of Satan's fatal project of sowing discord into the primordial gynandrous union in describing Jesus' first sign of changing water into wine at Cana's wedding in explicit response to Mary's intervention. Then, after stressing the need for a rebirth in the spirit, he has Jesus reveal his identity to a Samaritan woman at the well, promising her to become a source of living water herself, and defining worship as living in truth beyond all sacrificial rites at whatever temple. Next, after placing in the middle of Jesus' miraculous signs the lifesaving act of preventing a woman from being stoned by the sinful Temple officials (Jn. 8:1–11), John skillfully constructs a buildup to Jesus' passion and death at the hands of these foes, who declare that it is better for one man to die for the entire populace (Jn. 11:50). After a woman has anointed Jesus, motivating Judas to hand him over, John's account of the last supper has Jesus imitate the woman's gesture of washing the guests' feet. Keeping in mind the Eden story, we notice that John, like the synoptic gospels, lingers on the humiliating stripping of Jesus' clothes, in contrast to sinful Adam's first move of covering his differentiating genitals. John has this directly followed by Jesus' remarkable gesture of designating Mary as the mother of the new, apocalyptic community. The women's central role in John's account climaxes in the Easter events and the disciples' mission. Thus, by relating John's account to the original events we find a reversal of Eden's bitter rivalry and its gender-typical account of the mimetic crisis. By redressing the woman's demotion, the account joins the Banda covert conviction that *è'yi* is the actual boss and that, instead of being magic misdeeds by their wife's relatives, people's mishaps are actually due to their own wrongdoing.

John uses a poor couple's wedding at Cana to locate Jesus' first sacramental sign of the new, redemptive bliss.³³ And when Jesus and Paul question the harsh and complex marital rules, they clearly do not reject marriage itself, but repudiate the conflicts and rivalries it entails. In fact, the acme of Paul's version of the new "as-if" we find in Ephesians 5:21ff, defining marriage as the symbol of the cosmic and ecclesial order.³⁴ In the world (*kosmos*) subjected to God's plan of *agape*, Jesus' Church is the historic instrument by which this bliss is to realize. Christ is the *pais* (servant/son) to bring it about and the Church is his body, as

she lives by the "love and faith that was in Jesus" (1 Tm. 1: 14). She is *sub-ject*, in the Levinasian sense of the word, and committed to the life-project of the Lord in his double identity, as the determining (i.e., the creative) force, and also as the compassionate, taking care of possible victims of that shaping process (i.e., the suffering servant descending into Hell).

Ephesians 5 reads this sub-jection of all to God's plan of love, which the Church is to enact under Christ's leadership, as sacramentally embodied in the marriage, where women are sub-jected to the leadership of their husbands, each of whom, just as Christ is devoted to the Church, ties himself to his wife in love. The image of marital subjection (*hypostassō*) summarizes the apocalyptic "as-if" found in 1 Corinthians 7, in the gospels, and arguably also in Girard's vision of the sacrificial prospect of Christ's prophetic *eu-aggelion* conversion. For this to undo the mimetic rivalries, however, and to promote joyous hilarity (*hileoos*), the mimetic thrust must be inverted. Not only should I prevent my model from being turned into an obstacle and my desire into rivalry, but more importantly, I should act as a model that prevents itself turning into the other's rival. On Easter Sunday, by telling Magdalene to let go, Jesus inverts Eve's feminine yearning (cf. Gen. 3:16) and tells her to rather go and join the others in their gracious and mirthful task, spelled out in the sending of the Spirit as the bringer of joyous reconciliation by the removal (*aphesis*) of evil mimesis (Jn. 20:21–22). As noted, Jesus himself enacted this apocalyptic act by rendering the feminine washing service to his friends, "as-if" he were not their master. This vision of at-one-ment he himself defined as "sanctifying oneself so that the other too may become holy" (see Jn. 17:19): an act of inverted mimesis that Augustine was later to place at the heart of his monastic rules.³⁵

How does this translate the "as-if" that Jesus and Paul apply particularly to marital affairs? Traditionally their advice is mostly understood to extol celibate life, but as the foundational model of society, it rather urges a sanctification of oneself to inspire the other with evangelic motives. In Banda life we perceived to which extent the marital is at the heart of the social concerns, and in the converted, new dispensation, the matrimony is to raise the partners above the victimizing side of clan structure's rules. These rules are to be taken seriously, but in the self-giving "as-if" mode that does not succumb to a Sartrean evasive "bad-faith" but follows the Levinasian plea for an evasion beyond the formal order.

