

The Tenth Commandment, René Girard, And the Good Neighborhood of Hebrew Wisdom¹⁾

Craig G. Bartholomew*

Introduction

Several scholars including Michael Fox have rightly noted that the wisdom of Proverbs is not empirical;²⁾ it is experiential but its observations are informed by a set of values or an orientation towards the world. Little work, however, has been done to explicate the value system that underlies Proverbs and how this relates to the rest of the OT. Patrick Miller evocatively argues that the Ten Commandments establish the ethos of the good neighborhood.³⁾ This article will explore an aspect of the good neighborhood of wisdom in Proverbs through an examination of the relationship between the tenth commandment and the values of Proverbs. In the process we hope to illumine aspects of the value system informing Proverbs. The paper will conclude with an exploration of the relevance for today of the insights gleaned.

* H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Religion and Theology at Redeemer University College (2004-), Adjunct faculty, Senior Research Fellow of Trinity College, Bristol (2009-)

1) Unless otherwise indicated the NRSV translation is used throughout.

2) Michael W. Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistemology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 58 (1987), 137-155.

3) Patrick D. Miller, *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 51-67.

1. The Tenth Commandment

Why the tenth commandment? Elsewhere I have examined the Ten Commandments and their relationship to Proverbs⁴⁾ but for a variety of reasons it is worth singling out the tenth commandment (Ex 20:17):⁵⁾

You (sgl) are not to desire
the house of your (sgl) neighbor
You (sgl) are not to desire
the wife of your (sgl) neighbor,
nor his (sgl) servant, nor his (sgl) maidservant,
nor his (sgl) ox, nor his (sgl) ass,
nor anything that belongs to your (sgl) neighbor.

Unlike the other nine commandments this one cannot be legislated for because it deals with a subjective attitude, as many scholars have noted.⁶⁾ Leon Kass, for example, rightly notes that,

If most of the prohibitions in the second table are familiar, the Decalogue concludes in a surprising turn by focusing not on an overt action but on an internal condition of the heart or soul, a species of ardent desire or yearning. The uniqueness of this proscription of coveting is suggested both by its greater length and by the spelling out of the seven things belonging

4) Craig G. Bartholomew, "Hearing the Old Testament Wisdom Literature: The Wit of Many and the Wisdom of One," in Craig G. Bartholomew and David Beldman, eds., *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 302-331.

5) Cf., Deut 5: 21. My own translation. The following 'sgl' stands for singular.

6) John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3. (Texas: Word, 1987) 297-298; Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 351-53; etc.

to your neighbor that you not only must not steal but also must not even long for.⁷⁾

Nahum Sarna concludes from this that,

The Decalogue thus becomes a self-enforcing code in that its appeal is to the conscience, not to enlightened self-interest, and its enforcing mechanism is the spiritual discipline and moral fiber of the individual, not the threat of penalty that is imposed by the coercive power of the state.⁸⁾

Wisdom similarly is concerned with many aspects of life that cannot be dealt with by legislation but through persuasion, and so this is a natural place to begin comparing the two neighborhoods.

Furthermore the tenth commandment - ten being a significant symbolic number in the OT - forms an inclusio with the first one and summarizes the attitude required for the fulfillment of this relational code. Rabbi Goldman notes that, “The Decalogue begins with a right relation to God in the heart and concludes with a similar obligation in respect to man”.⁹⁾ Cassuto points out that “your neighbor” parallels “your God” in the opening: “There the essence is the love of God, and here it is the love of one’s fellow-man. The two parts are parallel to each other, so also are the two loves”.¹⁰⁾

Cassuto is perceptive in identifying the positive dimensions of the first and tenth commandments. Pope Benedict XVI similarly observes that,

7) Leon Kass, “The Ten Commandments: Why the Decalogue Matters”, with responses by Michael Fishbane, Peter Berkowitz, Gilbert Meilaender, Meir Soloveichik, *Mosaic*, June 2013, (Kindle Locations, 616-619).

8) Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (NY: Schocken, 1986, 1996), Kindle Locations, 3139-3141.

9) Solomon Goldman, *The Ten Commandments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 188.

