René Girard, Sacrifice, and the Eucharist

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RENÉ GIRARD, SACRIFICE, AND THE EUCHARIST

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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RENÉ GIRRARD, SACRIFICE, AND THE EUCHARIST

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In this dissertation I examine the Sacrament of the Eucharist in light of the theory of sacrifice proposed by René Girard. Specifically, I consider the Eucharist within the context of the sacrificial nature of Christianity, a matter of some controversy as regards both the early thought of Girard and those who have taken up and developed his thought. In his early work Girard rejects the notion of a Christian sacrifice. In later works, the realization that Christian and archaic sacrifice are analogous realities that have a typological relation helps him come to accept the notion of a Christian sacrifice, but certain expressions throughout his corpus give evidence that he is not entirely at ease with a fully typological understanding of the relationship of archaic religion and Christianity.
This dissertation seeks to establish the typological character of Girard’s thought, and to understand sacrifice and the relation of archaic religion to Christianity this light. The typological character of Girard’s thought comes into view within his analysis of idolatry. Idolatry is seen to form a type that bears the character of a parody that comes fully into view in light of Christian realities. Both the adoration that mimetic desire directs towards the model of desire and the violent worship of the victims of sacrifice emerge as anticipatory parodies of Christian life and worship. The parody emerges fully when Christ recapitulates its elements. Freeing humanity from idolatry means re-presenting in a healed and restored manner all of the elements of the original parodies, which includes archaic sacrifice. The meaning and purpose of Christian sacrifice will be examined in this light, first to see its role in completing the recapitulation of human nature and human culture, and then to understand better its role in Christian life.

Lastly, the dissertation will consider the significance of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Specifically, the dissertation will examine the Eucharist’s role in bringing the individual believer to participate in Christ’s renewing re-presentation of all things human, to bring him or her out of the parody of idolatry and into the truth and beauty of authentic discipleship.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother,

Kathleen Marie Darcy,

who once told me that I should write a book.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Of all the difficulties I have faced in writing this dissertation, the task of thanking in this small space all the persons who have helped me along the way is perhaps the greatest. I must thank first and foremost my brother Oratorians, who have provided much needed encouragement and who picked up the slack of all the work I neglected as a result of my undertaking this project. In particular I must thank Fr. Drew Morgan for his encouragement in this and all my other endeavors. I must thank also Mrs. Catharine Ryan, whose generosity gave me the freedom to devote more time to this project than would have been possible otherwise. I feel a great debt also to all the people who come by the Oratory to frequent the sacraments and to pray. I know that many were praying for me and the success of my work. Countless times I was asked, “How is it going?” to which I responded with a tentative and feeble, “Okay.” Each and every one of these little expressions of interest meant a great deal to me, and provided me with a much needed impetus to get back to work. After some of these encounters I indulged myself by imagining the joy of being able to say finally, “I am done; it is finished.” Now I look forward to letting you know in person and receiving your warm support once again.

I must thank too my advisor and dissertation director, Dr. Marie Baird. In my earliest days as a graduate student I expressed to her my interest in the work of René Girard, and her emphatic encouragement meant more to me than I think she realizes. My admiration and gratitude for her is all the more great because of the fact that our thoughts and opinions diverge on issues dear to both of us. I attribute the greater portion of our successful collaboration to her generosity of spirit.
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INTRODUCTION

René Girard’s admirers and detractors alike have tended to refer to his thought eponymously, preferring names such as “the Girardian theory” or *le système Girard*. Girard himself has expressed disapproval of such formulations, even referring to the latter as “hateful.”¹ His own preference is for “the mimetic theory”² as it is the mimetic nature of human desire that preoccupies the entirety of his thought.³ Imitation within the realm of desire and the interpersonal dynamics that it generates, the manifold “strategies” of desire that it inspires, are at the center of his consideration of all human phenomena from the evolutionary origin of humanity to the apocalypse.

In his address of welcome on the occasion of Girard’s induction into the *Académie Française*, Michel Serres referred to Girard as the “Darwin” of the human sciences.⁴ The comparison of the mimetic theory to Darwin’s theory of evolution is an apt one. Each is characterized by a “parsimonious genetic principle” that provides “immense explanatory power.”⁵ Darwin proposes the simple mechanism

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² See René Girard, *La Spirale Mimétique: Dix-huit leçons sur René Girard*, Maria Stella Barberi ed. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 7. “Mimetic” is a reference to the Greek word *mimesis*, which is translated as “imitation.” So whenever mimetic desire is spoken of here, it is simply a reference to that aspect of desire whereby it is actualized and formed in the desiring subject by the imitation of his or her model of desire. Girard refers to his distaste for the formulation, “*le système Girard*” in a talk at the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R), 1993.


of natural selection as the generator of the totality of biological forms. Girard proposes mimetic desire as the generator of the totality of cultural forms. The mimetic principle, like that of natural selection, is simple: human desires arise from imitation. Desire is not what it first seems to be, a direct and simple response to an essential or inherent desirability contained within objects, but is rather a function of a model of desire whose prestige bestows desirability on the objects in his possession or occupying his attention. Desire is engendered and structured according to the “triangle” formed by the desiring subject, the object of desire, and the all-important model of desire. Girard’s contention is that from this simple starting point emerges the totality of human culture in all its complexity. Just as water molecules unite to produce elaborate crystalline structures, the relentless repetition, combination, and recombination of the mimetic triangle produces the endless variety of cultural structures.

Girard has expressed approval of this comparison with Darwin, and has made use of Darwin’s description of the theory of evolution as “one long argument from the beginning to the end” to describe his own. This observation points to a difficulty facing the one seeking to communicate the substance of Girard’s theory or to bring his thought into dialogue with other disciplines. The mimetic theory is truly


7 Ibid., 111.


a long argument. Girard begins in literary criticism where he distills from the great novelists of modernity a theory of desire. He then turns to anthropology in order to confirm this founding insight and to understand its relation to human origins and the foundation of human culture. Then it seeks to recognize in modern thought and culture the enduring effect of humanity’s mimetic nature. From vast bodies of literature and countless cultural texts—first those of the great novelists, then the literatures of Greco-Roman antiquity considered in tandem with the massive cultural record amassed by modern anthropologists—Girard abstracts the most fundamental mechanisms animating human nature. Once in hand, he uses the anthropological perspective he develops to reconsider the development of Western culture from the pre-Socratics to post-modernity. And as though determined to strain all patience, he insists on the importance of that for which contemporary sensibilities has none, the centrality of religion to a proper understanding of human nature and culture.

Girard undertakes all his observations in order to understand more completely the way in which the dynamics of mimetic desire determine the rise of cultural structures and their subsequent development. His theory develops as he pursues its effects down the course of history, but also involves the reconstruction of events not accessible to historical study. The cornerstone of Girard’s account of human origins is an event that he calls the “founding murder.”10 The founding murder is the collective murder of a single victim, a “lynching,” as it were, that

10 Girard, Things Hidden, 40.
establishes fellowship and solidarity among the murderers in a startling way.  

Within any community of persons, including and perhaps especially the most archaic communities of persons, internecine rivalries generated by the relentless action of mimetic desire escalate to a level where they threaten to destroy the community. In the midst of a social crisis where this self-destruction seems imminent, a single member comes to stand apart from all others. This isolated person becomes the focus of the community’s violent wrath. The community’s mimetic rivalries, the accumulated rancor threatening to break out in all directions, find an uncanny outlet in a spasm of violence directed towards this single person. This act of collective murder saves the community from all out violence, and the peace and renewal it brings are impressed deeply on the community’s collective memory.

In time, the community learns to fashion an institution that can recreate the cathartic effects of the founding murder. The spontaneous lynching becomes a kind of template upon which the institution of sacrifice is based. Sacrifice is a kind of re-presentation of the essential features of the founding murder, which makes sacrificial rites an important means by which the founding murder can be reconstructed. Sacrifice functions by extending through time the generative power of the collective violence of the founding murder, and from the perspective of archaic humanity, continually demonstrates its fructifying power. Girard shows that


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
the most fundamental of cultural institutions—agriculture, the domestication of animals, even political power—emerge from archaic humanity’s experience of sacrifice. Even more fundamentally, it cultivates and nurtures human nature itself. The human person is the first domesticated animal, and sacrifice is his or her domesticator.14

The founding murder is, to invoke a title of one of Girard’s principle works, the “thing hidden since the foundation of the world.” It forms the very cornerstone of his theory, and yet no direct evidence for it exists. According to his theory it is a function of the activity of mimetic desire and the violent rivalry it inevitably generates. Girard reconstructs the founding murder as the best explanation of the available data taken from the structure and content of sacrificial rites, their related myths, and the pressing need confronting human communities to find a means by which to protect themselves from the violence of their own mimetic rivalries. The theory is constructed and proposed as all sound theories are, as the simplest explanation of the available data. In this case, however, the available data is a vast body of circumstantial evidence.15

Addressing this aspect of his theory, Girard points out that there is more to be said for circumstantial evidence than is typically acknowledged. A piece of direct evidence amounts to an isolated fact that can generate false impressions unless accompanied by corroborating circumstantial evidence. In the book of Genesis, for example, Potiphar’s wife offers Joseph’s tunic as direct evidence of his attempt to

14 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 72.

15 Ibid., 165.
rape her, which officials erroneously take as proof of his guilt.  

Turning once again to the Darwinian precedent, Girard notes that the artifacts that are often regarded as the theory’s “smoking guns” were available to science long before Darwin formulated the theory of evolution, but remained in obscurity until they could be reconsidered in light of the evolutionary theory. Only a “theory by which to work” can provide the ability to recognize the significance of new evidence.

Girard’s theory, like any theory, must be evaluated according to its ability to explain the available evidence. The available evidence in this case is dauntingly vast: the available record of all cultural forms from archaic sacrifice, myth, and taboo, to systems of law and jurisprudence, and again to modern economic institutions. The sources from which he gathers are massive. Roughly speaking, they are modern, ancient and archaic literatures, as well as modern accounts of archaic rites and myths. With a body of data this vast there can be no “smoking guns.” No one “clue,” no one explanation of an archaic myth or account of a peculiar ritual will provide proof of the soundness of his theory. Demonstration can only be achieved by moving patiently from one area of study to the next, witnessing the ability of the mimetic hypothesis to explain the significance of cultural forms. The theory’s soundness can only be recognized as each movement occasions the discovery of new evidence and the corroboration of former evidence. Reflecting on his own experience of the development of his theory, Girard notes that his


18 Ibid., 56 and 167.
conviction regarding his hypothesis arose from witnessing its ability to gather
together and make sense of the enormous body of evidence before him, as well as to
make sense of anthropological phenomena long since regarded as hopelessly
obscure. Ultimately he came to regard the overall evidence for his hypothesis as
“numerous, ubiquitous, and consistent,” but only truly convincing after witnessing
its explanatory power in action in a number of otherwise unrelated fields.\textsuperscript{19}

Giving the mimetic theory a full hearing “from the beginning to the end”
inevitably demands that the reader give careful attention to topics far removed from
his or her primary subject of interest. The scholar seeking to make use of the
mimetic theory in his or her chosen field must consider a great many others. The
literary critic must become an amateur anthropologist and vice versa. The
philosopher must become familiar with both of those fields. Likewise in the case of
the psychologist and the historian. The most promising aspect of the theory, its
universal relevance to the humanities, can also seem like the single greatest
stumbling block to its acceptance. Girard’s work is fully “interdisciplinary,” and
while many express frustration with the narrow specialization characterizing
modern scholarship, the clumsy reception of Girard’s thought demonstrates the
difficulties faced by a thinker proposing a theory that gathers information from a
diversity of disciplines.

Of all the human sciences, the mimetic theory may pose the greatest promise
for Christian theology. Girard’s theory emphasizes the essential role that Christian
revelation plays in revealing the dynamisms of mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, and

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 165.
the structuring potentialities of collective violence. It gives a particular significance to the words, “they know not what they do.” As Girard insists repeatedly, the founding murder and violent sacrifice work precisely because they are misunderstood. Their cathartic efficacy provides an impenetrable cover for the innocence of their victims by giving a seemingly irrefutable credibility to the accusation directed towards the persecuted victim. The Bible as a whole undermines the efficacy of generative violence by “taking the side” of the victims of persecution and showing them to be innocent, or at least not guilty of the crises and crimes for which they take the blame. The story of Jesus’ suffering and death are for Girard the principle locus of our capacity to understand the founding murder precisely because the “scene of the crime” is there revisited, but in this case the innocence of the victim of collective persecution is proclaimed. The Gospels undermine the efficacy of the descendents of the founding murder, all forms of collective persecution including formal sacrifice, working first by disclosing the error at the heart of their operation, the guilt attributed to the victim. The Bible as a whole and the Gospels in particular reveal the victim to be a “scapegoat” in the modern sense of one who falsely takes the blame for the sake of protecting another from accusation. Christian revelation sets in motion a historical process by which

22 Girard, Things Hidden, 208-209.
23 Ibid., 216.
humanity sees with greater acuity the kinship shared by Christ and all persecuted victims, thereby continually diminishing the “generative” power of violence.\textsuperscript{25}

Girard insists that Christian revelation is the \textit{sine qua non} of the mimetic theory. The revelation of the founding murder and its relationship to mimetic desire develops throughout the Bible and reaches its crescendo in the New Testament with the disclosure of the Risen Christ as the Victim of victims. Not only, then, does Girard propose to revive the quest for a unified theory of the human sciences, he places Christian revelation at the very center of that enterprise. Girard’s theory seems to offer the possibility that Christian theology would once again be regarded as “the queen of the sciences” as it was in the Middle Ages, but now fortified with the full complement of the modern humane disciplines and social sciences.

Girard seeks relentlessly to vindicate the epistemological value of Christian revelation to the development of an integral anthropology. He demonstrates concretely the truth of the insistence made in Vatican II’s \textit{Gaudium et Spes} when it declares that in Christ, God “fully reveals man to man himself.”\textsuperscript{26} John Paul II clearly aspired to demonstrate the relevance of Christianity to human experience, and Pope Benedict XVI, while still Joseph Ratzinger, wrote that the coincidence of theology and anthropology constitutes, “the most exciting part of Christian faith.” Pope Benedict also wrote of the need “to show more clearly the place of Christianity in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 178-179.
\end{itemize}
history of religions and thereby to reinvest with some concrete and particular
meaning theological statements about the uniqueness and the absolute value of
Christianity.”

No intellectual development in the past 500 years exceeds the
capacity of the mimetic theory to show precisely in what manner “God reveals man
to himself,” nor is there any that provides a more promising basis for the mutual
elucidation of theology and anthropology. Just as importantly, Girard’s theory
promises to demonstrate what few today suspect, namely that the modern West’s
reflexively critical and skeptical spirit originates not in some superior modern
rationality, but in the Gospels and their demystification of mimetic desire and the
founding murder. It seems poised to play a principle role in saving Western
rationality from the intellectual self-immolation that has seemed imminent since the
19th century. The mimetic theory may very well turn out to be, as one observer put
it, “the heroic apogee of modern rationality: a voyage to the end of the sciences of
man which, having reached the edge of the abyss of nihilism, does an amazing
about-face that leads back in a blazing journey to the very domain believed left
forever: that of the word of God.”

This dissertation will seek to explore the way in which Girard leads us back
to the Word of God by demonstrating its epistemological value with respect to the


“Plus je reviens à l’œuvre de René Girard et plus son ‘hypothèse,’ comme il dit, m’apparaît comme l’apogée héroïque de la rationalité moderne: voyage au bout des science de l’homme qui parvenue au bord de l’abîme du nihilisme, opèrent cet étonnant demi-tour qui les ramène, en au fulgurant voyage, dans ce domaine qu’elle croyaient précisément avoir quitté pour toujours: celui de la parole de Dieu.
most fundamental aspects of human anthropology. It will be seen that Girard’s reading of the Gospels alongside the anthropological record has yielded in the mimetic theory the means by which Jesus’ death on the cross can be recognized as God’s re-presentation of the precise moment of cultural genesis, the founding murder. And now that that the founding murder has been re-presented according to the truth of God, a new sacrifice is possible whereby all that emerged from sacrifice originally, human nature and the totality of human culture, can be re-founded, freed from their links to the founding murder and reestablished in truth and goodness. Just as archaic sacrifice in this sense “commemorates” the founding murder, so too the Eucharist commemorates Jesus’ death on the cross and extends its effects in order to renew all that the founding murder and sacrifice have bequeathed to humanity.29 Sacrifice worked first by extending and magnifying the generative power of malice and cruelty. Now, converted in Christ, sacrifice extends and magnifies the generative power of forgiveness and mercy.

It will be seen that the conversion of sacrifice that his anthropological and religious analysis points to is essentially related to the conversion he explores in the works of great literary figures of modernity. The possibility of the conversion of humanity away from idolatrous models of desire, away from patterns of mimetic desire that generate conflict and scapegoats, begins with the conversion of the founding murder and sacrifice that is effected in Christ. It will be shown that this conversion results in the establishment of a religious economy centered on the person of Jesus that is analogous to the former religious economy centered on

victims of archaic sacrifice, which itself refers to the founding murder. This analogous relationship is such that these two economies, that of archaic religion and that of Christianity, can be juxtaposed in the manner of a photograph and its negative image. The structure of each is identical to the other, but each is a reversal of the other. Critics of Christianity have been fond of identifying those features of Christianity that have counterparts in other religions. They point out, correctly, that Christianity preserves the features of the most archaic religious systems. On this basis they declare Christianity to be simply another instance of archaic religion. Girard helps us to see, however, that the earliest Christian thinkers, unlike many of their modern counterparts, were not ashamed of these similarities. They understood, at least intuitively, that all similarities serve ultimately to distinguish Christianity from other religions by highlighting a more profound difference.

Girard’s characterization of the relationship of archaic religion and Christianity bears an important resemblance to the notion of “recapitulation” advanced first by St. Paul and developed extensively in the writings of the Church Fathers in their typological readings of the Old Testament. The English term


31 Girard, Things Hidden, 278.

32 Ibid., 274. I am eager to note that I am aware that the use of the terms “Old” and “New” Testaments is not uncontroversial. They suggest to many a “supercessionism” that regards Christianity as exceeding and making irrelevant both the Old Testament revelation and the Jewish community. For this reason many today prefer to speak of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The reason I choose to use the older style of referring to the different Testaments will only be fully elaborated in the fifth chapter where I deal with the issues of typology and the basis for regarding the Testaments as united according to a theological trajectory that develops across the Testaments. As will be seen there, I do not think that all forms of supercessionism can be avoided by Christians, but I
“recapitulation” is a Latin based rendering of the Greek term *anakephalaiosis* used by St. Paul in Ephesians 1:10.\(^{33}\) This text is translated into English in various ways,\(^ {34}\) but the word choice most illuminating from the perspective of the mimetic theory is that used by the Douay-Rheims, which indicates that God has made known his plan “to re-establish (*anakephalaiosasthai*) all things in Christ.” The Fathers’ development of the notion of recapitulation proceeds hand in hand with their development of the notion of Biblical “types” that likewise has its origin in the writings of St. Paul. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul describes Adam of the book of Genesis as a “type of the one to come,”\(^ {35}\) a figural foreshadowing who is recapitulated—re-established—in the second Adam, Christ.

The Church Fathers elaborated many Old Testament figures as types of Christ, but the Adam typology provided by St. Paul is foundational to the tradition. The fall of Adam and the fidelity of Christ are structurally identical. Both involve human nature in relation to God’s will, and the association of the events is emphasized by the New Testament’s repetition of the dramatic elements mentioned in Genesis: the setting of the Garden and the re-presentation of the tree of the knowledge of good

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\(^{33}\) Ephesians 1:9-10: “[9] that he might make known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in him, [10] in the dispensation of the fullness of times, to re-establish all things (*anakephalaiosasthai ta panta*) in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in him.” (Douai-Rheims version).

\(^{34}\) NIA: “to bring to unity;” KJV: “gather together;” ASV, NAB: “to sum up;” RSV: “to unite.” All translations agree that the object of the verb in question is “all things.”

\(^{35}\) Romans 5:14.
and evil, as St. Peter tells us, in the cross of Jesus.\textsuperscript{36} The structure is the same, but the outcome signals a complete reversal: the former is a lapse that causes the fall of human nature, the latter is a decisive act of faithfulness to God’s will that effects humanity’s redemption. We can recognize here again a negative and positive image. The type consists of Adam as an anticipatory inversion of Christ.

This understanding of the relation of the Gospels to what is prior points to an epistemological perspective shared by Girard and the Fathers. Again, the photographic metaphor is illustrative. A negative image is understood best in light of the finished photograph. Looked at in isolation it fails to reveal, and perhaps distorts, the reality it depicts. In light of the photograph, however, the significance of its elements can be recognized. Likewise, the Fathers make clear that the significance of Old Testament types can only be recognized in light of their fulfillment in Christ.\textsuperscript{37} The first Adam can be recognized as a pre-figuration of something greater only in light of the second Adam who fulfills the type. The second Adam, Christ, is second chronologically, but possesses a priority as the key to understanding what comes earlier. Girard affirms the decisive epistemological value of the Gospels, but extends it beyond the confines of the Bible. He contends that the theological intuition expressed in the typological observations of the Fathers draws its strength from a yet more primordial typological relationship of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} 1 Peter 2:24: “He himself bore our sins, in his body, on the tree (\textit{xylon}) that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” \textit{Xylon} more precisely denotes “wood,” while Greek word for tree is \textit{dendron}. It may be that English translations using “wood” to translate \textit{xylon} are making the typological reference more explicit. Many modern translations inadvertently suppress St. Peter’s typology by rendering \textit{xylon} as “cross.”
\item \textsuperscript{37} Richard Hays, \textit{Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness} (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).
\end{itemize}
which the Fathers lack a precise knowledge, that existing between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the founding murder.\footnote{Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 274-275.} Here too, the epistemological priority resides with that which comes later. Borrowing from the language of the scholastics, the archaic religious economy rooted in the founding murder, which includes sacrificial rituals and their associated myths, has a priority according to the “order of generation.”\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica}, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), I Q. 62, A. 4.} It occurs first historically. The death and resurrection of Jesus, however, has priority as regards “the order of perfection.” The Gospels arrive later historically, but in their “perfection” provide the key by which to understand not only the Old Testament pre-figurations of Christianity but also the broader pan-cultural pre-figurations of Christianity found in myth and ritual. They too are anticipatory inversions of what they prefigure. This is precisely what Girard indicates when he describes archaic religious systems as “broken Christianities.”\footnote{Girard mentions this the same lecture cited earlier. Girard, “Mimetic Theory and Christianity,” (Lecture, Colloquium on Violence and Religion, Chapel Hill, NC, April 22, 1993).}

We might say that Girard's anthropology concerning the role of collective persecution in human origins is an attempt to elaborate all that is denoted in the first Adam and his sinful condition. In the language of St. Paul and the Church Fathers, this elaboration depends entirely on the epistemological key provided by the second Adam.

The ability of “what comes later” to provide us the ability to understand “what comes earlier” depends on its full recapitulation of all that came first. Again,
the photographic negative provides a fitting illustration. The negative image is nearly impossible to decipher on its own. Its full intelligibility depends on the positive image that re-presents all it contains in a clarified way. Christianity helps us understand its broken predecessors precisely because it recapitulates the totality of their structural elements. Any essential element of the pre-figuration must have a re-established counterpart in its fulfillment. In their recapitulation, the founding murder and archaic sacrifice are subject to an illumination that makes of them a means by which further illumination occurs. Here we can recognize a concrete instance where the light provided by God is a means by which yet more light is given.41

This dissertation will demonstrate that Girard’s theory points to the typological relationship between archaic religion and Christianity, and then will proceed to make use of it as a kind of principle by which to examine the relationship of Girard’s theory to Christianity. Of particular interest will be the issue of the importance of sacrifice to Christian life. In his first extensive consideration of the significance of Judeo-Christian texts, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, Girard expresses the conviction that the notion of sacrifice is incompatible with Christianity. According to Girard, “sacrificial Christianity,” which proposes a sacrificial reading of the Gospels, amounts to a corruption that emerges early in Christian history, rises to prominence in the Middle Ages, and is finally “canonized”

41 Psalm 36:9: “For with you is a fountain of life; in your light we see light.” See also René Girard, Quand ces choses commenceront (Paris: Arlea, 1994), 158.
in the atonement theology of St. Anselm. The Christian God described by St. Anselm becomes nearly indistinguishable from the pagan deities whose violence must be countered and appeased by the violence of scapegoating. On this basis Girard seeks initially to vindicate a non-violent, anti-sacrificial reading of the Gospels. This initial assessment of the relationship of Christianity to sacrifice poses obvious difficulties for Christian theology, which regards Christ’s death on the cross as a sacrifice. Catholics face the added difficulty of reconciling Girard’s analysis of sacrifice with the Council of Trent’s solemn declaration that the Eucharist is also a “true and proper sacrifice.”

In his later works, Girard revises this aspect of his theory, and credits the Jesuit theologian, Fr. Raymund Schwager, for providing an essential help to understanding the proper place of sacrifice within Christianity. Nevertheless, one often encounters in the writings of Catholic appropriators of Girard an effort to qualify and even diminish the attribution of sacrifice in their discussions of the Eucharist. Indeed, even within Girard’s writings one will encounter expressions

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46 See Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 123. Daly speaks approvingly of ICEL’s (International Committee for English in the Liturgy) decision to “quiet down” the language of sacrifice in its rendering of the original Latin version of the various Eucharistic prayer text found in the Roman Missal. Likewise, he expresses misgivings at the efforts to restore sacrificial language in the 2011 translation, which at the time Daly wrote had not yet appeared in its final form.
that seem to indicate lingering hesitations regarding notions such as a Christian mimesis, sacred, sacrifice, or even desire itself.\textsuperscript{47} After having argued persuasively that these realities are powerful anthropological constants, one encounters in his remarks, even if only in passing, indications that seem to suggest that Christian conversion means abandoning or somehow moving beyond them.\textsuperscript{48} In almost all cases, especially in his later works, these seem to be little more than imprecisions in his expression, but they may also indicate a lingering suspicion formed during the earliest stage of his career that mimetic desire and violence are never without each other for very long.

At one point in his writings, Girard cites approvingly Blaise Pascal's observation that one is permitted to correct the Bible so long as one uses the Bible to do so.\textsuperscript{49} One might regard this dissertation as seeking to do something similar within the realm of the mimetic theory: to use Girard's theory to correct Girard. It will seek to show that in spite of his own hesitations, the theoretical framework he provides points to the conversion of Christian sacrifice by means of its

\textsuperscript{47} See René Girard, \textit{Battling to the End}, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 56. Regarding Carl von Clausewitz, the subject of this last major work, Girard writes, "As we have guessed, he is too mimetic, too full of resentment to try to avoid a confrontation." In this work Girard many times countenances the possibility of a peaceful mimesis and emphasizes repeatedly here and elsewhere that mimetic desire is fundamental to human nature, but the quote given here he indicates that one can be "too mimetic," or that being peaceful means being something other than fully mimetic. Girard refers to an aversion to the notion of a "Christian sacred" in an interview that took place on a Stanford radio show: Robert Harrison, "The Scapegoat: A Conversation with René Girard," \textit{Entitled Opinions}, Stanford University Radio, Stanford, CA: KZSU, May 5, 2009.

\textsuperscript{48} See, for example, René Girard, "Conversion in Literature and Christianity," \textit{Mimesis and Theory}, ed. Robert Doran (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 270. "The second perspective comes from the end of the novel, from the omega point of conversion, which is a liberation from desire."

\textsuperscript{49} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 276.
recapitulation. It will begin by showing that from its very beginnings Girard’s thought is “recapitulative” in nature. Human desire gone astray and lapsing into idolatry immediately establishes a kind of parody of Christian religion, and in so doing establishes a pattern that in hindsight can be recognized as a sign of the possibility of its reorientation. This pattern, in fact, becomes the means by which that reorientation is effected. Desire may be thought to proceed by inscribing this typological foreshadowing into the cultural institutions it subsequently generates, sacrifice in particular. This will help us to recognize the essential role of the Eucharistic sacrifice in the completion of Christianity’s recapitulation of the entirety of the structure of archaic religion. This discussion, in turn, will set the stage for an examination of the Eucharist’s role in the reestablishment of human culture.

The dissertation will consist of two parts. The first part will be devoted to a description of Girard’s mimetic theory. Chapter one of the first part will describe Girard’s literary criticism. It will be seen that the great novels of the Western canon provide the mimetic theory with its theoretical starting point, the mimetic nature of desire. Girard distills from the narratives of the great novels and the interaction of their characters a phenomenology of desire, a richly detailed portrait of the effect of imitation on interpersonal relations. An essential feature of this portrait is what may justly be termed a mysticism surrounding the model of desire that can be recognized as a kind of parody of Christian devotion to God.

The second chapter will follow the progress of the mimetic theory into anthropology. There we will see that the intuition of the great novelists concerning the nature of desire receives a powerful confirmation in the content of archaic
religion. There the mysticism of the model of desire is writ large in the rituals and beliefs of early humanity. The idolatry implicit in the mysticism of the model of desire becomes explicit in the devotion of archaic peoples to the victims of their violent sacrifices. Here the deeply ambivalent nature of desire that Girard recognizes in the attraction and repulsion exerted on literary characters by the models of their desire manifests itself in the violent idolatry of archaic religion. According to Girard's analysis, the violent sacrifices of archaic religion are a function of rivalries generated by the imitation of desire, and the hallucinatory confusion they generate creates a condition where the collective persecution of surrogates and substitutes can be made to serve as the means by which persons are reconciled to one another.

Part two of the dissertation consists of chapters three and four, which will describe Girard's analysis of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Chapter three will examine his analysis of the Old Testament. Here we will see that within the Old Testament a revelation unfolds that is simultaneously anthropological and theological, that works to penetrate the mysticism associated with the idolatries of both interpersonal desire and the myths and violent rituals of archaic religion. This revelation powerfully critiques the notion of divinity that emerges from the seed of the mysticism of the model of desire. Girard shows that the texts of the Old Testament regard the violent sacrifices of pagan religion to be a function of human appetites disordered by the practice of idolatrous desire. Likewise, the Old Testament manifests a growing awareness that violent sacrifice is an all too human affair, one that is contrary to the will of the true God, who wills humans to be
reconciled to one another not through collective violence, but by the practice of justice, mercy, and forgiveness.

Chapter four will examine the way in which the New Testament brings to completion the theological and anthropological themes that emerge in the Old Testament. In Christ God reveals the innocence of the victims of sacrifice fully by becoming the victim of an event that re-presents the circumstances of sacrificial violence. This amounts to a final and decisive penetration of both the mysticism of the model of desire and sacrificial violence, and forms the basis of a new transcendence, a new understanding of God and a new vision of human life.

Chapter five will consider the specific relation of Christianity to archaic religion. It will be seen that developing across the Old Testament and emerging fully into view in the New is a recapitulation of archaic religion. Christianity presents a healed and corrected version of archaic religion, and in light of its re-presentation, archaic religion and its violent cult of the model of desire can be recognized as a parody of the Christian devotion to Christ, the model of a healed and corrected desire. It will be seen that revelation is fundamentally typological, revealing simultaneously the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the origin and the destination, and at its most developed, revelation discloses the parodic quality of the original type. When the human origin is illuminated finally, it can be recognized as a parodic attempt to achieve what in the end is given by God. The same is true for the personal transformation effected by grace and conversion. It bears the same typological quality of revelation itself, creating a new, transformed self, which discloses the former self as a parody of the new creation.
Chapter five will devote particular attention to the Eucharist’s role in completing the typological relationship of archaic religion and Christianity. It will be seen that as the sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ, the Eucharist is an efficacious sign of the revelatory and transformative power of Jesus’ Cross. In its structure and form the Eucharist bears the typological character of revelation, retaining the vestiges of its parodic counterpart in archaic religion. The aspects of type and parody associated with the sign value of the Eucharist declare that the grace given to the individual communicant makes him or her subject to the renewal of humanity signaled in all typologies.
1.1. Introduction

Girard's first major scholarly work, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, was a work of literary criticism. There he considers the rise and progress of the genre of the novel in light of the works of five principal novelists, Miguel de Cervantes, Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Marcel Proust. Here and in his lesser works of literary criticism Girard presents the development of the novelistic genre as a kind of record of the degeneration throughout modernity of what might be termed – provisionally and problematically – a kind of Christian sacred, a set of religious beliefs and cultural institutions that had arisen by the time of the Middle Ages.\(^{50}\) In the course of his presentation he makes clear that the great novelists never present this degeneration simply as the elimination of the Christian God and the clearing out of a neutral, secular space within the cultural and social life of Europe. The novel shows that within the history of the modern West the displacement of the imitation of Christ has given way to an imitation of neighbor that produces a transcendence of its own that takes the shape of a close parody of

the Christian transcendence it replaces.\textsuperscript{51} This parody bears all the characteristics of the Christian religious vision it displaces, albeit in a negative fashion.\textsuperscript{52} This chapter will seek to show that Girard’s literary criticism details what we may justly refer to as a “mysticism of the mediator” that forms a close analogy, a negative image, of the mysticism associated with the imitation of Christ. In subsequent chapters it will be seen that this negative transcendence anatomized in Girard’s literary criticism is the genesis of the typological relationship that emerges within Girard’s anthropology between Jesus’ death on the cross and the founding murder.

1.2. The Science of the Novel

The esteem given by Girard to the epistemological value of the novel is indicated succinctly by his terms “novelistic truth” and its counterpart, “the romantic lie.”\textsuperscript{53} The latter regards desire as spontaneous and unmediated, arising from within the desiring subject as though springing from what is most intimate, private, and personal in the desiring subject. The romantic sensibility regards imitated desires as inferior copies, the marks of an “inauthentic” or otherwise deficient humanity. It minimizes or ignores altogether the fundamental role of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire and the Novel}, 155-156. “\textit{Askesis} for the sake of desire is just as legitimate and productive, in the triangular context, as ‘vertical’ \textit{askesis} in the framework of religious vision. The analogy between deviated transcendency and vertical transcendency is even closer than we first suspected.”
\item The French title of \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel} is \textit{Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque}, or literally, “romantic lie and novelistic truth.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
model of desire, the one who mediates desire to imitators.\textsuperscript{54} The novel shows us that desires are “contagious,” and spread among persons by an agency that is anatomized nowhere as fully as it is in the interpersonal relations depicted by the great novelists.\textsuperscript{55} This is not to say that all novels participate equally in the disclosure of mimetic desire. Many, perhaps even most, exhibit a romantic sensibility. Nevertheless, the particular connection between the novel and the impulse to realism in the depiction of human existential relations is such that its finest examples by the most capable artists tend toward the depiction of desire as mimetic.\textsuperscript{56}

The novel emerges in the period of time immediately following the Renaissance, a time when artists were eager to perfect the techniques of aesthetic mimesis, creating artistic techniques of perfected realism in the graphic and plastic arts, as well as in the dramatic arts where writers such as Shakespeare, Molière, and Calderon explored human behavior and psychology with careful attention.\textsuperscript{57} The rise of the novel as a literary genre was the fruit of this impulse to greater and more precise realism. In the novel anything that might distract from a fully realistic portrayal of human interactions is set aside. All the formal considerations of poetry, for example, are abandoned. More than the poet and even the dramatist, the


\textsuperscript{55} René Girard, \textit{Quand ces choses commenceront} (Paris: Arlea, 1994), 166.


\textsuperscript{57} René Girard, \textit{A Theatre of Envy} (Notre Dame: St. Augustine Press, 2004), 330.
novenlist enjoys the ability to “violate the consciousness” of his characters in the elaboration of their motivations and mental states.58

The novel is not only the product of the drive to greater levels of realism in literature, and but also plays an important role in facilitating this progress as well. The genre not only allows for greater realism, but to a very great extent requires it. The novel places before its practitioners the continual demand for a greater and more complete realism in its depictions of human persons in their social interactions. Girard points out that many of the authors he considers confronted a certain “falseness” in the early drafts of their works or the lesser works of their early career.59 Their review of these drafts occasioned a confrontation between the authors and their own vanities and false perceptions.60 In the construction of their characters and the structuring of their relationships they were brought face to face with their own propensity to self-flattery and self-deception. They could see too their hidden or barely hidden obsessions with enemies and admirers. In short, they were brought face to face with the workings of mimetic desire in their own lives.61 The engagement of their art prompted a kind of examination of conscience that

58 Ibid., 153.

59 Girard, “Marcel Proust,” Mimesis and Theory, 67. “As Jacques Rivière perceived, the lyricism of the novel is inseparable from its psychological truth. Jean Santeuil and Remembrance of Things Past illustrate Simone Weil’s distinction between those works of art, which remain second rate, however brilliant they may be, because they do nothing but “enrich” their author’s personality, and true masterpieces, which originate from an impoverishment, a mutilation of the inauthentic self.”

60 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 38.

61 Robert Doran, “Editor’s Introduction,” Mimesis and Theory, ed. Robert Doran (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), xxii. “In other words, the creative process allows the author to discover his own bad faith or self-deception from the perspective of desire.”
resulted in the development of a phenomenology of human interaction of the
greatest anthropological significance.\textsuperscript{62}

This is not to say that even the great novelists come to a perfected theoretical understanding of human nature. Even as they depict human nature as fully mimetic and dramatize the significance of the relationship between the desiring subject and the mediator of desire, they often fail to express adequately this relation as they comment on their own work.\textsuperscript{63} Of the novelist Marcel Proust, for example, Girard notes that in his theoretical observations and commentary on his own work he “tends to regress to a lower level of intuition.”\textsuperscript{64} He makes similar observations concerning Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose greatest masterpieces play an indispensable role in the development of the mimetic theory.\textsuperscript{65} The establishment and development of a “science of the novel” requires the distillation and systematization of the dramatic content of the great novelists, a work for which novelists themselves do not always seem well prepared. This is precisely the task to which Girard sets himself in the course of his literary analysis.

The science of the novel promises to contribute significantly to other modern disciplines by expanding the scope of our view of human nature. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology function by restricting their investigations


\textsuperscript{63} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 30.


\textsuperscript{65} Girard, \textit{Resurrection from Underground}, 136.
to a narrow range of existential phenomena. By doing so they have been able to develop a range of investigative techniques and clearly articulated conceptual apparatus. This technical aspect, however, comes at the price of the global vision enjoyed by the novel. In the hands of skilled artists of vision, the novel affords the means by which to depict the full measure of human relatedness. The novelist can consider his or her characters within their full cultural context, considering individuals in light of the full range of their interpersonal and social realities, their personal, familial, social, political, and religious relations.

This is not to say that the science of the novel can replace or supersedes in any way the technical approaches of other modern disciplines. The rise of the modern human sciences has provided us with the means by which to express fully what the great novelists could depict very well but could not objectively articulate even themselves. The first attempts to develop modern technical disciplines faltered with respect to recognizing the reality of mimetic desire, but managed to develop a range of conceptual apparatus capable of making explicit the insights that remain implicit in great literature. The dramatic depiction of mimetic desire does not itself rise to the level of a science. For this, a methodical and systematic explication is required. It needs to rise to the level of theory.

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66 Ibid., 139.

67 Girard, *Resurrection from Underground*, 139. “And because the novelist never closes the circle of observation of events, his power of evocation is prodigious.”

1.3. Mimesis

Neither the novel’s nor Girard’s interest in mimesis represents anything new in the history of ideas. Mimesis has preoccupied Western thought from its beginning. It is a topic of keen interest for Plato. In spite of a deep ambivalence for mimesis, he develops a great portion of his philosophy in relation to it, even to the point of making of it a basis for his ontology.69 Aristotle insists on the mimetic nature of art and assigns to imitation a significant role in the cultivation of virtue. Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis is one of the most important works of literary criticism in the 20th century,70 and modern cognitive science has revealed the significant mimetic dimensions of the brain’s operation.71 From the time of the ancients to our own day mimesis has maintained an important role in the unfolding of Western thought. But what has escaped any significant attention in all these spheres is what Girard insists preoccupies the great novelists of Western literature. This is the significance of mimesis to the existential workings of human nature, the fundamental relation of mimesis to human desire. To this may be added the intimate connection between mimesis and violence. However many thinkers have turned their attention to mimesis, only the great literary masters have arrived at the role played by mimesis in the initiation and propagation of violent conflict, a relation that preoccupies almost the entirety of Girard’s analysis.72

69 Ibid., 8.


1.4. The Prestige of the Mediator

At the beginning of his academic career, Girard was asked to teach literature courses. He agreed, but faced a sizeable difficulty: he had not read the books he was to teach. His earliest literary education, therefore, was self-directed, and undertaken, he notes, apart from the influence of the reigning theories of literary interpretation that seek to determine the unique genius of a given artist. As Girard undertook his reading he noted instead the commonalities between the great authors. In their depiction of human interactions the novelists agree that human desire is not the function of an objective desirability rooted essentially in the objects of desire, but is rather always the function of the all-important model of desire who mediates desire to imitators, desiring subjects. Desire thus has a structure, and that structure is triangular, where the terms of the triangle are the desiring subject, the object of desire, and the model or “mediator of desire.” Among the literary characters featured in the novels considered by Girard, these admired persons are themselves literary or quasi-literary as in the case of Napoleon whose remarkable life was transformed into something resembling legend in his romanticized

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72 Girard, *Quand ces choses commonceront*, 31-32.


76 "Model of desire" and "mediator of desire" are synonymous terms. Models of desire function as models precisely by mediating desire to their imitators. They are the means by which desires are communicated to desiring subjects.
biographies. Models of this sort or models that live and breathe right around us—parents, siblings, teachers, friends—all have the same characteristic that elicits the attention and imitation of others. They all seem to possess a “greater plenitude of being;” they seem to live a richer existence, enjoying a greater access to the world and its benefits. This fuller existence elicits the admiration of others who wish to share in these benefits, which in turn elicits their imitation. The admiring subject becomes the imitating subject, directed toward the admired person who becomes the model of imitation. The admiration directed towards the models of desire is the womb from which all desirability is begotten. The happiness or richer existence they seem to enjoy bestows upon all that is associated with them—the articles in their possession, the activities they undertake, the social positions they occupy, the political, religious, or philosophical ideas they hold—a kind of sacramental value. The objects associated with them promise some share of the greater glory they enjoy; the mediator “transfigures” them with value and attractiveness.\(^\text{78}\)

As some of the terms used above suggest—sacramental, glory, transfigure—it is natural to speak of the relation of the imitating subject and the model of desire in religious terms. Indeed, the authors mentioned above, regardless of their religious convictions or aversions, employ religious imagery in order to characterize the relationships of their characters.\(^\text{79}\) One can adapt expressions of religious devotion with little modification in order to describe the relationship of desiring subjects and


\(^{78}\) Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 17.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 30.
their mediators. St. Paul’s “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” might become for Don Quixote, “It is no longer I who live, but Amadis of Gaul who lives in me.” Analogous formulas could be made for Julien Sorel of *The Red and the Black* and Napoleon, or Dostoevsky’s “Underground Man” and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Manfred*, or Marcel from *Remembrance of Things Past* and the god-like character Bergotte.81

Desire is a kind of neediness, a lack or deficiency, a gnawing emptiness that we long to fill and which requires of us blood, sweat, and tears. Models are made radiant by their greater freedom from these concerns. They seem to enjoy a greater repose and satisfaction with life. They seem to live in a realm removed from everyday hardships. They do not live in obscurity, but rather win the admiration and attention of all others. They move through life imposing their will everywhere and seem to meet with little resistance. The mediator seems to possess some share – perhaps small, perhaps great – of the most obvious trait of divinity: a self-mastery or “self-sufficiency” with respect to desire.82 This self-sufficiency with respect to desire is the most fundamental characteristic of the “glory” that draws the attention of the imitating subject. When such a person is seen to desire something, the model cannot help but regard the object as very precious indeed.83

80 Gal 2:20.

81 Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 69. These analogues are the basis for the “inexhaustible” analogues that Girard observes can be made between the works of the great novelists considered by Girard.


Desire is engendered by a kind of identification of the imitating subject with the mediator. The imitator wishes in some sense to become the mediator, to occupy the same identity or “place” in the world above the banalities and wearisome cares that preoccupy mere mortals. Girard finds several descriptions of mimetic desire in the plays of Shakespeare, but one from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – “to choose love by another’s eyes” – captures best the way in which desire springs from the subject’s identification with the mediator. By this identification the imitator sees him or herself and the world at large “through the eyes” of the mediator. And the first sacrifice the imitator lays at the feet of the adored mediator is the “most fundamental personal prerogative,” that of choosing one’s own desire. Imitation might begin superficially, initially taking the form of adopting the external appearance or superficial mannerisms of the model, but the ultimate aim is the mediator’s essence. The acquisitive aspect of desire begins in the desire to absorb the being of the mediator.

The extent of the subject’s identification with the mediator will have everything to do with the prestige of the mediator, and the mediator’s prestige has everything to do with the self-sufficiency the subject perceives in him or her. Desire, in turn, is the prestige given to objects out of the store of prestige possessed by the mediator. The mediator displays his or her interest in an object, bestows his or her

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87 Ibid., 53.
prestige upon it, and desire is aroused. When the mediator turns away, desire vanishes; when he or she give attention once more to the object, its value is just as quickly restored. All of this, of course, depends on the perceptions of the subject of desire, which are liable to all sorts of errors and misjudgments. Any reassessment of the prestige of the mediator will necessarily affect the desirability of those objects he or she once endowed with desirability. Someone idolized as self-sufficient and afforded the highest prestige might in an instant, by the simplest gesture, forfeit all of his her prestige and bring him or herself “down to earth.” This accounts for the rapid reversals to which desire is prone, which correspond always to changes in the relationship between the desiring subject and the mediator. These fluctuations can produce disorienting psychological effects as desire vanishes in one moment and reappears in the next. Cervantes, for example, shows us how a worthless barber’s basin can become a glittering object of desire, the “golden helmet of Mambrino” at the suggestion of an admired mediator. The etymology of “prestige” confirms its longstanding association with the hallucinatory effects of mimetic desire, and as will be seen as we explore further the anthropological content of Girard’s thought, the full range of magical effects and mythological transfigurations seen in archaic myth and ritual has everything to do with the wild fluctuations to which desire is prone owing to its mysterious connection to mediators.

88 Girard, Things Hidden, 44.


1.5. Metaphysical Desire and Deviated Transcendence

As desire becomes increasingly mimetic, as it becomes increasingly a function of the prestige of the mediator and his or her perceived self-sufficiency, it comes to have less and less to do with the real value of the object. Desire “departs” from the object of desire and takes its energy from something beyond it. Girard identifies this departure as a kind of transcendence, and the degree of transcendence marks the distance between the desire of the desiring subject and the real value of the object, a distance that we can account for only with reference to the distorting effects of the subject’s admiration for the mediator. In this way, the influence of the mediator has a profoundly distorting effect on the subject’s perception of whatever might be regarded as the real value of the objects subject to the transfigurations of mimetic desire. The transcendence of mimetic desire is a “deviated transcendence” that impedes contact with reality.92 As shall be seen in subsequent chapters, the deviated transcendence of mimetic desire is at the root of all idolatry, whether it be the formal idolatry condemned by the Jewish prophets, or the modern idolatry condemned by Dostoevsky who realized that men become gods for one another not to create heaven on earth but to condemn one another to hell.93

Girard will likewise speak of “metaphysical” desire, which in his usage is practically synonymous with deviated transcendence.94 Here we confront a

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93 Ibid., 61.

94 Ibid., 65.
peculiarity in the terminology employed by Girard to describe desire and its nature. He seems to employ “metaphysical” according to the word’s precise etymology, which means something like “after” or “beyond” the physical. Desire that is metaphysical has lost its contact with the object to which it is directed. The more metaphysical a desire, the more it is a function of the mediator rather than a response to a real encounter with its actual goodness. Girard will thus speak of the “disincarnating” effect of mimetic desire.\footnote{Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 166.} Desire can become so metaphysical and so disincarnated that the object itself may fall entirely from view, and we are confronted with the phenomenon of “desire with no object.”\footnote{Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 299.} Here desire is entirely metaphysical and transcends the object entirely, but this “beyond” is no further beyond the subject and the object of his or her desire than the distance between the subject and the mediator.\footnote{The qualifier “deviated” helps us recognize the sense of Girard’s use of transcendence with respect to mimetic desire, but his use of metaphysical is more easily misunderstood. The term metaphysical has been deployed in varied ways throughout the history of philosophical and theological thought. In the sense most familiar to Catholic thinkers, it denotes that which is most real, the essential reality dwelling at the heart of observed phenomena. This is the sense of the term developed by great Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and taken up by Catholic philosophers such as St. Thomas Aquinas. It is important to note that Girard employs the term in a very different way, perhaps in a way opposite to this classical usage. The more metaphysical a desire, the less it has to do with the essential reality of the object and more to do with the mediator.}  

“Metaphysics” also has important religious associations, which may, after all, be a sense that Girard wishes to suggest. Sometime between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period the term “metaphysical” began to acquire magical connotations as it applied to the unseen causes associated with
obsolete and discredited ideas such as phlogiston, caloric, or the celestial spheres. As improved scientific techniques supplied better understandings of the phenomena these theories sought to explain, the discredited causal explanations came to be seen as increasingly ridiculous, and causal explanations not subject to scientific observation came to be regarded with increasing suspicion. This intellectual trend led to the rise of the positivistic epistemologies of the 19th century that regard true knowledge as consisting exclusively of ideas that can be confirmed by the scientific method or mathematical proof. By the twentieth century, the practice of “metaphysics” was sometimes used to describe activities such as séances and modern forms of witchcraft and fortune telling. Girard’s use of “metaphysical” may very well have these magical connotations in mind, inasmuch as he regards the phenomena of archaic religion and the transcendence it generates as rooted in the deviated transcendence of mimetic desire.

