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“Blessed Is the One Who Takes No Scandal in Me”

Those familiar with mimetic theory know that Girard claims an identity between what he calls the mimetic cycle of violence and biblical scandal. “The words [in the New Testament] that designate mimetic rivalry and its consequences are the noun *skandalon* and the verb *skandalizen*” (*I Saw Satan Fall*, 16). While I accept the identification, I do not think that it is self-evident, and so I want to present an argument supporting why evangelical scandal is, in fact, the same phenomenon as mimetic rivalry. At the same time I want to show how mimetic rivalry, and so biblical scandal, is reflected in the ways we use the word “scandal” today. I begin by calling to mind those usages in order to raise our consciousness of the polysemous nature of so ordinary a word. With that in mind I move to an analogously polysemous usage in the New Testament. I open up the various meanings of New Testament scandal by exploring the interplay of three “theses,” which very much seem to contradict each other. These theses are derived from three different verses: first, scandal is a constitutive part of the Gospel (“We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block [scandal] to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1Cor 1.23)); second, believers must not be scandalized at the Gospel (“Blessed is he who is not scandalized in me” (Mt 11.6 and Lk 7.23)); and third, one must not scandalize others (cf. Mt. 18.6). These three theses reveal, first, that taking scandal at the Cross and causing scandal to others are intimately related phenomena and, second, that we are to avoid the giving and the taking of scandal up to the point at which such avoidance would result in even greater scandal.