10) Goldman, *ibid.*, 189.

the law of God is not to be seen as a concentrate of “noes” that are an end in themselves, but as the door of access to the great “yes” that opens up to God and to life. The Commandments are not chains that bind humans, but an antidote to the seductions, the passions, the unfettered desires that give the illusion of a limitless freedom, while in reality are false conquests that debase existence and make it empty. Placed in the right perspective, these laws are therefore to be considered as essential references for a life project directed to responsibility, fidelity and love, and therefore based on solid and enduring values that generate true freedom and the joy of living.¹¹⁾

Thus, if we can show that there is convergence between the neighborhood of the Ten Commandments and that of wisdom in the area of desire, then we have gone a long way towards showing a fundamental similarity at a deep, central level between the two.

2. The Gateway of Mimetic Desire

The profound significance of the tenth commandment is foregrounded in the seminal work of René Girard.¹²⁾ As he notes, “In the Bible, and especially in the Gospels, there is an original conception of desire and its conflicts that has gone largely unrecognized.”¹³⁾ Commandments 6-9 prohibit the most serious acts of violence against one’s neighbor. The tenth prohibits not an act,

11) Benedict XVI, *The Ten Commandments*. Catholic Foundation Stones series. (UK: St Pauls Publishing, 2014), Kindle Locations 30-35. Emphasis added.

12) For an introduction to Girard’s work see Scott Cowdell, René Girard and Secular *Modernity: Christ, Culture, and Crisis* (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

13) René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2001), 7.

but a desire. As Durham suggests, ḥāmad was the verb deliberately chosen to govern the final commandment.¹⁴⁾ As such it seeks to close the gateway of obsessive covetousness that would open the way to violate every other principle in the Decalogue.¹⁵⁾ The sequence in the second tablet is, do not injure your neighbor by action, by word, or by desire. The tenth commandment deals with desire, a theme high on 21st century agendas in a whole variety of ways.¹⁶⁾

According to Girard, however, the tenth commandment is far more significant than is often realized: “What the tenth commandments sketches, without defining it explicitly, is a fundamental revolution in the understanding of desire.”¹⁷⁾ Leon Kass perceptively notes that,

the final injunction causes us to reflect about the meaning of possession and about the nature of desire and neighborhood. A man who covets what is his neighbor’s suffers, whether he knows it or not, from multiple deformations of his own desire. Not content with his own portion of goodly things, he is incapable of seeing them in their true light: as means to— and participants in— a higher way of life. Moreover, some of the same items occur on both the list of seven partakers in Sabbath rest and in the list of seven “covetables”— as if to indicate the mistaken direction of the coveter’s desire.¹⁸⁾

Girard is thus not unique in recognizing the concern of the tenth commandment with constraining desire, as noted above, but his work is unique in unpacking the mechanics of desire and thus

14) On the use of ḥāmad in the OT see Hamilton, *Exodus*, 352. He notes that occasionally ḥāmad is used of a positive, healthy desire (Gen 2:9, for example) but mainly it refers to misdirected desire.

15) Durham, *Exodus*, 298. Cf. Pesqita Rabbati in Goldamn, *Ten Commandments*, 187.

16) See, for e.g., Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Penguin, 1998), which includes a chapter on Ecclesiastes, *ibid.*, 36-42.

17) *I See Satan*, 9.

18) Kass, “The Ten Commandments,” Kindle Locations 623-635.

the radicality of the tenth commandment in this respect. He notes rightly that medieval and modern theologians “speak much of original sin, but they fail to make the idea concrete.”¹⁹⁾ Few have followed the tenth commandment, as Kass indicates we should, in reflecting on desire and neighborliness, as deeply and concretely as has Girard.

Desire rests, argues Girard, in reality not on objects (houses, spouses, fields) so much as on a third party, usually the one closest, the neighbor. The tenth commandment recognizes this in its final clause: “nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Our neighbor is the model for our desires or what Girard calls mimetic desire. This accounts for the fragility of human relations. Mimetic desire is natural and children, for example, are designed to develop by modelling themselves on their parents.

