One of the things that I like very much about COV&R’s way of doing things is the way it is continually bringing new people on to the Advisory Board. It gives a number of our members a chance to really exercise some ownership of the organization. We strive to find a balance on the Board but if you feel that something or someone is missing, please let me know.

Finally, we have an outstanding conference being planned for our 25th year as an organization in St. Louis next year. 2016 will take COV&R to the Southern Hemisphere and Down-under. We need to be thinking of 2017 and where we might be holding the meeting in that year.

Jeremiah Alberg

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Report on the COV&R-conference 2014 in Freising, Germany, on “Battling to the End” 1914-2014

This year’s colloquium was my first, and perhaps readers will be interested in hearing from a newcomer. I begin with superficial, yet baroque, praises of how classy everyone and everything was at the Kardinal-Döpfner-Haus, atop the central hill in Freising, Germany. Where else can one find rooms full of hospitable, capable, multi-lingual scholars, not only enjoying and giving lectures but savoring a string quartet followed by rounds of champagne in some medieval bar? I hasten to praise, as well, one of the famous plenary lecturers, Herfried Münkler, for his magisterial beard, consummate fashion, and exquisite German, if nothing else. Only a French gentleman, reportedly a member of the Dutch Girardian group, came near this grandeur with his estimable handlebar mustache.

But there was far more than mere class at the Döpfner-Haus. The first, highly anticipated event, was Jean-Luc Marion’s lecture, devoted to what one might call the apophasis of forgiveness. Drawing partly from the insight of Christ not forgiving, per se, but asking the Father to forgive, Marion highlighted the notion of “letting Being be.” By this, he meant the refusal to “fill the space” that judgment and assurance (among other ontological over-presences) so often fill. By not rushing to fill this space, we open up eschatological space. Instead of establishing sheer presence and ousious, through, say, casting judgment or hatred, we make space by forgiveness: the par-ousious. Hence, the inner logic of love and patience in the “second coming”. That is, instead of just practicing the gift, geben—the “given,” being—we must learn to practice vergeben, forgiveness.

Other plenary lectures included the four student Schwager award-winners’ presentations—all erudite and detailed. Given the conference’s theme surrounding WWI, one of them, Simon De Keukelaere, interpreted the binding of Isaac in light of Europe having “killed half its seed” because it refused to “sacrifice the ram of pride,” as a poem by Wilfrid Owen (1893-1918) expresses it. In his lecture titled “Do This in Memory of Me” Bernard Disco offered a Girardian interpretation of the institution narratives, which all include some amount of betrayal, though no retribution. Markus Wierschem proved himself a deft interpreter of the American psycho-social landscape of violence and living with(out) hope, as portrayed through Cormac McCarthy’s apocalyptic genre. And Petro Sette Camara e Silva interpreted Bernanos’ Under the Sun of Satan in the light of mimetic theory.

Some other highlights from plenaries: The aforementioned Herfried Münkler delivered a considerable lecture on the cultural status of sacrifice and myth in Germany surrounding WWI. Benoit Chantre not only reviewed the content and backstory of Achever Clausewitz but commented on U.S. foreign policy. From the apocalyptic advent of the bomb to the hubristic escalations in Iraq, Girard’s thought—with its deep suspicion of politics, combined with a world-savvy realism about the katechon—is naturally contextualized in, and prophetic to, the U.S. political landscape. Mathias Moosbrugger traced the trajectory of Girardian apocalyptic thought throughout Girard’s career. And Malise Ruthven offered an in depth historical account of the battle of Galipoli—including trench courtesies and mirror neuron empathy. Lastly, Michael Staudigl reflected on the disappearance of the face of the enemy and the twentieth century as one long war, while John Duvall extrapolated the intersection of race, lynching, and print media.

In the parallel session devoted to “Modernity, Apocalypse and Total War,” there ensued a
lively debate. All was calm as Robert DORAN traced the insights of Battling to the End, discussing how we unfortunately need external constraints (e.g. Geneva Conventions), filling the diminishing role of internal constraints (e.g. the sacred, taboo). But room temperature increased when Stephen GARDNER asserted how “GIRARD’s renunciation of the political is absurd” and “he is a utopian romantic”; chairs were thrown, tables toppled, counter-arguments foisted, and, after reconciling through blood sacrifice, all parties eventually left ready for convivial drinks.

In another session, on “Theological Approaches,” Margaret BLUME drew out how ORIGEN’s grappling with myth helps us frame the Christian revelation—and particularly its Eucharistic practice—as both sacrificial and not sacrificial. Thomas RYBA offered his way past both BULTMANN and biblical literalism, rehabilitating demon language (sounding akin to a Ricoeurian second naïveté). And Nikolaus WANDINGER advanced R. SCHWAGER’s dramatic understandings of Jesus life and death—that each “act” of that drama, from his “failure” to inaugurate the kingdom, to Pentecost, all are continually re-done throughout our lives. (I cannot report on the other sessions, though I heard they were all excellent.)

Besides cherishing my visit, loving the new friends I made, and feeling warmly welcomed into this small cadre of capable scholars, I came away considering how theologians like John Howard YODER, Stanley HAUERWAS, and William T. CAVANAUGH may be of some use in Girardian political discourse. Ambivalence toward the katechon requires learning to think and live with or without government and law. The thinkers above, each with weaknesses to be sure, advocate a mode of being “resident aliens” that could offer some ways for Girardians to contemplate being “political”—that is, active and present in this world—but not necessarily governmental, or at least putting much hope in the katechon. Unfortunately, not many words at this colloquium were spent in discussion of praxis. Besides staring down the last bloody century with insightful theory, and analyzing the potential escalation to extremes in our day, we indeed need to consider how to live—as people, communities, churches, and not merely citizens and nations. We need models more communal, gritty, engaged, adventurous, and ecclesiological than HÖLDERLIN and his poetic withdrawal. Dorothy DAY and Peter MAURIN are well known exemplars. But who else?

Chris Haw

Special Attendees’ Reports

Some attendees of the conference in Freising in July might have realized that there was a group of very young students among us. They were, in fact, high school students who had come through “Politische und Christliche Jugendbildung e. V.”, or the Foundation for Political and Christian Youth Education. Two of them, Kyra Gerber (16) and Lorenzo Wienecke (17) wrote little essays of their impressions, which we publish here in excerpts.

The fine white historical conference building was in front of me, I took the first step inside and looked around. Excitement and a thousand questions popped up in my mind which was already exhausted from traveling: What can I expect? Will a pupil even be taken seriously in a meeting like this? The enormous impression mixed up with scepticism and turned into a timid but eager curiosity. I hope that you, my readers, still have some idea of what might go on in the mind of an 11th grade high school student before an international meeting for academic scholars. But the 24th conference of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion gave me much more inspiration and experience than the first impression had me expect. – And I would like to share them with you.

Philosophy is a subject I take at school and I think about studying it. I was very excited about the mimetic theory and looked forward to the philosophy lectures. During the conference I learned a lot about mimetic theory and I experienced it as a comprehensive and especially current approach for many different themes and topics. It was also very nice to listen to the historical part of the conference, especially because I had talked about the First World War some weeks ago in school.

The participants at the meeting, whether they were professors from other countries or students from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, were communicative and interested and I was able to talk with everybody about so many varied themes from theology to the latest political situations. The way of communication...