1.6. External and Internal Mediation

The desiring subject wishes to become like his or her model as a means by which to appropriate his or her superior being. Don Quixote’s relentless reading of the tales of medieval chivalry has left him with a burning desire to come to possess some share of the being of the greatest of the knights errant, Amadis of Gaul, and we

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see the comic outcomes of his attempt to fashion himself into a kind of copy of his hero. A precise likeness, however, is ruled out by the “distance” between Don Quixote and Amadis.\textsuperscript{100} One is a man of flesh and blood, and while the other may have been so at one point in time, the literary transfiguration he has undergone renders him nearly divine in comparison to the lowly Don Quixote. The distance in time and the different ontological statuses of the two men mean that Don Quixote’s imitation can result in only a shadowy and distant resemblance between them. Their likeness can never be too great, and it can never bring them face to face with one another, which rules out the rise of conflict between them. These are the essential characteristics of what Girard terms the “external” mediation of desire.\textsuperscript{101}

No such necessary limitation exists for the resemblance possible between Don Quixote and Sancho. Amadis of Gaul is enthroned on high and lived generations earlier, but Sancho and Don Quixote occupy the same existential sphere. But while there is a possibility of them coming to resemble each other, their desires are never allowed to converge. Cervantes seems at pains to maintain the strictest distinction between their ambitions. Sancho has no interest in Amadis of Gaul and knight errantry. Likewise, Don Quixote cares little for anything of interest to Sancho. All the money and caches of food they encounter are left to Sancho. What Sancho desires, he receives from Don Quixote, but in all cases their desires are oriented away from each other.\textsuperscript{102} The island promised to Sancho as a reward seems to

\textsuperscript{100} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 9.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
underscore that while Don Quixote and Sancho are always in close proximity to one another, their desires always remain isolated. While it is not impossible that they would converge as is the case with Don Quixote and Amadis, they nevertheless remain separate.\textsuperscript{103}

This is not the case for all the characters in the novel. The narrative of Don Quixote’s misadventures is interrupted from time to time by extended stories that have nothing directly to do with Don Quixote. Within these “interpolated love stories” the reader encounters characters who occupy the same existential sphere as one another, and whose desires converge freely.\textsuperscript{104} Their desires are not kept separate by the kind of ontological difference present between Don Quixote and Amadis of Gaul, nor do social and class differences serve to prevent the convergence of desire as is the case with Don Quixote and Sancho. One such story is that of Cardenio, whom Don Quixote and Sancho encounter in the remote areas of Sierra Morena where Cardenio lives as a half mad hermit. Cardenio’s story begins with his description of his love for Luscinda, the daughter of a wealthy nobleman of the same town. When Luscinda’s father learns of their affections for one another, he decides for the sake of propriety to secure her safely behind the walls of the family’s home. This confinement, Cardenio relates, “added more flames to the fire and more ardor to our desire.”\textsuperscript{105} In the course of asking his father for permission to marry Luscinda, Cardenio is told by his father that he has been asked by Duke Ricardo, another

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104} Cesareo Bandera, \textit{A Refuge of Lies} (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 139.

\textsuperscript{105} Cervantes, \textit{Don Quixote}, 184.
nobleman from a distant town, to accompany his son, Don Fernando. Cardenio agrees, and when he arrives to render services to Don Fernando, he is surprised at Don Fernando’s eagerness to be friends. In the course of their conversation, Cardenio speaks lavishly to Don Fernando of his love for Luscinda. Business then takes the two to Cardenio’s hometown. While there, Cardenio manages to catch a glimpse of his beloved Luscinda, and when he relates his joy to Don Fernando, Don Fernando insists on seeing her too. The two watch her by night as she stands in her window unaware of their presence. Later, Don Fernando finds a love letter composed by Cardenio for Luscinda. This final testimony of Cardenio’s love for Luscinda prompts Don Fernando himself to fall madly in love with Luscinda. He sends Cardenio back to Duke Ricardo ostensibly to conclude his business but really so that he may pursue his own infatuation with Luscinda. Don Fernando remains behind, and before too long Cardenio receives word from Luscinda that Don Fernando has abducted her with plans to marry her. On the day of their marriage Cardenio gains a secret audience with Luscinda where she tells him that she plans on killing herself with a small knife hidden in her dress rather than marry Don Fernando. At the decisive moment, however, Cardenio hears her pronounce the words “I do.” At this he slips into madness and makes his way to the isolation of the Sierra Morena where he encounters Don Quixote.¹⁰⁶

Don Fernando’s desire for Luscinda emerges after having been exposed to that of Cardenio, most particularly after reading Cardenio’s love letters to Luscinda. In other words, Cardenio mediates his desire by his “literature.” These letters play

¹⁰⁶ Cervantes, Don Quixote, 184-190.
the same role for Don Fernando’s desire as the books of medieval chivalry play for Don Quixote’s. Having acquired Cardenio’s desire, Don Fernando now wishes to possess Luscinda. When he succeeds in doing so, Cardenio is now in the position of wishing to acquire Don Fernando’s possession. In other words, the two have exchanged the roles of imitator and mediator. At first, Cardenio mediates desire to Don Fernando; having taken Luscinda, Don Fernando now mediates desire to Cardenio. The existential proximity of Don Fernando and Cardenio has allowed them to become the mediators of desire for each other. This is the fundamental characteristic of what Girard calls “double mediation,” which is the direct outcome of the progress of “internal” mediation.107 In a relationship of internal mediation desires converge so intimately that the distinction between imitator and mediator no longer remains fixed as in the case of Don Quixote and Amadis of Gaul, but becomes a kind of object of exchange between desiring subjects.108

1.7. From External to Internal Mediation

Don Quixote and Cardenio represent separate cases, but one might easily recast them as a single case. Imagine for a moment an apprentice who has been taken under the wing of a master. When the apprentice begins imitating the master, the roles are clearly defined: the apprentice imitates his model, the master, who mediates desire to the imitator. Initially, the relationship is characterized by a

107 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 103.

108 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 138. See also Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 79; Girard, Things Hidden, 12.
shared admiration. The imitation practiced by the apprentice is welcomed by the master. She finds it flattering and feels honored by the attention paid to her by her apprentice. The admiring attention of the apprentice confirms, in some sense, the position of superiority enjoyed by the master. Likewise, the apprentice is eager to please the master and finds her praise gratifying.

As the apprentice gains in skill and strength, however, he begins to narrow the gap between himself and the master. The resemblance between the two begins to converge, and this convergence of resemblance can only come at the expense of the master’s clear possession of a superior status relative to the position of the apprentice. For this reason the master may very well come to regard this approach of the apprentice as threatening. Whereas before the imitation of the apprentice was welcomed as flattering, now it comes to be regarded as threatening, even usurping and aggressive. As noted above, imitation is directed at the being of the mediator, and in this case, the master may begin to perceive, at least implicitly, that her being is at risk.

The master’s response to the imitation of the apprentice will turn to discouragement. She will block and hinder the progress of the apprentice’s imitation. But just as placing Luscinda behind the walls of her father’s home only adds to Cardenio’s desire for her, so too this resistance on the part of the master will only “add to the ardor” of the apprentice. The apprentice will not understand the onset of his master’s resistance. The zealous imitation that formerly was the bond
between them now becomes “the strangler of their amity,” but he lacks the means by which to recognize this. The apprentice may wish simply to regain his master’s favor, or he may regard the master as greedily withdrawing the prize in order to keep it for herself. Whether to return to the master’s good graces or to overcome what he may perceive as the appearance of the master’s greedy self-regard, he will resort to the only strategy that has served in the past both to please the master and to approach the desired end: imitation. The onset of resistance and rivalry between the master and the apprentice will elicit the redoubling of the apprentice’s imitation. This redoubled imitation will beget yet more resistance on the part of the master, which will in turn elicit still more vigorous gestures of imitation.

Rounds of imitation and resistance will escalate and intensify as the two converge on their commonly desired goal and each other. In the case described above, the master participates in the escalation of imitation and rivalry. Her resistance is a response to the imitation of the apprentice, which now appears as an increasingly aggressive attempt to appropriate her status as master. The perception that the apprentice wishes to usurp his role confirms in the master her desire to retain her superior position. The imitation of the apprentice and the threatening aspect it has taken on moves the master to value and defend her status more vigorously than he had formerly. In other words, the apprentice is now mediating desire to the master. As their rivalry develops and escalates, the two exchange the

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111 Ibid., 147.
roles of imitator and mediator more quickly.\textsuperscript{112} Each by turns is both for the other, and as the relationship becomes increasingly conflictual, it arrives at a point where there is little basis for making a distinction between them.\textsuperscript{113} Rounds of imitation eventually become so rapid that a point is reached at which it becomes impossible to make a clear distinction between them in this regard. Each both imitates and mediates the desire of the other. Their relentless and increasingly frantic imitation of the other renders them completely alike with respect to desire.\textsuperscript{114}

The onset and advance of internal mediation witnesses a kind of “apocalypse” of desire, a revelation of the relative unimportance of the object of desire in the mediation of desire and the absolute importance of the mediator.\textsuperscript{115} As external mediation gives way to internal mediation, and as rivalry ensues between the imitating subject and the mediator of desire, the attention of each becomes increasingly focused on the other. The desire for a common object brings the pair together, but with the onset of rivalry, the mediator becomes the object of attention. As gestures of imitation come to be regarded as gestures of appropriation they are regarded with increasing hostility, and they become the object of the obsessive attention of the antagonists. They are opposed with escalating vigor, eliciting in turn greater desire as well as yet more vigorous attempts at appropriation. Like boxers circling each other in a ring, staring at each other over raised fists, or like


\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{114} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 302.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 301.
chess players hunched over the board scrutinizing the other’s pieces, they study each other’s movements with meticulous attention. The slightest movement is regarded with suspicion, assumed to be an incipient act of aggression.116 The response of each to the other becomes increasingly reflexive, and reflexively aggressive until finally it escalates into open violence. As the escalation continues the original object that brought the two together is forgotten entirely.117

In this condition of internal mediation in extremis, the mimetic rivals seem very different from their former selves. Our apprentice and master have transitioned from harmonious collaborators to violent antagonists. Much has changed between them, but one thing has not. More than ever, they are brought together by mimetic desire. Now, however, the mediating reality of the object of desire has fallen away, and their increasingly violent attention is now directed at each other. Whereas before they were united by a desire for a common object, their desire now is for each other. With the disappearance of the original object of desire that brought subject and model together in the first place, the violent fascination of each for the other signals the paramount importance of the other as the mediator of the desire of each. In their imitation of each other’s violence and the disappearance from view of the original object of desire, the importance of the original “impulse towards the mediator”118 emerges fully into view. Girard will consider carefully the

116 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 18, 81.
117 Girard, Things Hidden, 311. “Jean-Michel Oughourlian: ‘The disappearance of the object, must, I imagine, be an aspect of desire’s tendency to become a caricature of itself and proclaim its own truth – the ascendency of the mimetic model over the object.’ René Girard: ‘Desire becomes detached from the object, bit by bit, and attaches onto the model.’”
phenomenon of “desire without an object,” which we can now recognize as a symptom of the advance of internal mediation and the onset of mimetic rivalry. The object has disappeared, but that is not to say that there is no object at all. Each has become for the other the object of desire. The progress of mimetic desire has dismantled the original mimetic triangle. Now all three elements of the original triangle of desire – imitator, mediator, and object – reside in each antagonist.

1.8. Internal Mediation and Mimetic Doubles

Imitation effects the final dissolution of the triangular structure of desire. The onset of mimetic rivalry that accompanies the onset of internal mediation greatly accelerates this dissolution. Don Quixote is protected from an absolute descent into internal mediation by his distance from Amadis of Gaul and Sancho, but the so-called interpolated love stories provide an opportunity to portray those like Cardenio who give themselves over to mimetic desire more absolutely and so more disastrously. When we first meet Cardenio, he is roaming the hills of the Sierra Morena. He is sunburned and dressed in tatters, but in his speech and manners still recognizably “wellborn and a gentleman.”

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119 Girard discusses at length the phenomenon of “desire without object.” See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 299. “In rivalry, everyone occupies all the positions, one after another and then simultaneously, and there are no longer any distinct positions.”


121 Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 180.
Cardenio experiences a “fit” whereby “some kind of craziness” comes over him.

With no warning he begins jumping up and down and attacking “the man closest to him.” If others did not prevent him, he would have “beaten and bitten him to death.”

While raving in this way, Cardenio is heard to exclaim, “Ah, false Fernando!”

We see here the dislocating effect of deviated transcendence. The lingering effect of Cardenio’s rivalry with Don Fernando is a lasting obsession with his rival that degrades his experience of reality. This degradation is the result of the distance placed between mimetic rivals and reality by their imitation of one another.

Mimetic desire is always a matter of judging the world by what one imagines the mediator thinks and feels. The value of real objects is judged according to what the imitating subject perceives to be the assessments of his or her model of desire. With the onset of internal mediation this identification with the mediator increases and intensifies, and continues to increase as the ensuing conflict escalates. The world is seen increasingly “through the eyes” of the mediator. Perceptions of reality become “thin” and “faint,” and are easily taken over by memories of the rival that have been revisited obsessively. The rival becomes a kind of watery glass through which reality is perceived and increasingly misperceived. Reality seems to lose its substance, and becomes shadowy and deceptive. Other persons lose their substance as well. Runaway internal mediation imposes a kind of hell aptly

\[122\] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 181.

\[123\] Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 5. Girard regards Shakespeare’s phrase “to love by another eyes” found in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, to be a particularly apt description of mimetic desire.

\[124\] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 151. “The fits of vertigo that attend the process stem from this terrible oscillation, and they ultimately engulf all perceived reality.”
described by the character Harry from T.S. Eliot’s *The Family Reunion*. It is “the hell of not being there, the degradation of being parted from my self... I, not a person in a world not of persons, but only of contaminating presences.”\(^{125}\) In just this sense, Don Fernando has become for Cardenio a “contaminating presence,” and the world has become vague and faint enough place where that presence may be transposed onto all others.

The “degradation of being parted from my self” indicates the full extent of the disintegrating effect of the onset of internal mediation. It extends to the integrity of the self, making of it a contaminating presence as well. The self becomes a kind of hated other inasmuch as imitation has rendered it a perfect copy of the rival. Arthur Rimbaud’s famous declaration, *Je est un autre*\(^{126}\) – “I is an other” – is best understood in this light.\(^{127}\) The same can be said of Cardenio. He is an “other” to himself. This is the fruit of his rivalry with Don Fernando, and it reflects the confusion of identity associated with mimetic desire and the rivalries it engenders.

We have already seen that the onset of internal mediation effaces the structure of desire as desiring subject, mediator, and object increasingly coincide as desire progresses into rivalry. The difference between self and other suffers the same fate. This is because the progress of internal mediation and mimetic rivalry is


fueled the feedback loop of double mediation. Each antagonist is imitating his or her own desire as it appears in the other.\footnote{128}{Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 99.} As the imitator responds to the resistance of the mediator, he or she is not likely to realize that the increased resistance offered by the mediator is a response to his or her own increased efforts to appropriate the common object of desire. The resistance that elicits an increase in the imitator's desire for the object is itself a function of that same desire. In other words, the imitator is imitating his or her own escalating desire as it is presented back to him or her in the escalating desire of the mediator. The very same can be said for the mediator. Each round of imitation features an escalation in the imitating subject's desire for the object that is a response to the mediator's resistance. The mediator's desire increases in response to his or her own desire as it manifests itself in the desire of the other. They are imitating each other, but the difference between self and other is eroding at an increasingly rapid pace.\footnote{129}{Ibid. “We now have a subject-mediator and a mediator-subject, a model disciple and a disciple model. Each imitates the other while claiming that his own desire is prior and previous.”} The other is a reflection of the self and the self is a reflection of the other. Each increasingly contaminates the other. As is the case with Cardenio, this blurring of the distinction between self and other has a generalized effect on the whole of one’s social environment. All “others” are caught up in it.\footnote{130}{Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 302.} The self too is a “violent other” who with little provocation projects itself onto all others. Cardenio’s conflict with Fernando has so destabilized his integrity as a “self” that he easily lapses into a state of emotional and mental exasperation where all others appear as the other with whom he has identified.
himself, his enemy Fernando.\textsuperscript{131} The end result of the imitation characterizing his conflict with Fernando is that Cardenio now carries Fernando within him always, and sees him everywhere.

We have seen how the loss of a mediating object is prevented in the case of Don Quixote and Amadis of Gaul. As has already been discussed, circumstances rule out that they should ever meet in a condition of double mediation. However, Cervantes presents a case that gives us an idea of what the result of such a meeting might have been. Don Quixote encounters a university student from Salamanca, Sampson Carrasco, who has disguised himself as a knight errant and challenges Don Quixote to a duel in an attempt to meet him in his delusion and to cure him of it. When the “Knight of the Wood,” as Carrasco originally calls himself, arrives at the duel, he is dressed in such brilliant armor that he becomes known, tellingly, as “the Knight of Mirrors.”\textsuperscript{132} Carrasco “mirrors” Don Quixote, entering his delusion in order to cure it, but in the end we see that the effect is quite the opposite.\textsuperscript{133} Don Carrasco enters mimetic rivalry and becomes the mirror image of his rival. The duel proves disastrous for Don Carrasco, and provides the occasion for one of Don Quixote’s few martial victories. When Carrasco’s squire, Tom Cecial, offers that Carrasco may be the crazier of the two for having consciously chosen such absurd behavior, he rejoins that he can leave off his act whenever he wishes.\textsuperscript{134} In terms of

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 34-35. The “exasperation” associated with intense mimetic relations is seen in the occurrence of trances and “possession” in societies where social integration is “in regression.”

\textsuperscript{132}Cervantes, \textit{Don Quixote}, 526-550.

\textsuperscript{133} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 97.
internal mediation, however, his imitation of Don Quixote is not without lasting effect. The last we hear of Carrasco is his promise to pursue revenge against Don Quixote. Having consciously imitated Don Quixote in an attempt to overcome Don Quixote’s confused obsession with Amadis of Gaul, Carrasco now exhibits the first signs of the violent obsession first seen in Cardenio. He cannot think of going home until he has given Don Quixote a “good beating.”

The encounter of Don Carrasco and Don Quixote gives us some indication of the rapidity of the transition from external to internal mediation, the onset, in other words, of double mediation. The educated and sane Carrasco imagines he is capable of controlling the escalation of imitation he initiates in what seems at first to be a harmless parody of Don Quixote’s madness. What he fails to recognize is that in his parody he has taken the first step towards a resemblance already prefigured in the “mirrors” of his armor. The conflict that ensues only serves to advance the resemblance between them, and as the mimetic exchange between Carrasco and Don Quixote becomes violent, it quickly accelerates beyond Carrasco’s ability to maintain control of his participation in it. Mimetic antagonists turn to violence as a means by which to distinguish the self from the other. What they cannot see is that this violence is an acceleration of a mimetic process that will quickly spiral out of control and ultimately efface entirely the difference between self and other.136

134 Cervantes, Don Quixote, 549.

135 Ibid.

136 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 112; Girard, Things Hidden, 301. “If the will to absorb and assimilate never succeeds in overcoming the difference of the other, the will to differ – which is basically the same thing – never succeeds in conjuring away sameness and reciprocity.” Here we see emerging within Girard’s literary criticism a theme he we revisit in his anthropology, the way human
Those engaged in the mimesis of violent conflict see only difference. As the conflict progresses each sees the other with a kind of “Manichean” clarity.\textsuperscript{137} The self is good and innocent, the practitioner of a violence exercised in the name of justice and truth. The other is depraved and aggressive, motivated by malice and cruelty. The violence of the conflict is expected to separate finally the sheep from the goats. Neither intuits the mimetic nature of these gestures, nor notices in the midst of the escalation of the conflict that they imitate one another with increasingly zeal and precision. Neither suspects that far from serving to distinguish the self from the hated other, violent gestures are expressions of an increasingly obsessive mimesis that rapidly erodes all relevant differences between them. Their violence does not serve to establish a difference, but rather renders them mirror images of one another. As their violence escalates, they identify themselves with one another with increasing intensity. Internal mediation, double mediation, mimetic rivalry—all synonyms of one another—render them what Girard calls “mimetic doubles.”\textsuperscript{138}

1.9. The Skandalon

The rise of mimetic doubles is synonymous with the movement from external to internal mediation. We have seen already that the process is characterized by the nature turns to violence as a means by which to establish and restore differences. See also, Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 85-86.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 142.

\textsuperscript{138} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 79. Girard notes the difference between his notion of the mimetic double and that employed commonly in the literature of the Romantic period. The Romantic use is characterized by regarding the double as an illusion, whereas Girard attributes to it the real symmetry of mimetic rivals. See also Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 300.
paradoxical conjunction of impulses of attraction and repulsion. Mimetic rivals are repelled by one another’s aggression, but simultaneously fascinated by it. They hate each other as rivals, but simultaneously imitate that which is most hateful in the other. Girard insists that these contradictory aspects of mimetic doubling and the process as a whole are best understood as symptoms of the operation of the skandalon in the initiation and progress of mimetic rivalry. The term is drawn by Girard from the pages of the New Testament where it appears thirteen times in its noun form, skandalon, and another twenty seven times in its verb form, skandalizein.139 Newer translations tend to render the former as “hindrance,” or in the case of the verb form, as “a cause for sin” as when the New American Bible translates Matthew 5:30: “And if your right hand causes you to sin (skandalizei), cut it off.”

The skandalon’s significance to the mimetic theory is rooted in its designation of the obstacle to desire that arouses desire precisely because it opposes desire.140 It is never simply an obstacle to desire in the sense of an object of desire that is difficult to acquire. Its attractiveness resides in the opposition it presents. In its original Greek usage the skandalon is a part of a snaring trap of the sort that might be used to catch animals. Specifically, it is the portion of the trap to which bait is attached. At its root is the Greek skazein, which means “to limp” suggesting that the deployment of skandalon may appeal to the image of an animal attracted by bait,


140 Girard, Things Hidden, 416.
caught in a snare, and so forced to limp.\textsuperscript{141} The “scandalized” person stumbles continually, kicking again and again against an obstacle that might easily be avoided were it not for its strange power of attraction. The modern renderings fail to capture this sense of repetition and the continual return to the obstacle, which Girard regards as its most essential feature.\textsuperscript{142}

The \textit{skandalon} is fundamental to the process of mimetic doubling, and so the examples already cited serve well to illustrate the pattern of its operation. We have already noted in the story of Cardenio, for example, the role played by the wall as the obstacle that simultaneously blocks and enflames Cardenio’s desire for Luscinda. Of great consequence for the development of the mimetic theory, however, are those instances where the \textit{skandalon} is seen to be at work in cases of double mediation, where the mediator of desire functions simultaneously as an obstacle to desire. As the desire of Cardenio and Don Fernando converge on Luscinda, each mediates desire to the other and simultaneously blocks that desire. Each, in other words, is a \textit{skandalon} to the other, an obstacle that arouses desire by its opposition to desire. The same is true in the case of the master and the apprentice. When the master begins to oppose the apprentice, she arouses yet more desire \textit{precisely because} as he blocks it.

The epistemological contribution of the novel can be understood in terms of its elaboration and amplification of the significance of this Biblical term. All of the

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 416.

dynamisms of mimetic desire noted so far are inspired by the activity of the *skandalon* and its contradictory inspirations. Their discovery of the *skandalon*, even if only implicit, inspired the great novelists’ elaboration of the significance of mimetic desire as the key to the proper depiction of existential relations. The lack of even an implicit knowledge of the *skandalon* prevented other disciplines from arriving at the significance of conflictual mimesis, which in fact is properly regarded as a constant feature of human existence. As a result of their ignorance of the *skandalon*, the social sciences tend to regard eruptions of violence as completely unexpected, anomalous aberrations to be set aside in the study of culture. The romantic view errs in the opposite extreme. It trusts violence as much as it does desire. Violence too is regarded as an expression of one’s own passion, that which is most personal, rooted in one’s most intimate personal commitments. As a result, the romantic sensibility always imagines it can recognize a symmetry between the magnitude of a conflict and its cause. Great conflicts can only arise from great ideological debates, or matters of great honor or justice. The intuition of the novelist speaks to him of mimetic desire, and provides an awareness that the escalation of conflicts is fueled by a sometimes comic, sometimes tragic obsession with the mediator of desire. The workings of the *skandalon* in human life are such that the slightest opposition can give rise to an obsessive interest that quickly

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143 Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 18. “... all theoreticians of imitation from Plato and Aristotle to Gabriel Tarde, all the modern experimental students of imitative behavior, have missed the transparent but essential paradox of conflictual mimesis.”

144 Girard, *Quand ces choses commenceront*, 166.


146 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 16.
spirals out of control and has little to do anything other than the mimetic reflexes of antagonists. The great novelists present to us worlds where desires are irresistibly attracted to other desires, and which spiral out of control once they converge in opposition to each other. The novelists seem to know better than all others of the essential link between human desire and the skandalon, and for this reason are able to show that far from an aberration, conflict is endemic to desire and to human life.

1.10. The wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse

Girard credits Shakespeare’s drama with the same insight into the workings of the skandalon that he regards as properly “novelistic.” Predictably, critics of Shakespeare have faulted him for “building tragic conflicts out of trivial events, or even literally out of nothing.” The intensity of both mimetic desire and rivalry often turns out to be a matter of “much ado about nothing,” or at least about nothing more than the opposition of the antagonists themselves. The intuition of Shakespeare and the novelist converges on the significance of the skandalon to the genesis and development of mimetic desire, and on an important symbol of it as well. We have already discussed the “wall” as an indication of the activity of the skandalon in the story of Cardenio from Don Quixote. Ten years prior to the appearance of Don Quixote in 1605, Shakespeare included a wall in one of his most celebrated plays,

\[\text{147}\] Girard, A Theatre of Envy, 18.

*Romeo and Juliet.* It takes place in the Capulet orchard where Romeo discourses on Juliet’s surpassing loveliness.\(^{149}\) This is typically regarded as one of the most romantic episodes in the whole of Western literature. Girard notes, however, that if one examines the subject matter of their discourse, the “star crossed lovers” seem strangely preoccupied not with each other, but with the obstacles that stand in their way.\(^{150}\) Romeo spies Juliet in her window, and from there overhears her famous words, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other word would smell as sweet.”\(^{151}\) Their names, in fact, are precisely what divide them. Romeo is of the Montagues and Juliet of the Capulets, who have long been at war by the time of the play’s setting. Once Romeo reveals himself, they discuss the orchard walls that “are high and hard to climb,” and enclose a place of death for anyone found within them, especially a Montague. Following this, the conversation turns to the armed guards who patrol the property and who would kill Romeo should they find him there.\(^{152}\) The subject of their conversation returns consistently to the obstacles that block their desire for one another.

Like any successful commercial dramatist, Shakespeare was required to please a mass audience. Then as now, that required providing drama for those with an appetite for repetitions of stereotyped and cliché themes. Those eager for stories of romance have never failed to find one in *Romeo and Juliet,* and we can admire that

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\(^{151}\) *Romeo and Juliet,* II, ii, 43-44.

\(^{152}\) *Romeo and Juliet,* II, ii, 63-73
it has held pride of place among such stories for nearly five centuries. But
Shakespeare has another audience in mind as well, one more sophisticated and
clever that he did not want to disappoint.153 This audience would have been eager
for more than just entertainment; it wanted what we call today “theory.” In the
Renaissance and early modern period there was no strict division between technical
and artistic innovation. Examples of both were often exhibited together, and both
were regarded as expressions of the same spirit of development and discovery. The
sophisticated audiences of Shakespeare’s time approached artistic works with the
same astonishment that persons today reserve for technological gadgets.154 To
these Shakespeare could address the “theoretical” content of his plays, including his
commentary on human nature, mimetic desire, and mimetic rivalry, whose technical
aspects would have been of no interest to the main part of his audience.155 Often the
deeper themes of the plays emerge more clearly when similarly structured scenes of
different plays are compared and contrasted. In the case of the themes present in
*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare wasted no time in making more explicit its deeper,
theoretical themes. Soon after its appearance, he wrote *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,
which Girard notes should be “compulsory reading” for anthropologists.156 The play,
we should note, was written for the royal court of Queen Elizabeth, which would

153 Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 39

154 Ibid., 33.1.

155 Throughout his work on Shakespeare Girard speaks of the “superficial play” and the
Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 13, 36, 71.

have featured an audience eager for clever expressions of wit as well as the richer and more profound commentary that Girard seeks to highlight. Indeed, the Queen herself is known to have loved literature and taken great delight in her ability to detect hidden messages and subtle themes in literature.\textsuperscript{157}

\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} concludes with a play-within-the-play, a staging of a homespun version of the myth of \textit{Pyramus and Thisbe} written and performed by a group of simple country folks referred to in the stage directions as the “clowns”\textsuperscript{158} or the “rude mechanicals.”\textsuperscript{159} The myth of Pyramus and Thisbe happens to be the source material on which \textit{Romeo and Juliet} is based, so it provides the perfect context in which to revisit its themes. The myth and the later story contain many similarities, including the prominent place of a wall as a barrier to the young lovers. According to Ovid, Pyramus and Thisbe live in adjacent houses that are separated by a common wall with a crack in it that allows them to communicate. The “mechanicals” in Shakespeare’s play make of this feature of the scenery a character in the play, and cast one of their company, Snout, in the role of “Wall.” Snout dramatizes the important crack through which the young lovers communicate by holding up two of his fingers.\textsuperscript{160}

When Bottom appears on stage as Pyramus he beholds the wall and declares, “And thou, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall/That thou standest between her father’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157} Clare Asquith, \textit{Shadowplay} (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 20.
\item \textsuperscript{158} \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, III, i.
\item \textsuperscript{159} \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, III, ii, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{160} \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, V, i, 154-180.
\end{itemize}
ground and mine.”\textsuperscript{161} The wall is sweet and lovely so long as it stands between him and Thisbe, when it functions, in other words, as an obstacle to Pyramus’s desire. But when he looks through the “chink” and realizes Thisbe is not there, his opinion changes abruptly: “O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss/Cursed be thy stones for deceiving me.”\textsuperscript{162} When Flute enters as Thisbe, he too extols the loveliness of the wall, noting that, “My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones...”\textsuperscript{163} When each lover finally realizes that the other is present on either side of the wall, they attempt to kiss through the chink provided by Snout’s two fingers. Alas, the chink proves too small, and Thisbe, having inadvertently kissed Snout’s fingers, declares, “I kiss the wall’s hole, not your lips at all.”\textsuperscript{164} This is the decisive moment where Shakespeare makes more explicit what is left implicit and perhaps obscure in\textit{Romeo and Juliet}. This moment where the obstacle inadvertently becomes the direct object of affection functions as a brief revelation of the truth of the lovers’ attraction for each other. The affection of the lovers owes more to the obstacle separating them than to their real loveliness.

Behind the thin covers of the romance of\textit{Romeo and Juliet} and the comedy of\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} lies a disclosure of the darkest aspect of the \textit{skandalon}. Desire grows stronger as it meets with opposition, and as it grows, it becomes

\\[\textsuperscript{161}\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, V, i, 173.\]
\\[\textsuperscript{162}\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, V, i, 180.\]
\\[\textsuperscript{163}\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, V, i, 189.\]
\\[\textsuperscript{164}\textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, V, i, 200.\]
drawn to the greatest and most violent opposition.\textsuperscript{165} Shakespeare presents to us in forms both comic and tragic the deepening connection between desire and opposition. As the dynamic of the \emph{skandalon} increasingly dominates the subject’s consciousness, desire strengthens as it orients itself towards that which opposes it most fully. As this process continues and intensifies, desire orients itself more and more towards annihilation, the destruction of both self and other. As Friar Lawrence says in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, “These violent delights have violent ends,”\textsuperscript{166} which in the case of the young lovers is literally the tomb. Their suicides in Juliet’s tomb are not simply a matter of a young man too foolish to check to make sure his lover is dead, but is the finale of a “voluntary rush towards death.”\textsuperscript{167} A voluntary rush, that is, towards the ultimate \emph{skandalon}.\textsuperscript{168}

\section*{1.11. The \textit{Skandalon}, the Double Bind, and “Mimetism”}

By now it is clear that literary texts are at the center of Girard’s considerations and the development of his theory. He insists, however, that the significance of his theory extends beyond the realm of literary criticism. His theory is, finally, an anthropological theory, based in large part on the notion that the authors he considers provide an accurate commentary on human nature and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{165} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Shakespeare, \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, II, vi, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Girard, \textit{A Theatre of Envy}, 295.
\item \textsuperscript{168} Girard identifies the same tendency in other Shakespearean characters, including Desdemona of \textit{Othello} and Viola of \textit{Twelfth Night}. See Girard, \textit{A Theatre of Envy}, 293-295.
\end{itemize}
existential relations. The connection between desire and violence characterizing the skandalon is sown into human nature in the first instances when desire is met with resistance. Before a child reaches anything like an “age of reason” or even becomes fully conscious of itself, it will imitate his or her parents. Parents typically receive this imitation happily, and regard it as an expression of the child’s admiration and love. Eventually, however, there will arise an occasion on which the child imitates the parent in ways that are dangerous or simply not desired by the parents. The child will reach for the parents’ tools or other important articles, or will make an insufferable racket by playing with the pots and pans he or she sees her parent manipulating as they prepare meals. In these instances, the imitation of the child will be opposed or punished. From the perspective of the child nothing has changed, she is imitating the parents she admires as she has always done, and for which she was formerly praised. For this reason the parents’ response is completely bewildering to the child. The child lacks the means by which to understand the reaction of his parents. In one moment imitation is rewarded as a kind of royal road to affection and admiration. The parent beckons the child to imitate—“Imitate me, I am the secret of life, of true being!”—and the child eagerly responds. But in the next moment the impulse to imitate yields a harsh condemnation, and from the perspective of the child, this entails the possibility of alienation and exclusion from all that she admires in the model, which at this point in her life is the center of her entire existence. Having only one strategy by which to cross the gulf now before her, the child redoubles her efforts at imitation in order to regain her former position.

169 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 147.
This course will beget the same bewildering ambivalence of rich rewards and stern condemnations, a wild fluctuation between blessing and curse, security and exile.170

Girard describes this contradictory double imperative—imitate me; do not imitate me!—as the “double bind.”171 The imitator imitates, but before long encounters the resistance of the mediator. This resistance confirms and heightens the prestige of the mediator and elicits yet more vigorous imitation and resistance, which in turn elicits yet more resistance, and the double bind tightens. Each command constituting the double, contradictory imperative is rendered more emphatic with each escalation of resistance. The early experiences of the double bind, which are among a child’s earliest experiences, fix in the mind an enduring connection between desire and resistance. These early and inevitable experiences actualize a kind of stable habit within desire that consists of an attraction to the obstacles of desire.172 Henceforth obstacles to imitation and desire exert a mysterious and sometimes tragic allure.173

170 Ibid., 147.
171 Ibid.
172 It may be worth considering the habit of mimetism in conjunction with the notion of the habitus, an important aspect of classical and medieval moral philosophy. The contemporary word “habit” is derived from the Latin habitus, but is in some sense its opposite. Both are acquired from repeated behavior, which surely provides their etymological connection, but a habit in contemporary usage is merely a nervous reflex, a “fixed mechanism” of behavior. A habitus on the other hand is an “inventive capacity, perfecting the human faculty in which it is rooted.” The acquired skill of a craftsman or artist is a habitus. It is the perfection of a human faculty that grows and develops and expands as it is engaged repeatedly. Mimetism as a stable habit lacks the expansive and integrating characteristics of the habitus. As it is exercised it becomes increasingly mindless and reflexive. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 2, “Spiritual Master”, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2003), 13.
173 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 147.
An appropriate name for this habit is the term “mimetism” which Girard invokes in different contexts, and describes well the tendency within desire to hurl itself headlong against any and all obstacles. The intensity of mimetism within any one person will be determined by the nature and intensity of these early experiences and subsequent conditioning and training in virtue. Again, these early experiences of the double bind are in some sense inevitable—it must needs be that scandals come—but efforts can be made to diminish the degree of mimetism they engender. A healthy family will feature patterns of relating that protect children from the experiences of the double bind that are potentially devastating. At stake is a lasting effect on the child’s future choice of models, which will “determine the future shape of his personality.” The double bind’s contradictory imperative “forms the basis of all human relationships,” but the extent to which it affects a child’s subsequent relationships will vary according to the way in which adults manage and ameliorate these experiences.


175 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 148.

176 Matthew 18:7.

177 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 149.

178 Ibid., 148.
1.12. Self-Sufficiency and the Askesis of Desire

As noted earlier, the attractiveness of models of desire always contains some suggestion of self-sufficiency with respect to desire, which functions as a signal of the superior “being” of the models of desire. The imitating subject is keenly aware of a restless neediness from which the model seems free. When one who is relatively self-sufficient is seen to desire an object, that object’s desirability becomes all the more compelling. If one who seems to need so little desires an object, that object must be very valuable indeed. The objects the mediator’s desire are sought as so many means by which to climb to the same state of peaceful contentedness.\(^{179}\)

This self-sufficiency and its relation to raising prestige gives rise to what may be called “strategies” of desire, all of which, we shall see, draw their effectiveness from a manipulation of the dynamics of desire elicited by the skandalon. First among these is the askesis of desire, the suppression of the outward manifestation of desire as a means by which to thwart rivals.\(^{180}\) Those who have experienced competitive environments quickly acquire the practical wisdom that goes with realizing that every indication of desire is likely to attract the desires of others and their rivalry.\(^{181}\) The pursuit of objects thus requires the concealment of the outward indications of desire. Everything “in desire that can be seen” must be

\(^{179}\) Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 53-54.

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 153.

\(^{181}\) Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 314. Girard notes that Shakespeare depicts characters who by their “mimetic boastfulness” … “manage to communicate their desires to other people and thus generate the dangerous rivals whom they are too foolish to recognize as their own creation.”
suppressed.182 In its depiction of the practice of *askesis* the novel again demonstrates its ability to disclose the full range of mimetic effects. Better than all other literary genres it allows the artist to “violate the consciousness” of his characters in order to show their true thoughts and feelings, which he now must as in the practice of *askesis* the characters’ “words and gestures only lie.”183

The contradictory movements within the *askesis* of desire come into particular relief in the depictions of “coquetry” or as we often call it, “playing hard to get.” From time immemorial lovers have learned that pursuing love too eagerly can have the unintended effect of making one seem at first uninteresting and in time pathetic and contemptible. If an outward show of self-sufficiency signals a surfeit of being and prestige, nothing signals a deficit of being and a lack of prestige quite like desperately throwing oneself at a love interest. Maintaining self-restraint and making a display of self-possession on the other hand, making a grand display of “indifference,” in other words, may serve to elicit the attention of that love interest. The characters Hermia and Helena from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, seem on the verge of learning this lesson by accident. At one point they are discussing what Hermia has done to attract the interests of Demetrius. She is pursued by him relentlessly in spite of the fact that she has rejected him harshly countless times. The two have a conversation where each describes the responses

182 Ibid., 154.

of Demetrius to their respective interest and rejection. The last exchange between
them is the most telling and summarizes all others:

Hermia: The more I hate, the more he follows me.
Helena: The more I love, the more he hateth me.184

At one point Girard notes that “somewhere in Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past”
appears the remark that in the workings of desire, “every ‘in spite’ of is a ‘because’ in
disguise.”185 The two women are confounded by Demetrius because they do not see
that it is not in spite of her rejections that Demetrius is attracted to Hermia, but
because of them. Likewise, it is not in spite of Helena’s interest but because of it that
Demetrius rejects her. Demetrius’s behavior is confounding for the two women
because they lack any definite knowledge of what Shakespeare depicts consistently
throughout his plays, the skandalon, the obstacle of desire that attracts desire by
opposing it.

Hermia laments the interest of Demetrius, but one can imagine other persons
who might find this dynamic useful, and fashion it into a kind of strategy.
Shakespeare certainly could. Olivia from Twelfth Night, for example, is noted to be
in mourning over the death of her brother. She wears the customary veil over her
face, and rejects all suitors who come to her as a part of her observance of the
prescribed mourning period. In the midst of this, she discovers something
unexpected. In this state of unavailability she finds that her suitors pursue her as
never before, with greater zeal and desperation. We learn from her ministers that

184 A Midsummer Night’s Dream, I, i, 198-199.

185 Girard, A Theatre of Envy, 109. I have been unable to track this line attributed by Girard
to Proust. My suspicion that the line is actually of Girard’s own coinage, perhaps inspired by Proust,
and then erroneously attributed to Proust by Girard.
she has been mourning her brother’s death for seven years, well beyond the customary period of mourning. The careful reader realizes that while the observance of the rituals of mourning prompted her withdrawal from romantic availability in the first place, seeing the effect of this withdrawal has given rise to another motive. She has realized that making herself inaccessible has made her irresistibly fascinating. By her *askesis* she maintains an inaccessibility that appears as a kind of self-sufficiency in the eyes of those around her. She has found that she now enjoys a position of power as her suitors are taken hold of by an escalating desperation to overcome her inaccessibility. She holds sway over her household, and more importantly, Orsino, her increasingly frustrated suitor, whose desire for Olivia pursues him, as he says, like a “fell and cruel hound.” The practice of *askesis* has rendered her fascinating to Orsino, but she seems to realize, even if only by instinct, that once she lowers the veil and reveals any reciprocating desire, the spell will be broken and her prestige may disappear entirely. She has successfully presented Orsino with the image of a perfect self-sufficiency with respect to desire. Once this show of self-possession is ended, so too his fascination for her will come to an end.

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189 Ibid., 127. Girard describes this as the fate of Cressida in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. 
1.13. *Askesis and the Coquette*

This *askesis* of desire was of great interest to the French novelist Stendhal, author of *The Red and the Black*. Stendhal’s life and career coincided with the rise and fall of Napoleon and the period of French history known as the Restoration, when an attempt was made to restore the monarchy that was overthrown during the French Revolution. Stendhal was a great enthusiast for the Revolution, and marched eagerly with the armies of Napoleon. He noticed, however, that the overthrow of the monarchy and the elimination of the privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy did not yield the happy result he expected, at least not entirely. His novels record the way in which the elimination of the medieval prerogatives formerly enjoyed by the upper classes had the effect within French society of freeing competitive impulses—mimetic impulses—that precipitated a kind of sadness among persons. Whereas the Paris of Louis XVI saw the free display of passions and the gaiety of the comic theatre, the Paris following the Restoration was taciturn and grim. The revolutionaries sought to erase the “gay vanity” of the king and his courtiers. This they accomplished, but Stendhal shows that in its place appeared the *vanité triste*, the “sad vanity” of a hyper-competitive middle class. Whatever injustices might be attributed to them, the former social structures prevented desires from converging so directly as to render dangerous a free and sincere

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191 Ibid., 115.
192 Ibid., 121, 162.
193 Ibid., 121.
display of desire. If Cervantes presents to us a society still possessing social structures capable of preventing the convergence of desire in the likes of Don Quixote and Sancho, Stendhal presents a society where desires are free to converge and escalate. In a setting of unrestrained competitiveness such as post-Revolution France, persons quickly learn the art of insincerity, of stifling passion and dissimulating indifference. Stendhal presents the broadcasting an unbreachable self-sufficiency as the chief means by which his characters gather social prestige to themselves. He saw that the new social condition encouraged an askesis so strong and reflexive that it seems to have removed the capacity of persons to desire anything directly and without dissimulation. It fostered within French society a hypocrisy so thoroughgoing that persons seemed nearly incapable of any measure of what Stendhal called “passion,” a spontaneous and sincere desire.

In *The Red and the Black* we follow the career of Julien Sorel, the talented son of a provincial peasant whose successful lumber mill has given Julien access to education and advancement if not to the noble titles of the aristocrats with whom he associates. Julien’s father indicates an important aspect of the new world depicted by Stendhal, the world of Restoration France. He is a peasant on the rise, a member of the emerging middle class who has learned to make his way without the privileges to which his aristocratic competitors are accustomed. As a result, he often seems more adept in competitive circumstances than the aristocrats with whom he often associates, but also more harsh and ill-tempered than they are, less

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194 Ibid., 162.

195 Ibid., 65.
care free. The figure of Napoleon still looms large in this world. The ambitious
Julien is fascinated with him, and it is not hard to see why. Napoleon himself was a
kind of peasant, or at least did not enjoy the privileges of the aristocrats with whom
he competed for advancement, yet he rose to be Emperor of France and the deposer
of kings. Julien carries with him a book of Napoleon’s sayings that he turns to
continuously both for inspiration and consolation. He is devoted to Napoleon as
though to a god, or at least an Amadis of Gaul. At one point he seduces a woman for
no other reason than he is convinced that it is what Napoleon would have done.196

Stendhal depicts in Julien a person whose desire is completely stifled by the
competitive environment around him. He has created a character completely
devoid of the spontaneity that Stendhal values as a sign of real nobility. He seems
completely incapable of feeling a desire that is not a means to social advancement.
A significant portion of the novel deals with Julien’s love affair with Mathilde de la
Môle. When he first sees Mathilde, he is heard to think, “How that big girl displeases
me.” He finds her pale and non-descript and she “exaggerates all the fashions.” 197
His opinion changes, however, at the Hôtel de Retz when he sees the interest in
Mathilde of the other men present: “Since these puppets consider her so remarkable,
it is worth while for me to study her.” 198

For her part, Mathilde is a marvel of mimetic reenactment. While Julien, the
outsider, is fascinated with the aristocrats he deals with, Mathilde, the aristocrat, is

Books, 2005), 65, 91.

197 Ibid., 299.

198 Ibid., 301.
bored with her surroundings. As Julien is fascinated by Napoleon, Mathilde is fascinated with the long dead Queen Marguerite de Navarre who had an affair with Mathilde’s ancestor, Boniface de la Môle. His dramatic life came to a close at the order of Catherine de Medici who had him beheaded after he was implicated in a plot against King Charles IX. Queen Marguerite is supposed to have requested his head, and to have interred it at the foot of the hill at Montmartre in Paris.\textsuperscript{199} Mathilde’s imitation of the queen extends even to wearing mourning garb on the anniversary of Boniface’s beheading, which causes a great scandal among the residents of the Hôtel de la Môle.\textsuperscript{200}

The relationship of Julien and Mathilde begins and continues in perfect insincerity. They approach each other with the same suspicion and calculation that characterizes internal mediation. Each by turns becomes the model and obstacle of the other’s desire. In the course of their interaction, a different sort of triangle of desire emerges.\textsuperscript{201} For Julien, the triangle consists of himself as the desiring subject, the body of Mathilde as the object of his desire and Mathilde’s consciousness as his competitor, the mediator/obstacle of his desire. Imagine, perhaps, a typical contemporary car commercial \textit{minus the automobile}. The female model, scantily dressed, caresses her own curves rather than those of the car. She is highlighting and broadcasting the desirability of her own body as though it were an object separable from her true self. This true self is located in her consciousness, which

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 316-323.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 316.

presents her body to the audience as an object of desire. In the same manner, Mathilde’s consciousness presents itself to Julien as a model of desire for her body. In order to be effective, however, it must also function as an obstacle of desire, and in this, in fact, her consciousness is a particularly formidable obstacle inasmuch as its possession of the object is nearly total. The coquette is thus able to present in her flirtatiousness what amounts to a “radiant self-mastery.”  

Mathilde presents to Julien the example of her desire for herself as the example for him to follow, but he quickly learns the pointlessness of following this example. His imitation of the desire of Mathilde and his pursuit of her body immediately occasion a display of his own desire and lack of self-mastery. As she draws him in with the dazzling lure of the self-sufficiency of her desire, he shows that his desire is for another, namely her. He quickly discovers that the invitation to imitate her desire is in fact an invitation to make a fool of himself in her eyes. Every time he pursues Mathilde she is scandalized by his interest in her. Every time he displays his desire for her, he disqualifies himself as a suitable object of her desire.