The only culture really ours is not that into which we are born; it is the culture whose models we imitate at the age when the power of mimetic assimilation is the greatest. ... Mimetic desire ... is responsible for the best and the worst in us, for what lowers us below the animal level as well as what elevates us above it. Our unending discords are the ransom of our freedom.²⁰⁾

However, mimetic desire easily turns to rivalry. In the absence of an orientation towards God, our lives revolve around ourselves, and the person we imitate easily becomes a rival to or desires. The idolization of the neighbor involved in rivalry is necessarily associated with the idolization of ourselves. “The conflicts resulting from this double idolatry of self and other are the principal source of human violence.”²¹⁾ The rivalries of desire become exasperated and contaminate third parties who are as addicted as we are. Mimetic

19) Girard, *I See Satan*, 150.

20) Girard, *ibid.*, 15-16.

21) *Ibid.*, 11.

rivalry can become so intense that it leads us to denigrate the other, to steal his or her possessions, to seduce the other's spouse, and finally to murder, *the four commandments preceding the tenth, in reverse order.*

In his *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* Girard explores the pivotal role of the tenth commandment in containing mimetic desire, which he argues is at the heart of violence. Girard argues that the revolution initiated by the tenth commandment is fulfilled in the Gospels which call us to imitate Jesus' own desire.

As part of the code of ethics at the heart of the OT the tenth commandment is thus far more significant than is often realized. It reaches beyond actions to the heart and seeks to restrain societal violence at its root. The use of the second person singular throughout the Decalogue and in the tenth commandment should be noted. As Philo observed, "God thought good in proclaiming his ten oracles to address each [person individually] ... He wishes to teach the readers of the Sacred Scriptures ... that each single person, when he is law-abiding and obedient to God, is equal in worth to a whole nation ... even to the whole world ... [God] wills that no king or despot swollen with arrogance and contempt should despise an insignificant private person."²²) The tenth commandment thus holds the individual accountable for his or her inner attitudes and protects his or her interests. At the same time the tenth commandment is remarkable in its comprehensive focus on the household of the Israelite and its relationship to other households, so that it is intensely individual in its illocutionary force and intensely communal in its range. Halevi perceptively notes that the tenth commandment,

not only applies to another's property but to coveting that which belongs to God. The bottom-most sefirah is the Kingdom, and as such contains all the Grace that has come down from above. A human being may borrow for his time on earth those things he is given by providence, but he may

22) Quoted in Goldman, *Ten Commandments*, 75-76.

not consider them as possessions, because they are all gifts.²³⁾

Support for this view is found in the parallels between the tenth and the Sabbath commandment. Just as the whole household is to rest in remembrance of God as creator and creation as gift, so too, the whole household is to be protected from misdirected desire.

In short between the first and tenth commandment we are dealing with the inculcation of an entire worldview. The tenth commandment alerts us to the fact that the embodiment of such a worldview can only take place if the gate to mimetic desire is kept closed. With what some consider the most violent century in history just behind us it is clear how radical is the tenth commandment and how fundamental it is to the cultivation of the good neighborhood.

3. Desire in Proverbs

On the surface the tenth commandment does not seem terribly promising in terms of the good neighborhood of wisdom. There are explicit references to the danger of ḥāmad in only a few verses: Prov 6:25; 12:12. In 6:25a, “Do not desire her beauty in your heart”, ḥāmad is forbidden in relation to another’s wife, the adulteress, and the prostitute. This is the exact same form as we find in Deut 5 and Ex 20. The internal dimension is foregrounded with “in your heart.” The danger of such desire is evoked metaphorically in 6:27 “Can fire be carried in one’s bosom without burning one’s clothes?” In 12:12 ḥāmad characterizes the wicked who desire the proceeds of wickedness in contrast to the root of the righteous which bears fruit. Thus, even in these few verses ḥāmad is brought in relation to one’s neighbor’s wife, by implication to one’s female slave, and

23) Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, *Kabbalah and Exodus* (NY: Samuel Wesier, 1988), 123.

to one's house, which could only be obtained by another as a result of the "proceeds of wickedness." Prov 6:20-35 is interesting as a whole in that it makes explicit the connection between ḥāmad and adultery (cf. vv. 24-29, 32-35), and thus indirectly between the tenth and the seventh commandment.

