



A Violent God-Image: An Introduction to the Work of Eugen Drewermann

By Matthias Beier

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Theologian and psychotherapist Eugen Drewermann has been the most significant, the most prolific, and the best-selling theological writer in the German language over the past quarter century. Drewermann shows that religion, including Christianity, turns violent mentally, spiritually, and even physically if it uses fear as a motive for faith—fear of exclusion from the group, fear of hell, and fear of God. At the heart of Drewermann's nonviolent interpretation of key Christian beliefs is his analysis of a violent image of God that characterizes traditional interpretations of sin and the cross. It is this God-image, opposed to human desires and self-realization, that sanctified the killings of millions of peoples in wars declared to be “just” and legitimated the violent exploitation of nonhuman nature and the aggressive economic exploitation of non-Christian cultures. The sheer enormity of Drewermann's principal books has thwarted publication of his works in English translation to date. His empathic critique of the clerical mentality, ideology, and culture (*The Cleric*), based on his psychotherapeutic work with clergy, led to his being silenced by Roman Catholic authorities in 1991 and suspended from the priesthood in 1992. This is the first full-length introduction to Drewermann in English and includes extensive quotations from his works.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Thank you, Matthias Beier, for introducing Eugen Drewermann to American pastoral theologians and pastoral psychotherapists. *A Violent God-Image* is a gift to psychotherapists and should be added to our pastoral theology canon. Drawing upon his depth of personal experience and brilliant scholarship, Eugen Drewermann also understands violence through the lens of depth psychology. His insights about the biological and psychological origins of violence can be directly applied to clinical practice. However, *A Violent God-Image* deserves a wider audience. The world is desperate for Drewermann’s wisdom in this fearful time.” —Margaret Kornfeld, Past President, American Association of Pastoral Counselors, author of *Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities*

“A fascinating book! Beier brings to an English-speaking audience a profound and challenging Christian voice from Germany. In his homeland that voice has elicited the twin responses of excitement from a reading public that made his works bestsellers and of fear from his church’s hierarchy that sought to silence him. The book will be welcomed by those who labor on that frontier where faith and life collide.” —John Shelby Spong, author of *A New Christianity for a New World*

“Drewermann’s contribution is indispensable for two reasons: because he takes mental/spiritual suffering seriously and works for the liberation of those who, ‘crippled by fear all their lives, are prevented from risking themselves.’ Secondly, because he does something for the world-wide church that Latin-American liberation theologians cannot achieve but need: he challenges the mega institution’s attempt to stabilize power by means of fear and names authoritarian religion ‘a form of violence.’” -Dorothee Sölle

“Our time has known two thinkers of dazzling brilliance: the German Eugen Drewermann and the French René Girard. Girard’s thought has penetrated numerous fields: literary criticism, psychoanalysis, economics, and, not least, theology. Though a sensation in Europe, Drewermann is virtually unknown in America, due to the lack of translation. Matthias Beier has done the next best thing: he has provided a condensation and commentary that makes Drewermann’s thought accessible, in hopes that some enterprising press will see to the publication of more by this seminal thinker.” —Walter Wink, author of *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man*

“This first full-length volume in English on the thought of Eugen Drewermann is a welcome and long-overdue introduction to the groundbreaking work of the most prolific theological writer in the German language over the past twenty years.... We are indebted to Beier for undertaking a translation task only a native German speaker could accomplish, given the complexity and technicality of Drewermann’s prose.” —Review of Biblical Literature, 2005 (*Review Of Biblical Literature*)

“Beier has done us a very great favor in opening the door upon the work of Drewermann so well and wisely, for American scholars and interested, informed laypersons as well. This work is essential reading for every biblical scholar, every psychologist, particularly psychologists of religion, and professionals in the field of theology, ethics, and pastoral care. See your bed and buy this book!” —Journal of Psychology and Christianity (*Journal Of Psychology and Christianity*)

"This is a difficult but rewarding book.... But to those already familiar with existentialist and eco-feminist exegesis and theology, his introduction to Drewermann's complex theology will resonate on many levels, occasionally irritate, and suggest countless applications." -*Interpretation*, April 2006<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

"This is the first full-scale English introduction to the work of the Catholic Church's most interesting critic in Germany...an intelligent and lasting contribution to the study of this psychoanalyst-theologian and writer.... The causa Drewermann is not closed with this book; Beier has opened it, and it will stay open for quite some time to come."

Reviewed in *International Review of Biblical Studies*, 2007.

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"A Violent God-image is the first theological treatment I have seen that takes the integration of psychoanalysis and religion seriously. The result is a profoundly more human cast to otherwise abstract theological propositions.... Drewermann's approach ... opens the way to a potential new era of theological reflection centered on the integration of theological principles and doctrines with fundamental human concerns and psychic realities.... I would recommend Beier's treatise for its inherent interest and for its potential for stimulating more psychologically meaningful theological reflection." — W. W. Meissner, author of *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* and *Treatment of Patients in the Borderline Spectrum*

"This first full-length volume in English on the thought of Eugen Drewermann is a welcome and long-overdue introduction to the groundbreaking work of the most prolific theological writer in the German language over the past twenty years.... We are indebted to Beier for undertaking a translation task only a native German speaker could accomplish, given the complexity and technicality of Drewermann's prose." —Review of *Biblical Literature*, 2005

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About the Author

Matthias Beier, MDiv, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling and Director of the mental health license-track MA in Psychotherapy and Faith Program at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana, having taught previously at Fordham and Drew Universities. A nationally certified and New York State licensed psychoanalyst, Beier completed clinical training at the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP), New York City, founded by S. Freud's student Theodor Reik. An expert in the revolutionary work of bestselling German church critic, theologian and psychoanalyst Eugen Drewermann, Beier is well known as an international speaker on issues of religion and violence; health and religion; health or harm of God-images; and the debate between the new atheism and forms of fundamentalism.

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