Julien learns that in order to maintain the interest of Mathilde, he must achieve the appearance of an even greater self-mastery. He must perfect his ascetical self-control such that Mathilde never sees his desire for her. Having made

\footnote{Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 108.}

\footnote{Ibid., 159.}

\footnote{Ibid., 109.}
of himself a slave before her mastery, he must now achieve a surpassing mastery in
order to make of her his slave. He must make up for his previous lapses. He decides
to arouse Mathilde’s desire by directing his elsewhere. He feigns interest in
Madame de Fervaques, an aristocratic widow of a successful businessman. A
Russian nobleman, Prince Korasoff, provides Julien with fifty-three formulaic love
letters “to suit every variation of feminine character” as well as instructions as to
how they are to be copied and delivered.205 He courts Madame de Fervaques in
plain view of Mathilde.206 During a social encounter, his eyes remain fixed on
Madame de Fervaques, knowing that Mathilde will note his attention to her, but all
the while he is conscious of Mathilde’s presence. He is desperate to know if she is
watching him, but he struggles mightily against his desire to look towards Mathilde
lest she see through his display of indifference.207

These efforts to provoke Mathilde’s jealousy have their intended effect, and
she literally falls at Julien’s feet declaring her love for him.208 He wishes to lavish
her with affection, but knows well by now that he must restrain himself or he will
immediately forfeit all the prestige he has accumulated and again elicit her
contempt. By now he has learned the extent to which he must practice his well
exercised askesis. After he has won the affections of Mathilde we hear his thoughts
as he continually scrutinizes his actions lest he seem too affectionate. He

206 Ibid., 418, 447.
207 Ibid., 419.
208 Ibid., 437.
remembers the warning of Korasoff: "I may lose everything with a single word."\textsuperscript{209}

He returns to his room jubilant at his victory over Mathilde, but he sobers himself as he considers that the struggle will recommence the next day: "My advantage is definite and immense, but what will happen tomorrow? One instant may ruin everything."\textsuperscript{210} He prepares himself with an extended reading from Napoleon’s memoirs. He concludes that he must deal with Mathilde as though she were an enemy on the battlefield, always in need of intimidation.\textsuperscript{211}

Asceticism as a strategy of desire is especially demanding in the sexual realm where bodily indications of desire must be suppressed. Everything “real and concrete” in the sexual drive must be stifled.\textsuperscript{212} This prompts within the successful ascetical-hero such as Julien contradictory impulses between body and soul. Julien rejoices in his victory over Mathilde, but longs to give free reign to his affections. If only his rival would depart and leave him alone with the object of desire: “If I could only cover those pale cheeks with kisses without your feeling it.”\textsuperscript{213} A similar fantasy appears in later novelists who depict the paralysis of affection that masters of mimetic asceticism impose upon themselves. Marcel, the narrator of Marcel Proust’s \textit{Remembrance of Things Past}, fantasizes about kissing Albertine’s cheeks as she sleeps, her consciousness safely absent. Dostoevsky exaggerates this impulse,

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 436.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 444.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 444.

\textsuperscript{212} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 160.

\textsuperscript{213} Stendhal, \textit{The Red and the Black}, 439.
or perhaps reveals its inner logic, by featuring characters who are tempted to perpetrate “the homicidal act” against their characters not by a determined spirit of murder, but rather the desire to be delivered decisively from the rival, the consciousness of their lovers, and so to have full possession of the object of desire. These fantasies reveal the self-defeating trajectory taken by the strategies inspired by mimetism, strategies that allow one to draw close to objects of desire whose value has been distorted, but never to possess in a satisfying way.

1.14. Mastery and Slavery

These strategies are doomed to failure because they are at odds with themselves from the very start. As Julien moves closer to the object of his desire, he is frustrated to find that the rival is already there. He does not realize the necessity of this encounter inasmuch as he does not see that his rival is also the mediator of his desire. Were it not for the frustrating presence of the mediator, there would be no desire for the object. We have seen how Julien dissimulates and conceals his desire in order to subordinate Mathilde before his display of self-sufficiency. By this he is able to establish what Girard refers to as “mastery” over Mathilde. He is able to establish his possession of her, but we have seen too how tenuous this mastery is. A moment’s sincerity will reveal his desire for Mathilde, and the tables will turn leaving him in a position of slavery to her mastery. Events in the *The Red and the Black* intervene to prevent the occasion for this lapse into slavery, but during the

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entire sequence with Mathilde, which constitutes the last significant dramatization of Julien’s social interaction, we see that his grasp of mastery is slipping. The reader knows that he cannot maintain his self-possession for very much longer. Eventually he will lapse, and will go from possessor to possessed, from master to slave. By watching Julien we gain some sense that “the future of all mastery is slavery,” but Girard notes that Stendhal never provides his audience with a full picture of a descent into slavery. Once his characters lapse from mastery the attention of the narrator turns elsewhere. In the later authors Dostoevsky and Proust we encounter full depictions of slavery. In their novels the “consciousness of a slave” emerges fully into view.

This progression from depictions of mastery to depictions of slavery indicates the intimate relation of the novel to the progress of modernity. The movement from a preoccupation with masters as in the case of Stendhal to slaves as in the cases of Dostoevsky and Proust is more than a matter of aesthetic novelty. It signals a further advance within the social and cultural life of Europe of what we have already noted in the movement from Cervantes to Stendhal. As we move forward through the 19th century the institutions that formerly prevented the convergence of desire continue to degrade and in some instances disappear.

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215 Ibid., 171.
216 Ibid., 107.
217 Ibid., 170.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
altogether. Internal mediation proliferates with greater freedom, and mimetic rivalries escalate with dizzying rapidity. Mimetism has been set loose, and characters are shown to hurl themselves at obstacles with a recklessness that can no longer be contained. In the former world desiring subjects could contend with their mediators and gain the upper hand as we see Julien doing. As mimetism advances over time, mediators always gain the upper hand. The masterly, if tenuous, self-control of Julien gives way to the mania of a character like Fyodor Karamazov. In fact, the first pages of *The Brothers Karamazov* signal to the reader that the attractive obstacle, the *skandalon*, will be of central importance to the progress of the story. There we hear the narrator attempting to explain how the lovely Adelaida Ivanovna Miuesov could marry such a scoundrel as Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov, and invokes by way of explanation the case a “woman of the last ‘romantic’ generation” who might have married a man who loved her very much, but instead,

...invented insuperable obstacles to their union, and ended by throwing herself one stormy night into a rather deep and rapid river from a high bank, almost a precipice, and so perished, entirely to satisfy her own caprice, and to be like Shakespeare’s Ophelia.\(^{220}\)

Dostoevsky’s masterpiece of slavery, however, is his *Notes from Underground*. If Stendhal gives us a portrait of a hero’s triumph over his mediators, Dostoevsky is utterly preoccupied here with the triumph of the mediator and the hero’s abasement before him. This is achieved by the depiction of a mimetism even stronger than what has been seen in Stendhal, one that has overcome the subject

\(^{220}\) Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2002), 1. Here in this reference to Shakespeare we might find a kind of homage on the part of Dostoevsky to the source of his insights concerning the significance of the model who becomes a rival to desire.
such that we see his relentless and reflexive attraction to any and all obstacles of
desire. The mimetism of Dostoevsky’s “underground” exceeds all attempts at
askesis, and generates a “psychology” exhibited fully in the Underground Man.221

All of the features of the underground psychology are colored by its
animating principle, the skandalon. Just as the skandalon pushes and pulls according
to what seems like the contradictory impulses of attraction and repulsion, so too the
psychology of the underground is characterized by rending ironies and
contradictions. We are made to see that the hero of Notes from Underground, known
simply as “the Underground Man,” is thoroughly self deceived, profoundly
hypocritical, torn between delusions of grandeur and wrenching episodes of self-
loathing. The title character’s “underground” is the psychological obscurity
whereby he cannot see that hidden beneath the scorn and contempt he directs
towards practically everyone in his life is an obsessive admiration of them as well.
Once someone shows his or her indifference to his “greatness,” that person becomes
the object of his desperate attempts to demonstrate more decisively the greatness
he wishes to possess and wishes them to admire. These attempts consist of displays
of a superior, more comprehensive indifference to all others. His confrontations,
therefore, typically consist of grotesque and theatrical displays of his lack of interest
in those who have scandalized him with their indifference to him. The results are as
comic as they are tragic. The hypocrisy of this “theatrical indifference” is evident to
everyone except the Underground Man, but in it we see the essential feature of the

221 Girard, Resurrection from Underground, 46-70.
underground, the blindness of pride to its obsession with others.\textsuperscript{222} The
“underground,” therefore, is a psychological region created by pride’s relentless
collaboration with envy. We see throughout \textit{Notes from Underground} that the two
contribute to the development of a mimetism in the Underground Man that makes of
nearly everyone he encounters a \textit{skandalon}, an obstacle and a rival.

The Underground Man’s obsession with obstacles is signaled early in his
narrative when he declares himself to be “a man of spite.”\textsuperscript{223} Soon after this
declaration he discusses the significance for himself of an image with which we are
already familiar, “the wall.”\textsuperscript{224} He discusses the “voluptuous inertia”\textsuperscript{225} begotten by
encounters with insurmountable obstacles such as “stone walls,” which he offers as
a symbol of all the things and persons to which he is opposed or finds himself in
conflict. Just as the wall that opposes becomes the object of affection for Flute in \textit{A
Midsummer Night’s Dream}, now the stone wall becomes for the Underground Man a
source of a bitter sensuality.\textsuperscript{226} He declares walls to be “calming... perhaps even
mystical,”\textsuperscript{227} and we will see the fascination that obstacles hold for him through the
entirety of his discourse.

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{222} Girard, \textit{Resurrection from Underground}, 51.
\item\textsuperscript{223} Fyodor Dostoevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Bantam
\item\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 12-15.
\item\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 14.
\item\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 14.
\item\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 9.
\end{footnotes}
The underground dominates the whole of his existence, which is signaled in his declaration that he delights in all pointless oppositions, including his denial of the laws of nature and mathematics, but it becomes clear as his discourse continues that most important among these oppositions are those involving other persons. We see the psychology of the underground at work in the course of an encounter in a pool hall between the Underground Man and a military officer. As the officer moves about the room he encounters the weak and sickly Underground Man, and without so much as addressing him he picks him up by the shoulders and places him to the side as he might move an inconveniently placed chair. The Underground Man is filled with indignation as he contemplates the offense committed against him. His frustrated revenge resolves into a burning resentment that he stokes for “several years,” glaring at the soldier with “malice and hate” whenever he chances by him on the street. Finally he decides to write a letter to the officer to seek an apology.

This letter provides an occasion to exercise what he imagines to be his literary greatness. The Underground Man is a petty official in the Tsar’s great bureaucratic machine, but he is an educated man, and in the course of his education he developed a powerful admiration for the great literary figures of the Romantic era from whom he continues to draw dubious encouragement. Upon completing his letter to the officer he reviews it and is pleased with its excellence. He is

228 Ibid., 12.
229 Ibid., 59.
confident that if the officer has any appreciation of the high Romantic ideals of the “lofty and sublime” he will recognize the greatness of the author’s spirit.231 This, he imagines, will stir the noblest ideals in the officer, and will prompt the officer to seek him out in order to befriend him. The Underground Man thrills at the prospect of the friendship that will ensue between them. The military officer will protect him with his “rank and stature,” while the Underground Man will “ennoble him” with his “culture and, well, ... ideas.”232 The Underground Man’s bizarre movement from contempt to admiration and back again is incomprehensible apart from an understanding of the skandalon. The opposition enacted in the pool hall generates a spirit of revenge that is stifled and suppressed, but as it travels its subterranean course it finally yields up evidence of the admiration and envy lying at its heart. The letter is as an attempt at literary excellence, but shows itself finally to be an artifact of the underground.233

At one point the Underground Man provides us with an extended description of his fantasy life, and in it we see in it the importance of literary figures. Just as Don Quixote was driven to the misadventures of his knight errantry by his obsession with Amadis of Gaul, we see that the prodigious consumption of literature fuels the mimetism of the Underground Man. He retreats into a fantasy world populated by literary greats such as Lord Byron and the stories of the great feats of Napoleon. In these extended “retreats” into himself the Underground Man delights in the

231 Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, 60; Girard, Resurrection from Underground, 98.
232 Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, 60.
233 Ibid., 64.
prospect of proclaiming “new ideas” to adoring masses, and then dashing off to “rout
the reactionaries at Austerlitz,”234 a reference to one of Napoleon’s greatest military
triumphs. Then he imagines humiliating the powers of reaction once again by
granting “amnesty to all,” and in so doing causing the Pope to flee to Brazil. In this
last fantasy he imagines himself besting Napoleon who did no better than taking
Pope Pius VI a prisoner to France.235 These great triumphs are punctuated by the
fantastic prospect of a grand ball at the Villa Borghese on the shores of Lake Como,
“the lake having been brought for this occasion to Rome.”236 These sessions
function as a kind of psychic balm, soothing his wounded ego following the
humiliations he endures from the likes of the military officer. Before too long,
however, he must venture forth back into reality. Greatness in one’s mind can
satisfy for only so long. It requires confirmation in the real. He finds himself
“unable to endure his solitude any longer.”237 He comes to feel his need to “embrace
all people,” which requires “the presence of at least one person in reality.”238

The real world is a fearsome place for the Underground Man because
manifesting his greatness of spirit in the real world is never as easy as imagining it
in the solitude of his Napoleonic fantasies. We see exactly how problematic reality

234 Ibid., 68. On December 2, 1805 at Austerlitz in what is today the Czech Republic,
Napoleon defeated the armies of Russia and Austria. Andrew Roberts, Napoleon: A Life (New York:

235 Thomas Worcester, “Pius VII: Moderation in an Age of Revolution and Reaction,” The
Papacy Since 1500, eds. James Corkery and Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2010), 109.

236 Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, 68.

237 Ibid., 70.

238 Ibid., 69.
is for him when his impulse to venture forth into reality brings him to a former
classmate, Simonov. From Simonov he learns of a party that several of his
classmates are planning in honor of Zverkov, one of their number who has received
a military promotion and is preparing to depart for a new post. In spite of the fact
that he never liked these classmates, Zverkov least of all, he becomes indignant that
they did not think to invite him. His spitefulness, his reflexive impulse to oppose,
begins to manifest itself immediately.\textsuperscript{239}

Zverkov, he explains, is favored by the “gifts of nature.”\textsuperscript{240} He is, in other
words, the very opposite of the Underground Man. He is admired for his command
of social graces and good manners as well as for his sexual exploits. Not long after
the party begins the Underground Man becomes drunk and his resentment stirs. He
notes carefully the increasing attention given to Zverkov who discourses leisurely
on topics ranging from his love affairs to his professional prospects. Before too long
the Underground Man can restrain himself no longer. He interrupts the
conversation with an impromptu “speech” that bears a telling structural similarity
to the letter he composes to the military officer earlier in the novel. He begins by
condemning Zverkov and declaring his own love for more noble sentiments such as
“truth, sincerity, and honesty.”\textsuperscript{241} In the midst of his rant, he goes “cold with horror”

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 70-72.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 90.
\end{flushright}

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as he detects that he is losing control of himself, and tries finally to save himself from total embarrassment by proposing a toast to Zverkov's health and success.242

The classmates’ exasperation mounts and they turn their attention once more to Zverkov who resumes his reflections on fashionable ladies, attractive professional opportunities, and literature, specifically the writings of Shakespeare.243 The Underground Man is provoked once more. They have strayed onto a literary subject where they ought to acknowledge his authority. He remains apart from the group gathered around Zverkov, pacing back and forth trying desperately to communicate with his bodily postures and facial expressions his contempt for their opinions. Finally, he deploys a “deliberate and vicious snort” to crown his elaborately crafted display of “indifference.”244

It is obvious from the start that this indifference is an empty and bizarre show, which is made even clearer when the party ends and the classmates depart for a brothel.245 The classmates do not think to invite the Underground Man along. They do not imagine that one who seemed to despise them so much could possibly wish to be with them any longer, but this is only because they do not understand the obsession with them that animates his spite. He follows after them and records for us the wrenching oscillations he makes between wishing desperately to be reconciled with them and to enact a fitting revenge whereby they will be moved to

242 Ibid., 90.
243 Ibid., 90.
244 Ibid., 93.
245 Ibid., 95.
seek his friendship. In his more lucid moments he realizes the entire project is doomed to failure and humiliation, but he cannot help himself. In the form of his classmates, a stone wall of opposition has appeared before him, and he cannot resist its allure.

The Underground Man moves between feelings of admiration for his classmates and feelings of contempt and resentment. This corresponds to the oscillation between his ecstatic fantasies about his own greatness, modeled on the greatness of the literary heroes he admires endlessly, and the increasing degradation he creates for himself in the reality of his waking existence. Each movement prompts the other. His envy for his friends drives him to seek them out whereupon his interactions with them turn to disaster. Much the same can be said for his attempts to incarnate his literary heroes. After these painful encounters he returns to his fantasy world in order to raise his spirits and to seek inspiration and encouragement, but the balm he applies to his wounds is poisoned. It serves only to reinvigorate the doomed effort to create in reality the wild fantasies that fill his imagination.

In his classmates’ indifference the Underground Man encounters a skandalon, against which he kicks relentlessly. Their indifference to his attempts to awe them with his greatness prompts him to assert it more vigorously. He feels deeply that

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247 Ibid., 98.

248 Ibid., 72.

249 Ibid.
only their attention and admiration can confirm his absolute kinship with the heroes he imitates, but he finds in them insurmountable obstacles. His indifference is a pathetic show, the thinnest cover for the desperate fascination he has for them. Their indifference, on the other hand, seems entirely sincere. His classmates are for him like the great sphinx in Egypt; they are admired by everyone yet admire nothing themselves, and in this display the principal signal of the possession of divine being, a self-sufficiency with respect to desire.\textsuperscript{250} It is this that holds him in a thrall and which he struggles desperately to claim for himself. He attempts to best them with a display of his own become increasingly theatrical and ridiculous as they continue to encounter their inattention. His hypocrisy is evident to everyone but him. The darkness of underground psychology does not permit him to recognize that his over the top assertions of indifference accomplish little more than signal his desperate obsession with his classmates.

The pain of the episodes to which his literary heroes impel him only feeds the process by which his degradation advances. His humiliations enhance their divine aura and impel him towards them more vigorously. His failures amount to their rejection of him as a disciple, and just as the apprentice in our previous example was prompted to more zealous imitation by the rejection of his master, so too the Underground Man’s failures impel him towards his models more vigorously. His literary heroes and his classmates are complementary skandalon which he dashes

\textsuperscript{250} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 162; See also, Girard, \textit{Quand ces choses commenceront}, 54, 187. See also Girard, \textit{Theatre of Envy}, 115, where Girard notes that a typical mistake of the mimetically obsessed is to imagine that all others share in same obsession. “All individuals beset by mimetic desire are easily fooled into believing that the entire world shares their obsession with their current rival.”
himself by turns, and they are understood properly as complements to each other. In the case of the classmates, the conflictual nature of the relationship is most evident, while we only catch fleeting glimpses of the desperate admiration the Underground Man has for them. The opposite is true in the case of the literary heroes. The conflictual aspect of his relationship to them is entirely implicit, manifesting itself only in the increasingly sordid conditions of his life. The classmates and the literary figure are two “faces” of the same underground god. His relationship to this two-faced god corresponds precisely to the lineaments of the double bind discussed earlier. Every rejection enhances the prestige of the mediator and prompts renewed and redoubled imitation that in turn precipitates still more painful rejections and increasingly frantic imitation. With each round of imitation the mimetic spiral tightens.

This divided god shows itself to be a mirror of a divided self. The division between the literary heroes and the classmates is a mirror image of a division within the self that is begotten by underground pride, but pride here is not the simple belief that one is a god. It is rather the belief that one can makes oneself divine by imitating those who have achieved some measure of divinity themselves.\textsuperscript{251} In this way Girard emphasizes pride’s close collaboration with envy. Pride aspires to complete autonomy in all regards, desire included, but as we have seen in the case of the Underground Man it is other-centered to the point of obsession.\textsuperscript{252} Pride conceals from the prideful this hypocritical other-centeredness

\textsuperscript{251} Girard, \textit{Resurrection from Underground}, 75.
by diving the self between the true, “authentic” self and the inauthentic self that concerns itself with others and struggles to meet their expectations. What other-centeredness can be perceived is regarded as a temporary and embarrassing crutch by which the true self will hoist itself to the lofty self-sufficiency admired in the models of imitation. Across this division the “authentic” self scolds the inauthentic self, rather like a tennis player berating him or herself in the midst of a match for missing shots. The inadequate portion of the self is to blame for the failure to embody fully the divinity of the Promethean ideal.253

In psychological terms the inauthentic self is no less an “other” than any other obstacle. The “true” self stands over it and offers the harshest possible correction, treating it as it would an enemy. Whatever inadequacies or hypocrisies the Underground Man may observe in himself are easily set aside by attributing them to the hateful inadequate self. Vanity reassures the proud person that the god-like self is the true self and the imitating, other-obsessed self is a wretched hanger-on who can be conquered and left behind with a renewed and purified surge of imitation. Accusations of egotism only serve as so much cover for the proud person’s obsession with those that he imitates and those he is desperate to impress.254 Inasmuch as the proud person is able to recognize instances or symptoms of other-obsession, these are attributed to the hateful self whose distance from the divine self becomes increasingly great as pride continues its dividing work.

252 Ibid., 51-52.
253 Ibid., 79.
254 Ibid., 54.
Pride thus “blinds intelligence” and fashions the subterranean space of the underground.\textsuperscript{255}

1.15. Sadism, Masochism, and the Obstacle

From within the portrait of the Underground Man provided by Dostoevsky we begin to discern that he has developed a taste for the misery that accompanies his attempts to approach to his idols. He has come to discover in his humiliations a kind of pleasure. He displays the symptoms of a masochism, which like the mimetism that animates it has become reflexive and dwells in him as a kind of habit. He describes, for example, his own voluptuous enjoyment of “toothache,” whose “humiliating purposelessness”\textsuperscript{256} is to be counted among “certain refinements of pleasure.”\textsuperscript{257} The “pinpricks and torments” associated with the rending of self provide a “piquancy” to his existence, “like a good sauce.”\textsuperscript{258}

Girard points out, however, that the masochism of the Underground Man must not be interpreted in an entirely straightforward way. Some critics, for example, have tried to make of the Underground Man a kind of existentialist hero, one who has liberated himself from the metaphysical strictures of the “pursuit of

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{256} Dostoevsky, \textit{Notes from Underground}, 14.

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{258} Ibid, 67.
happiness” and “the Good.” According to this view the Underground Man’s masochism is a kind of liberation; his misery is the enactment of a perfect autonomy, a wild freedom. The masochism of the Underground Man is not the pursuit of his own defeat in this way. Mimetism always aims at “shattering triumphs.” The Underground Man ultimately wants his classmates to lay themselves down at his feet in subjection, admiring him in the way he admires the heroes of his fantasy world. Every practical attempt to achieve this victory, however, ends in humiliation. As this process repeats itself, he becomes convinced of the absolute superiority of his models of desire, his literary heroes. His humiliations amount to so much evidence of their unattainable loftiness and his own insufficiency; his degradations add to their radiance. The humiliations he has long endured, repeated, and magnified have come to be associated with his approach to the mediators he so admires. He has come to perceive them, in other words, as sadists.

Masochism and sadism are often associated with a particular type of eroticism, a form of sexual role-playing where dominant and submissive roles are assumed by sexual partners. Girard refers to this manifestation of masochism as

259 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 256-257. Girard notes here that Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground functions for this school of thought as a kind of “breviary.” The heroes of existentialist writers such as Samuel Beckett and Jean-Paul Sartre suffer many “ailments,” but are spared the “worst of all,” metaphysical desire. This existential reading emphasizing the freedom of the Underground Man ignores the significance of his slavish imitation of Zverkov, for example, and the other classmates. Girard notes that it is as though those characters simply do not exist.

260 Ibid., 256-261.

261 Girard, Things Hidden, 327.

262 Ibid., 327.

263 Ibid., 328.
“theatrical sado-masochism,”\textsuperscript{264} the result of an attempt to reproduce in a dramatic form the structure of real relations experienced in everyday life. The “theatre” of erotic sado-masochism is therefore “twice mimetic”: it is a mimetic representation of mimetic relations.\textsuperscript{265} But as in the case of mimetic relations, the masochism seen there must be understood in terms of the fascination of the masochist with his sadistic counterpart. As the opposition of mediators becomes more openly violent and cruel, its violence becomes inextricably associated with desire, and comes to be regarded as desirable.\textsuperscript{266} Masochism in either of its manifestations, theatrical or existential, is incomprehensible apart from an understanding of the role of the mediator of desire, the increasing perception of his cruelty and violence, and the way that violence comes first to signal desire and then, \textit{in extremis}, to become desirable itself.\textsuperscript{267}

If the mastery of Julien Sorel in \textit{The Red and the Black} is uneasy and tenuous, the Underground Man’s is non-existent, or exists only in his extravagant fantasies. Julien is rewarded for his heroic \textit{askesis} when Mathilde throws herself at his feet, but now we see the Underground Man throwing himself at the feet of anyone who opposes him. \textit{The Red and the Black} is a novel of mastery, as all of Stendhal’s novels tend to be, but Dostoevsky gives us a novel of slavery.\textsuperscript{268} “I am all alone, and they

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 330.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 328.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 330-331.
\textsuperscript{267} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 144. "It is no longer the intrinsic value of the object that bestows value on the objects, rather, it is the violence itself that bestows value on objects.”
\end{footnotesize}
are everyone”269 is the anguished cry of the Underground Man. The trajectory from master to slave is ordained by metaphysical desire itself. The quest for possession it inspires inevitably yields a dissatisfying result. Stendhal’s narrative ends before this is seen clearly, which is why “Dostoevsky is Stendhal’s future.”270 When one comes into possession of something whose value has been wildly inflated by mimetic interactions, its reality will inevitably disappoint. Shakespeare’s Hamlet, for example, tells us that to be great is to “find quarrel in a straw,”271 but when the mimetic rivalry of the quarrel has exaggerated the value of the straw and made it an object of desperate struggle, what happens to one’s interest in it after it comes to be possessed? Julien himself confronts this when after a romantic liaison he is heard to wonder, “My God! Being happy—being loved, is that all it comes to?”272

As mimetism becomes increasingly intense and reflexive, persons like Cardenio, Julien, and the Underground Man witness wild inflations the value of objects of desire only to see them come crashing down. As mimetism intensifies, experiences like this color the perception of the world. Reality seems to lose its most significant quality, its permanence and durability, its “out there-ness.” It begins to seem “thin” and faint, enigmatic, composed not of real things, but of “signs

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268 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 170.
269 Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, 52.
270 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 170.
272 Stendhal, The Red and the Black, 100.
and indices” that are insubstantial and untrustworthy. Such a person will move from object to object, desiring them until possessing them, but anything that allows itself to be possessed immediately bankrupts itself of all value. Only that which resists possession can hold any interest, and this interest is lost absent that resistance. The hyper-mimetic will move from disappointment to disappointment until finally he or she encounters an object that will not yield to possession. Only a permanent obstacle can maintain a permanent fascination. The unyielding obstacle will not disappoint precisely because it will never yield up a disappointing reality. Against it he or she will struggle with all his Sisyphean might. Girard provides a brief parable to describe this dynamic:

A man sets out to discover a treasure he believes is hidden under a stone; he turns over stone after stone but finds nothing. He grows tired of such a futile undertaking, but the treasure is too precious for him to give up. So he begins to look for a stone which is too heavy to lift—he places all his hopes in that stone and he will waste all his remaining strength on it.

To one accustomed to wild fluctuations in desire, and accustomed as well to disappointing encounters with the reality of the objects of his desire, the unyielding obstacle may come as a kind of relief. The Underground Man’s slavery is horrible and degrading, but it amounts at least to a stable refuge from the bewildering fluctuations to which desire is prone.

273 Girard, Things Hidden, 328.
274 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 176.
275 This is Girard’s interpretation of the condition existing between Orsino and Olivia in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. See Girard, Theatre of Envy, 115. “By refusing to love him, Olivia renders a great service to the duke; she gives stability to his life. Deep down, the duke feels rather lucky; he is eager to perpetuate the sentimental deadlock with Olivia. When he and she finally come face to face
1.16. The Cult of the Obstacle

In the works of “all great writers concerned with desire”\textsuperscript{276} one encounters a handful of metaphors used by “slaves” to describe those that are seen to be “masters.”\textsuperscript{277} Marcel from Proust’s \textit{Remembrance of Things Past} compares a group of girls who exclude him to a flock of seagulls.\textsuperscript{278} Dostoevsky’s Stavrogin from \textit{The Possessed} and Svidrigailov from \textit{Crime and Punishment} are haunted in their dreams by spiders and snakes.\textsuperscript{279} Sigmund Freud invokes the image of the tiger or the “wild beast with a sleek coat.”\textsuperscript{280} The significance of these animals lies in the manner in which they present themselves to human perception. They all seem, at least initially, to be “graceful and cruel,”\textsuperscript{281} and just as essentially, \textit{they are indifferent to human beings}. In other words, they exhibit for the mimetically obsessed the most obvious characteristic of the obstacles that fascinate them. They seem to possess fully the qualities of the \textit{skandalon} that appeal directly to mimetism, the self-sufficiency and indifference that indicate a “metaphysical closure” enjoyed by the mediator,\textsuperscript{282} and

\begin{quote}
Duke: Still so cruel?
Olivia: Still so constant, lord? (\textit{Twelfth Night}, V, i, 110-111.)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{276} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 382.

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{278} Girard, “Narcissism,” 179.


\textsuperscript{280} Girard, “Narcissism,” 179.

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{282} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 384.
in the cruelty perceived in them include a suggestion of his sadism. They desire nothing, envy nothing, enjoy their own being fully and desire the being of no one else. It is noteworthy in this light that the name “Zverkov” means “animal” or “beast.”

As the thrall of indifference intensifies, desire orients itself with increasing intensity towards that which is yet more indifferent. Objects of escalating inanimacy fascinate mimetism. Desire becomes increasingly destabilized and the project of self-divinization becomes increasingly absurd. Divinity is sought from that which is increasingly impersonal and inert. Desire moves from the personal to the animal and then on to the “mechanistic,” and as mimetism intensifies further, on to that which is still more inert, the “mineral.” In the mineral, desire finds that which is most indifferent, a world “lacking all movement,” a world of death. The deviated transcendency of mimetism begets an existential outlook fascinated by death and all that can be associated with it. Death comes to be regarded as the meaning of life.

Girard’s “parable” merits more consideration in this light. The image of the unmovable “stone” partakes of the stillness of the mineral, the “impenetrable immobility of granite.” Likewise, the image resonates with the center of this

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283 Girard, “Narcissism,” 179.
284 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 286.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 287.
287 Ibid.
dynamic, the *skandalon*, the “stone of stumbling” in the language of the older translations of the New Testament. This “stone of stumbling” is at the center of the progress of deviated transcendence and its movement towards a fascination with stillness and ultimately death. The final destination of deviated transcendence is a “mysticism of the stone” that is synonymous with a “mysticism of the mediator.” This mysticism remains almost entirely implicit in the novels from which Girard distills it. In his anthropology, however, Girard will show that the deviated transcendence dramatized by the great novelists and distilled in his literary criticism builds itself up in an explicit form into the structures of the archaic religious economy. The mysticism of the *skandalon* directs its devotees, the whole of humanity at the archaic level, towards stone as an implement of sacrifice, stone altars, and megalithic religious monuments including the stone-like stillness of the tomb.

1.17. *... and on this Rock...*

The “mysticism of the mediator” and its effects on the human person are expressed powerfully in the Biblical images of the “hardened heart”\(^{288}\) and the closely related image of the “heart of stone” provided by the prophet Ezekiel.\(^{289}\) The heart of stone is the heart oriented obsessively by mimetism towards the *skandalon*. It has been taken hold of by a spirit of negation, and has lost its most essential

\(^{288}\) Dt 15:7; Ex 9:12, 10:20; Zk 7:12; Ps 95:8-9; Pr 28:14; Mt 19:8; Mk 10:5; Eph 4:8; Hb 3:15.

\(^{289}\) Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26
human characteristics. It has become mindless, reflexive, and mechanical. It is inert like the stone-like obstacles that hold it in a thrall. In other words, it has become a likeness of the obstacle/mediator that imitates reflexively.

Girard writes that transcendence “towards the nadir is a mirror likeness of transcendence towards the zenith.” The stone and the heart of stone provide a two-fold image of the nadir of deviated transcendence. Girard does not develop extensively the notion of a vertical transcendence in his literary criticism except to note that that it is associated with the “writings of the Christian mystics.” Its possibility should prompt us to consider a counter image marking the zenith of transcendence. There must be a symbol that can stand as an anti-type, one that bears the formal characteristics of the stone, but which re-presents these according to a transcendence that restores and fortifies all that is distinctively human.

This expectation is met with the image of “the rock.” The rock appears throughout the Old Testament, but has a particularly prominent place in the Psalms. There the rock is God himself or the safety and stability he provides. Very often this safety and stability are provided in the midst of the bewildering confusion of a violent threat:

For God alone my soul waits in silence;  
from him comes my salvation.  
He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;  
I shall not be greatly moved. (Ps 62:1-2)

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. (Ps 18:2)


291 Ibid., 285.
Blessed be the Lord, my rock. (Ps 144:1)

I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined to me and heard my cry
He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog
And set my feet upon a rock. (Ps 40)

In the rock we find a formal symmetry with the image of the stone. Its fixity and immobility of the stone are re-presented, but in a new context.

Within the New Testament “rock” becomes associated with the disciple Peter, whose name is conferred on him in Mt 16:17-19: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” Peter comes to be at the center of the evangelists’ attention during each of the Gospels’ account of Christ’s passion. There, it is not his rock-likeness, but his denial and betrayal of Jesus that is featured prominently. Of greater importance, however, is his role in the Gospels’ disclosure of the mimetic forces at work in the crowd that obtains Jesus’ death, and the human tendency to overestimate one’s ability to resist those mimetic forces, which Peter has clearly done. In bestowing Peter’s name, the rock is established by Christ as an icon of discipleship, an image of the steadfastness that is to characterize his followers. It represents the capacity to remain faithful to the “pattern of being” established by Christ who St. Paul identifies with the rock of the book of Exodus.292 We see Christ, most particularly during his passion, resisting all enticements to violent reciprocity, to take as a mediator of desire anyone other than his Father.293 Rather than engage in a violent imitation of his enemies, which would be tantamount to stumbling on

292 1 Cor 10:1-5: “I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, and all ate the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

293 Girard, Things Hidden, 276.
the obstacles they place before him, he remains fixed on his Father as the mediator of his desire, and seeks always to accomplish his will. It is exactly this steadfastness in resisting skandalon that Christ enjoins upon his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, where he consistently indicates that his disciples are not to respond in kind to the aggression of enemies.

1.18. I will give you a new heart.

The ontological desire for a “greater plenitude of being” that drives envy and generates deviated transcendence finds its fulfillment in the life of Christian discipleship. There the full exercise of the human capacity for imitation heals and integrates the human person within the life of grace, wherein God gives his being freely and brings the human likeness to God to perfection. In light of the transcendence established and revealed by Christ, the meaning of the pattern established by the skandalon comes into view. The rock and the stone are opposites, but their affinity for each other presents the possibility that a transition from one to the other is possible. The conversion of imitation from the stone to the rock, from deviated transcendence to Christian transcendence, stands at the starting point of what St. Paul calls the “recapitulation” of “all things.”

All other recapitulations

294 See John 6:38.
295 Girard, Things Hidden, 197-198; 183.
296 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 146.
297 Ephesians 1:10.
draw their strength from the re-presentation of a truly divine mediator of desire. All other uses of “stone” in the New Testament, including St. Peter’s use in 1 Peter 2:5 – “You are living stones, building up a spiritual house” – should be understood in light of the recapitulation of the image that has taken place in Christ. The differing images of the “rock” and the “stone of stumbling,” provide for a contrast that helps to recognize the fundamental difference between the two, but the completeness of the recapitulation means that the former image can be reemployed in its new sense without hesitation.

As we have seen, Girard seeks to demonstrate that mimetic desire is fundamental to human nature. As will become more clear in the next chapter’s exploration of Girard’s anthropology, mimetic desire and the skandalon are implicated in the genesis and development of the entirety of human culture beginning with the primordial human institution, sacrifice. There we will see a mysticism of the stone once again, but in this case much more explicitly. In archaic religion, especially in the case of the institution of sacrifice and the cultural artifacts surrounding it, we encounter deviated transcendence writ large. We will see more clearly that the image of Flute from A Midsummer Night’s Dream kissing the stones of an insurmountable wall is a brief glimpse of the spiritual condition of humanity under the dominion of deviated transcendence. From its very beginning humanity has been oriented by desire towards the skandalon. It has bowed down in servitude before that which opposes it most, that which is most cruel, violent, and death-dealing. In the very act of doing so, however, it simultaneously foreshadows the means by which it will be oriented to love and life.
CHAPTER TWO
THE MIMETIC THEORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

Girard’s literary criticism yields the anthropological insight that we have already explored in the last chapter, the mimetic nature of human desire and the interpersonal dynamics it generates. This chapter will explore the way in which the issues set forth in the previous chapter illuminate the most fundamental anthropological questions. Here we will see that term “cult of the mediator” that was used to describe the slavish devotion of the desiring subject for the model of desire is no mere metaphor. Or rather, we will see that the religious and devotional metaphors that present themselves so naturally in discussions and depictions of mimetic desire have quite literal precedents in archaic religion. Girard’s address of anthropological issues may well be described as a “turn” in his thought, but it may also be understood as an examination of the original context from which these metaphors originate, the context in which they are literally true. We will see that his anthropology is best regarded as an extension of the investigation of desire and its effects that he begins in literary criticism.

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2.2. *Violence and the Sacred*

Following the publication of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* in 1965 Girard undertook an investigation of the anthropological record that culminated in the 1972 publication of *Violence and the Sacred*.\(^{300}\) This work is the fruit of his consideration of the body of data recorded by European anthropologists throughout the 19th century.\(^{301}\) This body of data is vast, to say the least, and the history of anthropology features many attempts to make sense of it. The 19th century scientists Girard relies on shared a confidence that eventually there would arise a theory adequate to explain the origin and purpose of the dizzying variety of customs, rituals, and myths gathered from around the globe.\(^{302}\) They centered their theoretical efforts on sacrifice, intuiting that it was somehow the key to understanding “the sacred,” the collection of rituals, attitudes, and myths that constituted religious observance in archaic societies.\(^ {303}\)

Ultimately the task proved too difficult. The ideas of this or that theorist might enjoy a day in the sun, but proposed explanations inevitably came to be regarded as inadequate. During the course of the 20th century, the enterprise was abandoned entirely. Modern confidence in the ability of scientific methods to


produce a satisfying account of culture in general and religion in particular gave way
to the post-modern critique of all such attempts.\(^{304}\) The anthropological record of
religious institutions and the strange content of mythology came to be regard as
irreducibly fragmented, hopelessly confused, defying all attempts at explanation.
“Totalizing” theories and “grand narratives” are regarded with deep suspicion.
Post-modern sensibilities now dismiss all such theorizing out of hand.\(^{305}\) As the
academic culture became increasingly sensitive of the imperial abuses of the past,
the 19\(^{th}\) century attempts to provide a systematic account of early, non-European
cultures, came to be regarded as a symptom of the violent colonialist impulses that
set the stage for the collection of the data in the first place. The community of
scholars has in large part rejected the possibility that any sense will ever be made of
the collected data. This is basically the state of things today.\(^{306}\) For this reason
Girard’s theory is sometimes regarded as an attempt to revivify a failed 19th century
project.\(^{307}\) In fact, he claims far more than the original theoreticians of the 19\(^{th}\)
century. According to the mimetic theory, not only is sacrifice the key to


\(^{306}\) The contemporary writer, Terry Eagleton, has written that the intellectual culture of
today is characterized by what he calls, “holophobia,” the fear of the “whole” that informs the post-
and Conversion*, x. See also, René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans.

\(^{307}\) Jean-Pierre Dupuy says the following concerning Girard’s undertaking: “Only an insane
person, ignoring all the norms of research in the human sciences, could today put forward the
following outrageous claims. In spite of, or rather because of, its noise and fury, the history of
humanity, taken as a whole, has a meaning.” *Seul un insensé, ignorant tout des normes de la recherche
en science humaines, peut aujourd’hui proférer les énormités suivantes. En dépit, ou plutôt du fait
meme de son bruit et sa fureur, l’histoire de l’humanité, pris dans so globalité, a un sens.* Jean-Pierre
understanding archaic religion, but is in some sense the key to understanding the whole of human culture and the human nature that gives rise to it.

Girard insists that anthropology abandoned too hastily the effort to give a systematic account of the origin and significance of culture. 19th century theorists failed in their attempts not because the project was impossible, but because the key to the success of their project lay not within anthropology, but within literary studies. Archaic religious institutions are best understood as the means by which early humanity protected itself against the violence generated by mimetic desire. We will see in the pages to follow that Girard conceives the archaic sacred as operating by transforming the continuously destabilizing effects of mimetic desire into a means for cultural stability and order. The archaic community staves off the potentially catastrophic internecine conflict generated by mimetic desire by periodically discharging the violent impulses it generates on a polarizing figure, a single victim, who makes of the community's hatred a galvanizing force. Sacred practices, especially sacrificial rites, exacerbate the pernicious effects of mimetic desire—rivalry, hatred, psychological destabilization—in order to prepare for a spasm of violence that purges the community of its violence and re-establishes it in peace and order.
2.3. The Plague

Literary creations such as Don Quixote will seem worlds away from an anthropological work such as George Frazer’s classic work of anthropology, The Golden Bough. The distance between literary criticism and anthropology is bridged by certain themes and motifs that confront both the literary critic and the anthropologist. One such theme is “the plague,” which is “found everywhere in literature.” Today, we know the plague to be an infectious disease caused by microscopic pathogens that are communicated person to person in various ways. This medical understanding, however, was made possible by scientific knowledge that developed relatively recently. To archaic humanity—as well as to ancient, medieval, and early modern humanity, for that matter—the plague denotes an acute social crisis characterized by profound reversals in the order of the afflicted society. As the plague spreads, honest men become thieves; friends murder one another and enemies embrace. The wealthy are reduced to poverty, and the poor suddenly become rich. Political and religious authorities collapse. The plague makes all social differences and hierarchical distinctions irrelevant. It respects no rank or privilege, and no frontier or border can contain it.

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308 Girard notes that his anthropological studies began with this famous work. Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 32.

309 Girard, To Double Business Bound, 136. Within antiquity we find references to plagues everywhere from the epic poems of Homer and Greek tragedies such as Oedipus Rex, to the histories of Thucydides and the philosophical poems of Lucretius. Among more recent works Girard cites the examples of Boccaccio’s Decameron, La Fontaine’s Les Animaux malades de la peste, and Manzoni’s I Promessi Sposi. Camus’ La Peste provides a 20th century example.

310 Girard, To Double Business Bound, 137.
It is difficult for us to imagine that medical and social crises could be confused for one another, but there are important similarities that explain their conflation in earlier periods, chief of which is their analogous contagiousness. The onset of a medical crisis often begins with a single case. A single person displays symptoms that then spread from person to person until everyone is afflicted. Likewise, a social crisis often originates in a single person, a courier, for example, who brings bad news that creates a panic as it spreads. A medical crisis may very well precipitate a social crisis, which of course would encourage their identification among those ignorant of their respective causes. Girard points out that historians still debate “whether the Black Death was a cause or a consequence of the social upheavals in the fourteenth century.” During the period when science was finally developing the capacity to distinguish the two types of crises, the two senses of “plague” were sometimes juxtaposed in telling ways. In the sixteenth century, for example, the French surgeon Ambroise Paré writes:

At the outbreak of the plague, even the highest authorities are likely to flee, so that the administration of justice is rendered impossible and no one can obtain his rights. General anarchy and confusion then set in and that is the worst evil by which the commonwealth can be assailed; for that is the moment when the dissolute bring another and worse plague into the town. [Girard provides the emphasis.]

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311 Girard, To Double Business Bound, 137.

2.4. The Effacement of Differences

The onset of the plague is signaled by the appearance of a disappearance, a spreading effacement of those cultural characteristics that normally distinguish the various members of the community from one another. A healthy society is characterized by the presence of “differences” among its members, differences of rank, wealth, authority, occupation, age, gender, etc. Societies depend on these asymmetries of relation for peace and productivity, so when the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker are reduced to an undifferentiated sameness, the social dynamisms that animate the life of the community come to a stop.313

Girard has referred to Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* as a kind of “Bible of mimetic desire.”314 There Ulysses is heard to describe the disappearance of cultural and social differences as a “crisis of degree,” which is synonymous with what we have called the crisis of differences. Ulysses describes the crisis in terms of contagion and illness:

Oh, when degree is shaked,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick! How could communities,  
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
The primogenitive and due of birth  
Prerogative of age, crowns, scepters, laurels,  
But by degree, stand in authentic place?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark, what discord follows! Each thing meets  
In mere oppugnancy.

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314 Girard, *Quand ces chose commenceront*, 36.
As Ulysses continues his discourse, he compares this “crisis of degree” to a flood, an image whose use in mythological texts parallels that of the plague.

The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe.
Strength should be the lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead.
Force should be right, or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too. (I, iii, 101-118)

Prior to a flood, when the waters are still “bounded,” a landscape is characterized by all kinds of differences: hills, valleys, trees, fields, homes, and churches. During the flood, all of these become inundated by an undifferentiated mass of water, and when the water subsides, all is covered beneath an undifferentiated layer of mud. Both the flood and the plague are signs of the “destruction of specificities.”

Dostoevsky juxtaposes the two usages of “plague,” medical and social. In his Crime and Punishment, the main character Raskalnikov has a dream of a plague that engulfs the entire world. It spreads from person to person until the whole of civilization finally collapses:

He dreamt that the whole world was condemned to a terrible new strange plague that had come to Europe from the depths of Asia.... Some new sorts of microbes were attacking the bodies of men, but these microbes were endowed with intelligence and will. Men attacked by them became at once mad and furious. But never had men considered themselves so intellectual and so completely in possession of the truth as these sufferers, never had they considered their decision, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible. Whole villages, whole towns and peoples went mad from the infection. All were excited and did not understand one another. Each thought that he alone had the truth and was wretched looking at the others, beat himself on the breast, wept, and wrung his hands. They did not know how to judge and could not agree what to consider evil and what good;

315 Girard, To Double Business Bound, 136.
they did not know whom to blame, whom to justify. Men killed each other in a sort of senseless spite. They gathered together in armies against one another, but even on the march the armies would begin attacking each other, the ranks would be broken and the soldiers would fall on each other, stabbing and cutting, biting and devouring each other. The alarm bell was ringing all day long in the towns; men rushed together, but why they were summoned and who was summoning them no one knew. The most ordinary trades were abandoned, because every one proposed his own ideas, his own improvements, and they could not agree. The land too was abandoned. Men met in groups, agreed on something, swore to keep together, but at once began on something quite different from what they had proposed. They accused one another, fought and killed each other. There were conflagrations and famine. All men and things were involved in destruction. The plague spread and moved further and further.  

The dream describes the effects of “microbes” that elicit symptoms whose mimetic character is indicated by the repetition of the telling phrases “one another” and “each other.” This pattern of interactions culminates with the recollection that the persons infected, “accused one another, fought and killed one another” as “the plague spread and moved further and further.” As in the case of Ulysses’ flood, the effect of the microbes is to engender a reciprocal conflict that erodes order and hierarchy.

The persons in Raskalnikov’s dream seem like so many “Underground Men.” They take up opinions and ideas in opposition to one another. Relations are consumed by pointless conflicts. As they continue to deteriorate, they lash out at one another, reflexively opposing one another at first socially and then physically. The onset of this “microbial epidemic” is the commencement of a proliferation of skandalà between members of the community. The self-aggrandizement of one

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317 Girard, To Double Business Bound, 139-140.
provokes a symmetrical response in all others, who reciprocally antagonize one
another in this way. The members of the community “worship” each other by their
obsessive attention, but simultaneously hate each other, not realizing that by doing
so they succumb to the contagion and propagate it to others.\(^\text{318}\)

This understanding of the significance of images such as the plague and the
flood should not be taken to deny that early human communities lived in fear of the
external threat of natural disasters, but should be taken rather as an indication that
communities understood external threats in terms of something that they regarded
with far more trepidation.\(^\text{319}\) As will become increasingly clear in the pages that
follow, of all the threats facing early humanity, the greatest by far was that of a
reciprocal violence that spreads uncontrollably from person to person in a manner
resembling an infectious disease.\(^\text{320}\)

\section*{2.5. Mimetic Desire and Human Evolution}

The decisive moment for human development is what anthropologists refer
to as “hominization,” that phase of evolution during which humanity becomes
distinct from the rest of the animal kingdom.\(^\text{321}\) The unfolding of this process
occasions the rise of all that we associate with human culture—language, social

\(^{318}\) Ibid., 139-140.


\(^{320}\) Girard, \textit{To Double Business Bound}, 139.

hierarchies, technology—as well as those anthropological features that provide the capacity for culture: rationality and symbolic thought. Girard insists that a full account of hominization must cover the entirety of its movement from pre-human animal forms to a fully emerged humanity. For this reason Girard insists that anthropology, or more specifically, ethnology, the study of the behavior of human populations, must begin in ethology, the study of the behavior of animal populations.322

It is certainly true that mimetic rivalries can be seen within animal populations. Animal mating combats often feature tremendous violence, and can sometimes exhibit the same “desire without an object” that Girard associates with mimetic rivalry in extremis. Two male animals competing for a female, for example, will at times be so carried away by their rivalry with each other that they seem to forget the female for which they fight. As the violent attention of competing males fixates on each other they may not notice as the female becomes bored and walks away. The two males have become, in some sense, mimetic doubles of each other.323

In a scenario such as this, the two animals may indeed end up killing each other. Far more often, however, the instinctual mechanisms at work in dominance hierarchies intervene to arrest the escalation of violence before it becomes life threatening.324 These instincts operate among animals to prevent intra-species

322 Girard, Things Hidden, 99.


conflicts from rising to lethal proportions with any regularity. Among the higher primates, for example, a simple look exchanged between members of a given population will often suffice to establish an inviolable hierarchy that assigns to each member his or her place in the population. It has been observed, for example, that subordinate chimpanzees will starve to death rather than compete for food with dominant members of their populations.