In the deuteronomic version of the Decalogue the second occurrence of ḥāmad is replaced with the verb 'awâ (Deut 5:21b; hithpael 2nd m sgl) which root occurs several times in Proverbs as a verb and a noun:

3.1. Verb: 'awâ

21:10 "The souls of the wicked desire evil; their neighbors find no mercy in their eyes." The link between desire and "their neighbors" takes us right back to the tenth commandment.

21:26 "All day long the wicked covet, but the righteous give and do not hold back." As we will see below the noun also occurs in v. 25. 21:26 contains verb and noun, literally reading, "desire desire". This is an example of a cognate internal accusative,²⁴ and it expresses being overwhelmed with desire. The parallelism in this verse alerts us to Benedict XVI's point above that the law is not just negative but the gateway to life. The righteous align themselves with all of life as a gift, as embodied in the Sabbath commandment, and respond to their neighbors accordingly.

23:6 "Do not eat the bread of the stingy; do not desire their delicacies." In the Hebrew "of the stingy" reads literally "whose eye is evil".

24) Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, In.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 10.2.1g, pp. 37-39. Cf. Num 11:4 for nearly the same expression.

3.2. Noun: ta'awâ

10:24 “What the wicked dread will come upon them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted.” Here we find an example of “desire” used in a positive and healthy sense, alerting us to the fact that humans are creatures of desire but that desire can be badly misdirected. The responsibility of the wise is to cultivate healthy desire.

13:12 “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

13:19 “A desire realized is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.” VV. 12 and 19 provide further examples of a positive use of desire, and “a tree of life” is related intertextually to Gen 2, indicating that healthy desire opens up life as God created it to be.

21:25 “The craving of the lazy person is fatal, for lazy hands refuse to labor.” This verse, through its intriguing parallelism, connects covetousness with laziness.

3.3. Noun: hawwâ

17:4 “An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.” A desiring tongue is in parallel to “wicked lips.”

There is also other vocabulary of desire in Proverbs of which *ḥēpeš* in 3:15 is most significant - nothing one desires can compare with wisdom; she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. The expression here, “tree of life” is almost identical to that in Gen 2:9, lacking only the definite article, and in my opinion we have here an intertextual reference to Gen 2. Karl Barth argues that the tree of life in Eden signifies God as co-inhabitant of Adam

and Eve in the garden.²⁵⁾ It is only as Adam and Eve “co-habit” with God that they will truly flourish as creatures in the *imago dei*. Wisdom, in that it connects us with God and his order for living in his creation likewise leads to human flourishing. Much of Prov 1-9, the introductory section to Proverbs, uses a smorgasbord of metaphors and exhortations to awaken in the reader a desire for wisdom. Theologically 8:30 is also significant in this respect in which wisdom personified describes herself as “daily his delight” (šûim). In Prov 8: 22-31 wisdom personified is brought forth before God creates and is with him when he creates. The wisdom of God is thereby built into the very fabric of creation so that humans flourish as they desire and discern God’s wisdom in the creation and live accordingly. This is what it means to be human, and thus fits with Gen 1-2.

4. Desire, Proverbs, and the Tenth Commandment

From the above we can see that,

Firstly, Proverbs is clearly congruent with the Decalogue in its recognition that not just acts but desire leading to acts must be attended to. This is clear in 6:25 in which exactly the same form of ḥāmad as we find in Ex 20 and Deut 5 is used. In 6:25 ḥāmad is used in relation to adultery thus linking desire and the 7th commandment.²⁶⁾ In 1:10-19 in which the 6th commandment forbidding murder and the 8th commandment forbidding stealing²⁷⁾ are presupposed when the son is discouraged from joining a band of ruffians to ambush the innocent and murder them, the language

25) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. ed., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, tran., G. W. Bromiley et al., 4 vols, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958. Vol. 3, pt. 1, 282.

26) Cf. 2:16-19; 5; 6:24-35; 23:27-28; 30:20.

