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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 378

Offered February 26, 2018

Commending the Colloquium on Violence and Religion.

Patrons—Ware and Toscano

WHEREAS, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, composed of men and women of goodwill from around the world, offers communities and nations a way to withdraw from rivalries as the necessary first step toward the possibility of peace; and

WHEREAS, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion draws its inspiration from the life and work of René Girard (1926 - 2015), who taught variously at Duke University, Bryn Mawr College, Johns Hopkins University, and Stanford University and for the breadth, depth, and majesty of his scholarly writings was elected to the famed Académie française in 2005; and

WHEREAS, drawing on a close reading of texts both ancient and modern, Girard demonstrated that human beings are characterized most of all by desire; that desire is mimetic, that is, that individuals desire either the possessions, prestige, or personalities of others; that mimesis ensues in rivalry; that rivalry is contagious, infecting entire communities; and that primordial human communities, to avoid an escalation of violence to the point of mutual extinction, turned on a spontaneously selected scapegoat to expel their passions; and

WHEREAS, René Girard drew on a vast range of scholarly evidence in every major discipline, including literary criticism, critical theory, anthropology, theology, psychology, mythology, sociology, economics, cultural studies, and philosophy, to demonstrate that the result of scapegoating an innocent victim was peace between previously warring peoples; and

WHEREAS, this peace was experienced as a mystery so profound that it was ascribed to superhuman agencies, thus giving rise to the divinization of the victim of the scapegoating action; and

WHEREAS, thus arose myths that concealed the unanimous violence of the mob, extolled persecutors, and insisted on the guilt of the exterminated victims, and thus arose, also, both the gods of mythology and, from sacrificial victims preened for execution, the cultural basis of monarchy; and

WHEREAS, the "scapegoat mechanism," by which René Girard traced this common thread in ancient and modern texts and histories alike, having proven efficacious in saving violent combatants from mutual destruction, was repeated in subsequent crises of contagious desire, giving rise to the rituals that characterize all prehistoric human cultures; and

WHEREAS, the false religion or "transcendence" of "sacred" violence against the scapegoat became the foundation of human culture and human institutions alike; and

WHEREAS, though myths concealed the catastrophic unanimous violence of warring mobs behind the saga of victims deemed to have been guilty, in time, first through the Hebrew prophets in their witness of Joseph, of Job, and of The Suffering Servant, and ultimately in the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth ("Father, forgive them, they know not what they do"), the innocence of the victims, hence the "founding murder" on which human culture and institutions rest, was disclosed; and

WHEREAS, the disclosure of the innocence of the victims has given rise worldwide to the realization that scapegoating is by definition an injustice; and

WHEREAS, the way to achieve peace requires nothing less than the refusal to perpetuate rivalries, or to mimic through "tit-for-tat" the violence of others that threatens a community with a contagion of animosity; and

WHEREAS, registering the experience of conversion from mimetic rivalry is, in the judgment of René Girard, the central inspiration of the great texts of all human cultures, notably in the modern works of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, and Proust; and

WHEREAS, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion pursues such theses in writings and conferences in an attempt to identify the groundless rivalries that entrap unwitting human communities in cycles of violence and to reveal the possibility of a substantive conversion from violent imitation to a way of peace; and

WHEREAS, the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, founded in 1990, has held its annual meetings in Spain, Australia, Germany, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Canada; and

WHEREAS, the 2018 annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion will be held just across the Potomac River from Virginia in the District of Columbia at The Catholic University of America in July; and

WHEREAS, Virginians of goodwill may be expected to be participants in the 2018 annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion; now, therefore, be it

INTRODUCED

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59 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
60 commend the Colloquium on Violence and Religion for preserving the memory and work of René
61 Girard as his intellectual and spiritual heirs in the pursuit of peace; and, be it
62 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
63 for presentation to Stephen McKenna, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Media & Communications of
64 The Catholic University of America, wishing him and his associates every advance on the way to
65 scholarly contributions to the way of peace as he hosts the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Colloquium on
66 Violence and Religion.