Hominization featured the disappearance of these instinctual restraints on the escalation of violent conflict. Evolution freed human desires to converge, reinforce one another, and spiral out of control. Lacking dominance hierarchies, the sort of escalation to extremes seen rarely within animal populations becomes an imminent threat within human populations. And whereas animals under the direction of dominance hierarchies accept immediately the outcome of mating combats and other instinctual means by which hierarchical distinctions are established, human persons harbor within them the lingering memory of their social defeats. They live on as skandala, the artifacts of envy and resentment, and generate constantly a rancor that accumulates to explosive proportions if allowed to accumulate for too long.

Certain other features of human development further exacerbate the already precarious circumstance facing humanity. Among other mammal species there are

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{325} Indeed, they intervene frequently to prevent conflicts over territory and food sources in order to prevent the waste of precious energy among population members. See, Alcock, Animal Behavior, 90.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{326} Girard, Things Hidden, 89.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{327} Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 10.}}\]
discreet periods of sexual excitation where population members compete for mates. Humanity is characterized by a condition of permanent sexual excitation, creating the continuous possibility of conflicts for sexual partners. The rise of hunting as an important food source encouraged the fortification of adrenal glands in order to equip early hunters with the capacity for powerful discharges of aggressive strength. The enhanced capacity for violence was further multiplied by the use of tools that could double as weapons.328

Complicating this already difficult circumstance is the total vulnerability of newborn children, as well as the extremely long duration of this vulnerability. In other animal species, the discrete periods of sexual excitation among males are spaced in such a way as to diminish the likelihood that their sexual interest will interfere with the maternal care of children. This also diminishes the possibility that males will encounter children as obstacles to their pursuit of females. Where this does occur in animal populations children often become the victims of male aggression.329 The new capacity for adrenaline-fueled violence poses grave difficulties for families in particular. Outbursts of raging hostility are rarely “centrifugal.” They act “centripetally,” directing themselves most often towards the most intimate relations, to what is “closest and most cherished.”330 Humanity could not have developed in the manner it did unless there was some other form of protection in place to protect it from its own violence.

328 Girard, Things Hidden, 85.
329 Ibid., 85.
330 Ibid., 86.
2.6. The Plague and the Crisis of Differences

Newly freed from instinct, desire quickly forges a close association with violence that animates and underscores all the dangers associated with hominization. In a mimetic rivalry the opposition that each antagonist directs towards the other fuels the fascination of each for the other. Desire and violence escalate together, reciprocally reinforcing each other. According to the logic of the skandalon, violence itself becomes first a signal of desirability, and as desire spirals out of control, the object of desire itself. In sum, from the time of humanity's first appearance, violence exerts a powerful and permanent fascination. So when an instance of violence breaks out in a human community it attracts the attention of all. As onlookers are drawn to the fracas they place themselves in closer proximity to the conflict and are thereby more likely to be drawn into it themselves. The agitation such a spectacle generates further increases the likelihood that other, similar eruptions of conflict will occur. Skandala proliferate as community

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331 It is important to remember that the earliest human community had no experience of the crisis of differences. No precedent for it exists in the animal kingdom. Earliest humans would have given themselves freely to the allure of the spectacle of violence. The contagiousness would have been magnified by the complete ignorance of the earliest humans to the consequences of its attraction. This becomes the basis of Girard’s response to the theoretical objections of Eric Gans, a student of Girard who developed a modification of the mimetic hypothesis called “generative anthropology.” According to Gans, culture begins with an aborted gesture of appropriation. Two early humans are prompted by mimetic desire towards the same object, but perceiving the danger of the convergence of their desire, one or both defers to the other. Mimesis brings them together over the same object, but the danger of conflict begets a response that is the opposite of the attempt to appropriate the object. Mimetic desire, in other words, begets a refusal to imitate. The aborted gesture of appropriation becomes a gesture towards the object that is not appropriative, and becomes the basis for the first cultural sign, the first step in the development of language. Gans thus emphasizes language as the means by which early humanity achieved reconciliation. Girard counters that Gans seems to presuppose the presence of an intelligence whereby early humanity can foresee the dangers of a crisis that has never yet occurred. See Eric Gans, Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and other Mimetic Structures (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 18. See also Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 123-124.
members are drawn to the violent spectacle like moths to a flame. The contagious spread of internal mediation, the runaway mimesis of the spreading conflict, renders the community a collection of mimetic doubles. As mimesis erodes all differences within the community and it dissolves into an undifferentiated sameness, it is aptly described by the Hobbesian formula “war of all against all.”

The plague is nothing other than the sign of a social crisis characterized by the proliferation and spread of countless *skandala*. The ubiquity and frequency of the appearance of images such as the plague in mythological stories indicate that such crises were not only possibilities, but happened with regularity. As we shall see, Girard attributes to the sort of crisis described above a fundamental role in the development not only of religion and culture, but of human nature itself. It is the “zero point” of culture, where all that is distinctively human disintegrates into an undifferentiated sameness. Rationality, language, law, social institutions and hierarchies reduce to Shakespeare’s “mere oppugnancy,” the out of control exchange of violent blows. Girard refers to it variously as the “crisis of difference,” “the mimetic crisis,” but most often the “sacrificial crisis” for reasons that will become clear. Its contagiousness and the undifferentiation it spreads must be understood in terms of runaway mimetism.

At the most archaic level of human history there was not any significant degree of cultural development. There was not much in the way of “differences” to

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dissolve during the onset of the first crisis of differences. There was present, however, the first and most fundamental difference, the clear and distinct demarcation of self and other that characterizes normal experience. We have already seen what mimetic rivalry can do to this difference in Cervantes’ presentation of the story of Cardenio. Cardenio’s rage for Fernando has grown so great that he sees him everywhere. His experience of mimetic rivalry has rendered the external world so “thin and faint” that any person who opposes him even slightly may become for him a “Fernando.” Much the same is true of our community in the throes of a mimetic crisis. The “disincarnating” effect of mimetic desire run wild undoes clear and coherent perceptions of reality and individual identities.335

Imitation is structured and animated by the identification of the desiring self with the model of imitation. As rounds of imitation accelerate, the frantic oscillation between self and other exasperates the ability of individuals to maintain clear distinction between those categories. This accounts for the frequency of the presence of twins in mythological stories. Like the plague, they signify the effacement of differences, the “resemblance” created among persons by the practice of mimetism. They signify the same undifferentiation as the flood and the plague, but recall the specifically interpersonal nature of the crisis.336

The disincarnating effect of mimesis imparts to the crisis a hallucinatory aspect that characterizes mythological stories. The confusion of day and night, the


transformations of humans into animals and back again, strange cosmic occurrences, journeys into the underworld: these are all indications of the psychological dislocation that characterizes the crisis they describe. The same can be said for the presence of mythological beasts, “monsters” whose confused “forms” indicate the formlessness of the crisis of differences.  

2.7. The Founding Murder

In this condition of violent chaos the community is quite literally on the brink of destroying itself. Part of the terror of the crisis consists of the very real possibility that an outbreak of violence will trigger a chain reaction, a series of violent reprisals that will destroy the community in its entirety. Girard regards it as likely that there were communities that did not survive their first encounter with the consequences of mimetic violence and ended by destroying themselves. For those that survived, salvation came in the form of precisely what the community lacks at the height of the crisis: a difference. In the midst of the undifferentiated chaos a single member of the community becomes distinguished from all others. The distinguishing mark may be very small and quite arbitrary. Perhaps he or she falls to the ground in the midst of a scuffle, or is the first to shed blood or becomes


338 Ibid., 25.

339 Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 99. “Based on the suppositions of the mimetic theory, one can argue that many groups and societies perished and were destroyed by lethal infighting, by the explosion of mimetic rivalry being unable to find any form of resolution.” See also, Girard, Things Hidden, 87.
disabled in some unexpected way. Whatever the case, one of the members of the community displays a feature or a behavior that marks him or her as an “exception” that attracts the attention of others, perhaps first only some small subset of the larger community, one or two persons. The attention of this minority draws the attention of still others until the attention of the entire community fixates on this single person. Just as the original spectacle of violence acts mimetically to draw others in, so a new wave of mimesis propagates through the community to direct all attention towards this single person.\textsuperscript{340}

As the spectacle created by the one who has distinguished him or herself gathers attention, participants perceive that they are no longer under the threat of the violent catastrophe that just a moment before seemed like an inevitability. With the passing of the terrible threat, the reality that was undone in the hallucinatory atmosphere of the crisis is now reestablished. And this salutary turn of events is inextricably linked to the single person who now occupies the attention of the community.\textsuperscript{341} Mimetic attention turns to mimetic accusation. In light of his or her strange role in resolving the crisis, this single exception comes to be regarded as its cause. The more the community turns its violent attention towards him or her, the more liberated it perceives itself to be from the weight of the fear of total violence, which further serves to confirm the accusation. The sudden onset of a unanimous

\textsuperscript{340} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 79.

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., 79. “Where only shortly before a thousand individual conflicts had raged unchecked between a thousand enemy brothers, there now reappears a true community, united in its hatred for one alone of its number.”
social cohesion that a moment before was unimaginable serves as irrefutable proof of the exception’s responsibility for the crisis.342

Now the full weight of the community’s accumulated wrath and terror, all the rancor stored up in the course of the crisis’s progress, comes raining down on the victim in an attack whose fury is recorded in myth and sacrificial rituals. We are given an indication of its nature in the Greek sparagmos, a sacrificial ritual associated with the worship of Dionysus, where the victim is torn literally limb from limb. Here in the community’s convergence on the exception, now the community’s victim, the crisis is resolved. To borrow and adapt the Hobbesian formula cited earlier, the accusation of the victim transforms the “war of all against all” into a “war of all against one.”343 Mimesis was the cause of the community’s crisis, its dissolution into violence and undifferentiation; by means of the unanimous accusation of the victim, it becomes the architect of its reunification.344

In the wake of the immolation of the victim, the community experiences something unexpected. The entire crisis is brought to an immediate end. The ferocious rivalries and the terrifying violence that fueled the hallucinatory crisis are expelled at a stroke. The terrible destruction that seemed imminent and inevitable is now suddenly gone. The spasm of violence directed at the victim achieves a powerful catharsis that restores the community to peace. The emergence of the victim as a single difference in a churning sea of chaos becomes the starting point

342 Ibid. “The firm conviction of the group is based on no other evidence than the unshakeable unanimity of its own illogic.”

343 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 8.

344 Ibid.
for the reemergence of all other differences. Within the context of the accusation of the victim the whole of reality recrudesces, and in the wake of his or her destruction, peaceful communal life resumes once more. The community that experiences this catharsis has survived its first encounter with mimetic desire by way of what Girard calls the “founding murder.”

The catharsis effected by the destruction of the victim removes from the community the threat posed by the onset of the internal mediation of desire, and restores the possibility of harmonious communal life. The catharsis restores the possibility of the external mediation of desire, desire with differences and without rivalry. In the mimetic turn towards the victim the countless skandala that proliferated in the midst of the community and precipitated the crisis are gathered together, as it were, into a single skandalon, a single rivalry between the community and its victim. The destruction of the victim expels this single skandalon, which takes all others with it. The identification associated with mimesis and which generates the hallucinatory aspect of the crisis now allows for another identification that saves the community and helps restore all differences. At the decisive moment, the hateful aspect of each other member is identified with the victim. The violence directed at the single victim effects the necessary catharsis because in it each member completes the formal gesture of killing the hated enemy who has been projected onto, as it were, the single victim. As the object of the community’s

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345 Girard, Things Hidden, 40.
collective violence the victim takes the place of the hated other. For this reason
Girard often refers to the victim of the founding murder as the “surrogate” victim.\textsuperscript{346}

Even in normal conditions violent impulses gladly accept substitutes for
whatever arouses them in the first place.\textsuperscript{347} At the height of the crisis the possibility
of substitution is even greater than usual. As identities become hopelessly confused
and as actions become increasingly mindless and reflexive, it becomes increasingly
possible to transpose the identity of one person onto another. The community
becomes a collection of Cardenios capable of projecting their mimetic rivals onto
anyone, and when they are finally projected onto a single victim, the community can
converge on him or her with the full measure of its accumulated rage. The appetite
for revenge residing in each member for every other member is satisfied by a spasm
of violence directed towards a single member, the victim of the community’s
collective violence.\textsuperscript{348}

A pattern quickly presents itself in Girard’s analysis. By now we have several
instances where the “poison” becomes the “cure.” Conflictual mimesis nearly
destroys the community but at the last moment suddenly reverses itself and saves it.
The runaway identification associated with mimesis at first confuses the community,
but becomes salutary when it allows the community to externalize its hateful,
vviolent aspect. In the accusatory turn towards the surrogate victim all instances of
resentment and impotent rage that formerly threatened the community are made to


\textsuperscript{347} Ibid., 35-36

serve the community’s reconciliation. All the evolutionary hazards mentioned earlier—the absence of dominance patterns, the likelihood that skandala will accumulate and fester among community members, the possibility of adrenaline charged outbursts of rage—collaborate to ensure that the intensity of the crisis will reach the intensity necessary for this transposition. Every one of these “about faces” pivots on the surrogate victim. In the absence of the surrogate victim, all that has been mentioned is a terrifying threat hanging over the community, poised to destroy it. In the presence of the surrogate victim, these threats become the means by which the community saves itself from the violence of that same crisis. Directed at the surrogate victim they are made to serve the establishment of a violent unanimity that is the “fundamental phenomenon of primitive religion.”349 The accusation of the victim transforms the community from a chaotic “crowd,” a formless mass of chaos, into a “mob,” that same crowd galvanized by a target for its violence.350 As we will see in more detail in the pages to follow, the mythological imagery associated with certain cultural contexts undergoes an evolution whose course is determined by the desire to conceal as much as possible the connection between the community and its violent origin. Increasingly obscured in this evolution is the identification of archaic deities as the “gods of homicidal fury” and

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349 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 81. “Violent unanimity will, I believe, reveal itself as the fundamental phenomenon of primitive religion.”

350 Very often “crowd” and “mob” are identified as synonyms. The distinction put forward here has in mind the connection between the word “mob” and “mobilize,” as when we speak of an army “mobilizing for war.” This suggests a connection between the mob and the violent target not yet discovered by the crowd. See Girard, The Scapegoat, 16.
“mob hysteria.”\textsuperscript{351} Girard insists, for example, that if the Greek god Dionysus is examined apart from the philosophical and aesthetic significance heaped upon him by modern thinkers, he can be recognized clearly as “the god of decisive mob action.”\textsuperscript{352} Dionysus and all gods like him show their decisiveness by presenting to their respective community’s suitable targets for collective violence.

\section*{2.8. The Beatific Victim}

The experience of catharsis leaves the community with certain uncanny impressions. All the elements of the experience—the onset and spread of the crisis of differences, its hallucinatory effects, and its resolution in unanimous violence—which Girard denotes with the interchangeable terms “mimetic” or “sacrificial cycle,”\textsuperscript{353} seem to converge on the victim whose dead body now lies at the community’s feet. As a living member of the community he or she appears as the malicious cause of the dangerous chaos of the crisis of differences. In death the victim appears as the cause of the catharsis and the unexpected peace enjoyed by the community. The catharsis occasions a second of two “transfigurations” to which the victim is subject.\textsuperscript{354} The first is the negative transfiguration associated with the crisis whereby the victim becomes the community’s hated enemy. The second

\textsuperscript{351} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 133.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{353} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall like Lightning}, 30.

\textsuperscript{354} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 45.
occurs in the context of the cathartic peace where the victim reappears as a “beatific other,” the heroic bringer of peace who saves the community in the nick of time.\textsuperscript{355} The outcome of the crisis occasions an epiphany that discloses the transcendent power of the victim to sow the seeds of disorder not only into the community but into the entirety of the cosmos as well. He or she can undo and reestablish the world and everything in it at will. He or she becomes the community's god who manifests to the community two “faces,” one malicious, the other benevolent. Drawing near to the community, dwelling in its midst, the surrogate victim is the community's curse; satisfied and driven away by an act of violence, he or she becomes the community's source of blessing.\textsuperscript{356}

The violent mimesis of the initial phase of the cycle renders the victim a kind of screen onto which the community projects its own homicidal fury, that aspect of the community its members find terrifying. The second transfiguration occurs in wake of his or her destruction, which establishes peace for the community. The victim as a god, blessing the community, is once again a screen, but now the image projected is the community’s positive aspect, the community reconciled and at peace. The two faces of the god are in reality the two faces of the community’s violence, the first chaotic and destructive, the second unanimous and reconciliatory. The victim is, of course, entirely passive before the community, completely helpless and totally subject to this violence. But as the cycle unfolds and moves through its

\textsuperscript{355} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 65-66. “The victim is thus transfigured twice: the first time in a negative, evil fashion; the second time in a positive beneficial fashion.”

\textsuperscript{356} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 70.
phases, it gives to the community the impression that its surrogate victim is “supremely active and all powerful,”\textsuperscript{357} dictating the course of the entire sequence of events. According to Girard’s description, the archaic god is hardly more than a mirror of the community in its dissolution into the chaos of the crisis and then its reemergence as violently unanimous.

The transfigured victim, the community’s god, appears to the community in a manner described well by Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of an “idol.” Marion describes an idol as a kind of “invisible mirror” that presents an image to the self that the self mistakes as something “other” and “beyond.”\textsuperscript{358} This misunderstanding is fundamental to the working of the archaic sacred, especially its centerpiece, sacrifice.\textsuperscript{359} Girard himself invokes Émile Durkheim’s paradoxical concept of “social transcendence” to describe the illusory beyond opened up by the archaic gods.\textsuperscript{360} The transcendence of archaic religion is real inasmuch as it begets real social effects, but the “beyond” of its transcendence is no further beyond each individual member of the community than the community as a whole and the possibility of its existence. The beyond of this transcendence is thus similar to the transcendence from which it

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 52. See also, Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 82. “The idea... that the scapegoat can change his direction, choose the trail of his liking—in other words that he is an actor rather than a puppet—is again a typical concept of the persecutor, the generative illusion of the scapegoat mechanism.”


\textsuperscript{359} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 299. “Only one conclusion seems possible: there is a unity that underlies not only all mythologies and rituals but the whole of human culture, and this unity of unities depends on a single mechanism, continually functioning because perpetually misunderstood.”

\textsuperscript{360} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 99-100.
emerges, the transcendence of deviated transcendence, which we examined in the last chapter. There the metaphysical “beyond” of metaphysical desire is no further beyond the subject and objet of desire than the mediator of desire whose influence on the subject remains unrecognized. This “misunderstanding” active in animating the dynamics of human desire becomes collectivized in the experience of collective violence and animates the dynamics of the archaic sacred.361

The misunderstanding of deviated transcendence becomes the misunderstanding of sacrifice in the consolidation of skandala in the community's victim. Mimetic rivals unwittingly externalize their hateful aggression by projecting it onto each other. The self is good and innocent, the practitioner of self-defense against a rival who is seen increasingly as depraved and aggressive. This Manichean view intensifies even as violent mimesis renders them mimetic doubles, indistinguishable from one another with respect to hatred and violence. The first, negative transfiguration that results in the singling out of the victim as the hated enemy is a collectivization of this externalization. No less than mimetic rivals believe in the justice of their vengeance, the community believes its victims to be the cause of its crisis, and with the onset of the cathartic peace, cannot but believe him or her to be its cause as well. In other words, the community’s persecution of its victim is unconscious.362 Persecutors do not realize that they converge on their victims for “inadequate reasons,” or even “for no reason at all, more or less at

361 Girard will sometimes render this as méconnaissance. See Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 81. Girard allies Shakespeare’s “misprison” with the misunderstanding of méconnaissance. See Girard, A Theater of Envy, 37.

random.”⁶⁶ In a very real sense, “they know not what they do.”⁶⁴ Indeed, this ignorance is fundamental to the unfolding of the mimetic cycle. The externalization of the community's violence is so complete that they believe in the justice of their violence. If ever the victim's arbitrariness were fully acknowledged, the victim would fail to externalize the community's hatred. In that case, the violence directed against him or her could no longer be regarded as an act of self-defense, and the accumulated hatred of each member would remain statically contained within the community, disrupting its relations until finally destroying it.⁶⁵

2.9. Sacrifice and the Effacement of Differences

The efficacy of the founding murder allows humanity to survive its first encounter with the effects of mimetic desire. However, the resumption of normal communal life becomes once more the occasion for mimetic interactions and the accumulation of skandala. Rivalries commence and recommence, resentments fester and rancor accumulates. Before too long, the plague returns and the community dissolve once again into a collection of mimetic doubles. The crisis of

⑥³ Girard, Violent Origins, 78.


⑥⁵ Girard, A Theatre of Envy, 273. “In order to perform revenge with conviction, you must believe in the justice of your own cause. This is what we noted before, and the revenge seeker will not believe in his own cause unless he believes in the guilt of his intended victim. And the guilt of that intended victim entails in turn the innocence of that victim's victim. If the victim's victim is already a killer and if the revenge seeker reflects a little too much on the circularity of revenge, his faith in vengeance must collapse.”

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differences and its hallucinatory terror return. A key difference, of course, is that subsequent crises occur within the context of the memory of the original crisis and its resolution by the founding murder. The community realizes that if the original act of murder can be replicated—imitated, in other words—the community can enjoy again its cathartic effect. As this sequence is repeated, perhaps more or less reflexively and even unconsciously over the vast span of humanity’s earliest period of existence, human populations learn to recreate the conditions of the original, spontaneous event of the founding murder.\textsuperscript{366} The community learns that the sudden onslaught of the great and terrible crisis can be avoided by staging crises of lesser intensity modeled on the original event in order to recreate its cathartic power. \textit{Skandala} can be expelled in these controlled, lesser crises so as to preempt the greater, out of control crisis. These recreations, these attenuated versions of the founding murder, are the first instances of sacrificial rituals.\textsuperscript{367}

Re-experiencing the catharsis of the founding murder requires a re-visitation of the primordial crisis of differences that provided the context and the necessary conditions for the efficacy of the founding murder. For this reason sacrificial rituals begin with a provocation of a kind of “mini” crisis of differences. The initial phase of the ritual seeks to undo the cultural differences that normally characterize communal life. The gestures characterizing this phase of the ritual will vary greatly from culture to culture and ritual to ritual, but they have in common an essential structural feature. They all seek to efface or at least temporarily set aside (so the

\textsuperscript{366} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World}, 100.

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 56.
community hopes) the normal “asymmetries” that characterize peaceful communal life.  

A typical ritual might begin with a particular member of the community performing a gesture as simple as walking in a circle. One by one others repeat the gesture until the entire community is walking together. Another or others may begin creating “rhythmic sound patterns,” perhaps by beating on a drum, for example. The simple gesture of walking in a circle might develop into some kind of dance that is begun by one and then adopted by all others. Very often the dance betrays the discordant aspect of the original spontaneous crisis. It might feature, for example, the pumping of fists or the stomping of feet, and very often resembles a kind of “mock combat.” A dance such as this is an “aestheticized” version of the violence of the original crisis of undifferentiation. Rhymthic vocalizations that resemble war cries may spread among persons. In the Greek Bouphonia, for example, participants make a point of quarreling among themselves in the early stages of the ritual. This quarreling has the same intended effect of all symmetrical ritualized gestures. They are intended to impart to participants the undifferentiation of mimetic conflicts. As the ritual progresses, intoxicating substances may be consumed to facilitate the abandonment of personal identities.

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368 Ibid., 21.
369 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 98.
370 Ibid., 98.
371 Girard, Things Hidden, 21.
372 Ibid., 21.
373 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 98.
and help induce the hallucinatory atmosphere associated with a heightened practice of mimesis.\textsuperscript{374} All of these gestures serve to dissolve all the differences distinguishing participants, to make of the community a collectivized singularity, a mob prepared to go to war with its victim.

\textbf{2.10. The Surrogate Victim, the Sacrificial Victim, and Accusation}

The accusation of the surrogate victim establishes the threshold between the community's "inside" and its "outside," which is synonymous with the difference between "the accusers" and "the accused." All other cultural categories, all other differences, depend on the maintenance of this most fundamental demarcation, which is the first difference established as the community begins its return from its descent into the chaos of the crisis of differences.\textsuperscript{375} Sacrificial rites allow this line to be effaced so that it can be renewed and reestablished by another act of accusation patterned on the original spontaneous accusation of the surrogate victim.\textsuperscript{376}

Accusation remains fundamental to the practice of collective violence. Both in ritual and in myth sacred victims are accused of particular cultural transgressions that must be distinguished from simple crimes. These transgressions always bear

\textsuperscript{374} Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{375} It is noteworthy in this regard that the English "category" has at its root the Greek \textit{kategoreo}, whose original meaning is "to accuse or denounce." Robert Sokolowski, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 88.

\textsuperscript{376} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 258.
the essential feature of the larger crisis they are thought to initiate. They involve, and result in, the effacement of differences; they violate and confuse fundamental categories. This is true of the most famous mythological accusations, that of incest and parricide. The incest of Oedipus of _Oedipus the King_, for example, is less significant for the sexual component of the transgression than for the confusion of generations it threatens to effect. The children of his marriage to Jocasta would be both his sons and daughters and his brothers and sisters. His offense is against “the laws of a certain type of descent.” Crimes such as this are dangerous because they promise to incite a plague of similar confusions that will spread and efface the foundational difference that establishes the community itself, the difference between the community's interior where there is to be order and peace, and its exterior where chaos reigns. Transgressors threaten this difference, but serve to build it up again as they become objects of the community's accusation.

The original spontaneous murder is directed towards a member of the community, an “insider.” As the process is repeated, and as communities take greater control of their sacrificial rites, they begin to realize the danger inherent in selecting a victim from among their own number. The point of the surrogate victim is to externalize the internal danger of violent reprisals. Killing an insider poses the risk of inspiring the very spirit of revenge that the community seeks to purge from within itself. Where insiders are chosen, they are selected from among those least...

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378 Girard, _Things Hidden_, 298.
implicated within the community, those who lack connections to anyone who might wish to avenge the violence directed at them. This helps explain the Bible's preferential option for “the orphan” and “the widow,” as well as “the stranger.”\textsuperscript{379} These are categories of persons whose diminished integration into the community makes them attractive targets of collective violence.\textsuperscript{380}

The community learns the wisdom of choosing an “outsider” as he or she is free of those connections that might instigate violent responses to his or her murder. The community seeks always to move violence away from its center.\textsuperscript{381} However, it would be easy to exaggerate the difference between the first surrogate victim and subsequent sacrificial substitutes. The surrogate victim of the founding murder is already, in some sense, an outsider. The experience of the crisis and its resolution around the surrogate victim renders him or her immediately “other” in the imagination of the community. Accusation itself makes its own contribution by its ability to impose otherness on its targets.\textsuperscript{382}

The sacrificial victim must externalize the community’s violence, but cannot be so foreign to the community that he or she is not implicated in the “infectious strains” that circulate throughout the community. For the sake of erring on the side of caution, the community begins from the outside and works the victim back

\textsuperscript{379} Psalm 68:5; Deut 27:19.

\textsuperscript{380} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 25. See also, Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 78. “In societies where human sacrifice is practiced, orphans are the chosen victims. The sacrifice of a child whose parents are living runs the risk of making enemies of them.”

\textsuperscript{381} Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 118

\textsuperscript{382} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 271.
towards the inside. As rituals become more complex, they are preceded by periods of time where the chosen outsider is integrated into the community. As rituals become more complex, they are preceded by periods of time where the chosen outsider is integrated into the community. He or she is “domesticated” according to the precise etymology of the word, initiated into the domus, the household, in preparation for being expelled from it. As shall be seen, this interval of preparation becomes a fertile period of cultural development. The intimate connection between the domestication of victims and the domestication of animals will be explored in a later section. For now it will suffice to point out that the process of domestication can reach as far into the community’s exterior as the animal kingdom. Through a very literal process of domestication, animals are brought into the community’s interior where they are made to substitute for human victims.

The rituals of the African Dinka provide particularly clear indications that animal victims are substitutes for what were originally human victims. As the ritual begins, participants do their best to seem “scattered and self-absorbed.” “Insistent choral incantations” capture their attention, at which time they begin to brandish weapons towards each other in a way that is “manifestly reciprocal.”

383 Ibid., 272.

384 This basic pattern can be seen in the manner in which Mardi Gras celebrations are conducted. Typically a “king” of the celebration is enthroned, very often chosen by lot. At the conclusion of the celebration an effigy of the king is then destroyed, very often burned. Richard Sale, Landmark Visitor’s Guide: Provence and Côte d’Azur (Cedarburg, WI: Hunter Publishing, 1999), 196. Girard also describes the way in which the Dinka remove cattle to be sacrificed from among the larger herd and place it into closer proximity to the human population. Once here the animal is treated like a human member of the community in preparation for its sacrifice. See also Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 272.

385 Girard, Things Hidden, 68-73.

386 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 98.
Occasionally one of the participants comes forward to beat the cow selected for sacrifice and to hurl insults at it. A strange power is attributed to these curses, as though the words themselves, the accusations, in other words, have the ability to destroy the animal. As the abuse of the animal proceeds it gathers in the participants until finally it is stampeded to death. Once killed, “the scorn, hostility, and cruelty” visited upon the animal are replaced by “a show of ritualistic veneration.”

387 Weapons are present in the course of the Dinka ritual, but the final killing is weaponless, as is the case in many other rituals. In the Greek ritual of the pharmakos, for example, the victim might be beaten to death with stones or forced off a cliff. In other instances victims are simply torn to pieces as in the Dionysiac sparagmos.388 The “unarmed” aspect of these methods of immolation is likely a recreation of a feature of the spontaneity of the original event where participants gathered for a peaceful purpose and so had no weapons, or had only those that happened to be at hand such as stones or other natural implements that could be taken from the environment.389

2.11. Prohibition and Resemblance

Sacrificial rituals always include the inducement of a condition of undifferentiation among community members. As noted, the initial phases of rituals

387 Ibid., 98.
388 Ibid., 100.
389 Ibid., 131; 199-200.
include gestures that serve to efface differences and make of the community a collection of doubles. This is a radical departure from the community's ordinary attitude towards undifferentiation, which is one of terror. Normally it is regarded with fear, even terror. In normal circumstances, archaic communities do all they can to prevent mimetic rivalries. This does not mean, of course, that they have anything like a systematic understanding of mimetic desire and the skandalon. Their attention is drawn to the resemblances created by mimesis, and they seek to prevent their occurrence. For this reason an important outcome of the resolution of the crisis is the establishment of prohibitions, often referred to as “taboos,” that prevent the convergence of desire and the appearance of the dread resemblances between persons that attend mimetic rivalries.\(^{390}\) Incest taboos, for example, a subject of great interest to anthropologists, serve to prevent the convergence of desire within families, which are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks of violence. Indeed, archaic communities often seek to eliminate such competition entirely by observing the practice of exogamy,\(^{391}\) allowing for the procuring of wives only by exchange with other tribes, that is, other exogamic groups.\(^{392}\) Marriages are thus


\(^{391}\) “Exogamy” is the term given to the practice of finding wives beyond the confines of one's own cultural community, however that is defined. Its contrary is “endogamy.” Among the practices of archaic peoples there are indications that sexual rivalries are regarded as particularly dangerous and a significant contributor to the rivalries that require ritual purgation. As the African Dinka stampede their animal victims to death they will single out their sexual organs for particular abuse. The same can be said for the ancient Greeks and their killing of pharmakos, whose genitals are whipped with herbaceous plants as he is being killed. See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 98.

\(^{392}\) Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 229-231.
confined to a “determined matrimonial circuit,” which prevents the competition for sexual partners from taking place within the community.

The danger posed by endogamous sexual exchange is recounted in myth. Girard recounts a Tenetehara story where the “culture hero” Tupan becomes angry that his godchild has been mistreated by relatives. He orders the child to place feathers around the village. The feathers are set on fire, and the village becomes surrounded with flames. The terrified villagers begin running back and forth, and as they dash about their cries are transformed into grunts. In the course of their grunting the villagers are transformed into pigs. Some of these pigs run into the forest, and become the ancestors of the wild pigs there today. In a variant of the myth, Tupan breathes tobacco smoke among the villagers who become dizzy. When they hear the command “Eat your food!” they mistake it for a command to copulate. In the course of copulating they begin to make grunting noises whereupon they transform into pigs.

The myth presents an intimate association between sexual endogamy and the crisis of differences, which is signified by the transformation of the tribespeople into pigs. The causality at first seems reversed by the sequence of events described in the myth: the endogamous sexual activity is a consequence of the crisis

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393 Ibid., 231.
396 We see too, incidentally, what may be a conflation of a depiction of a real crisis and its ritualized counterpart in the role played by the tobacco smoke in adding to the community’s disorientation.
rather than its cause. At the same time, however, it plays an unmistakable role in exacerbating the crisis and precipitating the birth of mimetic doubles signified by the villagers’ transformation. The violation of the prohibition is both a cause and an effect of the proliferation of resemblances.\(^{397}\)

The association with the crisis of differences means that resemblance is most often avoided, and is made the subject of strict, and sometimes strange, prohibitions. The esteemed anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski discovered that Trobriand islanders were deeply offended at being told that they resemble other family members.\(^{398}\) For the same reason archaic societies typically greet the birth of twins with great fear, as though their appearance might signal or in some way trigger the commencement of a plague of undifferentiation, akin to the transformation of the mythic Teneteharan villagers into pigs. For this reason one or both of the twins are often exposed.\(^{399}\)

Among certain archaic societies, however, the appearance of certain resemblances, including the birth of twins in some cases, are regarded with jubilation, as though presaging “good effects.”\(^{400}\) This kind of contradictory attitude is often encountered in the course of examining the record of anthropological data. At first glance such marked divergences can only seem bewildering, and


\(^{399}\) Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 57.

\(^{400}\) Ibid., 58.
undoubtedly have served to prompt doubts that any significance can be assigned to such practices. The significance of the ambivalent attitudes becomes clear at once, however, when they are understood in terms of their association with the two primary sorts of resemblances experienced in the course of the sacrificial cycle, either the resemblances of the negative phase that features the proliferation of antagonistic mimetic doubles, or the positive phase featuring the restored unanimous mimesis achieved in the presence of the community's victim.401

The two divergent resemblances are seen side by side in the peculiar story of the Horatii found in Livy's *The Early Histories of Rome*.402 As the Roman army faces off against that of Alba, it is discovered that both armies have within them brothers who are triplets, the Horatii and the Curiatii. It is decided that these sets of triplets will be brought out to fight each other, and the result of their combat will decide the issue between the armies. Each set of triplets is a kind of microcosm of its respective army. An army at war is united within itself by the unanimous violence it directs against its foe. The mimetic “tripleting” of the brothers indicates the positive resemblance brought about by a common external enemy. At the same time, the resemblance existing across the Horatii and the Curiatii—their symmetrical status as triplets—is the negative resemblance of mimetic rivals, the same phenomenon, practically speaking, as the rivalry of Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, or any pair of mythological twins.403

401 Ibid., 58.

This understanding of the significance of resemblances clarifies at once the strange ambivalence concerning blood taboos that has long puzzled anthropologists. While “nothing could seem more alike than drops of blood,” archaic peoples exhibit a powerful ambivalence towards blood when it is spilled. When spilled in the course of daily life, whether the result of “malice or mischance,” it is a source of great fear and subject to strict taboos, violations of which require assiduous ritual cleansing. Ironically, this cleansing will often include sacrificial rites where participants wash themselves in blood spilled from sacrificial victims. The Bible, for example, includes descriptions of rituals where the blood of sacrifices is sprinkled on the assembled people.

As in the case of twins, the divergent reactions are determined by whether or not the violence associated with the spilling of blood is perceived as undermining or establishing the community's unanimity. Blood spilled apart from sacrificial rituals suggests internecine conflict, and is allied with the commencement of a crisis of differences. The blood of sacrifice is associated with the violence that creates unanimity and purges the community of the contagious violence suggested by all other spilt blood. The qualities of blood in these different contexts seem to corroborate the divergent attitudes towards it. The spilt blood of conflict flows and

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403 The antagonistic resemblance across the two sets of triplets is highlighted by the detail Livy provides where he notes that the different sources he relies on do not agree upon the names of the brothers, some giving to the Roman brothers the name “Curati” and the Alban brothers, “Horati.” Also, Girard points out that foreign wars such as that of Rome and Alba, Hellas and Troy, or Thebes and Argos, may originally have been episodes of civil strife that were recast as conflicts with foreigners. See Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, 59; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 249.


405 Ibid., 36.

406 Ex 24:8.
spreads, suggesting the contagious quality of violent mimesis with which it is associated. When it is encountered after a conflict, it has typically been left to coagulate and discolor. The blood of sacrifice is fresh and bright, and is cleaned off before it takes on an ugly aspect.⁴⁰⁷

Prohibition may be thought of as the ordinary means by which the community staves off mimetic rivalry, but experience tells archaic communities that these preventative measures will suffice for only so long. The residue of mimetic rivalries—resentment, the appetite for vengeance—will eventually assert itself irresistibly and will bring about the return of terrifying resemblances. Even the strictest prohibitions must be made to give way to sacrificial rituals where the resemblances prohibition seeks to prevent are assiduously cultivated. This aspect of ritual imparts to it the appearance of a "solemn breach of prohibition."⁴⁰⁸ Within the context of the sacred, that is, in the milieu established by the sacrificial victim, the resemblances created by these transgressions can be transformed from the harmful variety to the salubrious. Archaic humanity realizes that defending itself against the crisis of differences requires two divergent approaches: prohibiting desires that inspire rivalry and instigate an appetite for revenge, and occasionally suspending these prohibitions and indulging prohibited appetites in circumstances that allow for a single spasm of collective vengeance that "dead ends" in the object to which it is directed. The ritual provides the precise context where this can occur. The skandala that exist between persons as a result of the spontaneous practice of

⁴⁰⁷ Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 37.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 196.
mimetic desire, which are normally discouraged by the community's prohibitions, are cultivated and exaggerated by the ritual so that they reach the critical degree at which they can be gathered up and expelled from the community by way of sacrificial violence.409

2.12. The Victim, the Sacred, and Political Power

Sacrifice frees humanity from the threat of mimetic rivalries and allows it to progress in the development of other institutions that solidify and enlarge this freedom. First among these are institutions relating to political power, which manifests itself first in the institution of kingship. The archaic king is nothing other than a sacrificial victim who experiences his or her apotheosis to divine status before the sacrificial blow is struck. The clearest evidence of this comes from archaic enthronement rituals themselves, which are hardly more than sacrificial rituals minus the final killing blow. The one to be crowned king is subject to all the abuse and humiliation typically visited upon sacrificial victims. They are treated hatefully, cursed, and spit upon, made to eat disgusting and often taboo food items. They are subject to physical abuse, which often rises to lethal proportions. They are treated, in other words, precisely like sacrificial victims, but at the last minute they are not only spared, but granted vast powers over the community.410

409 Ibid. The festival, for example, is "a permitted or rather an obligatory excess, a solemn breach of prohibition." Girard quotes here Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1994), 108.

410 Girard, Things Hidden, 53.
The concentration of power and prestige in the king originates in the period preceding the sacrificial ritual where the victim is “domesticated” in preparation for sacrifice, during the period of time during which the victim is internalized by the community in preparation for his or her violent externalization. As sacrificial rituals become more elaborate and require a more complex identification with the victim, this period will be extended in time so as to allow for a more comprehensive internalization. During this period the prospective victim is given not only the benefits of living within the community, but even special privileges and honors. Even as the community prepares to treat the victim as a “hated other” within the context of the sacrifice, it recalls his or her reconciling power. The community eventually discovers that consolidating power and prestige in the victim has an effect that closely approximates the reconciling effect of the sacrificial act, and so the victim’s immolation may be postponed indefinitely. The king is nothing other than this victim whose sacrifice has been deferred and who enjoys all the honor and prestige due to the community’s reconciling hero.411

The strange elements of archaic coronation rituals are easily understood when their relation to sacrificial rituals are recognized.412 The transgressive

411 The intimate connection between victims of sacrifice and archaic kingship is recognizable in such rites as that observed in Rwanda where “the king and the queen mother—clearly an incestuous couple—must periodically submit to a sacrificial rite that can only be regarded as a symbolic punishment for incest: ‘the royal pair appeared in public, bound like captives condemned to death. A bull and a cow, their substitutes, were clubbed to the ground and slaughtered. The king then mounted the flanks of the bull and some of the bull’s blood was poured over him so as to carry the symbolic resemblance between the two as far as possible [emphasis provided by Girard].’” Luc de Heusch, “Aspectes de la sacralité du pouvoir en Afrique,” in Le Pvoir et le sacré (Brussels, 1962), cited in Le Ruanda ancien (Namur, 1939), 209-216. Quoted in Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 107.
gestures of the enthronement ceremonies render the king capable of serving the same function as a sacrificial victim. The king is made to “draw to himself all the infectious strains” in the community and “to transform them into a source of peace and fecundity.”\textsuperscript{413} The sacrificial victim accomplishes the latter aim in death as the transfigured victim who reconciles the community from afar. The king accomplishes it in life as the center of power and prestige within the midst of the community. And if ever the community should encounter a hardship that elicits an appetite for a sacrificial victim, they have one ready made in their king. His “otherness” as divine or quasi-divine king is easily transformed from the admired otherness of kingship to the “hated otherness” of a sacrificial victim. This ambivalence of archaic peoples towards their kings is indicated very succinctly in the investiture hymn of the Mossi people of west Africa:

\begin{quote}
You are a turd,
You are a heap of refuse
You have come to kill us,
You have come to save us.\textsuperscript{414}
\end{quote}

The institution of king draws its power from the same sources as those animating sacrifice. The sacred is the catalyst that transforms the energy of internecine rivalries into “positive cultural values.”\textsuperscript{415} In this particular case, the sacred makes of them the basis of political power.

\textsuperscript{412} Girard notes even in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when confidence was still high that all rituals and cultural practices could be classified systematically, the rituals associated with African kingship were regarded formally as “exceptions.” See \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 104-105.

\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{414} Quoted in Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 107.

\textsuperscript{415} Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred}, 107.
2.13. Sacrifice and the Origin of Agriculture

Sacrifice and the practices surrounding it occasioned yet other fundamental developments and provided the occasion for more startling discoveries. Standard accounts of the rise of agriculture regard it as the result of human ingenuity, as though archaic populations discovered the means and foresaw the benefits of the cultivation of crops, and so developed methods of agriculture by something approximating modern methods of experimentation. Significant problems confront this account. The first, and perhaps most significant difficulty, lies in the fact that at its first appearance agriculture was anti-economical.\textsuperscript{416} Hunter/gatherer societies obtained far more calories from hunting and foraging than the first attempts at agriculture were capable of providing. The average height among hunter/gatherer societies is 5’ 10” for males and 5’ 6” for females.\textsuperscript{417} Agricultural societies would eventually provide enough nourishment for human populations to reach these proportions once again, but not until the twentieth century and only after many sophisticated technological developments. It goes without saying that archaic populations could never have foreseen these benefits.\textsuperscript{418}

The less intuitive, but in the end more plausible explanation regards agriculture as a kind of secularized offshoot of sacrifice. Agriculture arises only after nomadic hunter/gatherer societies came to settle permanently at specific locations. Environmental and climactic conditions are also relevant factors, of

\textsuperscript{416} Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 117.

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{418} Ibid.
course, but most decisive is the significance of sacred burial sites, the locations of the tombs of the community’s victims and their increasing symbolic importance.\textsuperscript{419} These sites would have become more important as sacrificial rituals became more complex and elaborate, and came to involve other symbolic gestures directed towards the victim, such as the burial of important objects alongside his or her body. Food items offered to the victim and buried with him or her would have included seed bearing plants that sprouted in and around the tomb. The profusion of fruit bearing plants in the vicinity of tombs confirmed the religious notion of the victim’s body as fructifying and nourishing, the center of the community’s prosperity and well-being. It also provided the context in which early humanity could discover the necessary starting point for the development of agricultural techniques, specifically the connection between seeds and mature plants. This account confirms the view that the rise of agriculture was preceded by the practice of horticulture. It also helps explain the origin of the importance of gardens within religious imagery and sacred architecture.\textsuperscript{420}

\subsection*{2.14. Sacrifice and the Domestication of Animals}

The mimetic theory likewise provides a more sound account of the domestication of animals by examining the religious origin of the practice. Again,

\textsuperscript{419} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., 119-120. This account prioritizes horticulture over agriculture, and helps account for the importance of gardens in religious imagery and architecture.
standard explanations posit an economic motive for the practice, as though archaic humanity foresaw the benefits of creating for itself a stable source of animal meat. And again, the anti-economic outcome of the practice makes this view problematic. The process of the domestication causes animals to shrink in size, and so they yield less nutrition than their wild counterparts. Domesticated animals exposed early humanity to new diseases that imposed great burdens on their health and well-being. It is true that eventually the food produced by the cultivation of domesticated animals would exceed that procured by hunting and gathering, but as in the case of agriculture, this would not occur for millennia. The practical benefits could not have been foreseen by the earliest practitioners. Once again, the religious explanation provides a better account. Animals are brought close to early communities not in order to procure a stable food source, but in order to establish a stable source of sacrificial victims, animal substitutes for human victims. Animals were domesticated first not for the sake of nutrition, but so that they could function properly as sacrifices. The utilization of populations of domesticated animals as a food source arose only later as a secularized outcome of what was originally a religious practice.

421 Ibid., 117.

422 Ibid., 116-117. It is noteworthy that where no animals existed suitable for domestication, such as in South America, human sacrifice continued unabated until European contact.
2.15. Sacrifice and Symbolic Thought

We have examined the relationship of sacrifice to cultural institutions. Humanity’s relationship to sacrifice is still more intimate. Sacrifice generates not only humanity’s institutions, but even, in some sense, human nature itself. Human nature and sacrifice develop together, reciprocally prompting growth and increasing complexity in each other. Sacrifice functions as a kind of “handmaid” or “pedagogue” for humanity, serving as the external catalyst for the development of the spiritual capacities of human nature, all that we regard as distinctively human, those capacities relating to symbolic thought: mental abstraction, the mental use of concepts, and language. The great expansion of the mental capacity of humanity is, of course, intimately associated with the tremendous increase in the size of the brain and its structural complexity, an element of human evolution denoted by the term “encephalization.”\textsuperscript{423} But anthropologists largely agree that biological evolution alone cannot account for the rapid increase in brain size that takes place over the course of the relatively short time span encompassing hominization. Encephalization required an external stimulus to instigate and accelerate its progress. This stimulus was provided by the surrogate victim.\textsuperscript{424}

The experience of the sacrificial cycle—the experience of the dissolution of differences and the onset of confusion, the emergence of the victim, the polarization of the community, the unexpected advent of the cathartic peace upon his death—

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{424} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 88; Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 106.
provides powerful experiences that impress themselves deeply on the participants. It occasions the experience of certain binary oppositions that structuralism insists are the fundamentals of cultural structure, linguistic and otherwise.\textsuperscript{425} The accusation of the victim creates the binary “victim and us,” which becomes a kind of template for the classic binary of the “one and many.” The movement from “chaos” to “order” provides another, and in turn occasions a powerful experience of “before and after.” The victim itself provides the boundary between “inside and outside,” “profane and sacred.” Indeed, the victim seems to encompass these and all other differences. He or she is the sower of discord and the bringer of peace, the source of both evil and good, “a life that brings death and a death that guarantees life.”\textsuperscript{426} All of the binaries consists of elements that are contrary to one another, but which communicate and refer to one another.\textsuperscript{427} As such they lay the foundation for symbolic communication and linguistic structure, and provide a symbolic center for the mind’s development.\textsuperscript{428}

Both symbolic thought and cultural signification operate by means of a substitution whereby concepts and signs are made to stand for the objects to which they refer. The first instance of substitution in humanity’s development is the founding murder, the moment when the victim is made to stand for the community. This moment is quickly revisited in sacrifice, where the immolated victim becomes

\textsuperscript{425} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 100.

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 102

\textsuperscript{428} Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 107.
the first cultural sign, a sign that refers to the original surrogate victim, and so becomes the essential starting point of the development of all subsequent cultural signification.\textsuperscript{429} These collective substitutions establish what Girard calls “the model of the exception that is in the process of emerging.”\textsuperscript{430} The exception is the surrogate victim who emerges from the background of the undifferentiation of the crisis of differences to occupy the attention of the community. This experience becomes a basis for the “real structures of human thought and culture.”\textsuperscript{431} James Williams considers certain fundamental structures of communication—metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor. As these are considered in light of the emerging exception, we can recognize it as a kind of template for the structure of these linguistic features. All three involve substitution where a part is made to stand for a whole in a way analogous to the victim standing for the community. In the case of metonymy, a name is made to stand for the whole, as in “I was reading Shakespeare.” In the case of synecdoche a part is made to stand for a whole, as when we say “hired hand” or “head of cattle.” Metaphor is perhaps the most illuminating case. When we speak of “a blanket of snow” we are comparing two very different things, a blanket and a layer of snow on the ground. All of the many differences, most of the features of the two items, in fact, are forced unconsidered into the background of the

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{430} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 100.