27) Cf. 1:13; 10:2; 11:1; 15:6, 27; 16:8; etc.

of desire is clearly present in v. 13: “We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty.” The 9th commandment dealing with false witness is surprisingly common in Proverbs²⁸⁾ and in context, cf., 21: 27 “with evil intent”, 21:28, “A false witness will perish ...” is closely linked into motivation. And the exhortations in Proverbs to value and thus desire wisdom like a great treasure (cf., Prov 2:4) are not just related to the second tablet of the ten commandments but also to the first (cf., Prov 2:5), and not least because we are clearly to delight in and to desire wisdom as does Yahweh in Prov 8. Thus, at least implicitly, Proverbs recognizes the link between the tenth commandment and the other nine.

Secondly, Proverbs makes explicit what is perhaps implicit in the Decalogue, namely that there is good and bad desire, evil and righteous. In this respect the link between the tenth and the first commandments is important. As Rabbi Goldman noted, “Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or dependent upon, more than god, of that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god.”²⁹⁾ Implicit in the “you shall not” is, of course the possibility that you shall! This is explicit in Proverbs’ doctrine of two ways, the way of wisdom and the way of folly. The root ’awâ is used, as noted above, both for the desire of the righteous (noun; 10:24; 13:12, 19) and for the desiring (verb; 21:10, 26; 23:6) of the wicked.

In Reformational thought a useful distinction in this respect is made between structure and direction.³⁰⁾ Creation is good and thus the structures built into the creation are inherently good. The human capacity for desire is one such structure. What the fall does is not to eradicate the good structures of creation - humans remain

28) Cf. 6:19; 14:5, 25; 21:28; 24:28; etc.

29) Goldman, *ibid.*, 136.

30) See Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

human – but to open up the possibility of the radical misdirection of the structures. Humans are creatures of desire by creation, and the capacity for desire is good. Since the fall, however, desire can be misdirected with tragic consequences.

5. Proverbs as a School of Desire

As a veritable school of desire Proverbs seeks to constrain and to awaken and redirect desire. It is clear from the above that the good neighborhood of Proverbs has much in common with that of Sinai. What Van Leeuwen notes about the liquid love of marriage in Proverbs could equally be said of desire: “This reality has its parallel at Sinai.”³¹ However wisdom is a different genre than law and there is more to be said. Von Rad notes that,

The man whom wisdom instructed was a member of the cultic community, his life was subject to manifold cultic ties, in the Temple at the great pilgrimage festivals he heard the peremptory or the comforting voice of Jahweh: to order a man’s life in this – that is, the cultic – sphere lay completely outwith the jurisdiction of the teacher of wisdom. But of course a wide sphere still remained unconditioned and unregulated by the cult ... It is the sphere of the most common and ordinary in daily life, in which the question was not always of murder or adultery or theft, though it was brimful of questions of a different sort.³²

This is surely true although I doubt that the cultic sphere lay

31) Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9,” *Semeia* 50 (1990), 111-144, 132.

32) Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Volume 1. tran., D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 433.

completely outside of the province of the wisdom teacher (cf. Eccl 4:17-5:5 [5:1-6]). Wisdom deals not just with the multiple aspects and particularities of everyday life unattended to by the law but seeks to inculcate an ethos, an eros of desire oriented rightly.

In his work on Proverbs and OT wisdom Van Leeuwen poses the question as to the deepest roots of the vision of wisdom and suggests that,

underlying the bipolar metaphorical system of positive and negative youths, invitations/calls, “ways,” “women,” and “houses” in Proverbs 1-9, is a yet more fundamental reality which these images together portray. These chapters depict the world as the arena of human existence. This world possesses two fundamental characteristics. First is its structure of boundaries or limits. Second is the bi-polar human eros for the beauty of Wisdom, who prescribes life within limits, or for the seeming beauty of Folly, who offers bogus delights in defiance of created limits.³³⁾

This is correct, in my view. For example the eros of wisdom is clearly articulated in 3:13-18 and in 8. In 3:15 nothing you can desire can compare with Lady Wisdom. In 3:18 she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of / touch³⁴⁾ her, an allusion to Gen 2:9 as we noted above. There is a parallel to 3:15 in 8:11 - all that you may desire cannot compare with Lady Wisdom. In 8:22-31 Lady Wisdom is described as the LORD’s “delight,” with the clear implication that she should also be ours.

