

Theology and Peace, a new organization grounded in mimetic theory, held its inaugural meeting at Bon Secours Spiritual Center near Marriotsville, Maryland on May 21-22, 2008. The day-long conference attended by nearly forty people witnessed the birth of a community of conversation committed to on-going dialogue on the Christian meaning and practice of peace from the perspective of mimetic theory.

An earlier prototype under a more classical title, *Theologia Pacis*, convened in January of 2007. In addition to the change of name, the Maryland gathering established Theology and Peace as a membership organization, approved a Mission and Vision Statement and agreed to hold annual meetings.

The idea for an offspring from the Girardian matrix came through pastoral leaders and theologians who saw a need for a forum for on-going and in-depth discussion on Christian theology and practice among those also well-versed in mimetic theory. The hope of *Theology and Peace* is to explore a range of viewpoints about how mimetic theory might inform the theology and practice of the North American church, perhaps leading to new perceptions and frameworks. The Raven Foundation, a local church and several individuals provided financial support for the 2008 conference. In turn, *Theology and Peace* will continue to support the good work of COV&R, Preaching Peace, the Raven Foundation and other groups working with mimetic theory while also taking up this new endeavor.

Episcopal priest Tom Nicoll and theologians Tony Bartlett, Jim Williams, and Michael Hardin were involved in preliminary conversations that eventually led to the formation of *Theology and Peace*, with Michael and Tony convening the initial *Theologia Pacis* meeting last year. After that first meeting a provisional Board was put together to refine the group's focus and make plans for a second conference. Board members Tony Bartlett (NY), Mary McKinney (IL), Tom Nicoll (NY), and Dorothy Whiston (IA) produced the 2008 *Theology and Peace* event and drafted the Mission and Vision statement adopted by the gathering (and printed below).

The conference included presentations on Theology, Spirituality and Ecclesiology by theologian S. Mark Heim, spiritual director Dorothy Whiston and parish pastor Paul Neuchterlein, respectively.

Mark, author of the acclaimed *Saved From Sacrifice, A Theology Of The Cross*, led the group in a meta-view of the cross: a triple function of the victim revealed, of the victim vindicated, and the empty cross of no more victims. This framework enabled a wide-ranging and productive discussion of the revolutionary effect of Christian meaning. Dorothy continued with a treatment of several classic Christian spiritual traditions seen through the lens of mimetic theory, walking us through the personal pathway of transformation in Christ and its wider evolutionary human significance. Paul concluded with a provocative account of some impacts of the wider culture on Christians today, noting the mirror effects of culture and gospel. He suggested that in some ways secular culture was ahead of church culture in embracing changes that are deeply consonant with the gospel.

Dialogue during and after the presentations engaged the community in open-ended thought and reflection. Seeking to understand the gospel more and more on its own terms was also an important part of the conversation, given that Girard has shown us so powerfully how revelation of the human condition arises from the dynamic of the scriptures themselves. A palpable sense of possibility emerged during the conference, opening a space where the meaning of God and humanity can continue to be explored through the Girardian hermeneutic. And a real impetus for theological, spiritual and ecclesial work was struggling to the surface, which can only strengthen and mature over time.

Theology and Peace is already beginning plans for its 2009 conference and continuing to explore how the organization might best take shape. We invite all those with theological, spiritual and pastoral concerns arising from mimetic anthropology to write us at tpacis@gmail.com to give us your in-put or to get on our mailing list.