

Love in a Time of Terror

In an age marked by terrorism, much focus is placed on the efforts of police, military and intelligence to prevent or counter violence. But what role is there for love in an age marked by extremist violence? What is erotic love? What is agapeic love? What is “romantic” love? And how can love be understood within a theological anthropology, using René Girard’s mimetic theory?

Much Girardian theory with respect to human relationships is either negative or deflationary – that is, human relationships are figured as either the locus of rivalry, and/or they are construed as the privileged site of the mensonge romantique (romantic lie). The emphasis in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is on “demythification,” on the novelist’s capacity to see his through his own romantic delusions which were present in his earlier (inferior) work. And yet, despite the Girardian’s scepticism about “romantic” relationships, many – perhaps most – of them are subject to these relationships, including Girard himself. We live in situations where to see our attachment to a particular person as merely reflecting (say) broader social dynamics of attraction and repulsion cannot possibly tell us the whole story about that relationship, about that attachment. But when we look to mimetic theory for models of what erotic love – and even filial love – might look like, we are often offered Christ. (Either this, or we are offered the exquisite insanity of Oughourlian’s jealousy-strategies!). Imitatio Christi may provide leads (say, more leads than might be given if an auto-mechanic were told to fix an engine by “following Christ,” for instance), but this is thin advice. So we might ask: what is love to a Girardian? What is erotic love? What is agapeic love? What is what we call “romantic” love?