\textsuperscript{431} Ibid., 101-102.
imagination as a single aspect of each image is allowed to stand out as a salient that is compared to the single salient of the other image.  

The identification with another that is fundamental to the operation of mimetic desire, the identification with the admired model of desire, plays a principal role in the catalytic relationship of the surrogate victim to advances in the symbolic capacity of the human mind. The runaway mimesis of the crisis is both caused by and elicits a frenzy of identification of each member of the community with every other as the community becomes a collection of mimetic doubles. This out of control identification reverses itself and acts to unite the community as each member identifies with each other in the collective accusation of the victim. The accusation itself is energized by the identification of the victim with the hateful aspect of every other community member. The efficacy of sacrifice thus requires some degree of capacity for identification, but also fosters its development. As this capacity develops, rites of greater complexity become possible, which encourage yet more development in the capacity to identify with another. The symbolic element of mimetic identification escalates as sacrifice and mimesis reinforce each other, which expands the human capacity for symbolic thought over the course of humanity’s relationship with sacrifice. Rituals both require and elicit the possibility of an increased mimesis, which allows for still more complex rituals, which in turn encourages yet more mental development.  

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2.16. The Victim and the Transcendental Signifier

Early humanity is no less convinced than Girard that sacrifice is the catalyst for its growth and well being, albeit for very different reasons. As far as archaic communities are concerned, each of their sacrificial rituals is a voyage led by the surrogate victim into the realm of chaos and back again. They witness, as far as they can tell, the victim's control over all differences and cultural signification, his or her power to dissolve and then restore it. As the community's god, the surrogate victim is the guarantor of culture and meaning, and the continual demand for sacrifices is the principal means by which he or she exercises custodianship. Understood properly, myth provides powerful indications of this conviction. The “Hymn of Man” given in the *Rig Veda* is one such indication of the relationship of the victim of sacrifice to cultural differences and signification.\textsuperscript{434} It is of a category of myth known as “myths of dismemberment” that includes many examples across cultures.\textsuperscript{435} It describes the sacrifice of a “cosmic giant,” identified within the text simply as “the man.” It quickly becomes obvious that this is no ordinary man; he is a monster: “The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet” (v. 1). The hymn presents to us the confused world of the sacred where all differences are mixed and mingled. The subject is a man, but also a divinity; in his absolute monstrosity he effaces the difference between the human and the divine. He is the sacrifice, the offering, but also the sacrificing mob, the community that has been

\textsuperscript{434} The Vedas are the sacred texts of Hinduism. They were written in Sanskrit in the middle of the second to the middle of the first millennium BC. Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37.

gathered into a monstrous singularity by the mimetic violence about to be unleashed in the act of sacrifice. The confusion of the crisis of differences is seen in the strange double roles of cause and effect played by everything in the hymn. The man is the offering, but also the active agent who directs and controls the events around his sacrifice. The cosmos both participates in the sacrifice and originates from it.\textsuperscript{436}

When the gods spread the sacrifice with the Man as the offering, spring was the clarified butter, summer the fuel, autumn the oblation. (v. 6)

From that sacrifice in which everything was offered, the melted fat was collected, and he made it into those beasts who live in the air, in the forest, and in villages. (v. 8)

From that sacrifice in which everything was offered the verses and chants were born, the metres were born from it, and from it the formulas were born. (v. 9)

The undifferentiation signaled at the beginning of the hymn gives way to order and difference as the elements of the natural order and culture spring, literally, from the body of the sacrificed victim. Before was chaos, signified by the monstrous quality of the “man with a thousand heads” but now there is the harmony and the order of music, the “formulas,” and the meters that modulate the Vedas themselves. All differences emerge from the body of the sacrificial victim. Each cultural and cosmic element is associated with a different part of his body.

His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the people, and from his feet the servants were born. The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni\textsuperscript{437} came


\textsuperscript{437} “Indra” is the leader of the Devas, the angels, “Agni” is the messenger god who communicates sacrifices between humanity and the gods. See Girard, \textit{Sacrifice}, 12.
from his mouth, and from his vital breath the Wind was born. From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they set the worlds in order. (v. 12-14)\textsuperscript{438}

The hymn indicates the conviction that the victim creates and maintains all social, cultural, and cosmic differences.\textsuperscript{439} The order and meaning of language is not referred to by name, but the establishment of the “formulas” and “metres” of the sacred hymns means nothing without it. The victim, and more specifically, his body, functions in the manner of what has been called the “transcendental signifier,” the signifier that guarantees the signification of all other signs.\textsuperscript{440}

2.17. Culture and Accusation

The *Hymn of Man* is told so serenely and so peacefully that it is easy to forget that it is an account of the dismemberment of a living person. We do not hear the screams of the victim. There are no references to his thrashing about in agony, nor are we given horrifying visions of spouting blood and crude butchery. This elimination of violence from its narratives is a consistent feature of the retelling of collective violence, which Girard insists is the principal subject matter of mythology. For Girard, myth is the story of collective violence, most often the founding murder,

\textsuperscript{438} O’Flaherty, ed., *The Rig Veda*, 28-30.

\textsuperscript{439} Girard, *Sacrifice*, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{440} Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 103. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 102-103. “J-MO: Are you referring to the idea of a transcendental signifier, which has been energetically rejected by current thought?

RG: I am not saying that we have found the true transcendental signifier. So far we have only discovered what functions in that capacity for human beings.”
from the perspective of the murdering community within the context of the cathartic peace. The perception of the victim as the instigator of crisis and catharsis acts from the first to keep the community from a clear recognition of the role played by its own violence. The unanimity achieved around the victim is so thoroughgoing that it does not allow for any other conclusion than that the victim and not the community is the source of the crisis. No other proof need be given, because nothing could add or subtract from the conviction provided by the perception of the reconciling power of the victim. The reconciliation effected in the community’s accusation gives rise to the possibility of proof, the possibility that a community would exist to receive it and that cultural mechanisms would exist by which to consider it. As far as the community can tell, all truth and all truth telling arises from its religious institutions, which are animated and illuminated by the collective accusation of victims. The thought that this accusation is somehow mistaken, that the victim is not truly the principal agent of their operation is, in the most profound sense, unthinkable.441

The disguising of violence is not a fully conscious process. The misunderstanding of the nature of the collective violence serves to distance the community from its own violence. Collective violence is the true “subject” of the mimetic cycle, which becomes incarnate in the corporate person of the community as it converges unanimously on its victim.442 The community alienates its own


442 Ibid., 199, 210. “Every cultural order is always the true subject of the very ritual or institutional structure.”
violence from itself by identifying the victim as this corporate person, its god. This misperception determines a trajectory away from the community that all subsequent concealments will follow.

The violence of the community continues to disguise its true nature as sacrifice develops in complexity. The tomb, for example, is the quintessential artifact of the archaic sacred, demonstrating the creative power of violence and its ability to conceal its true nature. It is easy to forget that the great pyramids of Egypt, the ziggurats of Mesopotamia and Asia, the temples of pre-Columbian South America, and the mounds of the Native American cultures of the Mississippi river valley were all locations of sacrifice, burial, or both. They all serve to conceal, literally, the sacred victims within.443

The “killing and the building” are intimately related.444 Girard theorizes that these structures all have their origin in the practice of stoning. Stoning was a particularly attractive means of collective violence. Not every thrown stone is as lethal as all others, but the act of casting a stone is a killing gesture in which the entire community can easily participate. Killing by projectile does not require coming into contact with the sacrificial victim, who prior to the cathartic effects of his or her death is regarded as dangerously contagious. After the stoning all that is left is the victim beneath a pile of stones, the first crude tomb. The tomb is a kind of metaphor of the cultural structures that arise around the body of the victim. It is an

443 Ibid., 83. “The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the surrogate victim, the first most elemental and fundamental matrix of all meaning. There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol.”

expression of all that the victim seems to give to its communities, all that is distinctly human: architecture, aesthetics, engineering. It is the glorious expression of the community restored and nurtured by the sacrificial act, and serves further to ensure that the community remains undisturbed by the sight of what might otherwise be taken as a sign of the community’s violence and cruelty, the broken and bloodied body of its victim.445 It also happens to form a close analogue to the spiritual essence of the sacrificial act. Each member of the community takes up his or her skandalon and joins with others in hurling it at the victim, and in so doing builds the community while simultaneously concealing its own violence.

2.18. Myth and the Victim

Myth joins in the concealing work of the tomb. Anthropologists typically regard myth as essentially meaningless, indicating that it contains little more than “curiosities” or “horrific little fictions.”446 Girard insists that all the elements of myth are drawn from the reality of the original collective murder, but are difficult to recognize as such because they are subject to the same transfiguration imposed upon the victim. Myth is the story of the crisis told from the perspective of the murdering community from within the context of the sudden and startling peace

445 Girard, Things Hidden, 83.

446 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 234, 246. John Milbank, for example, has insisted that the analogous features of myth referred to by Girard amount to “surd coincidences.” The chaos and founding violence are an “essentially imaginary chaos.” See John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 398.
that follows in the wake of the murder of the surrogate victim. All the essential elements of the crisis of differences and its resolution in violence are presented in mythological stories, but they are so transfigured in light of the happy outcome of the crisis that they are in many cases barely recognizable. These stories must be subjected to a thorough “decoding” in light of the knowledge of the significance of the surrogate victim to cultural genesis. Sacrificial rituals play an important role in shedding light on myth because of its closer resemblance to the founding murder. Both myth and ritual in their own way are representations of the original violence from which the community owes its existence, but because ritual seeks to re-achieve the cathartic effects of collective violence, it must more closely resemble its origin. In other words, it must be a more directly mimetic representation of the founding event.

Myth, like ritual, typically begins with a representation of the crisis of differences. We have already examined the plague in these terms, but this is only one of many possible indications of the undifferentiation of the runaway mimesis of the crisis. Another is the presence of human twins or other signs of mimetic doubling such as the transformation of community members into animals or other monstrous forms that cannot be distinguished from one another. The presence of the monstrous in myth signals the crisis because the monster incarnates, as it were, 

448 Girard’s insistence is that ultimately modernity’s greatly enhanced ability to decode what he calls “texts of persecution” derives from its experience of Judaeo-Christian revelation. This aspect of his theory will be explored in the next chapter.
the principal feature of the crisis, the confusion of identities and the effacement of differences. Mythological beasts combine elements of natures that normally remain distinct. The Pegasus, for example, effaces the distinction between bird and horse; the Minotaur, the difference between human and bull; the cherubim of Mesopotamian myth combines the lion, the bull, and the eagle. These monsters are instantiations of the crisis, crystallizations of the hysterical confusion of differences of the sacrificial crisis. In the monster the confusion of the crisis is remembered and given a stabilized form. All signs of the crisis exhibit the essential feature of the monstrous, including the plague and the flood.  

Much the same can be said for the sacred itself. It is the “exterior,” the milieu of the monstrous, where all is confused in a grotesque monotony, where human persons become indistinguishable from their gods and where “fair is foul and foul is fair” until the plague of undifferentiation is lifted by a spasm of violence.

As in ritual, transgression plays an important role in myth. Myths typically identify undifferentiation as the result of a violation of one of the community’s prohibitions. The transgressor’s expulsion is then seen to restore the differences he or she is accused of violating and destroying. For this reason the transgressor is not presented as a simple criminal. He or she manifests a heroic aspect that is projected back across the mythical narrative in its entirety. This must be understood in terms of his or her transfiguration in the epiphanic catharsis. The

450 Girard, The Scapegoat, 13; Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 160. “The double and the monster are one and the same thing.”

ambivalence of the mythic hero as both transgressor and hero can only be understood in terms of the role attributed to him or her as both the cause and resolution of the crisis of differences.\footnote{Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 43.}

In a Dogrib myth considered by Girard a tribal woman has sexual relations with a dog and gives birth to a litter of puppies.\footnote{The Dogrib people are an aboriginal tribe located in Northwest Canada. See Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 161; see also Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 49.} She is banished from the tribe and sent into the wilderness where she must become a huntress, but after her banishment she secretly returns to find that the puppies she gave birth to have been transformed into children. She steals the animal skins away from them so they cannot return to their original animal form.\footnote{Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 49.} A bizarre story, to be sure, but one rendered intelligible by Girard’s analysis. The woman is accused of a sexual transgression that violates the fundamental difference between human and beast. This violation gives birth, literally, to a crisis of differences, which is indicated in the litter of puppies, who in their animal form are indistinguishable from one another. She is driven away as the community’s victim, whereupon differences are restored: the puppies assume a human form. She sneaks back to the village and steals the skins in order to prevent their return to undifferentiation. In other words, the woman returns to the community as its principal of order and the guarantor of its differences.\footnote{Ibid., 49-50.} In the end the woman becomes the community’s protector, its god, and it is in this light, in the light of her transfiguration, that the story is told.
Western culture has bestowed a great deal of prestige upon ancient Greek culture, and while Girard certainly devotes considerable attention to Greek myth and tragedy, he insists that Greco-Roman myths are not fundamentally different from a story such as that of the Dogrib woman.\footnote{Girard, Things Hidden, 264.} When the bare details of the story of the Dogrib woman are recounted in close proximity to a Greek narrative such as that of \textit{Oedipus the King}, for example, it is hardly necessary to emphasize the similarities. Oedipus’ story begins in Thebes, where he is king. A plague afflicts the city, which Oedipus learns from the oracle at Delphi is caused by the presence of someone who has violated fundamental hierarchies by committing incest with his mother and killed his father. Oedipus seeks to find the monstrous transgressor, which turns out to be himself. He banishes himself from the city and the plague disappears.\footnote{Girard, The Scapegoat, 25}

Oedipus, like the Dogrib woman, is a transgressor, and for this reason, a monster. Both monsters are the source of a contagion whereby their monstrosity is communicated to their respective communities in the form of a crisis. As in the case of the Dogrib woman, Oedipus is a source of order as well. He begins the story as the king of Thebes, and not long after his expulsion resumes an “actively beneficial role.”\footnote{Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 250.} The apotheosis both undergo disguises a straightforward recognition of each as a victim of collective violence, but if the signs of their relation to the crisis of

\footnote{Girard, Things Hidden, 264.}
\footnote{Girard, The Scapegoat, 25}
\footnote{Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 250.}
differences is detected, and their role in its resolution is understood, their true status as their communities’ victims can be recognized easily.

2.19. Signs of the Victim

The transfiguration according to which the victim is depicted in myth does not obscure his or her true identity completely. Even where myths have been purged of the most obvious signs of victimization there are nearly always telltale indications, “stereotypes of persecution,” that betray the presence of a victim of collective violence.\(^{459}\) We have already explored the first two of these stereotypes: first, the presence of a crisis of differences, and, second, hierarchy-violating crimes such as bestiality as in the case of the Dogrib woman, or incest and parricide as in the case of Oedipus.\(^{460}\) The third stereotype is the presence of what Girard calls “victimary signs.”\(^{461}\)

Victimary signs are physical deformities that indicate a heroic figure’s true identity as a victim of collective persecution. Again, these deformities are to be understood in terms of the relationship of the victim to the crisis. The deformity is a remnant of the monstrous quality either recognized in or projected onto the victim, or both. The deformity may be a mythic creation, or it may be a real memory of a feature of the surrogate victim. Actual deformed persons are likely objects of


\(^{460}\) Ibid., 14-15.

\(^{461}\) Ibid., 59.
collective persecution. Their singularity often attracts derisive attention, and is likely to attract the strains of rancor that circulate through populations. Their appearance appeals directly to the persecutorial imagination. The body is a system of differentiated parts. Bodily systems in a condition of health work together harmoniously. When one part of the system becomes sick or deformed, it creates a disordered aspect that permeates the rest of the body. Deformed persons thus recall the community in crisis, the social system disordered and made ungainly by one of its elements. The regularity with which deformities occur, whether congenital or by injury, ensures that communities have within them persons around which collective violence is ready to polarize.\textsuperscript{462}

For this reason “world mythologies swarm with the lame, the blind, and the crippled,”\textsuperscript{463} but the distinguishing marks associated with victims need not always assume an entirely negative aspect. They need only be anomalous in one way or another. Some mythological heroes are gigantic in stature, such as Heracles, Achilles, Orestes and Pelops; others are unusually short. Others are “theriomorphic” in that they take the form of an animal. They may be androgynous as in the case of Cecrops or change their sex back and forth as in the case of Tiresias, or have other strange abnormalities such as Heracles’ three rows of teeth.\textsuperscript{464}

To be a foreigner is nearly the same thing as to be disabled. Foreigners invariably distinguish themselves for their incapacity to observe cultural differences,
so they too are likely to become objects of collective violence.\textsuperscript{465} Oedipus, we can recall, is both disabled and a foreigner. He was born of a Theban, but was raised from his infancy in Corinth. The name “Oedipus” literally means “swollen foot,” which originates in the deformity that results from his father’s attempt to kill him in his infancy by piercing his feet prior to exposing him. And just as importantly, he was a transgressor, a “doer of foul deeds,” and the source of a plague.\textsuperscript{466} All of this confirms Oedipus as a monster and a source of monstrosities.\textsuperscript{467}

Myth acts to conceal the victim as an arbitrary object of the community’s violence inasmuch as it presents the victim, even in his or her heroic guise, as the cause of the crisis of differences. Girard often refers to the “innocence” of victims, but this innocence must be regarded as relative. They too are guilty of the crisis, but no more guilty than any other. Every community member makes his or her own contribution to the mimetic contagion that causes the crisis. As Girard points out, scapegoats are almost always guilty of something; in their persecution, however, they are not guilty \textit{as charged}. The victim is unique for being made to assume the entirety of the blame. In the Dogrib myth the woman is banished from the tribe whereupon she is made to hunt. Oedipus too is, in some sense, a hunter. After his visit to the oracle at Delphi he sets in motion the hunt for the cause of the plague. He

\textsuperscript{465} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 22.

\textsuperscript{466} Mark Anspach, “Editor’s Introduction,” \textit{Oedipus Unbound}, xvi.

\textsuperscript{467} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 36.
is as guilty as all other Thebans of looking for someone to persecute, so is not
precisely innocent even as he can be recognized as a persecuted victim.\textsuperscript{468}

Victimary signs become more essential to the effort to recognize indications of
victimization in myths that have been censored or purged of indications of
violence. In those cultures that come to rely less and less on sacrificial rituals for the
maintenance of order and peace, there often begins a process of purgation whereby
myths are cleansed of their violent content. As the archaic religious economy loses
its integrity, the stories associated with it—stories of deformed heroes committing
incest, rape, and murder—will not do. The community looks with increasing
scandal at its own sacred texts, and seeks to censor those elements it finds
distasteful. This effort excises depictions of gods and heroes committing terrible
crimes and eliminates overt references to violent acts. By the time the Latin poet
Ovid sets out to compile Greco-Roman myths in \textit{The Metamorphoses}, the political
might of the Roman Empire has been established. His renditions of the stories thus
often seem entirely peaceful, the last vestiges of violence having been eliminated or
rendered picturesque in order to produce the desired aesthetic effect. Centuries
before Ovid, Plato sought to rehabilitate mythological stories by a program of
censorship wherein the transgressions of gods and heroes are replaced with stories
of exemplary virtue.\textsuperscript{469} This censorious effort removes many of the most obvious
signs of the victim, but victimary signs inevitably remain. Because the precise


\textsuperscript{469} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 43, 77-78.
means by which the archaic sacred is misunderstood, not all victimary signs are recognized as such by the censors, and so they are left behind to serve as clues.\textsuperscript{470}

Whether motivated by aesthetic or moral concerns, and in spite of its imprecision, the rehabilitation of mythological texts is effective. Modern anthropology still has difficulty discerning the real violent event events obscured by mythological texts.\textsuperscript{471} We can understand or even admire the aversion of persons such as Ovid and Plato to the violence and cruelty depicted in the most ancient version of myths, but must understand simultaneously that this kind of censoriousness makes its own contribution to the concealment of the victim as such. In other words, this rehabilitation of mythology is itself mythological. The censoring of myths advances the work of myth by further obscuring the community's violent origins. The community may remove from its victims the signs of their guilt and magnify their heroic aspects so totally that all signs of their monstrosity are removed. Victims are no longer subject to the original accusations, but within this process the movement of violence is always in one direction: away from its actual perpetrator, the community itself.\textsuperscript{472}

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., 166.
2.20. Texts of Persecution

The decline and disintegration of the sacred over time means that collective persecutions become easier to recognize. This is especially true in the West where the archaic sacred encounters an influence that continuously degrades its operation. This will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, which deals with the relation of Judaeo-Christian revelation to the archaic sacred. It will suffice for now to note that while humanity in all historical and social contexts is as prone to mimetic rivalry and violence as ever, the capacity of persecuting groups to conceal their victims behind veils of sacred transfigurations has been radically diminished. Victimization occurs as in the past, but now the victims appear unmistakably as such.

In his book, The Scapegoat, Girard compares archaic texts of persecution to more recent texts. There he brings into close juxtaposition not only archaic myths of different cultures, but archaic myths and more recent texts such as medieval accounts of the persecutions of Jews. In the medieval cases the degree of decoding required is much less because of the far greater naturalism characterizing the narratives. The lack of mythological transfiguration means that the victims of medieval texts appear clearly and unmistakably as arbitrary victims of collective violence.

The text examined at the outset of The Scapegoat is The Judgment of the King of Navarre by Guillaume de Machaut. It is a long poem that conforms to the style and form of medieval courtly poetry, but is unusual for its opening passages. There,

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473 See also Girard, Evolution and Conversion, 164-165.
de Machaut describes a terrifying crisis that he narrowly survives. He describes stars raining from the sky, cities destroyed by lightning, and large numbers of dead. He describes that all this was the result of Jews and certain “Christian accomplices” who poisoned rivers and wells. Eventually, the “evil-doers” were made known to the afflicted townsmen who “massacred them all.”

There are many features of the texts that strike the modern reader as completely implausible to the point of being outlandish, the stars raining from the skies and cities destroyed by lightning, for example. Others are slightly more plausible, but still basically unbelievable, such as the destruction of whole cities by the poisoning of wells and rivers. The story of the persecution of Jews, however, is quite plausible, in no small part because other Medieval sources indicate that such persecutions occurred many times during the Middle Ages. De Machaut’s story is decoded quite effortlessly by most sensible modern people. The supernatural elements of de Machaut’s account do not distract us from the fact that a real event of persecution lies at the heart of his story, even when its relation to the strange phenomena he describes remains obscure. Introducing a few elements of the mimetic theory complete our picture of what actually occurred. De Machaut experienced a social crisis very similar to the crisis of differences. The supernatural elements he reports bear a close kinship to the strange elements of mythology that

474 Girard, The Scapegoat, 1.
475 Ibid.
476 Ibid., 6.
477 Ibid., 3.
are caused by the hallucinatory terror of the crisis. In the midst of this social crisis, the men of the town rediscover social cohesion and dispel the strange phenomena by means of striking out against the neighboring Jewish population, which brings the episode to an end.

We see that mythological elements are present in de Machaut’s text, but they do not dominate the narrative in the same manner that they dominate archaic texts. For this reason modern persons are not inclined to doubt the occurrence of an actual event of persecution, nor do they distract us from the fact that Jewish neighbors were innocent victims of an episode of mob, that is, mimetic violence. As the mythological veil is dropped, we can see that while certain aspects of the event’s true nature are not faithfully represented, it would be wrong to suppose that de Machaut presents a simple fiction or is trying to mislead his audience. He is attempting to represent faithfully his own memory of the event, and the confused elements are simply essential parts of that memory. Guillaume is a naïve persecutor, one who becomes subject to the out of control mimesis of the sacrificial crisis, which as in the case of archaic communities, propels him to an act of persecution. Without recourse to the full power of the archaic sacred to transfigure the event entirely, his account fails to obscure his victims as such. We are inclined to consider

\[\text{footnote 478} \text{ In fact, it is known that the Black Death was spreading in Northern France at the time of de Machaut’s activity, which may have instigated the panic he describes. See Ibid., 5.}\]

\[\text{footnote 479} \text{ Ibid., 1. Girard notes that after the attack on the Jews concluded, “All was over, and courtly poetry could begin again.” This observation is close to the Rig Veda’s attribution of the sacrifice of the “man” to the development of “verses and chants”: See O’Flaherty, ed., Rig Veda, 29. “From that sacrifice in which everything was offered the verses and chants were born, the metres were born from it, and from it the formulas were born.”}\]

\[\text{footnote 480} \text{ Girard, The Scapegoat, 8.}\]
what truly happened, and are filled with horror as we contemplate the devastation wrought upon the unsuspecting and completely innocent Jewish communities. The fact that we do not regard the stories of Oedipus and the Dogrib woman similarly indicate the effectiveness of mythological transfigurations in these cases.\footnote{Ibid., 91; 165.}

The contrast is even more striking when the myth of the Dogrib woman is considered in light of Johann Fishart’s 1575 \textit{Wunderzeitung}, where a Jewish woman is shown contemplating two piglets to which she has given birth.\footnote{Ibid.} We are filled with horror at such an image, recognizing in it a symptom of persecutorial bigotry. Such an image might be easily compared to the woman in the Dogrib myth, but because one text is subject to a thorough mythological transfiguration, only the other is easily recognized as a text of persecution. In the case of Oedipus, modern readers willingly accept the notion of Oedipus’ guilt in spite of the fact that practically no modern person is likely to regard plagues of any kind to be the result of any crime, including incest and parricide.\footnote{Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 353.}

\subsection{2.21. The Place of the Victim}

The truth concerning the victim, his or her innocence, is like the victim itself, buried deep into human foundations. Human culture draws life from its victims even as it guards itself against the truth of their persecution. Sacrifice provides
illumination, both cultural and spiritual, even as it secrets away the victims it produces. The development of humanity occasions an association with the terrible violence and cruelty of sacrifice, and its darkness. Modern Western culture, unique among world cultures for its elimination of violent sacrificial rituals, displays a continuing connection to the victim even if in a negative fashion. The escalation in the West’s capacity for violence, and the escalating number of victims claimed by the conflicts of Western history, can only be understood fully as consequences of the increasing inefficacy of the archaic sacred. Liberated from the strict limits established by the sacred, violence is now free to escalate and move beyond the confines of a single victim. Without recourse to sacrificial victims, reciprocal violence can only escalate according to the logic of mimetic reprisals. The growing specter of total war and the possibility of worldwide catastrophe facing the modern West now revolve around an evacuated center. Human culture archaic and modern, each in very different ways, await the arrival of a reconciling victim.

In the first chapter we saw mimetic desire’s tendency to become obsessed with obstacles and to divinize enemies. This is as true today as it was in the time of Dostoevsky and Proust, and Girard shows that it was no less true at the time of the dawn of humanity. Sacrifice enlarges and intensifies the obsession with obstacles and divinized enemies even as it provides a space where humanity can be temporarily free of it, and where culture can arise and develop. The divinized enemies of humanity masquerade convincingly as bearers of light. The crisis that

484 Girard, Sacrifice, 4; Girard, The Scapegoat, 205; Girard, Things Hidden, 126-127.

485 René Girard, Battling to the End, trans. Mary Baker (Michigan State University Press, 2010), 103.
deviated transcendence is always preparing for its human practitioners is not eliminated so much as continually deferred, always looming, and with ever more accumulated rancor.

Can the continuing escalation be reversed or even simply arrested? Or more basically, as a scholar of mimetic theory recently asked, can humanity survive its origin? Enlightenment thinkers supposed that a solution to the violence endemic to human existence is to be found in a purified exercise of reason or in the elimination of various oppressive cultural institutions that they regarded irrational, especially those associated with religion. Rationality and cultural reform alone cannot be the means by which humanity’s crisis is addressed, because they are themselves implicated with it. Whatever progress can be made in averting the crisis looming above human history can only be effected by altering what we can now recognize as the fundamental relationship between human nature and violence.

This can only occur by the renewal of sacrifice. Sacrifice touches the source of humanity’s crisis, the divinization of victims and the human obsession with obstacles. Only it has access to the intimate center of human nature from which conflict and rivalry spring. Only sacrifice, the primordial human institution, the handmaid of all that is human, can renew all that is human. In the next chapter we will consider how the mimetic theory helps us to recognize this as an essential aspect of the Christian notion of the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ. Christ’s assumption of human nature is completed, as it were, by his visitation of the

moment of human nature’s origin. Jesus’ death on the cross is to be understood as the re-presentation of the founding murder where the surrogate victim is shown to be innocent, killed “without cause.” This allows for the establishment of a sacrifice after the pattern of this new presentation of the founding murder.

The renewal of humanity and human culture is thus a kind of sublation where the structure generated by sacrifice is allowed to remain in its integrity. The systems of transcendence that develop from archaic sacrifice, all of the spiritual capacities of human nature—language, conceptual thought, symbolicity of all kinds—as well as the systems of cultural transcendence—law, political power, technology—are preserved in the course of their visitation by the divine, but are given a new foundation and center, a new point of departure. Of particular interest to this study is the incarnation’s sublation of archaic religious institutions. In the chapters to come we will see that in the Christian religious vision the victim’s body bears an intimate relation to all that is. The structure of archaic religious institutions, the primordial source of all human transcendence, is preserved, but given a new center. This sublation retains the transcendence produced by archaic sacrifice while purifying it and extending it to the fullness of truth that includes, first,

487 See John 15:25; Ps 69:4.

488 Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, vol 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 36-37. “... I wish to introduce the notion of sublation, not exactly in Hegel’s sense, but rather in a sense used by Karl Rahner. Let us distinguish, then, between a sublating set of operations and a sublated set. The sublating set introduces operations that are quite new and distinct; it finds among them a new basis and ground; but so far from stunting or interfering with the sublated set, it preserves them integrally, it vastly extends their relevance, and it perfects their performance”
the truth of God as non-violent, the victim rather than the instigator of a violence that is shown to be fully human.

It will seen that this sublation is synonymous with the “reestablishment” of “all things” indicated by St. Paul in Eph 1:10 where he writes that God has reestablished “all things in Christ that are in heaven and on earth.” By the action of God in Christ sacrifice becomes an unalloyed transmitter of light and truth, and becomes the means by which human nature and all cultural forms are re-presented and re-established in truth, in a transcendence that has no relation to darkness. Sacrifice now becomes a means by which the truth of human nature is recognized, where the deviated transcendence of idolatrous desire is demonstrated, corrected, and healed, and the possibility of a true transcendence propagated to “all things.”

489 “…he hath graced us in his beloved son. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace, which hath superabounded in us in all wisdom and prudence, that he might make known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in him, In the dispensation of the fullness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and earth, in him.” Ephesians 1:6-10, Douay-Rheims translation.
3.1. Introduction

In the last chapter we examined human culture’s profound debt to collective victimization. In this chapter we will examine Girard’s analysis of the Old Testament where a new vision of God and human culture begins to dawn. Within the Old Testament we again encounter stories of collective violence and persecution, but this time from a perspective quite different from that of myth. Whereas myth presents these events always from the perspective of a persecuting crowd that is subject to the hallucinatory terror of the crisis of differences and the galvanizing power of collective accusation, the Bible tells its stories from the perspective of the victim, the one against whom the crowd mobilizes. As we shall see, this difference in perspective affects nearly all aspects of the Old Testament, including, and we may say especially, those aspects that seem most similar to mythology. Many interpreters of the Bible have noticed the affinities that exist between stories from the Bible and myths from around the world, and either value or dismiss the content of the Bible on this basis.\textsuperscript{490} Girard highlights and underscores these affinities, but

\textsuperscript{490} Joseph Campbell is an example of a scholar who presents the convergence of Jewish and mythological themes an indication of wisdom shared by both. See his notion of “monomyth.” Joseph Campbell, \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces: The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell} (New York: New
always for the sake of drawing attention to the all-important differences that distinguish Bible stories from their counterparts in mythology. These differences are always explainable, he insists, with recourse to the change in perspective offered consistently by the Biblical authors. The Bible revisits texts of persecution from the perspective of the victim, and by this re-visitation the Old Testament begins to penetrate the veil drawn across human understanding by the culturally generative powers of collective violence. The appearance of the Old Testament writings marks a watershed in human history with respect to humanity’s capacity to consider itself, the world, and the divine apart from the archaic sacred.

3.2. *In the beginning...*

The Old Testament’s departure from the archaic sacred is signaled in the first passages of the Book of Genesis. The first creation account describes God’s serene and effortless creation of the world. God only has to speak his word and all things come to be: “And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” (Gen 1:3). Creation stories are a consistent feature of mythological systems, and indeed, the Jewish creation accounts are likely to have originated from stories that more closely resemble their pagan counterparts. The description of the earth as “formless wasteland” (tohu wa bohu) (Gen 1:2) is almost certainly an echo of the standard feature of more archaic creation stories where all things begin in the formless chaos

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of a violent crisis of differences. The development of this story and perhaps many of the stories of Genesis, including those of the Patriarchs, involved a process of reshaping and “recasting” older mythological versions of these stories according to the religious inspiration of Jewish monotheism. Emerging from this process are texts that disclose a religious and moral vision quite different from that of the archaic sacred, one such as that of the first creation story of Genesis where God’s creative power owes nothing to violence.

The experience of sacrifice forms within the archaic consciousness a confidence in the generative power of violence, and mythological stories contain countless references to its creative magic. One of the most well known is that of the creation of Athena who emerges fully formed from the head of Zeus after it is struck by Hephaestus with an axe. Other myths are more subtle in their indications of the creativity latent within violence, and hide it more assiduously beneath a dense cover of mythological transfigurations. In a Japanese creation story, for example, the islands of Japan are formed when the five deities give to the twins Izanagi and Izanami a jeweled spear. The two dip the spear into the ocean, and from the water that drips from it the islands of Japan form. The ocean here plays the same role as the formlessness of Gen 1:2. It is an indication of the original undifferentation of the

491 See René Girard, To Double Business Bound: Essays in Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 156.


493 Tony Allen and Sara Maitland, Titans and Olympians (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1997), 70.

crisis of differences from which the community emerges. In the case of the Japanese myth, however, the decisive creative gesture is an act of violence indicated by the spear thrust. In other words, the ocean plays same role in the Japanese myth as the victim in the *Rig Veda’s “Hymn of Man.”* More precisely, the ocean simply is the victim. The Japanese myth obscures his or her presence more completely than its Indian counterpart by concealing it beneath a picturesque image whose uniformity signifies only the most essential feature the victim’s monstrous aspect, his or her personification of the undifferentiation of the mimetic crisis.

The formless chaos present in the text of Genesis may indicate some kinship with texts of archaic religion, but the absence of any violent gesture in the creative act of God indicates that a new vision of divine transcendence, the world, and humanity has emerged within Jewish culture. The cosmos is no longer viewed through the deceitful mediation of the archaic sacred. No longer is it a collection of shifting appearances that dissolves and reforms according to the caprice and malice of cruel deities. It is presented here as founded on something trustworthy, the word of God, and its goodness is guaranteed by God. God’s creation will be marred by the sin and the violence of humanity, but these are not present at the origin of all that is. Doublemindedness and violence do not originate in God himself, but are introduced later by others. Genesis contains the first indication of the dawning of a new vision

of God and creation. Its appearance will not come fully into view within the pages of the Old Testament, but as we shall see, it makes there a real beginning.

### 3.3. Mimetic Desire in the Primitive History of Genesis

The chapters of Genesis that contain the “primitive biblical history” offer, of course, no theoretical explications of desire and its interpersonal dynamisms. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that the sacred authors possess a keen intuition concerning the role of mimesis in desire and rivalry. In these stories we see the workings of the *skandalon*, the obstacle to desire that elicits desire precisely because it opposes desire. It is not named explicitly in the story of the Garden of Eden, but the interpersonal dynamic we have identified in association with it appears everywhere. The fall of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis begins with an exchange between Eve and the serpent:

> He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden’? And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. (Gen 3:1-3)

Eve is correct in contradicting the serpent by explaining that God did not forbid eating from all of the trees, but by including the detail, “neither shall you touch it,” she betrays the fact that the serpent has succeeded in exaggerating in Eve’s mind the

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496 This history covers the period preceding the Patriarchs, which includes the creation stories, the account of the Garden of Eden, the story of Cain and Abel, and the story of the Flood of Noah, and the Tower of Babel (Gen 1-11). See Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, trans. Maria Assad (New York: Gracewing, 1987), 70.

497 Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 70.
magnitude of the prohibition imposed by God. God did not, in fact, forbid the touching of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; he only forbade the eating of its fruit. The serpent’s questioning suggests to Eve a portrait of God as a rival and an obstacle, and by this means the serpent elicits Eve’s desire for the forbidden fruit:

But serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Gen 3:4-6)

The skandalon is not mentioned by name in these passages, but the method employed by the serpent demonstrates that he is fully aware of the role that obstacles and opposition play in arousing desire.

The story of the Garden of Eden also presents a dramatization of the effect of mimetic desire and the obsessive fascination it generates for both the model and object. Adam and Eve’s encounter with the skandalon has the effect of alienating them from God. The obsessive fascination generated by mimetic rivalry is diagnosed, at least implicitly, as a kind of idolatrous turning away from God that distances human subjects and their creator. After having eaten of the fruit, God must inquire as to the whereabouts of Adam and Eve in Gen 3:9. Here is established a pattern that will be repeated throughout the Bible, where the lawlessness that is practically synonymous with violence is a consequence of God leaving human beings to their own devices, allowing them to practice their idolatries and suffer the punishments that they mete out to one another.498

The consequence of the fall is that humanity must now live apart from the light of God’s face, enduring conditions

498Ibid., 48.
both interior and exterior, personal and cosmic, that prompt persons to regard one another as idols and rivals. 499 When God “hides his face” humans begin searching for divinity from among their own number, and in finding it there, begin the mimetic process whereby skandala proliferate and spiral out of control.

3.4. Cain and Abel: The Founding Murder

God promises death to Adam should he take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). Adam’s own death is indicated here, but there are reasons to suspect that it is not the fulfillment of God’s warning. Raymund Schwager cites Ludwig Wachter’s observation that nowhere in the Bible is a death such as Adam’s, one that follows after many years of life, regarded as a punishment. 500 The immediate fulfillment of God’s promise is the death of Abel, which is clearly linked to the fall of Adam and Eve by the pattern of God’s inquiries concerning the whereabouts of his lost children: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9); “Where is your brother, Abel?” (Gen 4:9). 501 Cain’s murder of Abel, in other words, ought to be regarded as the immediate consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve. 502

499 Ibid., 67. “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God/And your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Is 59:2)


501 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 68.

502 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, trans. James Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 83-84. See also, Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 68-69.
In the story of the first fratricide we see the consequence of humanity’s relationship with the *skandalon* quickly unfold.

The violence that Cain directs towards his brother is not itself sacrificial, but the theme of sacred violence dominates the story. At issue is the acceptability of the brothers’ respective sacrifices. Abel’s sacrifice of a lamb is received by God whereas Cain’s offering of “the fruits of the earth” is not (Gen 4:2-5). Cain’s murderous rage is more than simply a symptom of his envy for his brother’s success. The final outcome underscores the relative merits and effects of the brothers’ sacrifices. The violent cult of Abel satisfies God whereas the non-violent cult of Cain does not. As a tiller of the soil Cain does not have recourse to the “violence outlet of animal sacrifice.”\(^{503}\) Consequently, he is the one to become a murderer.\(^{504}\)

God punishes Cain by driving him “from the ground” and condemning him to wander the earth (Gen 4:11-12). Fearing the violent reciprocity that his murder has initiated, Cain protests God’s punishment by pleading that anyone who finds him will kill him (4:14).\(^{505}\) God responds by offering Cain a “mark” that contains the promise of a “seven-fold” vengeance for anyone who takes the life of Cain (4:15). This mark amounts to the first cultural sign that performs the most essential work of culture, the arresting of reciprocal violence, and it works by issuing a violent threat. If anyone kills Cain, he or she will be killed, and six others as well.\(^{506}\) The


\(^{504}\) Ibid., 4.

mark is thus essentially linked to the differentiation of legitimate and illegitimate killing. It is the sign that both forbids and sanctions murder, it is the sign of the “murderer protected by God.”\textsuperscript{507} This is the first and most essential cultural sign that indicates the most fundamental cultural difference, the difference between sacrifice and murder. This difference is “fine and precarious,”\textsuperscript{508} but as we have seen it is fundamental to all subsequent “marks,” that is, all subsequent cultural signification.

The killing of Abel is not presented as a ritualized event—it is a simple murder prompted by envy—but it bears certain decisive marks of sacred violence that give revelatory power to the Bible’s description of the event. Cain’s famous answer to God’s question concerning Abel’s whereabouts—“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9)—is more than a simple attempt at evasion. It is an adumbration of the displacement of blame for the original murder that is fundamental to the religious concealment of the founding murder beneath myth and ritual. Cain first expels Abel, and now he expels his expulsion.\textsuperscript{509} At its heart is the self-deception that animates deviated transcendence and mimetic rivalry, the rivalry that results in Abel’s death and animates the sacred economy with which Cain is now invested by the imposition of the mark.\textsuperscript{510} Deviated transcendence clothes Cain in a kind of

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\textsuperscript{506} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 84.

\textsuperscript{507} James Williams, \textit{Violence, the Sacred, and the Bible}, 185. See also, Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 85.

\textsuperscript{508} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 84.

\textsuperscript{509} Williams, \textit{Violence, the Sacred, and the Bible}, 84-85.

\textsuperscript{510} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 147.
\end{flushright}
kind of quasi-divine status, the same status afforded to the archaic gods, sacred
kings, and high priests: those who kill, but are protected from killing. The mark of
Cain is thus the beginning of a “Cainite” culture, a culture that has all the features of
culture with which we are now familiar: prohibition, myth, and ritualized
violence.\textsuperscript{511}

Cain thus lives up to his name as “forger” or “builder,”\textsuperscript{512} and we can see the
important role of violence in his work as a builder. Cain’s foundation of the first city
(\textit{Gen} 4:17) is an extension of his intimate relationship with violence in all its forms,
profane and sacred, which begins in his murder of Abel and is continued in the
sanctioned violence associated with his mark. Here we can recognize a tension
within the sacred text that will manifest itself throughout the entirety of the Old
Testament. The Biblical author will often seem caught on the horns of wishing to
exonerate God of the violence associated with human idolatry, and what from the
perspective of the Old Testament was undeniable, the efficacy of sacrifice and ritual
in the genesis and maintenance of culture. The sacred author does not and perhaps
cannot deny that God is implicated in the investiture of Cain with the quasi-divine
status that mythology affords to other cultural founders.\textsuperscript{513} The sacred author’s

\textsuperscript{511} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 83-84.

\textsuperscript{512} The etymology of Cain’s name is “builder” or “forger,” somewhat like the English name
“Smith.” Girard points out that metal workers are often regarded with an ambivalence that closely
parallels that of the sacred itself. Their association with metal tools and weapons gives them an
intimate relation to a “potent form of violence.” In certain African societies, for example, metal
workers are regarded as dangerous and often forced to live on the outskirts of communities. On the
other hand, they are also associated with a higher degree of civilization and in times of crisis are
called upon as arbitrators for the setting of disputes. In other words, they are closely associated with
violence according to both its divisive and reconciling aspects. See Girard, \textit{Violence and the Sacred},
260-261.
inability to overcome entirely the archaic religious vision renders Cain a "morally ambiguous" figure. 514 Nevertheless, the Biblical story is clear about one essential point: the innocence of Abel. However much God invests him with divine powers, Cain remains a “vulgar murderer.” 515 Whereas many aspects of the Cain and Abel story unite it to similar mythic stories of fratricide and foundation, the emphasis of Abel’s innocence distinguishes it decisively.

Even as the Old Testament authors present God as the architect of the social arrangement whereby the threat of vengeance maintains social order, they point to the fact that this ordering of things is provisional and precarious. 516 Profane violence will inevitably escalate beyond the capacity of sanctioned violence to restrain it. Mimetic rivalries will proliferate and escalate until the difference between sacred and profane violence collapses with all others into the crisis of differences. Genesis records the progress of civilization among Cain’s descendents. By the time of Lamech, Cainite civilization features tent dwellers, keepers of livestock, the players of string and wind musical instruments, as well as forgers of “tools of bronze and iron” (Gen 4:20-22). We see too among the descendents of Cain a rapid escalation in the desire for vengeance, until finally we hear Lamech’s fearsome pronouncement:

Adah and Zillah hear my voice;
wives of Lamech, listen to my utterance.
I have killed a man for wounding me,

513 Girard, Things Hidden, 147; Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 83
514 Girard, Things Hidden, 147.
515 Ibid.
516 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 70.
a boy for bruising me.  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
then Lamech seventy-seven fold.  (Gen 4:23-24)

This vengeance continues to escalate and proliferate as the primitive history moves forward towards the great flood:

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.  (Gen 6:11)

The Jerusalem and New American Bibles translate the final passage of this verse as “filled with lawlessness.” This may not be entirely unsuitable as a translation, but only inasmuch as “lawlessness” is understood as a description of the chaos of the proliferating violent reprisals indicated in Lamech’s proclamation to his wives.  

Vengeance has escalated beyond the threshold where it can serve as a principal for order, beyond the level, in other words, at which it can be constrained by law.  In the account of the Nephilim (Gen 6:1-4) we see that this escalation has reached a crisis stage that is expressed in terms made familiar by myth, such as that of the Dogrib woman considered in the last chapter.  The “sons of heaven” have taken the “daughters of humans” as their wives (Gen 6:2).  This sexual transgression of a fundamental difference, that of heaven and earth no less, gives rise to the Nephilim, a race of giants whose monstrous stature signals the onset of a crisis of differences that foreshadows that of the Flood (Gen 6-7).  The Flood signals fully the inadequacy of the mark of Cain, the failure of violence to restrain violence.
3.5. The Skandalon Revisited

At the heart of the Jewish Law stand the Ten Commandments. These serve the same function as all prohibitions, Jewish and Gentile: to prevent the convergence of desire and the formation of skandalon. Examining them closely, one encounters a rough pattern that follows the reverse itinerary of the development of an escalating conflict. As is seen in the movement from the Garden of Eden to the conflict of Cain and Abel, first comes the skandalon, the convergence and escalation of desire, and then rivalry and violence. From the fifth commandment to the tenth we move in the opposite direction, from the prohibition of killing to the prohibition of covetousness. The wording of the tenth commandment is telling.

You shall not covet the house of your neighbor. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbor, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him. (Ex 20:17)

The skandalon is not mentioned by name, but in the course of elaborating the likely objects of desire, the author never allows us to lose sight of the neighbor who signals the value of those objects.\footnote{Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 9.}

The Ten Commandments seem to presume a kind of crisis facing humanity, or at least one that “crouches at the door”\footnote{See Gen 4:7.} and is ready to spring. They seem to presume the active practice of a violence that must be stopped before its cause can be addressed adequately. When one breaks up fighting children, for example, the first order of business is to pull them apart and tell them to stop fighting. Only when

\footnote{Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 9.}
they no longer pose an immediate threat to one another can one hope to address the cause of their animosity and exhort them to be friends. Just so the Ten Commandments give priority to the prohibition of killing, and only then proceed to its cause, the desires that draws us to our neighbors in a spirit of rivalry.\(^{519}\)

A similar structure of elaboration is found in Leviticus where the earliest explicit references to the *skandalon* appear:

> You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block (*skandalon*) before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:14).

Placing a stumbling block before a blind person is an example of wanton cruelty, the sort of malicious taunting associated with the worst kind of spitefulness. Shouting curses at a deaf person seems entirely gratuitous. Why hurl curses at someone who cannot hear them? These cruel gestures only make sense as means by which to make of persons a spectacle of helplessness, to indicate to others that the disabled person is vulnerable to further abuse. They must be understood as the mockery and taunting that unites persecutors in their cruel purpose.\(^{520}\) We can recall that mythologies of archaic peoples “swarm with the lame, the blind and the crippled”\(^{521}\) precisely because they attract the vengeful impulses generated by mimetic rivalry.

Similar to what can be recognized in the Ten Commandments, the passages of Leviticus that follow immediately upon 19:14 seek to thwart the progress of *skandalon* fueled persecution by tracing their progression in reverse order.

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\(^{520}\) Girard, *Things Hidden*, 420-421.

You shall not go about spreading slander among your kinsmen; nor shall you stand by idly when your neighbor’s life is at stake. I am the Lord. You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord (Lev 19:16-18).522

These passages prohibit the sorts of hostile recriminations that characterize the earliest stages of the mimetic crisis, those that feed the aggressive impulses that inevitably seek an outlet in violence directed at defenseless targets.523 Only after these prohibitions have been issued can the author present the positive ideal to which these many prohibitions are ordained, namely, the practice of love: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18).

We see in these passages at the very heart of the Jewish Law powerful expressions of the “spirit of the Old Testament”524 that understands and anticipates the dynamism of persecution and its hidden origin in mimetic desire and rivalry. The declaration repeated throughout these passages—“I am the Lord”—signals as well the association between mimesis, collective persecution, and the idolatry condemned throughout the Old Testament. To love one’s neighbor as oneself means refusing the idolatry whereby the neighbor is regarded as Other according to the charade alterity of deviated transcendence, the two-faced alterity that adores, envies, and detests the neighbors by turns.