CONCLUSION: CONCERNING THE "HILARIOUS SACRIFICE"

Challenged by the Parisian critique of Girard's analysis of sacrificial religion and by a Banda chief's query about the identity of Christ and trickster Tere, I have related basic paradoxes of the Banda and Christian social order to the mimetic thesis about cultural rules and their role as ambivalent means to ensure unity against the threat of all-out mimetic violence. This led to reflections on the curious Paulinian definition of Christ as the *hilasterion*, which has mainly been read in a sacrificial sense as Jesus' death on the cross, offering the ransom requested by the wrathful Father God, infuriated by mankind's flouting of His simple interdict in Eden. This thesis, climaxing in a biased reading of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, upset Girard, whose revision of this pivotal letter opens a wide perspective. In a brief summary of the foregoing I want to spell out how his vision, understood as positive mimesis, passes beyond the two main interpretations of the Christian discourse, starting from culture's basic paradox that imitation as a learning device is both crucial for survival and a constant cause of rivalry.

Girard's notion of *méconnaissance* proves pivotal to explain how culture's paradoxes are both known and willfully ignored. It offers a valuable opening for dialogue. We saw that the Banda know about the life-giving primacy of women (*éyí*), yet their dominant rules gainsay it. The same applies to views on guilt and penalty both in Banda witchcraft belief and in the Christian idea of original sin, dubbed a breach of God's law, but known to be misuse of "knowledge of good and evil" in rivalry and mutual discrimination. This "learned ignorance" underpins both cultural stability and the urge to resist and change the patterns, as the law is perceived as both needed and deceptive. Jesus adheres to the law yet rises above what Paul dubs this cause of sin and death. Through this "love and faith that was in Jesus" (1 Tm. 1:14) the disciples go mirthfully on the hellish, yet paradisiac, way along the given path of the law, without changing a dot or iota, so as to turn into each other's loving servant and a living source of water turned wine, in whom God is worshiped in truth as in a new temple, thanks to Jesus' Spirit that is both creative and compassionate.³⁶ In their observance of the law, they are to be a model that dies for the other to live, rather than becoming an obstacle.

Girard's solution to the basic cultural paradoxes thus relates to this "faith that was in Jesus," which transcends the perception of God as either a wrathful Judge or a mystical Unifier. Rather, it consists in the "as-if"-faith, illustrated in John's account of the Last Supper. "As if" he were not the master, Jesus bends over to do the woman's servile thing of washing the feet even of his traitor, and he explains he is sanctifying himself "so that they too may be holy" (Jn. 17:19).

By posing as the antimodel that unnerves any mimetic urge, he unmasks and inverts the cultural forms, not to abolish them, but to raise them to be "hilarious" in the sense of the bliss of a committed Eucharistic community.³⁷ This is not by Tere's practice of deceitfully bending the rules or evading their harsh challenges, but by acting on the *méconnaissance* and distracting each other from evil desires by one's own "evading sub-jection."