33) “Liminality and Worldview,” 116.

34) Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 159.

6. A School of Desire?

In conclusion I reflect on the implications of this congruence in good neighborhoods between Proverbs and the Decalogue.

First, the close connection between the tenth commandment and Proverbs should make us conscious that the often rigorous boundaries posited between narrative, law, prophecy and wisdom in too much modern Old Testament study is untenable. They are different but in a society such as ancient Israel it is unimaginable that they would have been kept apart. We would expect an organic relationship between them and that is what we find in relation to desire. The well-known Canadian literary scholar Northrop Frye argues that, “The conception of wisdom in the Bible, as we see most clearly in some of the psalms, starts with the individualizing of the law, with allowing the law, in its human and moral aspect, to permeate and inform all one’s personal life.”³⁵ Our exploration of the relationship between desire in the ten commandments and desire in Proverbs provides support for such a view.

Second, we should note the contemporary relevance of this theme of desire. Desire is prominent in contemporary philosophy and other disciplines. Of course it also has an ancient pedigree³⁶ but suffice it to focus on the present for now. Hugh Silverman notes that,

With respect to the question of desire, twentieth-century continental philosophy has been preoccupied with two alternative formulations – desire as sex [Freud] and desire as power [Hegel]. These two views oppose and complement each other. They form a frame within which the question of desire takes

35) Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Penguin, 1982, 1981), 121.

36) Cf. Gen 3:6. Desire is a central theme, for example, in Augustine’s work. See Augustine’s early work, “The Happy Life” in *ibid.*, *Trilogy on Faith and Happiness* (NY: New City Press, 2010).

shape.³⁷⁾

There is also an extensive literature on desire in analytic philosophy. For readers less interested in philosophy, an example closer to home: the epidemic of narcissism in the United States. In their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell assert unequivocally that “The United States is currently suffering from an epidemic of narcissism.”³⁸⁾ Since the 1980s it has risen as fast as obesity - although receiving far less attention - and is accelerating. And desire is at the heart of narcissism as Twenge’s and Campbell’s narcissism questionnaire makes clear.

Desire ought to be a topic on our agendas, just as should violence. In evocative imagery in his early “The Happy Life” Augustine asks what it will take for men to enter the harbor of philosophy [the love of wisdom] from which they can reach the territory and land of the happy life, what he calls “the land of their great desire”. For Augustine, rightly, Christian faith has everything to do with desire, and - again rightly and unlike Silverman - he frames his discussion in relation to Christ who is the wisdom of God: “What should we call wisdom if not that wisdom which is God’s? We have it on the authority of God himself that the Son of God is God’s wisdom, and the Son of God is surely God. Therefore, whoever is happy has God.”³⁹⁾

Third, our global culture is one of unbridled consumerism⁴⁰⁾ so that in a strong sense it is one of desire, but only in a certain, misdirected sense. As the perceptive Jewish sociologist Philip Rieff

37) Hugh J. Silverman, “Introduction: Twentieth-Century Desire and the Histories of Philosophy,” in *ibid.*, ed., *Philosophy and Desire* (London: Routledge, 2000) 1-13, 1.

38) *Ibid.*, 2.

39) “The Happy Life,” 34.

40) See Craig G. Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz, eds., *Christ and Consumerism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002).

notes of what he calls our third age, “Modern faith merges with the culture of consumption. The consumer consumes all moralities, like things.”⁴¹⁾ Girard speaks in a recent interview of a hurricane of desire! “Third world aims at a culture in which yielding to the pop [primacy of possibility] of desire rather than the resistances and renunciations become easier.”⁴²⁾ The identification of our culture as one of consumer desire is common enough. What is not often noted is the connection between this desire, mimetic desire and thus violence. The 21st century shows no sign of reduced violence while globalization spreads consumer desire across the world. The economic apartheid that has developed globally between north and south is a potential powder keg of desire.