522 Quoted in Girard, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, 420.
523 Ibid., 420-421.
524 Ibid., 421.
3.6. Oedipus and Joseph

In the story of Joseph from the Book of Genesis (Gen 37-50) we again encounter a story made familiar by both myth and what we have already considered in the Cain and Abel story. It is a story of sibling rivalry, except in this instance the persecution is collective in nature. Joseph is persecuted by his ten half brothers with the exception of Reuben who attempts to save him from the others (37:21-22). The theme of collective persecution brings the story close to countless other mythological stories. Girard compares it to that of Oedipus as told by Sophocles in his Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*. Here again, a close examination reveals an instance where the Bible takes up and repeats many of the themes found in ancient myth, but for the purpose of highlighting a more significant difference.

In both stories the hero is rejected by his original community. In the case of Joseph he is rejected from his family by his brothers. Oedipus’ father, Laius, attempts to kill him because of the oracle’s prediction concerning his future. Both become “successful immigrants,” Oedipus in Thebes and Joseph in Egypt. Both display great power and wisdom in the face of terrible crises: Oedipus saves Thebes by defeating the Sphinx, and Joseph helps Egypt negotiate a severe famine (Gen 41:33-52). Both are subject to the accusation of having committed a sexual crime, Oedipus for having committed incest with his mother, Joseph for attempting to rape Potiphar’s wife (39:6-15), a woman Joseph “should have respected as much as his

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526 Ibid.
mother.” Characteristics belong to Oedipus that mark him out as singular and so foreshadow the monstrous aspect that will emerge fully into view by the end of the tragedy. His foreign birth and the deformity associated with his feet predispose him to become the target of collective accusation. Girard’s analysis of the anomalous nature of scapegoats helps us understand that the same can be said for his heroic qualities, such as his victory over the sphinx and subsequent rise to the status of king. Joseph also displays remarkable abilities that mark him out as anomalous. In every situation, whether in the house of Potiphar or in prison, he rises to positions of trust and authority (39:2-3; 39:22), and just as Oedipus is the “solver of riddles,” the divine favor Joseph enjoys gives him the uncanny ability to interpret dreams (40:16; 41:25-36). Oedipus is the conqueror of the Sphinx plaguing Thebes, while Joseph “conquers” the famine that afflicts Egypt (47:25).

The careers of both follow a path of “brilliant achievements and violent expulsions.” For all their similarities, however, the texts diverge sharply with respect to guilt and innocence. Joseph’s expulsion is presented unambiguously as unjust, the accusations directed at him, whether by his brothers or Potiphar’s wife, are shown clearly to be false. The Biblical text refuses to take the accusations

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528 Girard, The Scapegoat, 22, 32-35.
529 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 108.
against Joseph seriously, and in this way critiques the hysterical mindset of persecutors that seizes upon the most meager evidence for their victim’s guilt.\textsuperscript{531}

The finale of the story crowns and magnifies the themes developing throughout. Before Joseph will give grain to the brothers, who still do not recognize him, he insists that they return with Benjamin, Joseph’s full brother and Jacob’s favorite son (Gen 42:20). They do so, and as they prepare to return home with their grain, Joseph places a silver cup in Benjamin’s sack (44:1-5). When they are stopped by the authorities, Benjamin is found to have the cup and is accused of theft. Knowing the terrible anguish that Benjamin’s imprisonment will cause their father, Jacob, Judah offers himself to be jailed instead of Benjamin (44:30-34). At the sight of Judah’s generous turn, his refusal to offer Benjamin as a victim to a false accusation and his offer of himself as a substitute Benjamin—his refusal, in other words, to allow Benjamin to be taken a kind of substitute victim for him and the other brothers—elicits the full measure of Joseph’s pardon (45:1-8). Judah’s act of generosity and the forgiveness it elicits from Joseph ends the “spiral of reprisals” which myth and ritual ends by collective violence.\textsuperscript{532}

\textbf{3.7. The Truth of Joseph, the Truth of the Bible}

The story of Joseph is a clear and beautiful example of a Biblical narrative where the victim is portrayed as innocent in the face of aggressive persecutors, and

\textsuperscript{531} Girard, \textit{I See Satan Fall Like Lightning}, 109.

\textsuperscript{532} Ibid., 111.
where the falsehood motivating the persecution is underscored. Throughout the modern period critics of the Bible, especially the harshest, have noted that what we have observed of the story of Joseph is true of the Bible as a whole. The Bible is characterized by what might well be called a “preferential option” for the victims of persecution. It consistently brings to light their innocence and diagnoses the coarse and deluded motivations of persecutors. Friedrich Nietzsche sees in this a symptom of the Bible’s *ressentiment*, the hateful frustration of the weak in the face of the greater vitality of the noble and strong. The consistent denunciation of persecutors is a salvo in the “slave revolt in morality” that is initiated by the Jews and taken up and magnified by Christians.533 The great twentieth century sociologist Max Weber follows Nietzsche’s lead when he assigns to the Jewish sympathy for victims a “purely sociological and cultural significance,” and regards it as an expression of the Jewish inadequacy in the face of the impressive military and cultural triumphs of the great powers that surrounded Israel.534

For Girard, the Jewish sympathy for victims is a function of its penetration of the hysterical mindset of collective persecutors. The Bible proclaims the truth concerning victims, but this truth should not be regarded primarily as metaphysical in nature. The truth in this case is most immediately anthropological in nature; it is

533 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1989), 34, ”... the Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical transvaluation of their enemies’ values, that is to say, an act of the most spiritual revenge”; ”... with the Jews there begins the slave revolt in morality: that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it—has been victorious.” Ibid., 36. ”The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true action, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge.”

the insistence that victims are persecuted arbitrarily. They are persecuted, as the Psalmists will insist, “without cause” (Ps 69:4). The Bible dismisses the mythological view that the victim somehow initiates the persecutorial event, drawing the community to itself by his or her divine magic, or that the persecution is the result of some kind of quasi-divine necessity. The fault is shown to lie in the persecutors themselves, in their envy as the stories of Abel and Joseph indicate (Gen 4:5; 37:11). These anthropological departures from the mythological presentation of persecution amount to the first penetrations of the mythological consciousness, the dispelling and deconstruction of the mindset generated by the hallucinatory atmosphere of the crisis of differences. This is where the truth of the Bible is to be located, in its consistent debunking of the systems of signification generated by the accusers at the expense of their victims. It is in this sense that the story of Joseph and his brothers ought to be regarded as “true.” This attribution of truth prescinds from a determination of the historical nature of the text, the question of whether it depicts a real historical person and real historical events. The story of Joseph is to be regarded as true if for no other reason than it depicts the true origin and progress of his persecution.

3.8. Truth and Realism

Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers amounts to a transcendence of the spirit of revenge that animates the archaic sacred. It is a transcendence of a transcendence, an overcoming of the deviated transcendence that fuels mimetic
reciprocity and makes possible sacrificial substitutions that animate the transcendence of the archaic sacred. This victory of Joseph is the victory of the Bible itself, which is manifested in its consistent sympathy for victims. When Joseph refuses to retaliate the wrongs committed against him by his brothers, he turns aside from the course of desire and rivalry determined by the logic of mimetism. His response to Judah’s offer of himself signals that Joseph has rejected the pattern of surrogate victimization at the heart of the archaic sacred, as well as the psychological dislocations associated with the spirit of revenge and the deviated transcendence it generates. Joseph’s scattering of the confused atmosphere of the crisis of differences bears a spiritual kinship with the aesthetic quality that characterizes the Bible as a whole. For all the divine interventions and stories of miracles contained within them, Biblical texts are characterized by a naturalism unknown in mythological stories. In the story of Joseph, for example, the accounts of Joseph’s rehabilitation first as the trusted chamberlain of Potiphar and then as the prime minister of Pharaoh bear a formal resemblance to the transfiguration of the victims of archaic religion. The Dogrib woman examined in the last chapter undergoes a mythological promotion from her community’s victim to its principal of order, and in the wake of his expulsion Oedipus takes on a kind of divine status during his residence at Colonus.535 The Biblical story, on the other hand, lacks all reference to magical causalities. Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams and manage the famine are described as signs of the divine favor he enjoys, but the abilities themselves are presented as radical perfections of his natural gifts rather than as

535 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 85.
supernatural powers. Joseph’s “resurrection” is nothing more than being found alive in Egypt. When he is found he is not at first recognized, but there is no indication that it is because he has undergone any kind of dazzling transfiguration along the lines of what is found in myth.

The realism of the Bible was famously noted by the eminent twentieth century literary critic, Erich Auerbach. In his classic work *Mimesis* Auerbach notes that the progress of art in the West is characterized by an increasing degree of realism. This, he notes, begins with the depictions of the Bible, and is in fact a function of the intimate encounter between European culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition.536 In the course of his study Auerbach compares the Bible’s achievement of realistic depictions to the “two-dimensional and flat” depictions of pagan literature.537 Ironically, the lack of realism characterizing classical literature originates in an aesthetic “hypermimeticism” that attempts to represent every last detail of reality. The exhaustive descriptions of classical authors end up falsifying reality and distorting their depictions. Homer, for example, presents to the reader a “homogenous and unbroken surface” that “prevents us from seeing through or beyond it.”538


538 Bandera, *A Refuge of Lies*, 20. Supporting Auerbach’s thesis, Cesareo Bandera offers as an example of Homer’s exhaustive description in the *Odyssey* of Penelope opening the door to the chamber where Odysseus’s bow is kept. A full ten lines are devoted to the description of the door and the manner in which she opens it:

When she, shining among women, had come to the chamber,
The Bible, on the other hand, is full of “gaps and discontinuities” through which “the invisible dimension of reality filters in.”539 The Bible’s narration is not so exhaustive as to suffocate the elusiveness of reality. This is manifested “at the psychological level” in depictions of Old Testament figures that are “fraught with their own biological past” in a way that no Homeric figure is. The latter is “clearly set forth once and for all,” and is not seen to change significantly over the course of the narratives in which he appears. Odysseus is the same man at the end of The Odyssey as he was at the beginning. A figure such as the Patriarch Jacob, however, is molded and shaped considerably by a history through which the will of God is effected.540

Auerbach’s consideration of the Bible’s greater realism is confined to aesthetics. He does not recognize that the Bible’s aesthetic realism is a function of a realism that extends beyond aesthetics to anthropological and theological depths. The Bible’s capacity to overcome the hypermimeticism of pagan aesthetics is a function of its overcoming of the hypermimeticism of the archaic sacred. Behind the hypermimeticism of classical art is the hypermimeticism of myth and ritual, which have at their center the hypermimeticism of the crisis of differences and the

And had come up to the oaken threshold, which the carpenter
Once had expertly planed and drawn it true to a chalkline,
And fitted the door posts to it and joined on the shining door leaves,
First she quickly set the fastening free of the hook, then
she inserted the key and knocked the bolt upward, pushing
The key straight in, and the door bellowed aloud, as a bull
Does, when he feeds in his pasture; such was the noise the splendid
Doors made, struck with the key, and now they quickly spread open. Quoted in Bandera, A Refuge of Lies, 18.

539 Bandera, A Refuge of Lies, 19.

540 Ibid.
hysterical mimetism of unanimous, that is, sacred violence.\textsuperscript{541} The hypermimetic aesthetic of classical art presents a “blinding visibility” that keeps the attention of the reader fixed on the surface of the narrative.\textsuperscript{542} It bears the same essential quality of the mythological narrative from which it originates.\textsuperscript{543} No invitation is made to investigate the background of events; no such investigation is even countenanced as a possibility. The “gaps and discontinuities” and the possibility of psychological depth characterizing the Biblical text’s realism set the stage for the reader to pass through the order of mere appearances and investigate what lies behind. The Biblical author seems aware that an attempt to exhaust the meaning of a given event would inevitably falsify its meaning. A text can only communicate reality by allowing the reader access to its anterior, to consider ironies and hidden motivations in the persons and events presented. The Bible’s penetration of surface meanings becomes the first means by which we can arrive at the realities hidden beneath the myth and ritual. In other words, the Bible’s aesthetic is intimately connected to its sympathy for victims, which gives rise to a suspicion that any blinding visibility may very well serve to conceal another version of the events described. Indeed, the Bible is the first to employ the “suspicion” of surface meanings and standard accounts that now dominates modern thought.\textsuperscript{544} It is also

\textsuperscript{541} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{542} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{543} Ibid., 20.

the real beginning of the practice of “decoding” that Girard notes is applied nearly reflexively in the case of certain texts of persecution such as the witch trials and anti-Semitic pogroms of the Middle Ages, but which scholars somehow fail to apply to mythology and archaic religion.

3.9. Realism and the Sacred

For all its considerable merit, Auerbach’s analysis of the history of Western literature cannot be complete because it fails to consider the importance of the sacred to all depictions of reality. The sacred is the “existential contact with the world.”\(^{545}\) The sacred provides a set of experiences by which all others are interpreted; it determines the “manner of comprehending and representing things.”\(^{546}\) The decisive moment of the archaic sacred is the crisis of differences, where the whole of reality becomes “thin and faint,” where the world shows itself to be an amalgamation of shifting appearances capable of dissolving without notice into a monstrous chaos. The archaic sacred also consists, of course, of the act of violence by which this chaos is dispelled. It provides a set of experiences that confirms in the pagan consciousness that reality is dangerous and untrustworthy. And so we find in pagan literature heroes such as Odysseus, who achieves his victories by deceit and cunning, who never dares to approach the world “out there”


\(^{546}\) Ibid., 31.
without a disguise.\textsuperscript{547} He is as untrustworthy as the two-dimensional and deceitful world that he manipulates.

Emerging into view in the Bible is the conviction that God is the maker of all things and the guarantor of a reality that shares in the trustworthiness of God himself. Over the course of the Old Testament, the Jewish conception of God becomes increasingly liberated from an understanding formed in light of the violent resolution of the crisis of differences.\textsuperscript{548} As will be seen in the pages to come, certain passages of the Old Testament give evidence of a lingering attachment to notions of a violent and capricious deity, but even so a trajectory is clearly discernible whereby God is steadily divested of his kinship with the pagan deities of Israel’s neighboring societies.

3.10. The Scapegoat

Throughout Girard’s works he employs the term “scapegoat” to describe the single victims of collective persecutions. In fact, while he speaks often of “single victims” and “victims of collective violence,” far more often he uses the term “scapegoat” to designate victims, and refers to collective persecution as instances of “scapegoating.” Discussion of the term has been reserved until now so it can be discussed fully and in its proper context. It first appears in the Book of Leviticus’s description of the scapegoat ritual where a goat is made to bear away the sins of the

\textsuperscript{547} Ibid., 22-24.

\textsuperscript{548} Ibid., 2.
community. The priest lays his hands onto the head of the goat, and the goat is sent out into the desert to the spirit Azazel (Lev 16:10). In other words, in the original context the goat believed to be truly guilty, made so by the ritual action in order that it may bear away the guilt of the community. Girard, however, uses the term according to its modern sense, which indicates that the scapegoat is not guilty, that he or she has been falsely accused.

For all the ease and frequency with which the term is used according to its contemporary usage, the modern sense of “scapegoat” entails a complex series of significations. It indicates a reality of unjust persecution that lies behind the screen of a story of accusation. The word thus has an important “theatrical” meaning that serves to deconstruct a theatre of persecution. It indicates simultaneously two realities: the first, the reality presented by the scapegoater; the second, the actual condition of reality that the scapegoater wishes to conceal. The term also implies a sophisticated theory of religion and sacrifice, one that recognizes the common origin of formal, organized persecutions and the dynamics of quotidian interpersonal conflicts. “Scapegoat” becomes a nimble linguistic tool by which to describe the countless ways in which persons of all historical periods have exercised the “the universal human tendency to transfer anxiety and conflict onto arbitrary victims.”

The contemporary usage departs sharply from the original Biblical meaning, and may even be said to contradict it. In a more profound sense, however, the contemporary usage fulfills the deepest spirit of the Bible. It is the fruit of accepting the Bible’s invitation to penetrate and inspect the story of a sacrifice and the

549 Girard, Things Hidden, 131.
“blinding visibility” of the account that describes it. It is not insignificant that only Western languages feature a word with the “double semantic sense”\textsuperscript{550} that denotes simultaneously divergent accounts of a single event. Indeed, the contemporary usage appears only in European languages, and there only as late as the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{551} The development of such an incisive denominator of false accusation, as well as the absence of any similar term from non-Western languages, can only be understood in terms of the influence of the Bible.

3.11. The Psalms

An essential aspect of the Bible’s realism, perhaps its most important aspect, is the realism with which it approaches the agony of the victims of persecution. The violence of the Bible can shock and horrify readers in ways that mythological literature rarely does. The “Hymn of Man” from the \textit{Rig Veda} is a poem of such even serenity that one might fail to notice that it is a description of the dismemberment of a living human being. Socrates, according to Plato’s descriptions, drank his hemlock without a word of complaint.\textsuperscript{552} Within the Bible violence is presented in all its horror, and the voices of the victims of violence are heard clearly with all the misery and resentment that one would expect from a victim of cruel abuse.

\textsuperscript{550} Ibid., 131.

\textsuperscript{551} David Dawson, \textit{Flesh Becomes Word} (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 121-129.

Nowhere is the voice of the victims of persecution heard as consistently and forcefully as in the Psalms. The psalmist curses his or her persecutors “loud and long.” Some of the most bitter passages of the Bible are found among their number, and the tone can be shrill. But their most difficult passages, those most distasteful to our ears, are the very ones humanity has most need of hearing. They place before us those aspects of human life that the proud and contented are most likely to ignore or actively suppress, the massive role played by violence and the anguished cry of its victims.

In certain psalms the psalmist faces a circumstance that is by now well familiar. He or she is at the center of a terrible crisis of differences. The psalmist speaks of being overwhelmed by floods (Ps 124:5) and raging storms (55:8), sinking into mud (40:2), and surrounded by ferocious pack animals (22:12,16), images whose significance is unmistakable in light of Girard’s account of their significance in mythological texts.

Save me, God, for the waters have reached my neck. I have sunk into the mire of the deep, where there is no foothold. I have gone down to the watery depths; the flood overwhelms me. I am weary with crying out;

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553 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 116.

554 Girard, The Scapegoat, 104. See also, René Girard, Job: The Victim of his People, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 150-151. “Job’s complaints, and the endless complaints of victims, make the Bible intolerable for many people, perhaps for everyone... Paradoxically, only Nietzsche pays attention to the voice of these victims. But he does so only in order to overwhelm them even more, and accuse them of resentment.” Within the context of his discussion it is clear that Girard regards our impatience with victims as an indication of our lack of sympathy with them, a suspicion on our part that they are really going on about nothing, which is really a species of sympathy for their persecutors.
my throat is parched.  
My eyes have failed,  
looking for my God.  (Psalm 69:2-4)

The psalmist describes the crisis from its very center, the place of the victim, the one against whom the crowd mobilizes. The psalmist is in the process of becoming the victim of a collective persecution and provides for us an account of the progress of the event. In this case, by his or her denial, we discover that it rallies around the accusation of theft that it directs towards its victim.

More numerous than the hairs of my head  
are those who hate me without cause.  
Too many for my strength  
are my treacherous enemies.  
Must I now restore  
what I did not steal?  (Psalm 69:5)

The psalmist indicates that the crowd gathers against him or her “without cause,” and in so doing identifies an essential aspect of collective persecution. The mimetic exchange within a crowd will feed the anger of all it has gathered into itself until hardly any pretext is required for the persecution, and any and all accusations, no matter how ridiculous, will suffice to justify the destruction of the victim.\textsuperscript{555} The psalmist thus makes an observation concerning mimetic persecutions that is similar to the one Shakespeare makes concerning mimetic desire: they are both “much ado about nothing.”

Ps 22 records a similar all-against-one persecution. The speaker describes the terrible fate to which he or she has been condemned by his persecutors, who have reduced him to the status of a victim. As a monster in the eyes of his

\textsuperscript{555} Girard, The Scapegoat, 146.
persecutors, a “worm” by the psalmist’s own description, he or she is subject to all the derision, mockery, and taunting witnessed in ritual.

But I am a worm, hardly human; scorned by everyone, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me, they curl their lips and jeer, they shake their heads at me; “You relied on the Lord—let him deliver you; if he loves you, let him rescue you.” (22:7-9)

As the persecuting crowd gathers round, again the unanimity of his accusers is described in terms of the undifferentiated appearance of animals.

Many bulls surround me, fierce bulls of Bashan surround me; They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar. (22:13-14)

Many dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. So wasted are my hands and feet that I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; (22:17-18)

Pack hunters appear in Ps 17 as well:

My ravenous enemies press upon me; they close their hearts; they fill their mouths with proud roaring. Their steps even now encircle me; they watch closely, keeping low to the ground, like lions looking eager for prey like young lions lurking in ambush. (17:9-12)

The psalmist in Ps 22 even records for us an indication of the reverence afforded the victims of collective persecution. The persecutors seem to anticipate their victim’s transfiguration as their reconciler, and compete with each other for his or her belongings even in the course of the persecution.

they divide my garments among them, for my clothing they cast lots. (22:19-21)
In Ps 55 the accusing crowd is likened to a storm that rages around the speaker:

Listen, God, to my prayer
   do not hide from my pleading;
   hear me and give answer.
I rock with grief; I groan
   at the uproar of the enemy,
   the clamor of the wicked.
They heap trouble upon me,
   savagely accuse me.
My heart pounds within me.
   death’s terrors fall upon me.
If I say, “If only I had wings like a dove
   that I might fly away and find rest.
Far away I would flee;
   I would stay in the desert.
I would soon find a shelter
   from the raging wind and storm. (55:1-9)

Ps 31 presents to us an account of the gathering of the storm, a description of the initial stages of the crowd’s convergence on the victim. Animosities and hateful feelings remain restless and dangerous until they find a target on which to fixate. By means of what we today might call a “whisper campaign,” targets can be tested for their suitability by the attempt to spread rumors about them. When a suggestion is made that a particular member of the community is iniquitous in some way, that he or she is a troublemaker or otherwise liable to condemnation, the rumor will either stick to the person and gather interest and credibility, or it will be rejected and a new attempt must be made on a new target. As animosities grow, this searching will become more aggressive, and community members will be more likely to accept suggested accusations. When finally rumors begin to stick onto a given person, the accusations become increasingly convincing by the weight of agreement they generate. The confidence of accusers spreads mimetically and the rumors gather
the community into a consensus that continually reinforces itself with increasing intensity. The psalmist records this process as he or she observes it uniting his or her persecutors. The speaker realizes that these whispered accusations are the means by which his or her neighbors will converge with more confident, loud, and violent accusations.\textsuperscript{556}

To all my foes I am a thing of scorn,  
to my neighbors, a dreaded sight,  
a horror to my friends.  
When they see me in the street,  
they quickly shy away.  
I am forgotten, out of mind like the dead;  
I am like a shattered dish.  
I hear the whispers of the crowd;  
terrors are all around me.  
They conspire against me;  
they plot to take my life. (Psalm 31:12-14)

Within the Psalms we thus encounter voices that report to us exactly what the persecuting crowd seeks relentlessly to stifle, the terrified cries of their victims.\textsuperscript{557}

\textsuperscript{556} It is worth noting in light of this the connection between the role of whispered accusations the frequency and intensity that Jewish authors condemned slander. The offer of an accusation regarding a particular a person can serve an exploratory function, a test of his or her liability to condemnation. The hateful word may be the first loose rock that signals the beginning of an avalanche.

Lord who may abide in your tent?  
Who may dwell on your holy mountain?  
Whoever walks without blame  
doing what is right,  
speaking truth from the heart;  
Who does not slander a neighbor,  
does no harm to another,  
ever defames a friend; (Ps 15:1-3)

“Death and life are in the hand of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21)

\textsuperscript{557} The Bible’s 150 psalms devote themselves to many different purposes including praise of God, rejoicing for God’s blessings, lamentations of disasters, and cries of penitence. See Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 194. Girard focuses his attention on so-called “penitential” psalms, which he also refers to as the “tragic” psalms. See Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 55.
The psalmist allows to be heard what the tomb and the mythologist conceal, and thus makes a powerful contribution to the Bible’s overall tendency to shift attention from persecutors to victims, from “those making history to those subjected to it.”

3.12. The Book of Job

The Book of Job reiterates and amplifies many characteristics of the Psalms that we have examined so far. For Girard, in fact, the Book of Job is a kind of “super-psalm” for presenting a yet more extended and comprehensive portrait of the victim confronted by a community of accusers. This victim, of course, is Job, whose condition is not entirely unfamiliar to us. In the last chapter we considered the origin of the archaic king as a development arising from violent sacrifice. The king is a victim whose destruction has been deferred while all power and prestige within the community are concentrated in his or her person. As long as the community remains stable, the king enjoys an exceptional position atop the community. In a moment of crisis, however, the king can be made to reconcile the community by another means by becoming its victim. In an instant the king’s exceptionality as the quasi-divine source of order and blessing becomes the exceptionality of community’s hated enemy, its scapegoat. The subtle currents of resentment and envy accompanying his or her former veneration are now set loose and allowed to

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gather into a wave of persecution. The community held together by a unanimous veneration is now united by a unanimous contempt.\textsuperscript{560}

Job is not exactly a king, more like an aristocrat, a man of great power and prestige even if not his community's ruler.\textsuperscript{561} We meet him in misery, but he speaks of the prestige he once enjoyed.\textsuperscript{562}

When I went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square. As soon as I appeared, the young men stepped aside, while the older men rose to their feet. Men of note interrupted their speeches, and put their fingers on their lips; The voices of rulers were silenced, and their tongues stayed still in their mouths.

They waited anxiously to hear me, and listened in silence to what I had to say. When I paused, there was no rejoinder, and my words dropped on them, one by one.

They waited for me, as men wait for rain, openmouthed, as if to catch the year's last showers. If I smiled at them, it was too good to be true, they watched my face for the least sign of favor.

In lordly style, I told them which course to take, and like a king amid his armies, I led them where I chose. (29:7-25)

By the beginning of his discourses with the “friends,” Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, his condition has dramatically changed. He is attacked by all, even those of the lowest social order. Those accustomed to the worst poverty and the contempt of all now enjoy the thrill of deriding the once high and mighty Job.

And now I am the laughing stock of my juniors, the young people, whose

\textsuperscript{560} See Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 84-90.

\textsuperscript{561} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{562} Girard's analysis disregards the opening prologue of the book (ch. 1-2) as well as the divine speeches and epilogue (ch. 38-42), which scholars agree were added by a later hand. See James Crenshaw, “The Book of Job,” \textit{Anchor Bible Dictionary}, vol 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday Books), 866. In fact, Girard regards these emendations as impediments to a proper understanding of the book’s genius, which is to be found in the discourses exchanged by Job and the friends. See Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 30, 46, 114.
fathers I did not consider fit to put with the dogs that looked after my flock. The strength of their hands would have been useless to me, enfeebled as they were, worn out by want and hunger. They used to gnaw the roots of desert plants, and brambles from abandoned ruins; And plucked mallow, and brushwood leaves, making their meals off roots of broom. Outlawed from the society of men, who, as against thieves, raised hue and cry against them, They made their dwellings on ravine’s steep sides, in caves or clefts of rock. You could hear them wailing from the bushes, as they huddled together in the thistles. Their children are as worthless a brood as they were, nameless people, outcasts of society. And these are the ones that now sing ballads about me, and make me the talk of the town!

[...]

They have cut me off from all escape, there is no one to check their attack. They move in, as though a wide breach, and I am crushed beneath the rubble. Terrors turn to meet me, my confidence is blown away as if by the wind; my hope of safety passes like a cloud. (30:1-9, 13-15)

Job was once the idol of his community, and now he is the object of its scorn. He is at the center of a persecution he describes in terms very similar to the ones used by the psalmist.

And now ill will drives me to distraction, and a whole host molests me, Rising like some witness for the prosecution, to utter slander to my very face. In tearing fury it pursues me, with gnashing teeth. My enemies whet their eyes on me, and opening gaping jaws. Their insults strike like slaps in the face, and all set on me together. Yes, God has handed me over to the godless, And cast me into the hands of the wicked. (16:7-11)

Amid the uproar they come on in waves; over me rolls the terror. (30:14-15)

It has thrown me into the mud where I am no better than dust and ashes. (30:19)

Traditional understandings of the book of Job regard it as a kind of meditation on the problem of evil, a “search for divine presence,” or the story of a courageous
rebel’s confrontation with the inscrutability of divine providence. It is clear from Job’s own words that his principal concern is the collective persecution of which he is at the center as its victim. Girard places the blame for the general failure to recognize the principal theme of Job’s discourses on the content of the introductory prologue (1-2) and the concluding divine speeches (38-42). Girard agrees with the overwhelming scholarly consensus that these chapters are later additions to the book. Their effect, he argues, is to distract from the subject matter of the true work of genius and the locus of the book’s inspiration, the progress of the collective persecution that unfolds in the dialogues between Job and the friends. For the sake of his analysis Girard sets these passages aside except to comment that in spite of modern scholarship’s awareness of their inauthenticity, they still seem to dictate the manner in which Job’s discourses are understood.

The friends with whom Job dialogues during the course of the work play an essential role in this persecution. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and then later Elihu whose speeches are given much later in the book, function as something like emissaries of the crowd that gathers around Job. Their speeches to Job are their


564 Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 15. These other philosophical and theological issues may be relevant to Job’s story, but Job confronts them within the specific condition of a victim confronted by an attacking mob.

565 Of the prologue, for example, Girard comments, “The short narrative is not on the same level as the dialogues and should not be taken seriously.” Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 3. Regarding the divine discourses that conclude the book, he writes, “This God poses the problem in the deceptive way that has prevailed ever since: he pushes aside anything that has to do with Job’s relations with his community—the best way of neutralizing the subversive force of Job’s speech,” Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 141.
attempts to convince him to accept the condemnation of the community that has
turned on him. The substance of their argument is the presentation of a kind of
theology of persecution, a grandiose and terrifying metaphysical vision that
magnifies the enormity of the unanimity of the persecuting crowd for the sake of
mobilizing yet more persecutors and further intimidating victims. It is a
mythological supplement that adorns the crowd in a way analogous perhaps to the
feathers and paint worn by ancient soldiers in order to increase their stature and
ferocious appearance. Bildad elaborates the magnitude and scope of the heavenly
economy that now ranges against Job. The “wicked man,” that is, the one deemed so
by the crowd’s accusation, is liable to terrible punishments at the hands of powerful
spiritual forces.

Disease devours his flesh, death’s first born gnaws his limbs.
He is torn from the shelter of his tent, and dragged before the King of Terrors.
The Lilith makes her home under his roof, while people scatter brimstone on
his holding. (18:13-15)566

These sorts of heavenly avengers—“death’s first born,” “the King of Terrors,”
“Lilith”—are found consistently throughout archaic religions. They are the Erinyes
of Greek myth and the Valkyries of the Norse.567 Examined within both their
mythological framework and their social operation, they come to be recognized as
fantastic exaggerations of the mobilized community, the community unanimous in

566 Girard cites a note given in The Jerusalem Bible: “The King of Terror, a figure from oriental
and Greek mythology (Nergal, Pluto, etc.) seems here to have infernal spirits (Furies) at his command
to plague the wicked man even during his lifetime [...] Lilith, another figure of popular legend, is a
female demon, [...] Brimstone produces, or is symbolic of sterility and is possibly (in this passage) a
precaution against infection.” Quoted in Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 30.

567 Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 28.
war with its enemies.\textsuperscript{568} They are the product of the persecutorial imagination that flatters the galvanizing power of unanimous violence by bestowing upon it a mystical grandeur.

Zophar patiently explains that collective persecutions are the enactment of a divine wrath that falls only on the guilty, never the innocent. The punishment and ensuing misery are themselves the best evidence of guilt. Nothing less than the judgment of heaven and earth is disclosed in the collective persecution.\textsuperscript{569}

Since he once destroyed the huts of poor men, and stole other’s houses when he should have built his own, since his avarice could never be satisfied, now his hoarding will not save him; since there was nothing ever escaped his greed, now his prosperity will not last.

[...]

On him God looses all his burning wrath, hurling against his flesh a hail of arrows

[...]

The heavens lay bare his iniquity, the earth takes its stand against him. A flood sweeps his house away, and carries it off in the Day of Wrath. Such is the fate God allots to the wicked, such his inheritance assigned by God. (20:19-21; 23; 27-29)

Job insists on his own innocence, but this means little to his persecutors. The mere fact that he has become the object of universal scorn confirms his guilt. He may forget his crimes, but heaven never will, and the friends have come to help him see that he is best served by admitting his guilt and accepting his punishment.

Not only does Job insist on his own innocence, he approaches the violent mysticism of the friends with a coarse and cynical realism that participates in and

\textsuperscript{568} Ibid., 125. “The real life executioners and the supernatural warriors are one in the same.”

\textsuperscript{569} The accusations of theft and greed leveled by Zophar recall the plaintive question asked by the speaker in Psalm 69:5, “Must I now restore/What I did not steal?”
extends the realism characterizing the Bible. He knows that they have come before him to ensure the success of an episode of scapegoating, and he makes it clear that he will not be their willing participant. At decisive moments in his dialogues Job gives clear indications that he knows the friends’ game as well as they do. In spite of their claims of heaven ordained justice and divine necessity, Job insists with scathing sarcasm that the friends might have just as easily pointed the crowd in the direction of any number of likely victims, including, for example, an orphan.

Fair comment can be borne without resentment, but what is the basis for your strictures? Do you think mere words deserve censure, desperate speech that the wind blows away? Soon you will be casting lots for an orphan, and selling your friend at bargain prices! Come, I beg you, look at me: as man to man, I will not lie. Relent, and grant me justice; relent, my case is not yet tried. Is falsehood to be found on my lips? Cannot my palate tell the taste of misfortune? (6:25-30)

Job consistently displays a remarkable intelligence of the kinship between himself and other likely victims of mob violence, those who are exceptional and vulnerable, albeit for reasons different from Job. In a retort to Eliphaz he remarks that he has become a tophet, a thing of shame and an object of abuse.

I have become a byword among the people, and a creature on whose face to spit (tophet). (17:6)

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Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 23. “In contrast to Job, whose language in the passages that describe his experience as a victim is as crudely realistic as the theme it describes, the three friends adopt a style that befits their presumed grandeur. Although there are plenty of concrete details, they are couched in the style of the religious epic.”
The tophet is the thing of shame and public execration indicated in this translation from The Jerusalem Bible. The word itself, however, is a reference to the place of shame referred to by the Prophet Jeremiah where “the sons of Judah” sacrificed their children to the pagan god Molech. Job’s identification with the orphan and a particularly heinous instance of child sacrifice indicates that he recognizes that he is the object of the same dynamic of collective persecution and victimization to which these other stereotypical victims are subject. In another telling passage Job declares,

As for you, you are only charlatans, physicians in your own estimation. I wish someone would teach you to be quiet—the only wisdom that becomes you! 13:3-5

This reference to the friends’ status as physicians ought to be understood in conjunction with “death’s first-born” referred to in 18:13, which The Jerusalem Bible indicates is a personification of the plague. “Death’s first born” is akin to the countless gods of mimetic contagion encountered throughout mythologies. These are countered and opposed by the “medicine” of medicine men and shamans who operate by “purifications and eliminations,” by violent sacrifices, in other words, or

571 Girard describes the etymology of “tophet” in Job: The Victim of His People, 73. See also Jer 7:30-34: “Yes, the sons of Judah have done what displeases me—it is Yahweh who speaks. They have put their abominations in the Temple that bears my name, to defile it; they have built the high place of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters; a thing I never commanded, a thing that never entered my thoughts. So now the days are coming—it is Yahweh who speaks—when people will no longer talk of Topheth, or the Valley of Ben-hinnom, but of the valley of Slaughter. Topheth will become a burial ground, for lack of other space; the corpses of this people will feed the birds of heaven and beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to drive them away.”


573 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 246-248. Girard discusses the significance of “Chief Pestilence” in a Tsimshian myth. Of this divine chief Girard notes, “... Chief Pestilence incarnates all the successive aspects of violence; master of deformities and metamorphoses, sole arbiter of the ultimate game, he plays the same role as Dionysus in The Bacchae.” He is master, in other words, of the plague as understood in the last chapter, the frequently employed sign of the violent crisis of differences.
other ritual gestures that approximate the cathartic effect of sacrifice. Job recognizes in the words of the friends the *modus operandi* of archaic holy men. He realizes they mean to make of him a “marvelous drug” by which to cure whatever pestilential mimetic crisis afflicts the community.

Job also reports the effectiveness of their medicine. He observes the ameliorating effect his persecution has already begun to have on the community. As the community unites against him, even those at the community’s margins find themselves welcome in the crowd that gathers around him. Everyone from the children of his social inferiors (30:1) to the outlaws who hide in “caves and clefts of rock” (30:6), all the “nameless people” (30:8), now find themselves rubbing elbows with the likes of Eliptah, Bildad, and Zophar. By their participation in the condemnation of Job they occupy at last an honored place in the community that normally holds them in contempt and forces them, literally, to its margins. The condemnation of Job becomes a rare occasion for them to “participate in a recognized social activity.”

We receive through Job the view of the victim as he watches the community become unanimous at his expense. Job reports to us, in other words, the social efficacy of scapegoating.

Just men grow more settled in their ways, those whose hands are clean add strength to strength.

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574 Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, 79.
575 Ibid., 71.
576 Ibid., 79.
577 Ibid., 71.
Come, then, all of you: set on me once more! (17:9-10)

Job’s defiance in the face of his persecutors is extraordinary, and indeed threatens the success of the friends’ medicine, which explains the relentlessness of their attempts to persuade him to accept the community’s condemnation. Complete unanimity requires the participation of the victim himself, which Job refuses to grant them. Job’s consistent denial of the accusations of the friends points once again to the decisive difference between the Bible and pagan literature. In the story of Oedipus, for example, Oedipus not only relents before the accusations directed at him, he becomes his own most vigorous accuser, and carries out his own condemnation.\(^578\)

A great deal is at stake in the endeavor to elicit the victim’s self condemnation. The totality proposed by the accusers must be seamless. The exceptionless unanimity of the crowd and the grandiose theological vision of the friends reciprocally reinforce each other. The latter serves to emphasize the pointlessness of any attempt to oppose the former. The friends are aware, at least implicitly, that any counter example to the unanimity of the crowd is a dangerous threat. If the victim insists on his or her own innocence, it may come to pass that the accusers will imitate this self-exoneration rather than the accusation intended to cure the plague. The victim’s cries of innocence may well turn out to be the loose thread by which the entire garment is unraveled. For this reason the friends labor

\(^{578}\) Just as bewildering, Oedipus quickly and inexplicably abandons the issue of whether a single man killed Laius or many assailants, a discrepancy in the case against him that was certainly cause to question the possibility that he was the killer of his father. See Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, 39.
mightily to elicit from Job a condemnation of himself. Before he can be crushed physically, Job must be crushed spiritually, “with speeches.” (19:2).

The browbeating meted out to Job is a consistent feature of persecutions, and they are often successful. The sort of self-condemnation provided to persecutors by Oedipus has counterparts in many historical accounts of persecutions, including those of recent times. Self-condemnations are heard from the victims of medieval witch trials as well as the totalitarian show trials of the twentieth century. And coercion may not be sufficient to explain them. In these real world cases victims often seem hardly less eager than Oedipus to confess to fictional crimes, and even take a kind “somber glory” in them.579

The victim’s acceptance of his or her persecutors’ accusation is less strange than it at first seems. Job’s accusers, like all accusers, simply insist that their victim do what he or she has always done: imitate his or her neighbors. A great deal of life, perhaps nearly all of it, consists of the imitation of the patterns of behavior and the fashions in thought and language that we see in our neighbors. Within the context of a persecution all patterns of behavior reduce to the accusatory sign directed at the victim. Perhaps the theological vision of the friends becomes more comprehensible in light of this. We might regard it as an expression of the persecutors’ perception that the patterns of cultural signification have dissolved and monstrously recombined for one single purpose, to fuel the accusatory gesture by which they are restored to their ordinary form. The friends argue in so many words

579 Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 111, 129. See also, Girard, The Scapegoat, 64–65. “In our own time all forms of Stalinism find viperous victims who will confess far more than is asked of them, and rejoice in the just punishment that awaits them.”
that the entire edifice of cultural signification, all that Job relies on in order to
determine the content of reality, the whole of heaven and earth, in other words,
insists on his guilt. How could anyone even conceive of contradicting such a
judgment? To do so would constitute a kind of unthinkable blasphemy.

Not even Job can resist indefinitely the logic of the tide swelling against him.
We have heard him resist with biting sarcasm the accusations of his friends, but he
is heard consistently to relent on one essential point in the case against him, that
God himself has found fault with him. This is the one article that Job is unable to
refute, and so is brought to the brink of relenting before his accusers.

Suppose that I have gone astray, suppose I am even yet in error:
It is still true, though you think you have the upper hand of me and feel that
you have proved my guilt,
That God, you must know, is my oppressor, and his is the net that closes
around me. 19:4-6

Girard’s analysis highlights the significance of this passage and others like it that
contain what he refers to as Job’s “lapses.”580 According to his reading, Job begins
his engagement with the friends as a kind of secularist as regards his persecution.
He dismisses and derides it, Girard claims, as an entirely human phenomenon.581 As
the discourses unfold, the pressure exerted by the friends eventually wears him
down to the point where he nearly confesses. The lapses come only later, and
indicate that he has relented somewhat under the weight of the accusations of the
friends and the crowd. Only then does he begin to accede to the notion that God has

580 Girard, Job: The Victim of His People, 124.

581 Ibid., 1. “He dwells heavily on the cause of his misfortune, which is none of those
mentioned in the prologue. The cause is not divine, satanic, nor physical, but merely human.”
condemned him and has sent upon him his celestial armies. Modern criticism of the book of Job lends some support to Girard's reading inasmuch as many scholars attribute a confusion to the later speeches of Job, noting that in some cases “Job seems to surrender to the friends' understanding of things...”\textsuperscript{582} Girard, of course, would eagerly affirm this and attribute it to Job's and every victim's liability to the influence of his or her accusers.

This reading is rendered problematic by two points. One, there is good reason to question the somewhat classic assessment that Job's later speeches differ to any significant degree from his earlier ones.\textsuperscript{583} There may be differences, but they are differences in degree rather than kind, and the degree of difference is not necessarily very great. This is underscored by the second point: it is simply the case that in none of his speeches does Job fail to indicate that God is the source of his sufferings. From beginning to end Job can be heard to attribute his miserable condition to the punishing hand of God.\textsuperscript{584} Girard's characterization of Job as at first absolutely resistant to the friends, then cracking under their pressure, then shoring himself up and reasserting his innocence lends the text a certain drama that may not

\textsuperscript{582} See Crenshaw, “The Book of Job,” 863: “Job’s arguments at this point [the third cycle of speeches] become wholly out of character. He seems to surrender to the friends’ understanding of things, which contradicts everything he has said previously and makes nonsense of what follows.” Girard insists that the divergence cannot simply be a matter of a textual confusion. See also Girard, \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 129: “The editors are probably right. There must have been interpolations, all kinds of manipulations, but the disorder is too profound for a purely philological solution. In some cases, it is clearly Job who is speaking; we cannot replace him with one of his friends and yet he speaks exactly like them. He sounds just like Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar in one of their fits of vengeance.”


\textsuperscript{584} “The arrows of Shaddai stick fast in me, my spirit absorbs their poison” (6:4). See also, 10:2, 12:9, 16:11, 19:6, and 23:16.
actually be present. This may be an instance where Girard’s textual analysis bears
evidence of a fault to which he himself confesses, a tendency to exaggerate the
revelatory power of some of the texts he discusses.585

Job does not separate God and the persecuting crowd so absolutely as Girard
indicates, nor yet does he identify them in the manner of archaic religion. He
occupies a kind of intermediate position between the two views, which as we shall
see, inspires a measure of theological creativity on his part. As in the case of archaic
religion, the divine judgment directed against Job is synonymous with that of the
crowd gathered around him. But this is not because God and the crowd actually are
synonymous as is the case in archaic religion. Job’s lament is that the friends and
their fellow persecutors have somehow gotten to God and convinced God of his guilt.
The punishment comes from God, but only because God is under a false impression
foisted upon him by the friends and the persecuting crowd.

I shall say to God, 'Do not condemn me, but tell me the reason for your
assault.
Is it right for you to injure me, cheapening the work of your own hands
and abetting the schemes of the wicked?
Have you got human eyes, do you see as mankind sees?
You who inquire into my faults and investigate my sins,
You know very well that I am innocent and that no one can rescue me from
your hand. (10:2-3; 6-7)

If only Job could get to God and plead his cause before him, God would recognize his
innocence and the injustice of all that is happening.

My lament is still rebellious, that heavy hand of his drags groans from me.
If only I knew how to reach him, or how to travel to his dwelling!

travaille sur un auteur, il se peut sans doute, que dans mon enthousiasme, j’exagère un peu la valeur
révélatrice de ce qu’il dit.”
I should set out my case to him, my mouth would not want for arguments. Then I could learn his defense, every word of it, taking note of everything he said to me. Would he use all his strength in his debate with me? No, he would have to give me a hearing. He would see he was contending with an honest man, and I should surely win my case. (23:2-7)

Job casts doubt on the identity of earthly condemnations and the judgment of God, even those that yield the startling social benefits he describes. While not quite the complete demystification of the divinity of vengeful crowds that Girard indicates, nor an approach by Job to atheism, Job’s opposition to the friends features a powerful challenge to the solidarity between persecuting crowds and the divine that archaic religions take for granted.

Job is caught between the rock of a religious vision not essentially different from that of the friends—that God is the cause of his downfall—and the hard place of his conviction that he is innocent of the crimes for which he is persecuted.

I swear by the living God who denies me justice, by Shaddai who has turned my life sour, that as long as a shred of life is left in me, and the breath of God breathes in my nostrils, my lips shall never speak untruth, nor any lie be found on my tongue. Far from admitting you to be in the right: I will maintain my innocence to my dying day.” (27:2-5)

Job attributes to God a transcendence that removes him from a direct identification with the vengeful crowd, but also renders him aloof as regards the plight of the crowd’s victims. The crowd is more numerous and makes a louder clamor and so gets its way. Job remains convinced, however, that the crowd will not have the last

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586 Girard, Quand ces choses commenceront, 60. “Il résiste et, ce faisant, il avance—en frôlant peut-être l’athéisme—vers une religion où Dieu ne serait pas solidaire des foules vengeresses.”
word. As though grasping desperately for a court of higher appeal he insists that an advocate for his cause will eventually give Job access to God. This “Redeemer”\textsuperscript{587} will enable Job to convince God of both his righteousness and the injustice of his persecutors.

This I know: that my Avenger lives, and he, the Last, will take his stand on earth. After my awaking, he will set me close to him, and from my flesh I shall look on God. He whom I shall see will take my part: these eyes will gaze on him and find him not aloof. (19:25-27)

The opposition of the Redeemer to God is a reflection of a tension that is present in the writings of the Old Testament. The Jews rejected both the violent sacrifices and the polytheism of the neighboring pagan cultures, and display an astonishing degree of intelligence with respect to collective persecution. On the other hand, vestiges of a notion of God as a violent historical agent remain evident. In the writings of the Prophets, which are the subject of the next section, we find what Girard refers to as an “intermediate religion”\textsuperscript{588} situated between archaic religions and a monotheism where divinity is fully divested of the violent projections of the archaic sacred. Something of an intermediate religion characterizes the Book of Job, where God still bears an intimate association with collective persecution even as he is no longer synonymous with it.

\textsuperscript{587} The Hebrew \textit{goel} in 19:25 is translated in various ways. “Redeemer” is the translation used by the \textit{King James Bible} and most others. The \textit{Jerusalem Bible} chooses “avenger.” The \textit{International Standard Version} uses “vindicator.” Girard also refers to the \textit{goel} as “the defender.” See \textit{Job: The Victim of His People}, 138.

\textsuperscript{588} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 227.
In the final speeches of the Book of Job we find divinity speaking once again, “from the heart of the tempest” (38:1). This God says nothing about Job’s innocence, nor does he refer to any aspect of Job’s relationship to his community. He is not exactly the God presented by the friends, nor can we be sure that he is in complete sympathy with Job. The portrait of God provided in the final speech does not reveal the scapegoat mechanism that Job faces down, and therefore, Girard concludes, he must be rooted in it. The effect of both the prologue and the concluding divine speeches has been to distract readers from the subversive content of Job’s dialogues. Nevertheless, Girard points out, they may yet be vindicated for having done the invaluable work of protecting the dialogues from those who would have excluded them from the Bible altogether, and by this preserved them until such time as their true genius could be integrated into a comprehensive religious vision.

3.13. The Prophets

For Girard, the Old Testament is a “long laborious exodus out of the world of violence and sacred projections.” The path of this exodus is not straight, nor is it without reversals, nor is it completed within the Old Testament itself. The Prophets represent an essential advance in humanity’s pilgrimage away from the archaic sacred, but they do not carry us all the way. As in the primitive history of Genesis,

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589 Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, 141-142.

590 Ibid., 144.

591 Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 43.
the Psalms, and the Book of Job, scapegoats come “increasingly to light” in the writings of the Prophets.\textsuperscript{592} The Prophets further the progress of the Bible’s work of dismantling the archaic system from which these projections draw their strength by subverting the three pillars of archaic religion: myth, prohibition or taboo, and the sacrificial cult.