Tere flippantly seeks to benefit from the hidden primacy of the maternal domain and other social oddities, and the audience, in turn, sacrifices their avuncular hero by a boisterous hilarity over his fiascos, whereas Jesus accepts the original *raison d'être* of the culture's pacifying yet victimizing structure. But he enacts a dramatic ascent toward apocalyptic clarity through his heroic descent (kenosis) to expose the victimizing logic that dupes people into submitting by what Sartre rightly terms "bad faith" to a mythical order, turned into an ontological scheme. The "faith that was in Jesus," however, evades this evasive bad faith by the "inevitably fatal" route of self-exposure to the harsh conditions of social coherence and a divestment, notably of his cultural manhood that he bends to sexual complementarity in subservience to the maternal primacy.³⁸ By this apocalyptic "as-if," Jesus enacts the evasive sanctification of the self, which alone may edify the partner-rival to resist rivalry with the model as expressed in John 17:19, and turn into the blissful peace-offering (*hilasterion*) that is rightly labeled both sacrificial and Eucharistic. Girard's theory that any cultural setup is permeated by *méconnaissance* and thus by this double urge thereby offers a fruitful framework for an intercultural dialogue.³⁹ Tere and Jesus both invite people to transcend the ruling order, but the cheerful audience jolly well realizes that the route of *é'ú* Tere is a no-go. This, however, leaves the urge to liberate the dominant setup from its daily victimizing paradoxes, which each cultural union has to tackle in a dialogue with others, applying the principle of positive mimesis, becoming an inspiring model, while avoiding to act as an obstacle.

NOTES

1. René Girard's *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris, 1972) caused a serious upheaval in the Parisian centers of anthropology, where Claude Lévi-Strauss was about to publish the final volume of his *Mythologiques* on the American northwest coast. I joined them after a course with Pierre Maranda at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, and some fieldwork among the Nootka on Vancouver Island. About to continue my fieldwork in Africa, I was urged to investigate the criticism of Girard's mimetic theory raised notably by Luc de Heusch, who checked the theory against his Africanist data and claimed it to be failing, as he was to explain in *Sacrifice in Africa: A Structuralist*

- Approach* (Manchester, 1985). The data on Banda society in this article stem mainly from my own study, *Peuple d'autrui; une approche anthropologique de l'œuvre pastorale en milieu centrafricain* (Brussels, 1976).
2. See A. M. Hocart, *The Life-giving Myth*, ed. and intro. Lord Raglan (ed. 2004), https://archive.org/stream/lifegivingmythotoohoca/lifegivingmythotoohoca_djvu.txt.
 3. See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Zande Trickster* (Oxford, 1967). Missionaries have been eagerly collecting such stories, but I don't know of any suggestion making the trickster identical to the Christian redeemer.
 4. In the Banda language intonation is no less important than articulation, which enables long-distance communication in the savannah and sending messages by drum. It means that voiceless consonants like k- and t- may become interchangeable. The French phrase sounding *jesu kri thus becomes *jesu tre. And *krist jesu sounds as *tre se te jesu, which in Banda means Tere is Jesus.
 5. This negative connotation of the *makonji* is not so much due to the fact that the chieftaincy was imposed by the colonial power; it rather fits in with a common African trend to treat the (sacred) king or leader as dirt or an outcast, which Girard has famously interpreted in line with his mimetic theory, in *Des Choses cachées depuis la foundation du monde*, Book 1, chapter IIB (Paris, 1978).
 6. Girard has summarized his compelling critique of the impressionist level of comparative religious studies mainly in *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris, 1999). But in *La Violence et le sacré* (1972) he had already decried the trend of relativizing myths that justify violence against victims, leading to a misrecognition of the daily practice of scapegoating.
 7. Girard's *méconnaissance* is hard to translate into English. The French *mé* is clearly related to the Greek *mè* and the Indo-Germanic *mis*, as in misreading. But Girard refers to an emotion-driven act of hiding a truth that is known but ignored for a practical purpose. Paul Dumouchel proposes the term "misknowledge" in his article "De la méconnaissance" in *Lebenswelt. Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience* (2011), 97–111. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279462855_De_la_meconnaissance. But since the English *mis*- resembles the verb "to miss," it conceals the dramatic side of the deliberate that Girard has in view.
 8. Cf. René Girard, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris, 1999), especially ch. 11. Discussing the similarities between myths and the Gospel, Girard portrays Satan as the accuser that refuses to see the difference and reads the phrase "victory of the cross" as an enslaving event (see notably chap. 11).
 9. Cf. Gerard Kittel (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Band III, 300–24. The secular meaning of the Greek *hileos* received a religious dimension in the Septuagint translation that used it as a qualifier of the biblical God as gracious and compassionate. This relates this term both to Paul's eschatological understanding of the Christ in his letter to the Romans, and to the opening formula of most Suras in the Qur'an.
 10. How the historical figure of Jesus turned into a metaphysical absolute is beyond our scope here. It undoubtedly forms the backdrop to Girard's critique of the use of biblical texts that underpinned much of the colonial exploits and subsequent globalization.
 11. See Lucien Scubla, *Giving Life, Giving Death* (2016), discussing this notably in ch. 11. I was surprised to hear the French priest, at whose request I drove a car from Douala's harbor to Bangui, being called in Banda language *éyine*, its mother/owner.