Rieff’s work is well known for his view that culture involves the translation of sacred order into social order. That, in my view, is what both the Decalogue and wisdom are doing, each in its own way. In line with both Proverbs and the Decalogue, Rieff insists that such cultural work requires a “via,” a “vertical in authority,” the very thing which makes transgression possible. For Rieff our third age is the first culture to attempt to do without a “via.” For him this is the road to disaster, a view with which Proverbs and the Decalogue would no doubt agree even as Proverbs attempts to arouse our desire for - and together they attempt to fashion - the good neighborhood in our midst.

Fourth, we ought to note and explore Girard’s argument that Scripture is unique in exposing and providing a solution to mis-directed desire and thus violence. Girard’s theory of desire and violence is more nuanced and complicated than I can begin to explore in this article. He argues for a comparison of mythology with the Bible, demonstrating that such an anthropological comparison allows the uniqueness of Scripture to come to the fore. For Girard, ritual and sacrifice are at the root of all culture. The Gospels in particular

41) Philip Rieff, *The Crisis of the Officer Class: The Decline of the Tragic Sensibility* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 4.

42) *Ibid.*, 10.

reveal this mythology for what it is and thus overcome it, causing the downfall of Satan and exposing the mechanics of violence.

If Girard is right, and I think he is, then his work and our discussion in this article serve as a reminder of the enormity of Scripture with its comprehensive vision for all of life. Scripture is not a scientific or philosophical textbook but it orients us to all of life and biblical scholars need to work hard at opening up its insights for all of life. Especially at this time of resurgent religion across the globe, of global consumerism, of a changing world with new nations emerging as the economic and cultural major powers, it is vital that we explore Scripture's insights into desire and violence. Girard notes that,

Neo-paganism locates happiness in the unlimited satisfaction of desires, which means the suppression of all prohibitions. This idea acquires a semblance of credibility in the limited domain of consumer goods, whose prodigious multiplication, thanks to technological progress, weakens certain mimetic rivalries. The weakening of mimetic rivalries confers an appearance of plausibility, but only that, on the stance that turns the moral law into an instrument of repression and persecution.⁴³⁾

I am less optimistic than Girard. Market consumerism taps into desire, desire which it constantly promises to fulfill but never can. In the process it has generated a culture of consumption in the West that is simply unsustainable. Consumerism is, I suggest, fuel to the fire of mimetic rivalry and thus violence. It calls for a "school of desire!"

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43) Girard, *I See Satan*, 181.

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<Abstract>

The Tenth Commandment, René Girard, And the Good Neighborhood of Hebrew Wisdom

Craig G. Bartholomew
(Redeemer University College)

This article explores the role of desire in OT wisdom through an examination of the common ground in desire between the tenth commandment and wisdom in Proverbs. It argues that the tenth commandment is of central importance to the ethos of the Decalogue as a whole and that Proverbs is similarly a school of desire. Following the seminal work of René Girard on mimetic desire, I propose that Proverbs' concern to constrain and direct desire is of far greater societal importance, not least for today, than is often recognized. In the process, light is cast on the system of values that the Ten Commandments and OT wisdom share in common.

<초록>

열 번째 계명, 르네 지라르 그리고 히브리 지혜의 좋은 이웃

크레이그 비들로뮤
(Redeemer University College)

이 논문은 십계명의 열 번째 계명과 잠언서의 지혜 사이에 공존하는 욕망(desire)과 관계되는 부분의 연구를 통해 구약의 지혜서에서 나타난 욕망의 역할을 탐구한다. 열 번째 계명이 십계명의 정신(ethos)중 가장 핵심적인 부분이라는 것과 잠언서는 소위 “갈망의 학파”(a school of desire)라는 주장이 있다. 이에 필자는 르네 지라르(René Girard)의 “모방적 욕망”(mimetic desire)의 영향력 있는 이론에 근거하여 잠언서가 소위 “욕망”을 제한하고 규제하려는 관심에 있어서 특히 오늘날에 흔히 인식되는 것보다 더 큰 사회적인 중요성이 있다는 것을 주장하려 한다. 아울러 이 고찰은 십계명과 구약의 지혜서가 공유하는 가치 체계에 대한 이해를 돕는다.