As noted earlier, in the Pentateuch we encounter stories that may have originated as texts of persecution along the lines of what we have examined in mythology. Girard speculates, for example, that Joseph’s cloak, which his brothers dip into the blood of a slaughtered goat as false evidence for Jacob of Joseph’s death (Gen 39:31), is likely a vestige of an earlier version of the story wherein Joseph is simply killed by his brothers.\textsuperscript{593} In the prophetic literature the connection to mythological stories is broken completely. The Prophets have set aside entirely “mythical or legendary accounts.”\textsuperscript{594} The prophetic world is fully human and historical. The main event of history is the Exile, which is understood as the dissolution of the society into conflict as a result of the exhaustion of sacrificial systems.\textsuperscript{595}

The Jews had sacrifices of their own that formed the center of the activity of the Jewish Temple, but the Prophets minimize their significance and consistently provide strong critiques of the practice, often indicating a tremendous intelligence

\begin{footnotes}
\item[593] Ibid., 154.
\item[594] Ibid., 155.
\item[595] Ibid., 155.
\end{footnotes}
of the kinship of all violent sacrifices, from the human sacrifices of the pagans to the animal sacrifice practiced in Jewish rituals.\textsuperscript{596} Again, we cannot expect from the Prophets expressions of a theoretical nature, but there are key passages where animal and human sacrifice are juxtaposed in telling ways, and which indicate that the Prophets had at least an intuition of a genealogical connection. The Prophet Micah, for example, indicates that as Israelites rely increasingly on sacrifice, they become increasingly alienated from justice, and the magnitude and monstrosity of their sacrifices escalate until finally it arrives at the practice of the sacrifice of children.\textsuperscript{597}

\begin{quote}
With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow before God most high?  
Shall I come before him with holocausts,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with myriads streams of oil?  
Shall I give my first-born for my crime,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
You have been told, O man, what is good,  
and what the Lord requires of you:  
Only to do the right and to love goodness,  
and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6-8)
\end{quote}

And where sacrificial rituals are promoted and legitimized, as in the writings of Ezekiel (Ez 44:15), they lack the essential features of their pagan counterparts, the attributes of the spectacle of violent cruelty.\textsuperscript{598} They are not directed as pagan

\textsuperscript{596} Ibid., 451. “Criticism of the cult of sacrifice by pre-exilic prophets is played down by the majority of commentators, whether they are religious or irreligious by persuasion, Jewish or Christian, Protestant or Catholic.”

\textsuperscript{597} Ibid., 452.

\textsuperscript{598} Ibid., 451.
sacrifices are “to suffering and death.” The essence of the Passover ritual, for example, is the fellowship of the common meal.

The prophetic imagination draws strength from Israelite sacrifices only inasmuch as they recall the “historical and historically effective situation.” The Passover ritual inspires not because of the violence of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, but because it recalls God as known by the salvation he effects for his people in their experience of history. The Passover recalls the liberation of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, and prepares for a similar understanding of their experience of exile and return. Indeed, the Prophets condemn the “profuse sacrifices” of their own decadent time by contrasting it with the period of the Exodus when no sacrifices were possible because of the absence of sacrificial animals. The relative insignificance of sacrificial rituals to Old Testament Judaism is underscored by Judaism's survival of the extended “cultless” period associated with the Exile's disruption of national and cultural life.

The prophetic attitude towards the Law differs from that of the archaic sacred in fundamental ways. The “Thou shalt nots” of the Jewish Law are tremendously important to the Prophets as are its many other legal prescriptions,

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599 Ibid., 241.

600 Ibid., 239.


602 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 84.

603 Girard, Things Hidden, 451.

604 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 84.
but the prophetic interpretation of the significance of the Jewish Law is worlds apart from the archaic understanding of prohibition and taboo. Within the archaic context the primary object of prohibition and taboo is the prevention of the resemblances associated with the proliferation of mimetic rivalries and the onset of the crisis of differences. The underlying cause of the resemblances they dread remains unknown, which results in prohibitions that can seem arbitrary and entirely pointless. The greater awareness of the Prophets of the relationship of pride and envy to mimesis allows them to put forward a vision of the Jewish Law that overcomes the archaic conception of law as “a form of obsessive differentiation.”

The Prophets emphasize that real harmony and peace require more than the maintenance of cultural differentiation. The Prophets increasingly insist that the Law’s ultimate meaning lies in the fulfillment of the commandment that first appears in Leviticus, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18).

As in the case of the primordial history of Genesis, the Prophets do not offer us a theoretical explanation of mimetic desire and its relationship to violence. However, the Prophets invariably trace Israelite idolatries to the influence of neighboring cultures who are the object of Israelite envy. The Prophets describe the imitation of these practices in terms of “going after” or “following after” the gods of the foreign peoples. Disordered desire, sinful behavior, and idolatry are nearly


606 Ibid.

607 The Book of Deuteronomy formulates the first commandment in these terms. “You shall not follow other gods” (6:14). See also Jg 2:12: “They went after other gods.” The Israelites desire for
synonymous for the Prophets, and these together lead invariably to the violence of sacrifice.

The Prophet Ezekiel, for example, invents the female personifications Oholah and Oholibah to describe Samaria and Jerusalem (Ez 23). Ezekiel portrays these women as harlots and adulteresses and so condemns the idolatry of the Jewish people in terms of the tradition set forth in Hosea where Israel is likened to a faithless bride who abandons her true bridegroom, the Lord God. These personifications lend themselves to two purposes. The Prophet can condemn the idolatries of his contemporaries in the same terms as his prophetic predecessors:

Oholah became a harlot faithless to me; she lusted after her lovers, the Assyrians, warriors dressed in purple, governors and officers, all of them attractive young men, knights mounted on horses. Thus she gave herself as a harlot to them, to all the elite of the Assyrians, and she defiled herself with all those for whom she lusted with all of their idols. (Ez 23:6-7)

He can also condemn the sexual practices of his contemporaries in terms they undoubtedly do not expect. In telling passages, the Prophet condemns the sexual excesses of his predominantly male audience as being the result of their obsession with impressive foreign men. Ezekiel's critique seems to presume a vision of the triangularity of mimetic desire within the realm of human sexuality, where the disordered appetite for heterosexual sex must be understood in terms of a disordered homosexual fascination with the models of sexual desire. The Jewish appetite for sexual excess must be understood in terms of an implicit homosexual

a king, for example, was the direct result of their admiration for the political arrangements of foreign nations. See also I Sam 8:5-9. Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 78.

608 The Catholic Study Bible, 1056.

fascination with the models of the "exquisite virility" they admire. Ezekiel graphically places before the face of his audience the real nature of their desires.

She began whoring worse than ever, remembering her girlhood, when she had played the whore in the land of Egypt, when she had been infatuated by profligates big-membered as donkeys, ejaculating as violently as stallions. (Ezek 23:20)

The inversions proposed by Ezekiel—the Israelite men in the role of female harlots, lusting after Assyrian men—are best understood in light of the mimesis implicit in Ezekiel’s critique of their desire as well as their imitation of pagan sacrificial practices.

These desires, warns Ezekiel, will betray them. Just as the prestige of Job booms and then busts, so too their desires, inflated by mimesis, will collapse from overfeeding. The object of their envy will return to destroy them.

I will now stir up your lover against you, those with whom you are disgusted, and I will bring them against you from every side: the men of Babylon and all Caldea, Pekod, Shoa and Koa, along with those of Assyria, attractive young men, all them governors and officers, charioteers and warriors, all of them horsemen. (Ez 23:22-23)

All of the Prophets share the vision whereby attractiveness of the sacrifices of the pagans originates in the same disordered desires they feed and flatter:

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610 Girard regards certain depictions of the great novelists as pointing to exactly this homosexual component of otherwise heterosexual desire. Rather than regarding Dostoevsky’s Pavel Pavlovitch from The Eternal Husband as exhibiting a “latent homosexuality” along the lines of Freud’s descriptions, his obsession with his male counterpart Veltchaninov ought to be understood as an expression of his fascination for the male model of his sexual desire for women. See Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 47-48. “An attempt should be made to understand at least some forms of homosexuality from the standpoint of triangular desire... Certain passages of The Eternal Husband clearly show the beginning of an erotic deviation towards the fascinating rival.” Girard quotes Proust’s The Captive where he articulates the same insight: “It would fall to our lot, were we better able to analyze our loves, to see that often women rise in our estimation only because of the dead weight of men with whom we have to compete for them, although we can hardly bear the thought of that competition; the counterpoise removed, the charm of the woman declines.” See also, Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, 160.
How can you say, “I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals?”
Consider your conduct in the Valley, recall what you have done:
A frenzied she-camel, coursing near and far breaking away toward the desert,
Snuffing the wind in her ardor who can restrain her lust?
No beasts need tire themselves seeking her; in her month they will meet her. (Jer 2:23)

Girard helps us understand the precise connection between immoral behavior and the violent sacrifices that the Prophets are continually heard to condemn in nearly the same breath. The Prophets implicitly understand the wild sensuality of immorality to be a species of mimetism that leads inevitably to the mimetism of violence, abusive injustices of all kinds, and violent sacrifice. Out of control desires of all sorts enflame the passions and create an emotional, psychological, and spiritual disorder that is liable to the purification offered by the violent spasm of sacrifice. The one honing a keen appetite for sensual delights will inevitably find he or she has also famished a craving for the wild thrill of vengeance that adds to the allure of sacred rituals directed towards helpless victims.

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel, for the Lord has a grievance against the inhabitants of the land: There is no fidelity, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. False swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery! in their lawlessness, bloodshed follows bloodshed. (Hosea 4:1-3)

Rather, it is your crimes that separate you from your God, It is your sins that make him hide his face

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611 This reference to the “Valley” is a reference to the Valley of Ben-himmon where the Israelites practiced child sacrifice.
so that he will not hear you.
For your hands are stained with blood,
your fingers with guilt;
Your lips speak falsehood,
and your tongue utters deceit.

[...]
Their works are evil works,
and deeds of violence come from their hands.
Their feet run to evil,
and they are quick to shed innocent blood; (Is 59:2-3; 6-7)

By the mimetic conception of desire and violence we can understand the Prophets
when they speak of sin as though synonymous with violence. All sin ends in
violence, and the appetite for violence inevitably orients itself towards vulnerable
surrogates.612

3.14. The Day of the Lord and the Wrath of God

The religious thought of the Prophets represents a milestone in humanity’s
progress towards overcoming the notion of sacred violence, but it “has not yet
succeeded in freeing itself completely from concepts that derive their structure from
transcendent violence.”613 A lingering attachment to the notion of divine violence is
signaled in the Old Testament’s characterization of the “Day of the Lord,” or the “Day
of Yahweh,” as Girard prefers. The presentation of this notion shows that the God of
the Old Testament is “stripped of violence, but not completely so.”614 We see in it
the Prophets’ expectation that the power of God will be manifested in a final,

612 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 47, 88.
613 Girard, Things Hidden, 227.
614 Ibid., 200.
decisive vengeance, one reversed and redirected from persecuted to persecutor, towards the forces of evil “on behalf of the chosen.”

The expectation of a similar reversal appears in the Psalms and other passages that recall the Psalms in both form and content. Whereas in mythology and ritual violence moves from the crowd towards the single victim, in these instances it moves from the single victim to the crowd. These passages express the hope that God will enter into history as a violent antagonist ready to contribute one final, decisive reprisal against the unjust. One such text is a passage from II Samuel where King David sings his gratitude to God for his victory over his enemies.

O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock of refuge! My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior from violence, you keep me safe [...]
The breakers of death surged around me, the floods of perdition overwhelmed me, The cords of the nether world enmeshed me, the snares of death overtook me. In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to God; From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry reached to his ears. The earth swayed and quaked; the foundations of the heavens trembled and shook when his wrath flared up [...]
He reached out from on high and grasped me; he drew me out of the deep waters. He rescued me from my mighty enemy, from my foes, who were too powerful for me. They attacked me on my day of calamity, but the Lord came to my support [...]
For who is God except the Lord?

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615 Ibid., 200-201.
Who is a rock save our God?

[...
You girded me with strength for war;
you subdued my adversaries beneath me.
My enemies you put to flight before me
and those who hated me I destroyed.
They cried for help—but no one saved them;
to the Lord—but he answered them not
[...
You rescued me from the strife of the people;
you made me head over nations
[...
The Lord lives! And blessed be my Rock!
Exalted be my God, rock of my salvation.
O God who granted me vengeance,
who made peoples subject to me
and helped me escape from my enemies,
Above my adversaries you exalt me
and from the violent man you rescue me.
(II Sam 22 2-3, 5-8, 17, 32, 40-42, 47-49)

The presence of the sacrificial crisis here is unmistakable. The “breakers of death” (22:3), the “deep waters” (22:7), and the trembling foundations of the earth (22:8) point to a generalized effacement of differences. King David is evidently the polarizing target of the crisis. God’s intervention on King David’s behalf does not eliminate these phenomena, but reverses their direction. The miraculous power of God makes the attacking crowd subject to an overwhelming violence that God exercises by lending it to the one who would otherwise have been the crowd’s victim. The floodwaters of violence do not engulf him, but are turned, rather, on his persecutors.616

616 A similar reversal is signaled in the Song of Moses from the book of Deuteronomy: “If they had insight they would realize what happened, they would understand their future and say, ‘How could one man rout a thousand, or two men put ten thousand to flight, unless it was because their rock sold them up and the Lord delivered them up?’ Indeed, their ‘rock’ is not like our Rock, and our foes are under condemnation.” (Deut 32:29-30)
We can see in this text and the others already considered that the sacred author has been freed of the worst of the delusions of the archaic sacred. He is capable of seeing beyond the false accusations of hysterical mobs to the innocence of their victims, and denies to persecuting crowds the last word in transcendence. He does not, however, deny to violence itself the last word in transcendence. The sacred authors envision violence acting on behalf of the innocent, but do not overcome the notion of a divine violence altogether. The projection onto the divine of the human appetite for vengeance, the projection animating the archaic sacred, still clings to the religious vision of the Prophets. And in the course of this projection the very worst aspects of the human appetite for violence and cruelty are attributed to God. God’s wrath is hardly less “brutally arbitrary” than its human counterpart. This is seen not only in the Prophets; it is present throughout the entire Old Testament. Consistently God is seen to transform from a “life giving benefactor” to a “deadly agent of violence” with little provocation. After calling Moses to lead the Jews out of Egypt, for example, the Lord meets him on the way back to Egypt with the intention of killing him because he has not circumcised his son. Moses’ death would thwart the design to which God has just ordained him, and only the bloody foreskin of his son touched to Moses’ foot diverts God’s wrath (Ex

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617 Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 55.


619 Ibid., 57.
The descriptions of God’s violence even bears some measure of the sadism that characterizes the unrestrained vengeful spirit.

I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. (I Sam 15:2-3)

Hear the word of the Lord! You shall say to the southern forest. Thus says the Lord God: See! I am kindling a fire in you that shall devour all trees, the green as well as the dry. The blazing flame shall not be quenched, but from south to north every face shall be scorched by it. Everyone shall see that I, the Lord have kindled it, and it shall not be quenched. (Ez 21:3-4)

Thus says the Lord: See! I am coming at you; I will draw my sword from its sheath and cut off from you the virtuous and the wicked. Thus my sword shall leave its sheath against everyone from south to north, and everyone shall know that I, the Lord, have drawn my sword from its sheath, and it shall not be sheathed again. (Ez 21:8-10)

See now, says the Lord God, my anger and my wrath will pour out upon this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruits of the earth; it will burn without being quenched. (Jer 7:20)

God seems to take a “secret pleasure” in killing and loses himself in his violence, delighting in the prospect of killing man and beast, women and children, the just and the unjust alike. These descriptions display the characteristics of an all too human spirit of vengeance in extremis, because that is precisely their origin.

Schwager notes that this text “hints at an original meaning for circumcision.” The larger violent and bloody act by which Moses would be killed is diverted by the smaller, cultic act of cutting off the foreskin of his son. This gesture forms a close analogy with sacrifice itself whereby the larger violence of the crisis of differences is diverted towards a single victim whose absorption of the violence preserves the larger community. See Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 56.

Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 59.

“He manifests his might and glory through warfare and holds court like a wrathful avenger. No other topic is as often mentioned as God’s bloody works. A theology of Old Testament revelation that does not specifically deal with this grave and somber fact misses from the very start one of the most central questions and thus will hardly find the right perspective for a profound understanding of the revelation event. Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats, 55.
3.15. God’s Wrath and the Violent Hordes

In the Prophets God is never himself the direct cause of killing as he is in stories such as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24), or in the case of the final plague of Egypt (Ex 11:1-12:36), or as he threatens to be in the case already considered where Moses fails to circumcise his son (Ex 4:24-26). According to the Prophetic understanding, God’s wrath is enacted through the “violent hordes” he sends upon Israel as a punishment for them.\(^{623}\)

I will pour out my indignation upon you, breathing my fiery wrath upon you; I will hand you over to ravaging men, artisans of destruction. (Ez 21:36)

In Jeremiah God is heard to explain to the Babylonians that he will use them as the instrument of his wrath.

You are my hammer
my weapon for war;
With you I shatter nations,
with you I destroy kingdoms.
With you I shatter horse and rider,
with you I shatter chariot and driver
With you I shatter man and wife,
with you I shatter old and young,
with you I shatter youth and maiden. (Jer 51:20-22)

In these passages the Prophets deploy a theology similar to that of the friends in the Book of Job. Both the Prophets and the friends find God in the whirlwind, the swirling chaos that is rendered a mobilized horde by a target marked out for destruction. In spite of the remarkable extent to which the Prophets overcome the archaic sacred, we see that they still owe some measure of their inspiration to it. The vengeful spirit of unanimous violence still colors their vision.

\(^{623}\) Ibid., 91.
3.16. The Suffering Servant

We have seen that an essential aspect of the Old Testament inspiration consists of a penetration and a deconstruction of the deceitful transcendence associated with the archaic sacred. The cornerstone of this inspiration is the Old Testament’s sympathy with the victims of collective persecution. We have seen too that this sympathy exists in an “unstable combination” with a notion of divine violence that is not altogether incommensurable with archaic religion. However, within the writings of the Prophet referred to as Second or “Deutero” Isaiah a “new dimension” opens up.\(^{624}\) Here we find a profound approach to the reality of the founding murder, the basis for sacrifice, in the descriptions of a mysterious “Servant” of the Lord. This “Suffering Servant’s” terrible plight is recounted in four grand poems that occur throughout Second Isaiah (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).\(^{625}\) Girard begins his analysis with the passages inaugurating Second Isaiah.

A voice cries: “In the desert prepare a way for the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley; Then the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa 40:3-5)

Girard recognizes in this passage the beginning of a sacrificial cycle that unfolds over the course of the Suffering Servant passages, but which is never quite fully

\(^{624}\) Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 129. Modern scholarship typically identifies two and in some cases three distinct authors active within the book of the prophet Isaiah. The writings of “proto-Isaiah” are found in chapters 1-39, and originate from the period preceding the Exile. The writings of “Deutero-Isaiah” 40-66 originate from within the period of the Exile itself. Some scholars ascribe 56-66 to a third Isaian author referred to as “Trito-Isaiah” who writes in the period following the Exile.

explicated. Here we see its beginning, the erosion of differences in the leveling of the earth, the toppling of mountains and the filling up of valleys. 626 This, Isaiah declares in the final verse, will be the occasion, as all successfully resolved sacrificial crises are, for a manifestation of the divine. This epiphany takes place in the passages describing the murder of the Suffering Servant who dies at the hands of “a hysterical crowd that mobs against him.”627 The descriptions the victim Servant recall the condition of Job:

He was spurned, avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,  
One of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.  
Yet it was for our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured,  
While we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins,  
Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,  
by his stripes we were healed.  
We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way;  
But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all. (53:3-6)

Here the perspective of the Servant’s persecutor is given, and he or she relates to us the ameliorating effects of the collective persecution of the Servant. A violent projection has taken place and its galvanizing, “healing” effects are noted. The role of God in this transfer is ambiguous. Verse six seems to confirm that God himself plays a decisive role in the efficacy of this transfer. For this reason Girard describes the Suffering Servant passages in terms nearly synonymous with the rest of the Prophetic literature, ascribing to them the characteristics of the “intermediate

626 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 29.  
627 Ibid., 30.
religion” encountered elsewhere in the Bible. Raymund Schwager, however, recognizes in the Suffering Servant passages a greater advance in the overcoming of violent projections. In his analysis of 53:6, for example, he notes that Hebrew does not make a clear distinction between “an active ‘causing’ and a passive ‘letting.’” On this basis he suggests an alternative translation to verse six:

But the Lord permitted us to throw all our sins upon him (53:6).

This modification casts 53:3-6 in a different light that harmonizes with other texts from the Servant Songs that suggest a role for God very different from we have seen so far.

The Lord God has given me a well trained tongue,
That I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear;
And I have not rebelled, have not turned back.
I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
My face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. (50:4-6)

The passage indicates an intimate relation between God and the Servant. The Lord gives his word personally, repeatedly, and generously, and this gift is not without effect (Is 55:11). The word given to the Servant strengthens him to “give his back” to his persecutors and to endure the mob’s cruelty and scorn. The word of God strengthens the Servant in the face of the hysterical mob, but in a manner very different from what we have seen in the other passages from the Old Testament. The Servant is strengthened to endure the mob’s abuse without retaliation.

628 Girard, Things Hidden, 227.
629 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 131.
630 Ibid.
word of God gives him the strength of flint, but in this case he is hardened not by resentment, nor in preparation for an act of vengeance. He is hardened to resist these very human responses to violence. He is hardened, paradoxically as we shall see, against the mimetism of the mob.

The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; Therefore I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. He who declares my innocence is near. Who will oppose me? Let us appear together. Who will dispute my right? Let them confront me. See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will declare me guilty? See, they will all wear out like a garment, consumed by moths. (50:7-9)

God gives to the Servant the power to overcome both the pagan response to the mob’s mimetism as well as the Jewish response as it is recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament. We remember that when confronted with the mimetism of collective persecution, Oedipus acknowledges its authority and joins himself to it. He takes up its accusation and makes it his own when he condemns himself and banishes himself from Thebes. No such response is seen in the Servant of the Lord. The accusations directed against him never shake his confidence in his own innocence and his solidarity with God. Nor does the Servant follow the precedent established elsewhere in the Old Testament by lashing out at his or her persecutors, a manner of resisting the crowd that is essentially an imitation of its violence. The Servant does not strike back, he does not curse his persecutors, nor does the Servant pray for divine vengeance as is the case in both the writings of the Jeremiah and the
Psalms. He yields to the evil directed against him and allows himself to be led “like a lamb to the slaughter” (53:7).

The Servant’s patient endurance of violence and steadfast perseverance in non-retaliation has a remarkable effect on his persecutors. They begin to lose confidence in the justice of their accusation. The song recorded in chapters fifty-two and fifty-three indicates that the suffering of the Servant will serve a grand purpose not only for the persecutors who now recognize his innocence, but for the whole world. The Servant resists the frenzied mimetism of the crowd with his patient and deliberate imitation of God, and in so doing extends a new mimesis through his persecutors to the whole world.

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him—so marred were his features, beyond that of mortals his appearance, beyond that of human beings—So shall he startle many nations, kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it. Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? [...] Because of his anguish he shall see the light; because of his knowledge he shall be content; My servant, the just one, shall justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear. Therefore I will give him his portion among the many, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, Because he surrendered himself to death, was counted among the transgressors,


632 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 133. “Here too Yahweh reveals himself in a most personal way and at the same time empowers his servant to adopt a completely new, nonviolent mode of behavior.”
Bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.  
(52:13-15; 53:1, 11-12)

The crowds are united by their victim, but in this instance they are gathered so they may behold what was quite literally unthinkable until that moment, his innocence. And with this acknowledgment, they too are reconciled with God.

The Suffering Servant songs are the crown of a development that unfolds across the Old Testament whereby the transcendence of Israel’s God is distinguished from that of the pagan gods in increasingly absolute terms. Originally the faith of Israel regards God as superior to the pagan gods without necessarily denying their existence. Israel gains in the confidence to deny their existence definitively as it comes to understand the efficacy of pagan sacrifices in increasingly human terms. The recognition of God’s absolute transcendence requires an understanding, at least implicit, of the role of mimetism and its deviated transcendence in the establishment of the hallucinatory transcendence associated with pagan sacrifice.633

As Israel deconstructs and demystifies the transcendence of violence, a distinctive aspect of her religious vision comes more clearly into view. Increasingly free from the spells of mimetism Israel’s religious vision of God becomes increasingly divested of the “impersonal and irrational.”634 We saw in chapter one that mimetism in extremis hurls itself headlong into any and all obstacles until it finds one it cannot overcome. Increasingly inanimate objects fascinate desire. Their

633 Ibid., 75.

634 Ibid., 133.
inert unresponsiveness and cruel indifference impress mimetism as a kind of self-sufficient self-possession. As mimetism escalates, desire moves from the personal, to the animal, to the mechanistic, and finally to the mineral, to the “impenetrable immobility of granite.” 635 This admiration of the inert and the irrational informs the understanding of the divine such that the highest divinity must be capable of the greatest irrationality and the greatest cruelty. The divine may display characteristics of personhood at different points within the mythological consciousness, but it manifests itself decisively in the relentless tide of fury that culminates in the spasm of sacrificial violence. The God presented in the Suffering Servant songs is divested of the mimetism of violence, and for precisely this reason is divested fully of the impersonal and irrational. 636 The steadfastness of the Suffering Servant against the tide of mimetism directed at him preserves him against its depersonalizing effects, and readies him to encounter the fully personal God.

One might well suspect the many Old Testament references to God as “the Rock” of being expressions of a religious imagination still fascinated by the impersonal and the irrational, still beholden, in other words, to the projections of the violent sacred. 637 But the flinty steadfastness of the Suffering Servant issues from his intimate encounter with a God who is fully personal, and fully non-violent. And the rock-likeness of God serves to establish rather than to diminish the

635 Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, 287.
636 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 133.
637 Is 8:14, 17:10, 26:4, 28:16, 30:29, 44:8, 48:21,
personalism that characterizes the terrible beauty of the songs. The mimetism of revenge has been left behind entirely. Even so, the understanding of God and humanity presented in the Suffering Servant amounts to a glimpse of a new possibility rather than a departure from the intermediacy characterizing the Old Testament. The Suffering Servant songs themselves did not prove capable of effecting a definitive break between Judaism and archaic religion. Within the history of Jewish thought the Suffering Servant passages play no significant role, “lying there, misunderstood, like an eccentric addition.” The incomprehension surrounding them demonstrates the need for a yet more luminous disclosure of God’s inner life and his freedom from the mimetism that humans are eager to project onto him. This revelation lying dormant within the songs of the Suffering Servant must receive a renewed emphasis so that they might become the center of a renewed religious vision. A new epiphany of the divine must occur that brings to light unambiguously this most precious content of Old Testament prophecy.

638 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 135.
4.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore Girard’s assessment of the New Testament. It will be seen that in his own terms, in the terms of the mimetic theory, Girard affirms the orthodox Christian view that regards the Old and New Testaments as thematically united, the New fulfilling the themes initiated and developed in the Old. The New Testament revelation resumes and advances to completion the Old Testament’s demystification of the archaic sacred and sacrifice, revealing a non-violent God. The suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus brings to completion the Bible’s two-fold revelation, theological and anthropological. In the Passion narratives of the Gospels we encounter what seems tantalizingly close in the writing of the prophets, especially Second Isaiah: an account of a collective persecution that provides the basis for understanding the true nature of the founding murder, sacrifice, and their precise relation to human nature and human culture. Here at last the innocence of the victim is asserted unambiguously not only as the truth, but as the highest truth. As we shall see, the truth revealed concerning the victimization of Christ is the key to all truth. The truth of the victim is the truth by which all truth is known.

4.2. Jesus’ Rejection at Nazareth

The book of Job records for us the terrible swing in Job’s fortunes from privileged aristocrat to the humiliated victim of his community. Job’s prestige swells as persons imitate each other’s admiration for him, but suddenly and for reasons Job cannot understand, this imitation reverses itself and hostile feelings quickly coalesce around him. He comes to be perceived to be the community’s obstacle, its skandalon, and mimesis fuels a startling about-face from admiration to contempt. Jesus experiences a similar event at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. The three synoptic evangelists record the event, but Luke highlights and underscores its importance by placing it at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry and by providing greater detail. During the course of the proceedings at the synagogue Jesus steps forward to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The passage he reads is from Isaiah 61:1-3, a text sometimes included among the songs of the Suffering Servant:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;} \\
\text{He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted,} \\
\text{To proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners,} \\
\text{To announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God;} \\
\text{To comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes,} \\
\text{To give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit. (61:1-3)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{Lk 4:16-30; cf. Mk 6:1-6; Mt 13:54-58.}\]

\[640 \text{ "I take the four Songs to be 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12, and regard 61:1-3 as fifth and final Song that brings the whole series to a climax." Barry G. Webb, The Message of Zecharaiah (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 42.}\]
As Jesus ends his recitation he announces that this passage is fulfilled in the hearing of his audience and sits down. The initial effect of his declaration is to unite all in admiration of him. Luke notes that, “the eyes of all in the synagogue are fixed on him” (4:20). They speak well of him and are “amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth” (4:22). Jesus realizes, however, that this admiration will not last long. In Matthew and Mark he anticipates the abrupt turnaround in his prestige by declaring that, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own native place” (Mk 6:4; cf. Mt 13:56). At this point Luke expands Jesus’ remarks considerably.

“I, indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian” (Lk 4:25-27).

These remarks trigger a sudden violent reaction. The synagogue congregation attacks Jesus and leads him to the “brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong” (4:29).

Jesus’ declaration indicates that his mission will extend to all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike, and foreshadows the mission of the Christian Church to non-Jewish peoples. Its effect on the congregation is similar to that of the violation of a taboo in the archaic context, and in fact they have something essential in common: both transgress a cultural difference that the community regards as essential to its existence. Jesus’ elevation of the Gentile outsider is perceived as obscuring the essential difference between the community’s “inside” and its “outside.” It

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precipitates, in other words, a kind of crisis of differences for the synagogue congregation, and we see them responding to it in the manner that archaic communities typically respond to effacements of cultural differences, with an act of collective violence that galvanizes the community at the expense of the transgressor.

Within this reaction can be seen an important aspect of Jesus’ indication that the words of the prophet are “fulfilled in your hearing.” The effacement of differences precipitated by Jesus is an outcome of his continuation of the preaching of Second Isaiah, where we hear that all those that communities typically regard as outsiders and are often made subject to violent exclusion—captive foreigners, widows, orphans, the disabled—are now shown to be the recipients of God’s blessing. Jesus takes up the work of Second Isaiah, and like the Suffering Servant described there, finds himself at the center of a violent crisis.

Commentators note that Nazareth is not actually built on a cliff, and the nearest cliff that could serve as a reliable means of execution is some miles away from the town. But it misses Luke’s point entirely to attribute his descriptions to a “vague awareness of Palestinian geography.” The mimetic theory helps us recognize that Luke’s description, while departing from geographical precision, furthers the theological and anthropological aims that he shares with the other evangelists. By his provocation of the collective violence of the people of Nazareth, Jesus foreshadows his intent to revisit the foundation of all “towns,” the foundation

\[\text{Is 42:7.}\]

of the human city itself. The introduction of the image of the cliff allows Luke to allude to what would have been well familiar to his circa-Mediterranean audiences, the Greek ritual of the *pharmakos*. Typically, the sacrificial victim, the *pharmakos* himself, would be stoned to death, but in areas such as Southern France where the geography allowed for it, the victim is known to have been forced off a cliff. These two methods of sacrifice share one essential feature: neither requires that the community come into direct contact with its victim. The victim will become sacred in his or her death, but in the moments preceding the decisive act of collective violence, he or she is the source of a dangerous contagion that requires keeping a safe distance.645

4.3. Jesus in the Temple Precinct

Luke depicts in the episode at Nazareth one of the preferred means by which the *pharmakos* was killed. In the Gospel of St. John we find the other, and we see too that Jesus’ would be killers are motivated by a similar concern as the congregation at Nazareth. Chapter eight of John’s Gospel features a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees that takes place in the Temple precinct. During the course of their discussion, Jesus obscures a difference even more sacred than that distinguishing Jew and Gentile. He identifies himself with the great “I am who I am” of Ex 3:14.

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM. (Jn 8:58)

Jesus’ interlocutors recognized that his identification as “I AM” was tantamount to a claim to share in the same “timeless being of the deity” as God himself. Jesus effaces, in other words, a difference that his opponents regarded as inviolable. Their response is the same as the congregation at Nazareth.

So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the Temple area. (Jn 8:59)

A similar incident occurs in Jn 10, once again in the Temple area. This time Jesus solemnly declares to the Pharisees, “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30), and the Pharisees once again take up stones against him. These attempts at stoning set the stage for a question more illuminating than first seems to be the case: Where did the would-be executioners of Jesus obtain their stones? One possibility considered by commentators is that the Temple was under construction at that time so loose stones were available in the vicinity. Another possibility takes on added significance in light of the mimetic theory. These stones may have been obtained from the cobbled pavement of the Temple precincts. In other words, the first step in the stoning of Jesus would have included a small but symbolically significant disassembly of the Temple precinct.

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647 Some commentators reject the idea that Jesus is claiming the being of deity here, indicating instead that he is merely claiming for himself the status of Messiah, but Girard’s analysis provides reason to suppose that the Pharisees were reacting specifically to the violation of fundamental categories such as that distinguishing God and humanity. See Francis Maloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 269.

In our examination of sacrifice we saw that sacrificial rituals follow the pattern provided by the original spontaneous crisis of differences that arises from the escalation of rivalries and the accumulation of *skandala* within the community. The sacrificial ritual is a conscious imitation of this original event, and functions by effecting a smaller, more controlled crisis of differences. The community “disassembles” itself, purposefully recreating a condition of undifferentiation in preparation for reestablishing difference by polarizing unanimously against a victim. The Pharisees do something similar in these episodes where they make attempts on Jesus’ life. Jesus’ transgression of inviolable hierarchies triggers a response among his enemies that exhibits the paradoxical feature of all sacred rituals: they run headlong into the very thing most feared. Their defense of the sacred order represented by the Temple begins with their own attack on it so they can violently assert it once more.

4.4. *...a murderer from the beginning*

As Jesus engages his would be killers in the Temple precinct, he declares that they do not carry out the will of the Father in heaven, the Father of Abraham and Jesus’ own Father (Jn 8:18; 8:40), but another spiritual authority, the devil, or Satan as he is called elsewhere. Their motivations and their methods follow the pattern of this one referred to by Jesus as “the prince of this world.”

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649 Jn 12:31; 14:40; 16:11.
You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. (Jn 8:44)

According to Girard, the New Testament’s presentation of Satan is synonymous with the single victim mechanism in all its phases. As such, Satan bears an intimate relation to the skandalon, as Jesus’ words to Peter at Caesarea Philippi suggest: “Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle (skandalon) to me” (Mt 16:23). In Hebrew “Satan” means “adversary,” which immediately suggests the rival who stands as an obstacle to desire, the one blocking the way to the desired object. In the New Testament we hear Satan referred to as “the accuser” (Rev 12:10), which calls to mind the decisive gesture of the single victim mechanism, the isolation and accusation of the victim. These two definitions, “adversary” and “accuser,” denote

650 René Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, trans. James Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 32. It must be noted that from the perspective of the official teaching of the Catholic Church, Girard provides an inadequate definition of Satan. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared that, “The Devil and the other evil spirits were created good in nature, but they became evil by their own actions.” Recent popes have reiterated this long standing teaching. Pope Paul VI declared, “It is a departure from the picture provided by biblical and Church teaching to refuse to acknowledge the devil’s existence; to regard him as... a conceptual and fanciful personification of the unknown cause of our misfortunes... Exeges and theologians should not be deaf to this warning.” Paul IV, “Christian Faith and Demonology,” L’Osservatore Romano, English edition (Rome, Italy), July 10, 1975. Pope John Paul II reiterated this teaching in the course of his pontificate, which echoes the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Strathfield, NSW: St Paul’s Publications, 2000), n. 391. Certain aspects of Girard’s descriptions of Satan resonate with the Church’s classic descriptions of him, but in the end it must be acknowledged that they fall short of the Church’s understanding of him as an independent spiritual being. See Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 87, 150, 183; see also, Girard, Battling to the End, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 175.

651 The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon indicates “adversary” as the primary translation of “Satan.” See Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 966. In the Greek of the New Testament, Satan is often referred to simply as “the accuser” as in Rev 12:10: “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser (καταγγέλων) of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses (κατηγορεῖ) them day and night before our God.” See note 72 in chapter two for a comment on the significance of the etymological relationship between “category” and “accusation.”
the beginning and end points of Satan’s course through the mimetic cycle.\textsuperscript{652} He is the adversary that mimetic doubles find in each other as \textit{skandala} proliferate in the midst of the community, and he is the accuser as these \textit{skandala} are gathered up and projected onto the single victim who stands before the community as its single \textit{skandalon}.\textsuperscript{653}

We have seen already that the rivalry associated with \textit{skandala} is transformed by the single victim mechanism into a generative force in human life, both in terms of social order and cultural forms. The New Testament does not fail to give the Devil his due in this regard, and we have heard already Christ refer to him as “the prince of the world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). We can understand the unifying power of collective accusation as the principle means by which Satan performs his princely role, maintaining for his subjects a fractured and tenuous peace. He fulfills his reputation as the “bearer of light” principally by means of sacrifice, which as we have seen plays a catalytic role in the development of cultural forms and signification.\textsuperscript{654} This constructive and ordering effect of Satan provides

\textsuperscript{652} “The problem arises when one attempts to select the best English equivalent for Heb \textit{satan}, especially since \textit{satan} lacks a cognate in any of the Semitic languages. The choice appears to be between ‘accuse,’ ‘slander,’ and ‘adversary.’” Victor P. Hamilton, “Satan,” The Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol 5, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 985-989. The connection between slander and the violent accusation of collective murder we have already seen in the Psalms where “slander on every side” (Ps 31:13) is the indication that the crowd is galvanizing against its victim. We see the concrete wisdom of the rabbis’ observation that to destroy a person’s reputation was tantamount to murder inasmuch as it served to isolate the victim in preparation for collective accusation. Ronald L. Eisenberg, 850 Intriguing Questions About Judaism: True, False, or In Between (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 94.

\textsuperscript{653} René Girard, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 199, 210. “…violence, in every cultural order, is always the true subject of the very ritual or institutional structure.” In Girard’s estimation, Satan is the collective personality of the community in the same way that the primitive gods are in ancient mythology.
the basis for the kinship between “the prince of this world” and the various spiritual powers that the authors of the New Testament epistles associate with earthly power and order.655 “The god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), and “the world rulers of the present darkness” (Eph 6:12), as well as the “principalities and powers” that are described as led away in defeat by Christ (Col 2:15), are all expressions of the dominion of the one who orders and builds by violent accusations and whose dominion extends over the whole world (1 Jn 5:19).656

4.5. The Katechon

Satan is truly “legion.”657 He is the true identity of the countless archaic gods, but whereas the archaic gods appear according to two “faces,” one destructive and the other benevolent, Satan in the Bible bears a single fearsome countenance.658 The integration of the two aspects of the skandalon in the same menacing figure already begins the deconstruction of the archaic sacred. In Satan the ameliorative powers of violent accusation are condemned as another of his terrible features, an


655 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 99-100.

656 V. Hamilton, “Satan,” ABD vol 5, 988. Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 95-96. “Principalities and powers are not identical with Satan, the powers are all his tributaries because they are all servants of the false gods that are the offspring of Satan, that is, the offspring of the founding murder.”

657 “My name is Legion. There are many of us” (Mk 5:15).

658 Girard, Things Hidden, 162.
aspect of his deceitful activity that will be disclosed as such by God in the course of history as God’s revelation comes to its fullness. St. Paul’s elusive reference to the mysterious “restrainer” (katechon) in 2nd Thessalonians can be understood in this light.

And now you know what is restraining (katechôn), that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. But the one who restrains (katechon) is to do so only for the present, until he is removed from the scene. (2 Thess 2:6-7)

This katechon or “restrainer” performs the same historical role as Satan, and operates according to the same two-faced method as the single victim mechanism, restraining the outbreak of uncontrolled violence by the “lawlessness” of collective accusation. Neither Satan nor the katechon are merely synonymous with these original forms. In later historical periods such as our own the katechon will operate through other institutional forms, but they are united by their use of violence to maintain order. As with the sacred, what may be said of the katechon may be said of violence itself, and points to the root of all political order in the distinction made within archaic religion between sacred and profane violence. In all historical periods humanity has need of distinguishing the beneficent violence associated with the maintenance of order and peace from the malevolent variety associated with social chaos.659 St. Paul in 2nd Thessalonians articulates succinctly an essential aspect of the New Testament’s apocalyptic message: owing to the activity of God within history, social institutions will steadily lose the ability to make positive use of violence. The distinction of “lawful” and “lawless” has replaced the archaic

distinction of “sacred” and “profane” as descriptions of violence, but the same fate
awaits both distinctions. As history advances violence will escalate beyond the
ability of violent social mechanisms to transform it to social benefit, and eventually
violence eventually appear only in a destructive aspect.660

At the heart of the New Testament’s apocalyptic vision is this movement
whereby the archaic ambivalence towards violence steadily gives way to the Satanic
univocity. The pagan consciousness regards the two-facedness of the gods as a
durable partnership of two stable aspects, one that can last indefinitely, even
eternally.661 Jesus makes clear that he regards it to be a contradiction that dooms
Satan to destruction. The clearest expression occurs in Jesus’ response to
accusations directed at him suggesting that he casts out demons by the power of
“Beelzebul,” “the prince of demons.”

‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that
kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will
not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided,
he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. (Mk 3:23-26)

We can see how easily the language of Satan and demonic possession translates into
the language of scandal, as the full text of Mt 16:23 suggests:

Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God
does, but as human beings do.

660 René Girard, Celui par qui le scandale arrive (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 148-150.

661 This aspect of archaic religion reemerges in modern thought, especially in the writings of
Friedrich Nietzsche when he speaks of the “eternal recurrence.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to
‘Crucified’: there you have the antithesis. It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom—it is a
difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment,
destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—the ‘Crucified as the innocent
one’—counts as an objection to this life, as a formula to its condemnation.” See also Girard, I See
Satan Fall Like Lightning, 172.
The contradiction within Satan is perfectly analogous to the contradiction within the human relationship to violence, where the unanimous rivalry with a single victim is used to free communities from the many rivalries of social disorder. Satan casts out Satan and the *skandalon* removes all *skandala* within the context of collective persecution.

As the intimate association of Satan and human order already suggests, the fall of Satan’s house will not be an unmitigated boon for humanity, at least in the short term. The compromise of the means by which humanity has been established in order and peace will unleash the mimetic rivalries that collective violence has kept in check. As the pattern of Jesus’ discourse indicates, the symmetries of mimetic doubles will proliferate out of control, and will overwhelm the violent mechanisms humanity has historically used to restrain them. All human communities will be effected by this—“kingdom against kingdom;” “house against house”662—and all interpersonal relationships as well, including the most intimate:

‘Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” (Lk 12:51-53; Cf. Mt 10:34-36)

662 Matthew achieves a similar effect with the repetition with the word “every,” a repetition that is present in the original Greek but is often suppressed by modern translators: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (Mt 12:25). Girard, The Scapegoat, 185.
The above passage evokes unmistakably the chaotic violence of the “war of all against all” of the sacrificial crisis.\textsuperscript{663} The text points to the apocalyptic insistence that the crisis humanity first averted with the founding murder and kept at bay by countless violent sacrifices was not eliminated from history, nor can it be deferred indefinitely. The violent expulsions by which humanity has maintained peace are not without a remainder of violence, and this remainder will return and continually add to itself, and finally grow to a proportion that defies restraint.

When an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, it wanders through arid wastes searching for a resting place; failing to find one, it says, “I will go back where I came from.” It then returns to find the house swept and tidied. Next it goes out and returns with seven other spirits far worse than itself, who enter and dwell there. The result is that the last state of the man is worse than the first. (Lk 11:24-26)\textsuperscript{664}

Jesus’ reference here to expulsions by exorcism recalls the “eliminations and purifications” of shamanistic healers, which work by approximating the effects of sacrificial violence.\textsuperscript{665} The order that humanity manages to create by these expulsions serves to make the human “house” a dwelling fit for an ever increasing number of skandala that will require ever increasing doses of violence to expel. Eventually the number and intensity of skandala will simply be too great, and will defy all attempts to use them to maintain the house in peace and order.

\textsuperscript{663} Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 8.

\textsuperscript{664} This passage has a parallel in Mt 12:43-45 that is not conjoined with Matthew’s version of the discourse concerning “Satan casting out Satan.” It is conjoined rather with the discourse of Jesus concerning the “sign of Jonah.”

4.6. The Apocalyptic Vision

Intimations of the crisis of differences in Jesus' warnings of future crisis give way to explicit references in his apocalyptic discourses. Earthquakes and famines, images made familiar by mythological texts where they indicate the mimetic crisis, appear in all of the synoptic apocalyptic predictions (Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8). Luke supplies a reference to “plagues,” (Lk 21:11), which we have seen enjoys a kind of pride of place among the images associated with the effacement of differences. Likewise, the heavenly portents indicated in apocalyptic texts recall the experiences reported by Guillaume de Machaut, which includes stars raining from the skies and cities destroyed by lightning. As in the discourse concerning “Satan casting out Satan,” the disorientation of the apocalypse will be characterized by the appearance of the fearsome symmetries of mimetic doubles: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Lk 21:10; Cf. Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8).

Girard insists that the apocalyptic discourses of the Gospels describe a violence that is of a human origin, not divine. The violence of the apocalypse is the violence that cultural violence, religious or otherwise, can no longer restrain. It is noteworthy in this light that Jesus’ description of the fate of the Jewish Temple sets the stage for the apocalyptic discourses.

As he was making his way out of the temple area one of his disciples said to him, “Look, teacher, what stones and what buildings!” Jesus said to him, “Do

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667 Girard, The Scapegoat, 1.
you see these great buildings? There will not be one stone left upon another
that will not be thrown down. (Mark 13:2; cf. Mt 24:1-3; Lk 21:5-7)

The violence of the apocalyptic discourse is thus introduced by this image of the
collapsing sacred, the dissolution of the great edifice dedicated to the offering of
violent sacrifices.

The image of the Temple’s collapsing stones recalls the image presented by
the men in the story of the woman caught in adultery, who come prepared to stone
the woman but who are thwarted by Christ’s words, “Let the one among you who is
without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). Were it not for Jesus’
intervention, the stones would end gathered in a heap atop the corpse of the
murdered woman, recreating the first spontaneously erected tomb. Instead, we
may imagine, they end up scattered on the ground as the men depart, defeated and
resentful, but not murderers. We see here Jesus in the act of interrupting the
process whereby all sacred architecture comes to be and then renews and re-
establishes itself. These episodes in the life of Christ stand as historical versions of
the scenes presented in the apocalyptic literature of the New Testament. The
dissolution of the Temple, the failure of collective violence, and the nightmarish
chaos of the apocalypse are all of a piece. They are the effect of “the coming of the
Son of man”; they are the effects of Jesus’ message and ministry.

668 Girard, Things Hidden, 83.
669 Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27.
Girard confines his reflections to the content of the apocalyptic discourses of the Gospels, leaving open the question of the origin of the violence in the Book of Revelation. Raymund Schwager takes up Girard’s analysis of apocalyptic violence and confirms that the Book of Revelation is consistent with Jesus’ discourses in the Gospels for describing a violence of human origin. The classic images of divine wrath found in Revelation—the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Rev 6:1-8), the angels who pour out the cups of God’s wrath (16:1-21), and the “trumpets of disaster” (8:6-9:21)—indicate the unleashing of a human violence. Schwager points out that in the apocalyptic literature of the Jews feature passages where “angels” denote “human communities” and “entire peoples,” rather than purely spiritual persons who enact the divine will. This corresponds, in fact, to the depictions of angels in the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation. The image of “stars falling from the sky” (13:27) again recalls Guillaume de Machaut’s experience of a violent social crisis, and indicates the effect on worldly order that Christ predicts in the Gospels. Here again we see the effect of “the coming of the Son

671 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 218. “Indeed, this book does not contain any statement ascribing violence to God himself.”

672 Ibid., 218. The four horsemen of the apocalypse originally appear in the Book of the Prophet Zechariah. This is made explicit in a conversation between Zechariah and an angel: “Then I asked, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The man who was standing among the myrtle trees spoke up and said, ‘These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.’ And they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees and said, ‘We have patrolled the earth; see, the whole earth is tranquil and at rest!’” (Zech 1:9) In Zechariah it is made explicit that they are from God himself; they are divine powers that maintain peace, justice, and order. In the Book of Revelation the horsemen are earthly powers who have been unleashed for the sake of destruction. This change in presentation of the horsemen between the Old and New Testaments corresponds to the Girardian understanding of the apocalypse whereby the violent principles of order have become too weak to transform human violence into a means for social order.

673 Ibid., 219.

of Man” (14:14), the same effect that Jesus precipitates in his earthly life, and the
same that Jesus predicts in the apocalyptic discourses of the Gospels. These
passages collectively present an image identical to Jesus’ prediction that “the
heavens will be shaken” (Mt 24:29; Mk 13:25; Lk 21:26). Jesus clearly does not
have in mind the eternal heaven associated with his Father and himself. These are
the “heavens” associated with the social transcendence of archaic religion and
temporal order.  