12. In Banda kinship terms age is no factor; even *egbele* (child) may apply to someone older, since my brother’s son may be older than me, yet be *egbele* to me. The term *è’ú* can occasionally be used in a jovial manner between persons who have no kinship ties, to express friendship.
13. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937).
14. Lucien Scubla, pursuing Hocart’s lead in this respect, has often confronted Girardian studies with this quandary, notably at the conference on *René Girard et le problème du mal* (1981), and recently with his *Giving Life, Giving Death* (2016). Before my fieldwork I had been sensitized to the issue during my course in Vancouver with Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs-Maranda, and by some research on Vancouver Island in a place called Ucluelet, whose—slightly different—Nootka name was explained to me as the totemic bear’s vulva.
15. Cf. René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris, 1972), 305ff.
16. The name *Blood Brotherhood* (*Fraternité de sang*), as Tegnaeus continued to call it after Evans-Pritchard, is improper, as the latter himself has rightly explained and was further supported by Hocart, because the bond differs explicitly from clan brotherhood. An enlightening term was used by Griaule in his 1942 study *l’Alliance Cathartique*, attributing a liberating and mitigating role to this relationship.
17. The Banda perceive the surroundings by concentric circles that are either male or female. To begin from the centre of the ancestral sanctuary in the hamlet, the male center is surrounded by the houses and the special space behind them that are female territory, followed by the man-owned gardens and fields running to the female streams amid forest galleries, and further to the savannah that is the men’s hunting ground and terrain of the in-laws urging care in view of witchcraft. Time-wise, men prepare the fields, women sow, men harvest and store the crop, and women get some crop to prepare as food for the men who digest it and extract its “fat” (*ejero*) as semen, which they entrust to the wife on duty so as to bear them offspring.
18. The Banda call any such priest *èyíáyo*, literally, “mother of a tree,” *áyo* being a polysemiotic term designating first plants and trees, next medical extracts, and finally the spirit controlling that healing force.
19. About a century ago Marcel Mauss popularized the term “joking relation” (*alliances de plaisanterie*), but Marcel Griaule and Geneviève Dieterlen soon realized that much more was at stake and that “cathartic alliance” might be more suitable.
20. Cf. Geneviève Calame-Griaule in *Ethnologie et langage* (Paris, 1965), 381. Elaborating Marcel Griaule’s notion of cathartic relations, the author examines closely the functioning of words, notably joking phrases.
21. The common word for child, *ègbèlè*, does not follow the grammatical rules of a kinship term as does the rarely used *erü*, but both miss a sexual index. Anthropologists often consider this index a key factor of kinship systems, but we note that the Germanic *son–daughter* distinction is lacking in all European terms deriving from the Latin *filius–filia*, which have a gender but no sex index. Only five out of 15 Banda kinship terms carry a sex index: husband, wife, father, mother, and co-wife. The term of our special interest, *è’ú*, can be uncle or niece.
22. The imagery of a child descending from a transcendent mother on the behest of the clan’s ancestors can be found in many places in Africa, and also this interpretation of the sexual

