



problematic. Herodias and her daughter, for example, lead to John the Baptist's demise, and likewise, the verdict on Peter's denial is occasioned by the intervention of a passing maidservant.

A strength of Connolly's approach, for this reader at least, is the way in which she uncovers fundamental tensions or characteristics within the Markan text. She offers a reading that is avowedly 'Australian Feminist', but does so in way that is interpretatively fruitful for those who would not adopt such a hermeneutical lens. Two insights in particular spring to mind. First, the marginalization of women characters – especially in reducing them to merely familial roles – is a key premise for how Mark frames its account; as such, Mark's gospel narrative is unable (limited by its context) to deliver on the full inclusion of humanity. Second, and particularly insightful, is her suggestion that 'when Jesus is at his weakest point, in the penultimate moment before he dies, there is none he resembles more in the cast of the Gospel of Mark than the female characters Mark has portrayed' (p. 170). When the Markan Jesus is presented as facing the onslaught of evil, Jesus is depicted in the terms Mark otherwise uses of women.

As such, this is a rich text, one whose content demonstrates the interpretative potential of vernacular hermeneutics, both for the contextual reading position articulated, but also for other hermeneutical positions; either way, it generates 'better' engagement with the Markan text. It enables the reader to be alert to the impact (unconscious or otherwise) of a text whose origins lie within an imperial context, but also able to embrace the resurrection hope Mark ultimately seeks to extend.

David M. Allen
The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham



René Girard and the Nonviolent God, Scott Cowdell, University of Notre Dame Press, 2018 (ISBN 978-0-268-10453-5), x + 320 pp., hb \$50

In *René Girard and the Nonviolent God*, Scott Cowdell offers an illuminating reading of the theology of Girard and his mimetic theory. As Cowdell illustrates early on in his book, this is not a straightforward task. By the end of his study, attentive readers will understand Girard better and how his mimetic theory can work amicably with Christian theology.

The first three chapters offer a broad overview of René Girard's contributions to the social sciences. Each chapter covers three distinct periods of Girard's thinking ('Early,' 'Middle,' and 'Late'). Helpful here is Cowdell's

proposition that elements of 'Late' Girard (eg, his more positive view of sacrifice) can be seen in his earlier works. These chapters are extremely important for those who may be unfamiliar with Girard's work or need a refresher.

As the title suggests, Chapter 4 situates Girard among theologians. Cowdell aptly showcases Girard's catholic faith and self-understanding. One interesting example is Girard's belief in the virginal conception of Jesus, seeing it as indicative that 'Jesus was conceived in peace, contrary to the mythological divine births that issue from sexual violence' (p. 88). Responding to the theological criticisms of Girard from the likes of Raymond Schwager, John Milbank, and Sarah Coakely among others, Cowdell assuages any fears for those interested in relating mimetic theory to theology.

Chapters 5 through 7 present a 'Theo-dramatic perspective on Girard's reading of natural and human history as a salvation history', in which, Cowdell argues, 'human and natural history is best understood as a drama of divine action through the within of things, honouring both the freedom and finitude of creaturely existence' (p. 115). This five-staged Theo-drama is characterized by God's nonrivalrous acting within the world, which maintains human freedom. Yet the horror of violence still characterizes human existence. To this, Cowdell introduces his readers to three responses taken from the theater: Accepting, Blocking, and Overaccepting. The first two represent the typical dualistic response to such trauma – accepting the pain of reality or denying it outright. 'Neither version,' says Cowdell, 'is compatible with the eschatological, redemptive focus of a theology in tune with mimetic theory, though they certainly fit what we would expect from the false sacred' (p. 158). Pushing past these categories, 'Overaccepting' is an improvisation that takes what is given but moves the narrative along in a transformative way (Cowdell gives numerous illustrations to clarify). This 'Overaccepting' is what characterizes both God's actions in the world (especially in the incarnation) and 'Christian practice in the face of violence and tragedy' (p. 184). Cowdell explains that the opening chapters of Genesis are an example of overaccepting the violence of the Babylonian creation myths: it accepts the reality of chaos but transforms it nonviolently through an 'orderly, unhurried progression over six leisurely days – with a day off at the end' (p. 186).

Cowdell continues with several examples of Overaccepting: trauma in Psalms, wrath and judgment in Apocalyptic literature, and even the doctrine of hell. A Girardian Theo-dramatic perspective should lead one to understand that the portrait of a vengeful God of wrath is present within scripture but is transformed by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Cowdell closes his chapter by suggesting that, 'By overaccepting, we show that we have outgrown the mythology of a violent and wrathful God, which was once beneficial but has now become a burden, while drawing power

from this old imagery of the sacred for a new and better end' (p. 201). It is unclear, however, if this demythologizing and/or transformative interpretation is only accomplished by the reader. Perhaps, aspects of this work can already be observed operating within the text itself, and particularly, the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.

The final chapter focuses on the person and work of Christ as it relates to divine overaccepting. There is a helpful and concise discussion on three of the major atonement motifs. Cowdell goes at great lengths to present each fairly (though his approach naturally is critical of penal substitutionary atonement) before arguing for a nuanced perspective of *Christus Victor*. The sacrificial death of Christ was the 'contingent cost of humanity's escape from the false sacred' (ie, the violent portrait of a wrathful God who needed to be satiated, p. 237). Jesus's death reveals our mistaken theology – we are the ones who need to be reconciled to God, not the other way around. Cowdell writes, 'Yet there was no other way for God to overcome our crippling *méconnaissance* [mis-knowing] than by letting Jesus undergo at our hands what we humans wrongly took to be divine judgement. In this way, we can regard Jesus's sacrifice on our behalf as the overaccepting of atonement' (p. 237). One may find disagreement here, but if they do, it is with Girard and not Cowdell's representation of him.

As a whole, *René Girard and the Nonviolent God* is an excellent addition to the growing scholarly discussion of the important work of Girard. Cowdell has not only demonstrated the importance of Girard for theological discourse but constructed a way forward for those interested in interdisciplinary work via a Theo-dramatic perspective. The author showcases great charity when discussing the secondary literature. In a few places, however, Cowdell's own voice gets lost in a sea of citations. Those familiar with Girard's work will be delighted to find such a thorough theological engagement and proposal by Scott Cowdell.

Brandon Hurlbert
Durham University



Placemaking and the Arts: Cultivating the Christian Life, Jennifer Allen Craft, IVP Academic, 2018 (ISBN 978-0-8308-5067-9), x + 262 pp., pb \$30

Most works of theological aesthetics invite the reader to consider the objects that inhabit the world. Jennifer Allen Craft's new book, *Placemaking and the Arts*, asks us instead to consider the world itself. Attuned to the