- operation. The Banda and their neighbors reject utterly the idea of a more extensive excision, meant to hamper the woman's sexual enjoyment and ensure her fidelity.
23. In Banda perception it is inconceivable that one could be a victim of witchcraft by any of these relations of the *é'ú* type. An oracle suggesting such an eventuality is considered faulty off hand.
 24. Cf. Kittel, op. cit., 300. The English abridged edition—*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, abridged by George Bromley—also mention this link without elaborating on it (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, cf. 364, D *hilaskomai*). The debate on whether the reconciliation brought by the sacrifice was understood as pacifying God or bringing joy and bliss to the congregation is not our concern here. Yet we note that reconciliation is clearly a reciprocal concept. It effectuates a joyful closeness and intimacy. In English, the Hebrew term *kpr*, which the Septuagint translates as *hilasterion* (akin to the verbs *hilemi* *exhilaskomai*, to cheer up), is commonly translated as atonement, literally at-one-ment.
 25. Lucien Scubla extensively documented and analyzed the denial of sacrificial violence in “‘Ceci n'est pas une meurtre’ ou comment le sacrifice contient la violence,” in Séminaire de Françoise Heritier (ed.), *De la Violence II* (Paris, 1999), 135–170.
 26. Paul Dumouchel argues that knowledge and «méconnaissance» are not polar opposites; the prime insight is sidelined as unwelcome for emotional reasons to boost the “common knowledge.” While Christ is said to unmask «méconnaissance,» the Gospel revelation does not spell the end of «méconnaissance.» It rather initiates a different type of relationship between knowledge and «méconnaissance.» Cf. De la méconnaissance. in *Lebenswelt: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience* (2011), 97–111. Cf. note vii.
 27. See Book 2 Chapter IIIB of his *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, which Girard recanted after fruitful discussions with Raymond Schwager, accepting that Christ's voluntary acceptance of persecution and death can be called (self)-sacrifice.
 28. Cf. Markus Tiwald, “Christ as Hilasterion (Rom 3:25). Pauline Theology on the Day of Atonement in the Mirror of Early Jewish Thought,” in *The Day of Atonement. Its Interpretation in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Niklas, Series: *Themes in Biblical Narrative*, vol. 15 (2012), 189–209.
 29. Girard repeatedly stresses the “apocalyptic” meaning of revelation (*apo-kalupto*) as the true dimension of God's order, rather than some future catastrophic collapse of things.
 30. Paul Dumouchel, see note vii, 106.
 31. In his conclusion of *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* Girard explains that humanity has to free itself of the satanic scapegoating to prepare for the final judgment, which is suspended. Wolfgang Palaver has elaborated the notion of this suspense or *katechon* in several studies, among others in *Contagion* (1995): 57–74.
 32. Studies on “mimetic theory and evolution” usually follow Girard entangling these two roles. for which there is no stringent reason, apart from reflecting the Western trend of seeing God both as threat and savior, as I argued in “A Monadic Prelate without Divine Rival,” in *Contagion* (2020): 41–58. The role of gender thus stays out of sight in the mimetic crisis, so much so that in the index of a specialized book *Can We Survive Our Origin*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Paul Gifford (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), the lemmas of gender and sex are absent. See also my “‘Me Too, I Am a Memetic Horror’ On Mimetic Kenosis,” in *Generative Anthropology and*

Transdisciplinary Inquiry: Religion, Science, Language & Culture, ed. M. Zlocka-Drabowska and Beata Daj (Warsaw, 2018).

33. In the realm of Catholic sacramental rituals we note that Eucharistic joy defines the core of the new religion, not so much due to a priest's ritual reenactment of the sacrificial crucifixion, but rather as the society's restoration of the harmonious order, which was distorted by the sexual rivalry and is now restored by egalitarian believers in a matrimonial complementarity. Giuseppe Fornari stresses the pivotal role of the wine miracle at Cana at the start of John's gospel and relates it correctly to the theme of the new temple. Cf. *Dionysos, Christ, and the Death of God*, vol. II (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021), chap. 2. This new Temple of God living among his people, however, is not just a mystic union but an ethical challenge as well, as shown by Mt. 25.
34. Paul's authorship of the Letter to the Ephesians may be doubtful, but together with the one to the Colossians it is canonized as being in his faithful frame of mind.
35. Many a European translation curiously reads the Vulgate rendering the Greek *hayiazō* as sacrificing when applied to Jesus, referring to the imminent sacrificial crucifixion, while they use the correct "sanctifying" to refer to the disciples. In his lucid article "The Satanic and the Theomimetic" (*Contagion* 27 (2020)), Jordan John Wales rightly mentions Girard's second reading of *sacrificium* as self-giving in the case of Jesus. But as he chooses to ignore Robert Daly's advice not to use the term "offer" because of its use in street language that goes as far as making "Opfer" a curse word to dub someone a loser, he fails to mention the word's alternative etymology. The use of "offer" by most Germanic languages—including also Gothic, Slavonic, and Celtic ones—is generally explained by a derivation from the Latin verb *ob-ferre* in relation to the noun *sacrificium*. But this seems much less plausible than the alternative etymology referring to the Indo-European root of *opus* (and *operari*). The latter etymology better supports Wales's argument in seeing Christ's sacrificial "self-sanctification" as a positive deed in Girardian perspective.
36. The Greek phrase *pistis tou Xristou* is commonly translated as "faith in Jesus," ignoring the question of the objective and subjective genitive. 1 Timothy 1:14 makes clear that in many cases "faith of Jesus" may be more plausible. What counts is the faithful commitment that marked Jesus. His *hilasterion*, as self-giving offering that brings a joyful and reconciliatory, is the new creation, which both Mark and the Apocalypse view as the new reality of God's presence to be as the restored Temple that Deutero-Isaiah foresaw. See Morten H. Jensen, "Atonement Theology in the Gospel of Mark as Isaianic Proximity to the Divine," *Biblia* 100, no. 1 (2019): 84–104. This divine presence is to be read in a Trinitarian way as the unity, in the Spirit, of the divine urge to create and yet be mercifully concerned with all being that is marginalized due to any act of creation, as I explained in "A Monadic Prelate without Divine Rival: on Girard's Bifurcated Focus" (cf. *Contagion* 27: 41–58). I want to note that this Girardian perspective seems an excellent basis for the Muslim–Christian dialogue.
37. Recent exegesis stresses that beyond the Paulinian *theologia crucis*, explaining the Eucharist as the symbol of the sacrificial crucifixion, and John's vision of the apocalyptic *convivium*, the third dimension of a committed union is to be stressed, in which prevails the sharing in Christ's ethical spirit to remove sin and its devastations, as spelled out in the verdict of Gen. 3. This Spirit to remove sin is the advocate of the marginalized, figuring in the scene of the Judgment portrayed in Mt. 25. Cf. Petros Vassiliadis, "The Problem of Ethics in the Early Church: The Trajectory from Q to John via Paul" (2013), accessed November 2021, https://www.academia.edu/3576189/The_Problem_of_Ethics_in_the_Early_Church_The_Trajectory_from_Q_to_John_via_Paul.

38. Cf. Wiel Eggen, "The Gender of the Crucified," *Verbum SVD* 38 (1994): 267–287. If Jesus pleads to rise above the innumerable gender customs and rules, this is not the same as relativizing sexual identity.
39. This is in line with Levinas's original analysis of the bipolar "evasion" in his early study of both Husserl's phenomenology and the ideology behind Hitler's fascism, arguing that the West, ever since the Greek classics, made "being" its highest value and thereby promoted a "longing for each other's being." Calling this a form of evasion, he pleads for the opposite evasion from this urge by a transformation of the envy of the other's being into a response to its call for respect, which he was later to elaborate as "otherwise than being." See Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'évasion*, first published in *Recherches Philosophiques* 5 (1935/36): 373–392. Conformation to cultural structures is not the problem, but the *méconnaissance* of each other's transcending of their essence.

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