Christ shakes the order of humanity continuously throughout his ministry. In
the Gospel of John Jesus’ activity is seen to produce quarrels and discord within his
audiences. In one particularly telling instance, John’s account recalls Jesus’
proclamations in Matthew and Luke to bring “division” and the “sword” (Lk 12:51;
10:34).

Some in the crowd who heard these words said, “This is truly the Prophet.”
Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But others said, “The Messiah will not
come from Galilee, will he?” Does not the scripture say that the Messiah will
be of David’s family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David
lived? So a division occurred in the crowd because of him. (Jn 7:40-43)

This “division in the crowd” points to Jesus’ activity to undermine the crowd
phenomenon, which he does in the course of his ministry by diminishing the ability
of skandala to combine and organize themselves against scapegoats. Jesus’
challenge to the accusatorial spirit disrupts the crowd’s ability to gather their
skandala together as one, to make of their furors and resentments a galvanizing
force. This feature of Jesus’ message of peace and reconciliation poses a very real

675 Girard, Things Hidden, 190.

danger to humanity. By taking away the armor on which the strong man relies, Jesus leaves him prey to the most fearsome violence of all—his own. As the crisis looms larger, those threatened by it try all the more hard to make the old mechanisms work. But as mechanisms are deployed more frantically they are made to show themselves even more clearly, and inadvertently set the stage for the event that ensures their final defeat.

4.7. The Passion Narratives

Luke notes in his account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert that Satan “departed from him until an opportune time” (4:13). Luke does not indicate definitely when their next encounter occurs, but traditionally the Passion has been regarded as the moment of Christ’s confrontation with the full measure of Satan’s power. In the Gospel of John this is referred to as Jesus’ “hour,” the decisive episode in his earthly existence where his life and mission are fulfilled. Girard affirms this traditional understanding of the significance of Jesus’ Passion inasmuch as he regards the Passion as Jesus’ decisive confrontation with the single victim mechanism, the Satanic spirit of accusation. It is the occasion where God becomes the object of collective violence in order to effect a revelatory re-presentation of the

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678 See John 12:27: “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.” See also, 2:4; 7:30; 7:30; 12:23; 13:1. Brown, The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John I-XII, 517-518.
primordial act of collective violence, the founding murder. The Passion of Christ, his experience of the Cross, provides the truly divine perspective on all such events, which turns out to be synonymous with the perspective of the victim, a perspective unobscured by the hallucinatory chaos of the crowd and the deceitful power of its unanimity.

Prior to the Passion of Jesus, the founding murder was a kind of bottomless well into which humanity could throw the destructive violence it had projected onto its victims. Now in the Passion the victim rises up from the darkness of that abyss to speak the truth to humanity concerning his innocence. Christ the victim turns the founding murder inside out; the perspective that might have disappeared down the well forever emerges as the key to understanding the event and everything associated with it. The victim is the key also to a proper understanding of God: Jesus and the event of his victimization become the locus of divine self-disclosure. The darkness of a violence that is shown to be fully human is made to serve as a kind of screen, a black background against which the light of God's love and mercy at last can be seen fully. This, in turn, becomes the basis for a fundamental anthropological revelation.

We have seen that the founding murder was the origin of a great deal: cultural forms and even human nature itself. The new revelation does not obviate or overturn these real benefits; there is no spiteful rejection of the fruit gathered from the poisoned tree. The original murder was a source of illumination for early humanity, the origin of symbolic thought and cultural forms. So now the murder of Jesus will become the means by which these real benefits to humanity undergo a
purification. These principal signs of humanity’s spiritual nature are retrieved from the heart of the violence from which they seem to emerge. The Cross is God’s decisive indication that the spiritual capacities of human nature are not linked essentially to the violence of their origin. It is the means by which the human spirit is put in touch fully with the truth and goodness to which it is ordained.

4.8. The Passion and the Single Victim Mechanism

If one were asked to enumerate the *dramatis personae* of the Passion narratives one would likely include a small number of participants: Jesus himself, certain members of the religious authorities of the Jewish people, King Herod, Pontius Pilate, St. Peter and a handful of other disciples who are named, a few of Jesus’ female disciples, Simon of Cyrene, and a few Roman soldiers. Likely omitted would be the personality that stands as the true counterpart to Jesus, the “personality” of the crowd. The crowd in the Passion is the collective personality generated by mimetism, and like all of the crowds we have considered so far, whether in mythology or the Bible, the crowd of Good Friday is united by the power of a mimetic contagion that overwhelms and gathers into itself all who come into contact with it.

The crowd is continuously present in the public ministry of Jesus, and we see that his relationship with it is deeply ambivalent. In one instance members of the crowd attempt to carry him away to make him a king, which recalls the ambivalent
relationship of archaic kings to their communities.\textsuperscript{679} The crowd gathered around Jesus includes the needy and the poor whom he is eager to console and to heal, but it typically misunderstands him and exaggerates the importance of his miracles or interprets them incorrectly.\textsuperscript{680} This impedes his ministry and prevents him from carrying it out openly.\textsuperscript{681} Nevertheless, for most of his ministry the crowd serves to protect Jesus’ from his opponents.\textsuperscript{682} We have seen already in the episode in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:14-30) that the desire to kill Jesus arises early in his ministry. Those seeking his life, however, fear that acting against the crowd will make them the object of its anger and violence.\textsuperscript{683} They know that before they can act against Jesus they must turn the crowd against him, and so we find them trying to elicit from Jesus some utterance or action that will embarrass him in front of the crowd and cause his prestige to fall as precipitously as Job’s.\textsuperscript{684}

These enemies finally get their chance in the days following his entrance into Jerusalem when the crowd’s opinion of Jesus does the same about face we have seen in Job’s neighbors and the congregation at Nazareth. Jesus foresees such a turnaround in his prestige, even among his disciples. Just prior to his arrest Jesus

\begin{footnotes}
\item[679] John 6:15.
\item[680] Jn 6:22.
\item[681] Mk 1:45.
\item[682] Mt 12:14, 21:26; Mk 3:1; Lk 6:6.
\item[683] “They were seeking to arrest him, but they feared the crowd, for they realized that he had addressed the parable to them. So they left him and went away” (Mk 12:12). See also Mt 14:5, 21:46; Luke 20:19, 22:2; Jn 7:13.
\item[684] Mk 8:11, 10:2, 12:17.
\end{footnotes}
announces that he will become a *skandalon* to all.\textsuperscript{685} He will become, in other words, the object of a violent mimesis whose contagious aspect will gather all into itself, even them. The Passion makes clear that no one is capable of resisting it. Pontius Pilate makes an initial attempt when he declares that he finds no guilt in Jesus and seem intent on releasing Jesus.\textsuperscript{686} Likewise, we hear the vehemence of St. Peter’s insistence that he will be faithful to Jesus even if it means his own life.\textsuperscript{687} In both cases, however, Jesus’ prediction turns out to be correct.

In the Passion we see represented the essential feature of both the founding murder and sacrificial rites, the ability of collective violence to gather up *skandalon* and render them a means to achieve social unity by incorporating them into a single, all encompassing *skandalon*. All mimetic rivalries, all the resentments stemming from conflicts great and small, are gathered up as a single unanimous rivalry directed towards the single victim. Most of the groups arrayed against Jesus—the scribes and the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Caiaphas and the Zealots, Pontius Pilate and King Herod, Greek and Roman, Jew and Gentile—held each other in contempt and even openly hated one another. The conspiracy against Jesus unites them all. Luke draws our attention to the unity achieved in the course of Jesus’ condemnation with two telling details. In Lk 23:18 the crowd is heard to shout “all together” for

> “Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will have your faith shaken (*skandalisthesesthe*), for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be dispersed”’ (Mk 14:27; Mt 26:31). A more literal translation would render this, “All of you will be scandalized...” Cf. Mt 11:16; 26:31.

\textsuperscript{6886} Mt 23:17; Mk 15:10; Lk 23:4; Jn 19:4.

\textsuperscript{687} Mt 26:33; Mk 14:29; Lk 22:33
the condemnation of Christ. In another he indicates that “Pilate and Herod became friends that very day” (23:12). Luke emphasizes explicitly in these passages what is clearly evident in all the Gospels, that Jesus becomes for the crowd the principle of its violent unification.

The presence of the crowd indicates that Jesus is at the center of the same condition of undifferentiation that characterizes the initial stages of ritual sacrifices, where the community purposefully induces a condition of indifferentiation within itself in preparation for the collective violence of the rite. Scholars in recent history have not failed to notice the resemblance of Jesus’ Passion to the features of religious rituals. In his classic study, *The Golden Bough*, anthropologist George Frazer notes the correspondence of certain details of Christ’s Passion to features of religious rituals such as the Roman Saturnalia. Frazer recognizes in the mockery to which Jesus was subjected by the Roman soldiers (Mt 27:27-31; Jn 19:1) a particular resemblance to the proceedings of the Sacaea, a five day Babylonian festival associated with Anaitis, the Syrian war goddess who is often identified with the Greek goddess Athena. Frazer cites the description given by Dio Chrysostom:

They take one of the prisoners condemned to death and seat him upon the king’s throne, and give him the king’s raiment, and let him lord it and drink and run riot and use the king’s concubines during these days, and no man prevents him doing just what he likes. But after they strip and scourge and crucify him.

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688 Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats?*, 185.

689 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 194. See also, Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats?*, 186.

4.9. The Passion and the Old Testament

During the course of the Passion accounts the evangelists use passages from the Psalms and the Prophets to describe the experience of Jesus on Good Friday even where they offer little in the way of illumination regarding the course of events or even seem a bit platitudinous. Their full significance must be considered in light of the entire text from which they are taken, which conforms to the traditional Jewish practice of citing a single passage of text in order to invoke the larger text in its entirety. What they lack in descriptive power they make up for by emphasizing the relation of Christ’s Passion to the theme of collective persecution present in the Old Testament texts from which they are taken. In Jn 15:25, for example, we find quoted Ps 69:4—*they hated me for no reason*. The evangelist here selects the line not only because it describes the situation of Christ in the face of his accusers, but also because it unites his fate to that of the Psalmist. As we saw in the last chapter, the psalm describes the plight of one who is not only hated, but at the center of an attack on the part of a group of individuals more numerous, as the Psalmist describes, “than the hairs on his head” (69:5).

Luke’s quotation of the passage from the prophet Isaiah, “And he was numbered with the transgressors” (22:37) hardly sheds more light on the fate of Jesus than the account of his arrest, but its larger significance emerges fully into view when the passage is recognized as belonging to the Suffering Servant songs of

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693 Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 211.
Second Isaiah.\textsuperscript{694} In the Acts of the Apostles (4:25-28), a text that is not a Gospel properly speaking but whose evangelical character is affirmed by Girard,\textsuperscript{695} St. Peter is heard to quote from Psalm 2.

Why do the nations protest and the peoples conspire in vain?  
Kings on earth rise up and princes plot together  
against the Lord and his anointed one. (Ps 2:1-2)

The text draws attention to the universality of the unanimity arrayed against Jesus.  
Jew and Gentile alike conspire in his death.\textsuperscript{696}

The most memorable quotation of the Psalms comes from Jesus himself in his last moments. Matthew and Mark indicate that as he dies on the Cross Jesus cries out the opening line of Ps 22: \textit{My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?} (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). The fate of the Psalmist here is strikingly similar to that of Christ. He is surrounded by a cruel and mocking crowd whose members jeer and shake their heads at him (22:8). Like Jesus in the course of his crucifixion, his hands are pieced by “the dogs that surround” him (22:17). Jesus’ quotation of Ps 31 in Luke’s account—\textit{Father, into your hands I commend my spirit}\textsuperscript{697}—likewise refers us to the particularly clear indications of a collective persecution found in that Psalm. To all his foes he is a “thing of scorn” (31:12). He reports “the whispers of the crowd” that contains those who “conspire together against me” (31:14).

\textsuperscript{694} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 102.

\textsuperscript{695} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{696} Schwager, \textit{Must There Be Scapegoats?}, 211.

\textsuperscript{697} Lk 23:46.
4.10. Naturalism in the Passion Narratives

The Gospel writers’ couple their magnification of the Old Testament’s concern for collective persecution with a simultaneous magnification of the naturalism characterizing the Old Testament. We saw in our consideration of the Psalms that the Psalmist will rely on mythic imagery to denote violent mobs. Psalm 22 speaks of the “bulls of Bashan” and “lions that rend and roar” (22:14). Ps 144 denotes the crowd with the mythological image of “raging waters,” as does Ps 124. In the Gospels are not entirely devoid of mythic images; we hear of Jesus’ stilling a raging storm and drawing St. Peter out of the water into which he begins to sink. But within the Passion stories themselves all symbolic representations of the effects of mimetism give way to an uninterrupted naturalism. Jesus’ death is an unmistakably human affair, an attempt at a legal proceedings that degenerates into a common lynching. This gives to the Passion the quality of a “key” by which to decode the imagery of myth, and this decoding includes the Psalms themselves. In light of the Passion, the Psalms can be recognized as a kind of bridge between myth and the Passion, juxtaposing in telling ways the imagery of myth and the event depicted with perfect clarity in the Gospels, which amounts to a powerful contribution to the revelatory power of the scriptures as a whole.

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698 Mt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25.
701 Girard, The Scapegoat, 101-103.
The naturalism of the Passion narratives render the crowd as a crowd, and Jesus as a victim, a real human victim, responding as human victims do to violence. The reaction of mythological victims to their persecutors is often hardly less fantastic than any of the other elements of the texts in which they appear. Victims in myth embrace their fates placidly, as though the accusation of guilt and the violence directed against them are the perfectly natural outcome of all else that transpires. Oedipus accepts his guilt and administers the punishment himself. He joins in the “unified chorus” accusing him, and in so doing further obscures his status as a scapegoat. Indeed, Oedipus’ declaration of his own guilt may be the most convincing accusation of all, contributing more than any other the unanimity of his accusers, which includes nearly all readers since the time of Sophocles. Likewise, no cries of agony are heard from the victim of the “The Hymn of Parusha” referred to in the last chapter. Jesus’ response to his own fate could not be more different. His agony in Gethsemane and his exclamations from the Cross crown the revelatory realism of the New Testament.

The naturalism of the Gospels’ depictions of Jesus’ persecution is summarized powerfully in the image of the empty tomb emphasized prominently in the evangelists’ accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus. As we saw in chapter two, the archaic tomb stands as a kind of monument erected in honor of the violence
directed at the body of the one inside, a demonstration of the creative power latent within violence and actualized by collective persecution.\textsuperscript{705} The empty tomb of the Gospels declares that the well from which the archaic sacred draws its water has run dry, and the naturalism of the entirety of the Passion accounts is itself the clearest indication that its power is exhausted. The significance of the tomb is underscored by the three days elapsing between Jesus’ death and his Resurrection. These emphasize that something other than the violence of Good Friday is the source of Jesus’ new life.\textsuperscript{706} He is not reborn from his own ashes like the phoenix, nor does he spring up like Athena who appears “whole born” from Hephaestus’ hammer blow to the head of Zeus. The Gospels present to us a tomb that is empty, vacated of the victim placed within and devoid of magical power.\textsuperscript{707}

4.11. Mimetism in the Gospels

The revelatory naturalism of the Gospel manifests itself powerfully in two narratives found with the Gospels. The first is the denial of Peter, which is a feature of the Passion narratives themselves, and the other is the story of the beheading of John the Baptist, which is given as a kind of digression, a break in the evangelists’ concern to tell the story of Jesus. As we shall see, however, both narratives

\textsuperscript{705} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 83.

\textsuperscript{706} Ibid., 232.

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., 164.
participate fully in the Gospels’ revelation concerning mimetism and the archaic sacred.

4.11.1 Peter’s Denial

The Passion story highlights Peter’s denial of Jesus during his arrest and trial. It is used to illustrate the power of the crowd’s mimetism, whose effect on Peter is all the more significant because of his prominence among the disciples and his intimacy with Jesus. Peter’s preeminence among the disciples and his role as the spokesperson is established in the episode that Mark and Matthew indicate occurs at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:13-22; Mk 8:27-33). According to Matthew it is within the context of this interaction with his disciples that Jesus changes Peter’s name from Simon to “Rock” (Mt 16:17-18). The course of their dialogue in the scene provides some sense of the significance of the new identity that Jesus gives to Peter. The action begins with a question posed by Jesus to his disciples—*Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?* In this instance, all of the disciples respond—*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”* (16:13-14). The exchange continues with a second, more personal question—*But who do you say that I am?* Only Peter is heard to respond to this question—*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God* (16:15-16). Peter responds not only apart from “the people,” those identified as “the crowds” in Luke’s parallel

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708 Stanley Jaki, *And On This Rock* (Front Royal: Christendom Press, 1997), 73-78. Peter is an Anglicization of the name *Petros*, which is a masculine version of the Greek word for “rock,” *petra*, which is a feminine word. St. Paul indicates that Peter would have been known among the earliest disciples by the name *Kephas*, which is the Aramaic word for rock.
account (Lk 9:18), but even the other disciples. In his capacity to answer apart from the crowd he displays a remarkable freedom from the mimetism informing their strange notions of Jesus’ identity. We can be sure that Jesus honors this freedom when he bestows the name “Rock,” an appellation that recalls the Old Testament’s description of God as a refuge from mimetism.

We quickly see, however, that Peter’s freedom from the crowd’s mimetism is by no means complete. As the dialogue at Caesarea Philippi continues Jesus predicts his own suffering and death, his final, decisive confrontation with the full measure of the mimetism of the crowd. Peter balks at the suggestion, and exclaims, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you” (Mt 16:22). Jesus is as effusive with his correction as he was with his praise:

Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle (skandalon) to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do. (Mt 16:23)

Peter’s attempt to buoy up Jesus’ hopes for worldly success is tantamount to declaring, “Want what I want, imitate my desire.” Jesus’ invocation of the skandalon means that he recognizes Peter’s suggestion as the initial step towards them becoming rivals of one another, mimetic doubles who imitate and oppose one another.709

Peter’s lapse here indicates that his freedom from mimetism is not complete, and foreshadows the mimetism that he will display prominently in the Passion narratives. The first instance occurs within the context of the Last Supper. After Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will betray him, they are all heard to insist,

709 Girard, The Scapegoat, 194.
“Surely, not I.” In the face of this Peter insists on his own worthiness: “Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be” (Mt 26:33; Mk 14:29). Peter seems no more aware of the rivalrous nature of this declaration than he was of his rebuke of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi. He implies that Jesus’ prediction may well apply to the others, but not to himself, which amounts to a subtle indication of a spirit of rivalry quite at odds with the spirit of service that Jesus enjoins upon his disciples during these final interactions with them (Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:26-27).

Peter’s subtle grandstanding in the final hours of Jesus’ life may be thought of as an exaggeration and more intimate depiction of the rivalry that the evangelists attribute to all of the disciples. They are heard to argue about “which of them was the greatest” (Mk 9:34; Lk 9:46), an argument that Luke places within the context of the Last Supper itself (Lk 22:24). Matthew and Mark record an instance where James and John request of Jesus that they be privileged with the most prestigious seats in the kingdom of God (Mt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35). This request arouses indignation among the disciples that Jesus is quick to address by exhorting them to undertake their fellowship with one another in a spirit of service rather than competition (Mt 20:26; Mk 10:42). These repeated episodes of bickering among the disciples indicate that Peter’s lapses, including those committed in the course of the Passion, are provided as an occasion to witness a mimetism at work in all of the disciples. Peter’s rebuke of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi might be thought of as his

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710 According to Matthew it is the mother of the sons of Zebedee who makes the request on their behalf (Mt 20:21).
unwitting invitation to Jesus to join the disciples in the exchange of *skandalon* that characterizes their rivalries. Their eagerness to find obstacles in each other is the first indication of the disciples’ vulnerability to the mimetism of the crowd.

The account of Peter’s denial emphasizes that the disciples’ betrayal of Jesus is not a simple abandonment, a running off into isolation. Peter demonstrates that the disciples assure their own safety specifically by joining the crowd. Three of the four Gospels note that his denial takes place as he warms himself by a charcoal fire. Peter joins the group gathered there in order to warm himself, but Girard points out that the fire and the group provide more than just warmth. It provides him with a new identity now that Christ has been taken away. All of the disciples have formed their identity mimetically in relation to Jesus, by their “being with” him, however imperfect that may be. Now they must find their “being with” elsewhere, with a new model, and in the immediate wake of the personal devastation wrought by Jesus’ arrest, any model will do. In Peter’s case it is provided by the fire and those gathered around it. Persons gathered around a fire form a coherent structure. The radiating warmth and light dictate the formation of a circle so that all may be equidistant from the flames. Faces and hands are illuminated as persons extend themselves in like manner towards the flames. As Peter joins the company around the fire he is given a new identity and a place for “communion and communication.” The fire is a kind of god who fills the void left by Jesus.

[711] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 149. John specifies this to have been a “charcoal” fire. See Mk 14:54, Lk 22:56, Jn 18:18.

[712] Ibid., 150.
Peter seems to have found a place of safety and comfort until a servant girl approaches who questions his place around the fire. She challenges his belonging to the group by insisting that he in fact belongs to Jesus, that his “being with” is truly elsewhere—You also were with Jesus the Galilean. Matthew notes that the girl identifies Peter by his Galilean accent (Mt 26:73), which further isolates him and marks him as not truly belonging. It is another painful reminder to Peter that he is in danger of being excluded as a result of his association with Jesus. This association with the arrested Christ elicits panic. Peter, Girard notes, is reduced to a “vegetable like existence,” recalling his discussion of the trajectory of mimetism from the personal to the animal, the vegetable, and finally to the mineral. Peter is desperate to demonstrate his belonging to the company of the fire, and he finally accomplishes this with his “curses and oaths” (Mt 26:74, Mk 14:71). He cannot know precisely at this point the opinion of the people around him concerning Jesus, but he is not taking any chances. His curses ultimately are directed at Jesus and

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713 Ibid., 150-151.

714 The prominence of the fire in the accounts of Peter’s denial may be an allusion to the significance of the “sacred fire” in ancient Mediterranean religion that was associated with the worship of the Lares. Girard, The Scapegoat, 156. See also, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome, trans. Willard Small (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), 19. “The sacred fire was the Providence of the family. The worship was very simple. The first rule was, that there should always be upon the altar a few live coals; for if this fire was extinguished, the god ceased to exist… The god received these offerings, and devoured them; radiant with satisfaction, he rose above the altar, and lighted up the worshipper with its brightness. Then was the moment to invoke him; and the hymn of prayer went out from the heart of man.”

715 Mt 26:69; Cf. Mk 14:67; Lk 22:56; Jn 18:17

716 Girard, The Scapegoat, 153.

717 Ibid., 150. See also, René Girard, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 287.
Peter’s former self, the self identified as closely as possible with Jesus.\textsuperscript{718} Accustomed to taking the lead, he renders himself exemplary with respect to his scorn for Christ. He demonstrates his belonging with those around the fire by becoming a model of condemnation for others to follow.

4.11.2 The Beheading of John the Baptist

In their account of the beheading of John the Baptist the evangelists provide a historical event where the essential features of sacred rituals appear in such a way as to provide a basis for understanding their operation.\textsuperscript{719} This gives to the story its profoundly evangelical character. Otherwise we might question why it is included among the writings of the New Testament. Not only is Christ not the subject of the story, he is not mentioned in it at all, nor is he the one to tell the story. As we shall see, however, its engagement with the mimetic dynamisms animating the archaic sacred give the text an intimate kinship with the story of Christ’s Passion and contributes to its revelatory power. As with the Passion we are dealing here with a story of collective persecution. In this case, however, the crowd consists not of a chaotic rabble but the “the courtiers and officers and leading men of Galilee,” the powerful and prestigious guests present at the birthday celebration that King Herod has thrown for himself (Mk 6:21).\textsuperscript{720}

\textsuperscript{718} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 155. “Peter is ashamed of this Jesus whom all the world despises, ashamed of the model he chose, and therefore ashamed of himself.”

\textsuperscript{719} Mt 14:3-12; Mk 6:17-29.
The mimetic theme is sounded immediately by the presence of enemy brothers, King Herod and Philip. Herod and Philip. The evangelist makes use of a historical situation that incarnates the mythological theme. The object of their competition, Mark tells us, is a woman, Herodias, who is the wife of Philip but has been taken by Herod. John has entered the situation in order to tell Herod that he may not have his brother’s wife (Mk 6:18). This intrusion cannot have been altogether pleasing to Herod, yet Mark points out that Herod “liked to listen to him” (6:20). This brief indication of Herod’s fascination with John is the first sign of the out of control mimetism that dominates the text. Herod’s attraction to John is located in the opposition that John exerts and, perhaps more significantly, represents for Herod. As we shall see in more detail, John is for Herod a kind of incarnation of the principal of opposition, the *skandalon*, the obstacle that arouses desire precisely because it opposes desire.

Herodias does not share Herod’s fascination for John, but she too regards him as an obstacle, and her hatred for John can only be understood in terms of the frustration to her desire that she now experiences and attributes to him. She must have enjoyed great benefits as the center of a love triangle involving two wealthy and powerful brothers, but now that Herod has taken possession of her, her value as

720 The high status of Herod’s guests calls to mind not only Kierkegaard’s famous observation, “The crowd is untruth,” but his further observation that “A crowd—not this or that, one now living or long dead a crowd of the lowly or of nobles, of rich or poor, etc., but in its very concept—is untruth, since a crowd either renders the single individual wholly unrepentant and irresponsible, or weakens his responsibility by making it a fraction of his decision.” Soren Kierkegaard, “The Crowd is Untruth,” *Selected Essays*, trans. Charles Bellinger (Peabody: Benediction Classics, 2011), 1-2.


a “mimetic prize” has vanished, and her ability to get her way by playing the brothers off of one another has also disappeared.\textsuperscript{723} Her hatred for John first seems to spring from a fear that he will finally ruin any hope of recovering her former advantage, but the matter is more complex and subterranean than this.

The mimetism of Herod and Herodias emerges fully in light of the realization that John is not truly an obstacle for either Herod or Herodias. As a powerful king and vassal of Rome, Herod is entirely free to ignore John’s commands. Likewise, John has nothing to do with Herodias’ inability to get what she wants from Herod. Herod and Herodias are experiencing the two sides of the same mimetic coin; they are mimetic twins, as their names suggest: both are experiencing the collapse of desire associated with the dissolution of a love triangle. Herod is in the midst of the disappointment that attends the acquisition of any mimetic prize, and is showing all the signs of a bewildered desire, one lost with the sudden absence of a rival. Herodias is suffering the fate awaiting all coquettes. Her allure, and her power, resided mainly in her inaccessibility, but now she is possessed free and clear and so of no interest. Both Herod and Herodias have traveled the path together from mastery to slavery.\textsuperscript{724}

None of this, of course, has anything to do with John. His spectacle of asceticism, his stern counsels, and his warnings of fiery judgment pose no real obstacle to the desire of Herod and Herodias. They do, however, suggest the idea of opposition, and as the representation of this idea, he becomes a natural target for

\textsuperscript{723} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 130.

\textsuperscript{724} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 96-112.
the projections of their mimetism. Both attribute to him the origin of the unhappiness associated with their mimetism, and this elicits from each the opposite reactions that are really the two sides of the same coin: the fascination of Herod for that which he perceives to oppose him, and the burning hatred of Herodias for the same.

The presence of the prestigious guests at Herod’s birthday celebration presents Herodias with an opportunity to reinvigorate her influence. Today we typically regard peer pressure as the province of insecure teenagers, but this story makes clear that the evangelists take it much more seriously. In the hands of Herodias it becomes a powerful tool of manipulation and a deadly weapon. Whether by design or by chance the necessary leverage is provided by the young girl, referred to traditionally as Salome, who performs a dance for Herod. Girard points out that this dance is the only instance where any of the Gospels refer to an art form. Its mention here is all the more significant because of its prominence in archaic ritual, where it plays the role of accelerating the mimetic process. Dance removes skandala from among participants by encouraging them to adopt a unanimous mimesis. As participants join in the dance they are rendered harmoniously one by an identification with each other that is expressed and effected by the imitation of one another’s gestures. A performance such as Salome’s

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725 The young girl remains unnamed in the Gospels. From the writings of the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, it is known that King Herod had a niece named Salome, and so the girl in the story is often referred to by that name. Girard, The Scapegoat, 130.


727 Ibid., 317.
functions similarly. To behold a beautiful dance is to be delivered from one’s own infirmity by an identification with the graceful performer.\textsuperscript{728} We see how eager Herod is to identify with Salome when he makes his impulsive exclamation at the end of the dance—\textit{Ask of me whatever you wish and I will give it to you} (Mk 6:22). Herod would express nothing different if he said, “Your desire is my desire.”

Herod has given his desire to Salome, but she does not know what to do with it. She has no desire of her own, a characteristic of her youthfulness that Mark indicates by identifying her as a “little girl.”\textsuperscript{729} Salome goes to the one who she is accustomed to imitating, the one whose desire has the most prestige for her, her mother. Salome is like an empty vessel into which the desires of all present have been placed, and she in turn presents them to Herodias who can make them all identical with her own. She can now make of John the Baptist the same skandalon for everyone present that he is for her.

Herodias instructs her daughter to request the head of John the Baptist, and Mark records for us the way in which Salome is transformed by her mother’s desire (Mk 6:24). A moment before she was at a loss for what to request of Herod, but now we hear of her eagerness. She “hurries” back to Herod and demands “at once” the head of John the Baptist. In Matthew’s account, she demands the head “here”—\textit{Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter} (Mt 14:8). Again, the evangelists’ reserve with respect to description ought to alert us to the importance of these

\textsuperscript{728} Ibid., 316.

\textsuperscript{729} Girard points out that Mark uses not “\textit{kore}” that would indicate a girl, but “\textit{koraison},” which means “little girl.” Girard, “Scandal and the Dance,” 313.
details. They indicate the “impatience and feverishness”\textsuperscript{730} elicited by the girl’s contact with her mother’s desire. It is the excitement of a desire that is imitated, but no less intense for that.

Salome’s desire is imitated, but it is worth considering what is original in her request. Herodias indicates her wish for the head of John the Baptist, but it is extremely unlikely that she actually desired to possess his head. Undoubtedly she uses “head” figuratively as when we speak today of “capital” punishment even though contemporary executions do not involve beheading. The girl’s request for the actual head—\textit{here and now and on a platter}—stands as her own contribution to the macabre finale to the story. Salome has adopted the desire of her mother, but her youth and inexperience prevent her from tracking its subtleties. Her zeal to imitate Herodias renders her own desire a “grotesque caricature” of her mother’s.\textsuperscript{731}

In another sense, however, Salome’s request serves to make explicit what remains implicit in the desire of Herod and Herodias. The image of the head brought in on a platter recalls the fascination among certain archaic cultures for the heads of their slain enemies. This sometimes took the form of embalming heads taken in sacrifice or war in order to preserve them as souvenirs and ornaments.\textsuperscript{732}

Even more obviously, the image of John’s head borne into the celebration on a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{730} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 131.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{731} Ibid., 133. This is an instance where the Bible draws our attention to a desire that is clearly imitated, but no less intense as a result. A case such as that of the young girl considered here contradicts the essentially romantic view of desire that regards only spontaneous and autonomous desires as capable of real passion and strength. See Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 15, 322-323. See also Girard, \textit{Quand ces choses commenceront} (Paris: Arléa, 1993), 35. See also, Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 161.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{732} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 136.}
platter recalls the sacrificial consumption of the immolated victim and the practice of cannibalism. Salome’s request thus completes the reversion of Herod’s birthday feast to the primordial feast, the sacrificial ritual. The girl places before us not only the head of John the Baptist, but the entire itinerary of desire from mimetic desire, to mimetic doubles, to ritual, and finally to sacrifice.

Like its ritual antecedents, Salome’s dance intensifies the mimesis of her audience and facilitates the circulation of *skandal* among them. Within this atmosphere of out of control desire anything that suggests opposition will attract the countless strains of violent hatred harbored by those present, all the frustrations and difficulties, great and small, conscious and unconscious. We have already seen how John the Baptist becomes the object of Herod’s and Herodias’ projections in this regard. We have seen too in their cases that these projections take very different forms and even come to be at odds with one another. The dance gives to Herodias the same opportunity that ritual dances gives to all archaic sacrificers. It gathers together the community’s *skandal* and renders them malleable, preparing them to be made unanimous. When Salome gives to Herodias the promise of Herod, Herodias can with a single declaration render all the *skandal* in the room, including Herod’s, precisely identical to her own.

The course of the feast’s events renders John, even if only for the brief period of time Herodias requires, the living embodiment of all that forbids and constrains, all “that keeps them from being happy.” Everything that blocks happiness, every

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733 Ibid., 139.
frustration, every adversity, every source of animosity and feeling of inadequacy, in a word, every skandala experienced by the birthday celebrants is projected onto him. His head presented on a platter and circulated among the guests indicates the final victory achieved in the sacrificial ritual: the obstacle of desire that was once so threatening and forbidding, opposing desire with a condemning scowl, is now rendered “inert and docile.” This also underscores the terrible deceit of sacrificial violence. The mimetic projections that make his destruction desirable are totally erroneous. As we have already discussed, John has nothing to do with any of the obstacles projected onto him by Herod and Herodias, and even less as regards the guests. His execution is the result of the interaction of hallucinatory projections that are the product of the depravity of King Herod and his court.

The beheading of John the Baptist is a pointless lashing out against the principle of opposition, but it is not without effect. Mark, in fact, prioritizes its effect. The story of John’s beheading is told as a flashback by way of explaining Herod’s estimation of Jesus.

King Herod heard about it, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him. Others were saying, “He is Elijah”; still others, “He is a prophet like any of the prophets.” But when Herod learned of it, he said, “It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up.” (Mk 6:14)

We see here that however satisfying John’s death was to those in attendance, it did not represent a real victory over the obstacles that motivated the violence against

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734 Ibid., 146.
735 Ibid.
736 Ibid., 147.
him. Herod's continuing and increasingly irrational obsession with John signals what was surely true to varying degrees of Herodias and all others involved, namely, that the temporary freedom from mimetic obsession occasioned by the violence against the skandalon ultimately has the effect of increasing the fascination of its opposition, real or imagined. Mastery has once again become slavery: the mastery enjoyed in the course of beholding John's head atop the platter has now become the slavery of an obsessive fascination that dominates Herod's consciousness more than ever.

Herod's conviction concerning the "resurrection" of John is a product of the circumstances of his death. During the course of the birthday celebration, especially during the course of the dance, John comes to stand for what every victim of violent sacrifice stands for, all that opposes desire, every source of unhappiness. Inasmuch as his death seems to confirm this perception, John must also have some intimate relation to every subsequent happiness. Herod's experience of John both in life and death parallels archaic humanity's experience of its sacrificial victims because both are rooted in the same principle, mimetism.

Luke confirms this view even though his account seems to contradict Mark and Matthew's account. According to Luke, Herod rejects the notion that Jesus is John the Baptist come back from the dead.

Now Herod the ruler heard about all that had taken place, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he tried to see him. (Lk 9:7-9)

Luke attributes this belief to the "the crowds" instead.
Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds (ochloi) say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” (Lk 9:18-19)

This passage recalls Matthew's account of the exchange between Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, but contains an important substitution. Whereas in Matthew's version Jesus asks, “Who do the people (anthropoi) say that I am?,” (Mt 16:16), in Luke's version Jesus asks, “Who do the crowds (ochloi) say that I am?”

Ochlos, especially in the plural form as it appears in Lk 9:18, suggests a crowd that is agitated and restless, dangerous, fickle, and prone to violence.737 It is the panic stricken crowd, the crowd seized by mimetism.738

Rather than contradicting Matthew and Mark, Luke's attribution of the belief in John's resurrection to the crowds draws attention directly to what is most important. It rules out understanding Herod's belief in the resurrection of John in terms of some peculiarity of his psychology or an idiosyncratic, hyperactive superstition. Luke indicates that Herod's reaction must be understood in terms of the collective mimetism at the heart of the violent crowd phenomenon that generates the hallucinatory experiences constituting the fundamental elements of archaic religion. Crowds cannot believe in the death of their victims any more than Herod can because of the unshakeable sense that the victim somehow gathered the


738 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 69.
crowd to itself and effected the catharsis and peace that follows the final act of violence.\textsuperscript{739}

The evangelists do not take either Herod’s nor the crowd’s belief in the resurrection of John seriously except as an indication of the origin of a transcendence at odds with the transcendence associated with Christ. It is the fruit of mimetic desire run wild and the practice of a deviated transcendence so intense that its hallucinatory projections take a stable form that parallels that of archaic religion. The evangelists present this distorted and confused transcendence in order to critique it, and we see that in their critique they present it as parody of what they ultimately wish to describe, the Resurrection of Jesus and Jesus as the mediator of a renewed and purified desire. The parody serves two purposes simultaneously: it presents the distortions and confusions of Herod’s desire, and also the prophetic aspect of those distortions. In light of its referent the parody, no matter how depraved, can be recognized as an anticipation; it can be recognized as containing a prophetic indication that the parody can be restored to truth and goodness.

4.12. The Resurrection and the Place of the Victim

The idea of the innocence of Jesus as a victim of collective persecution and the idea of his bodily Resurrection are intimately related, and have in common a certain quality of “unthinkability” that points to the divine origin of both. The very

\textsuperscript{739} Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 146-147.
presence within history of the idea of Christ’s Resurrection points to the truth of the reality it signifies. Heinrich Schlier rebuts Rudolf Butmann’s reduction of the Resurrection of Jesus to his “rising into the kerygma” by pointing out that Jesus rising in the mind or imagination of his disciples is no more explicable in human terms than the bodily resurrection itself.740

The idea of the innocence of the victim is intimately associated with the Resurrection, and shares in its unthinkability. Prior to the appearance of the Gospel a “vicious circle” obtains where the truth concerning the victim, his or her innocence, is available only to the victim as victim, in the moment of his or her victimization, but this is precisely the moment when the victim is silenced. Culture arises from within the context of the unanimity of the crowd, a unanimity that presupposes the exclusion of the victim. The knowledge of the victim’s innocence can only come by way of a revelation that transcends the cultural realm. Jesus’ last words from the Cross—Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do741—take on a concrete meaning in light of this. In a very real sense persecutors know not what they do because they cannot know what they do: the structure of collective persecution prevents the recognition of the innocence of their victim.742

Only a victim absolutely innocent can penetrate the accusations directed against victim, which always possess some measure of credibility. Scapegoats are


742 Girard, Things Hidden, 218.
often guilty of something, but they are never guilty “as charged.”

Rather than taking the limited blame for whatever fault they have truly committed, mimetic projections and the crowd phenomenon work to ensure that they take the blame for all of the community’s woes. A scapegoat is aptly described as someone responsible for some limited handful of *skandala* within the community but who is made to bear the weight of them all. Only someone absolutely innocent can establish the relative innocence of all other victims. Only someone capable of speaking to humanity while remaining apart from the violence that is “the controlling agent” in every cultural structure can break the vicious circle of persecution and make available to history a real and effective knowledge of the innocence of victims. And this truth can only be spoken from the one cultural place that is designated by violence but not a party to it, the place of the victim. Only there can God signal his actual relationship to the crowd, its violence, and the projections that humanity has ascribed to divinity. We can know Jesus to be divine because only someone who transcends human culture completely can make the truth known from the very place that culture is organized to exclude. Only God can transform the place of the victim from the abyss down which the truth is thrown to the source of the greatest illumination, the locus of divine and anthropological revelation.

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745 Ibid., 219. “A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence.”
4.13. The Resurrection of Jesus and the Spirit of Truth

Christ is ever the victim, always excluded and alienated from a world that idolizes violence. The Crucifixion is the final and decisive indication of what is always the case, that “the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Lk 9:58). This fundamental aspect of his historical existence is summarized proleptically in the prologue of John’s Gospel: “He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him” (Jn 1:11). Victims of cultural violence are the ones forced to confront most directly the consequence of God’s exclusion from history. Job is confounded by God’s unwillingness to intervene on his behalf. He can only conclude that God is aloof and distant, or duped by the violent crowd that clearly has his support. Now in the person of Jesus, the “non-intervention” of God is seen in a new, radiant light. Rather than indicating a divine aloofness, or an indifference to the suffering of innocence, or worse yet, a solidarity with the strong and the cruel, the non-intervention of God can be understood in terms of his non-violence, his unwillingness to enter history as a violent antagonist. We saw in chapter three that Old Testament authors harbored the expectation that God would enter history in precisely this manner, by turning the violence of crowds back onto them. Contrary to the archaic expectation, divinity would signal itself from the place of the victim, but the one true God would nevertheless signal himself by means of a violence superior to that of persecutors. Within the Old Testament vision the mimetism of

violence and revenge remains a mark of divine glory. Psalm 44 records something approaching Israel’s scandal in the face of God’s non-intervention on behalf of Israel against her enemies.747 Now in Jesus the non-intervention of God becomes the example of mercy and forgiveness to be embraced and imitated.748

In the Resurrected Christ the place of the victim becomes a continual source of inspiration. Those who follow Jesus embrace the truth revealed in the victim who has returned to forgive them. They are to live as he did by rejecting the mimetism of sensuality and violence and embracing the radical practice of mercy and forgiveness that Jesus proclaims throughout his ministry. In the life of conversion Jesus’ disciples begin to experience the new life of the resurrection, a life made graceful and free by the absence of skandala.749 In his original work of literary criticism where Girard describes the importance of conversion in the great novels that he considers, he notes that

747 You make us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. All day long my disgrace is before me; shame has covered my face at the sound of those who taunt and revile, at the sight of the enemy and avenger.

[...]

Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Rise up! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face; why forget our pain and misery? For our soul has been humiliated in the dust; our belly is pressed to the earth. Rise up, help us! Redeem us in your mercy. (Ps 44:15-17, 24-27)

748 Girard, Things Hidden, 269.

Metaphysical desire brings into being a certain relationship to others and to oneself. True conversion engenders a new relationship to others and to oneself.  

When Julien Sorel of *The Red and the Black* no longer envies people and no longer wishes "to seduce or dominate them," he is surprised to find that he no longer hates them. Beholding other people as they are rather than according to the distortions of deviated transcendence and its violent projections is the blessing bestowed with the renunciation of "bad desire." This new way of relating is the first indication of a new life that will be fulfilled in resurrection. Or rather this new way of relating is the beginning of a movement that will be brought to completion by the bodily resurrection promised by Christ.

Jesus makes clear that his disciples will extend his mission and multiply its effects. They will witness to the new life associated with conversion to Jesus’ example of purity and forgiveness. They will extend his proclamation of the truth by advocating a life that is free of mimetism, its rivalries, and its projections. This truth that they will proclaim originates from the place of the victim, and is first and foremost the truth concerning the victim. Christ makes plain that they will serve the truth by taking this place themselves. They too will know persecution, and they will serve the truth by their suffering.

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750 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 295. Recall that “metaphysical desire” is synonymous with deviated transcendence, the source of mythological projections.

751 Ibid.


When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Mt 10:19-20)

The new, resurrected life of Christians is lived in the place of the victim and is animated by the truth that radiates from there. Jesus’ followers do not need to think about what to say, because their lives testify continually to the truth by referring the world to the place of the victim. Their resistance to the mimetism of revenge in the midst of persecution will speak more eloquently than whatever words they might utter. Those who resist mimetism even to the point of death are known as “martyrs,” a word taken from the Greek for “witness,” and we can see the structure of their witness and its ordination to the place of the victim. The testimony of the martyrs consists of a manner of life and death that refers humanity to the life and death of Jesus in order it can once again behold the truth proclaimed by his Resurrection.

Jesus makes clear that the persecution of Christians will be a principal means by which is manifested the activity of what he calls the “Spirit of Truth.” The Spirit of Truth operates according to the pattern seen in the martyrs themselves, “taking from Christ” what Christ makes known from the place of the victim.

I still have many things to say to you
But they would be too much for you now.
But when the Spirit of truth comes
He will lead you into all truth,
Since he will not be speaking as from himself

754 Girard, The Scapegoat, 198-199. “What the martyrs say has little importance because they are witnesses, not of a determined belief, as is imagined, but of man’s terrible propensity, in a group, to spill innocent blood in order to restore the unity of their community.”

755 Ibid., 198-199.
But will say only what he has learned;
And he will tell you of the things to come.
He will glorify me,
Since all he tells you
Will be taken from what is mine. (John 16:12-15)

The Spirit of Truth never testifies on its own behalf (Jn 15:26). It always refers the world to what is revealed in the risen Christ as the Victim of victims. It speaks in and through those imitating Christ, living and dying as he did. The new activity of the Spirit within history means that the sufferings of all victims will henceforth contribute to a deeper understanding of the human appetite for victims and the divine appetite for forgiveness.


John’s Gospel refers to the Spirit of Truth as the Parakletos, a term often rendered as “Advocate,” which suggests a symmetry between the activity of the Spirit as the Advocate for victims, proclaiming their innocence, and that of Satan, the “accuser,” who as the “Father of lies” condemns them falsely. Whereas Satan accuses victims and convinces persecutors of their guilt, the Spirit of Truth, speaking from the place of the victim, acts as their Advocate, defending their innocence. The juxtaposition emphasizes that Christ’s Resurrection and the mission of the Christian Church creates a new dynamic in history, one that counters and

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756 Ibid., 208. “Every defense and rehabilitation of victims is based on the Passion’s power of revelation.”

757 Von Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 210-211.

758 Girard, The Scapegoat, 205.
undermines Satan’s ability to accuse and condemn innocent victims. Collective persecutions will continue, just as Jesus foresees, but they will now inadvertently activate the power of the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate of victims, who will expand and magnify the revelatory power of Christ’s death and Resurrection.\textsuperscript{759}

History is now characterized by two counterpoised and escalating movements, both centered on the victims of collective persecutions. As the innocence of victims is continually emphasized, the order of the world founded on collective violence is destabilized. As this destabilization continues, violent mechanisms redouble their efforts, creating more victims and magnifying further the revelatory power of the Gospel. The broad outlines of this twin movement can be seen in the parable of the wicked tenants.

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, “They will respect my son.” But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, “This is the heir. Come let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.” They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?” They answered him, “He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times.” Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?” (Mt 21:33-42)

The wicked tenants continually try to secure the vineyard for themselves. Their violence is not entirely ineffective, but a destructive end comes into view by the end

\textsuperscript{759} Ibid., 209-210.
of the parable. Furthermore, they do not realize that their violence is serving the construction of another edifice, the cornerstone of which is laid by the rejection of the parable’s son. The apocalyptic vision so far has been expressed negatively, as a collapse of worldly order precipitated by the inability of violence to produce peace and order within human life. Now we can see that this negative view is a by-product of the activity of the Spirit of Truth that appropriates victimary mechanisms as the means by which to establish a new edifice.

Jesus suggests another perspective on the course of history, the one he declares in Mt 21:42 when he says that the work of the Lord is “wonderful in our eyes.” These are not the eyes of the persecutors who perceive history to go on as before the Resurrection of Christ, where human order and prosperity are created by means of victims who are never heard from again. These are the eyes of those who view history through the eyes of Christ from the place of the victim where he is laid as the cornerstone. From this vantage point can be seen the new current introduced into history by the Spirit of Truth. From the place of the victim it can be seen that persecutors make an unwitting contribution to the same work that the martyr undertakes knowingly with the understanding communicated by God’s Spirit. Those who understand according to the intelligence of the Spirit see that persecutors and victims collaborate, albeit in very different ways, in the construction of the new edifice established by Christ.

It would be a gross simplification to construe history as neatly divided between victims and persecutors. In all too many cases, victims quickly take whatever opportunity they have to turn the tables on their persecutors, and
persecutors make excellent scapegoats once they come to be regarded as having forfeited all rights to mercy and sympathy. Jesus displays a remarkable sensitivity to the slippery dynamic that occurs between the roles of victim and victimizer. In one of the so-called maledictions of the Pharisees, he condemns the Pharisees for their practice of building monuments to the prophets who were killed.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisee, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, “If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets’ blood.” Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; (Mt 23:29-31)

The practice referred to by Jesus of building tombs as memorials for the prophets was an attempt to honor them and to sympathize with them as victims, but Christ identifies within their gesture an accusatorial motive. By their memorials of the prophets they seek to establish themselves among the innocent and to place others, those of previous generations, among the accused. The gesture by which the Pharisees hope to distinguish themselves from their ancestors becomes the very sign of their complicity with them as accusers. Jesus here places before us the difficulty associated with overcoming accusatorial inspiration. The serpent in the Garden of Eden is described as the most “subtle” of all the creatures (Gen 3:1), and we see here that in spite of their best efforts, pride and envy have gotten the best of the Pharisees by turning their attempt to sympathize with victims to the service of accusation and scapegoating. The formal resemblance of the pursuit of justice and

760 Mt 23:1-39; Mk 12:35-40; Lk 11:37-47. These are also referred to as the "Woes to the Pharisees."

761 Girard, Things Hidden, 160-161.
the pursuit of vengeance means that the former will easily lapse into the latter.
Christ assures us, however, that the activity of the Spirit of Truth is now a permanent feature of history, and that victimization, no matter how contradictory and subterranean, will serve the developing illumination of the significance of Jesus’ death and Resurrection.

4.15. The Parables and the Judgment of God

The accusatorial spirit’s ability to contaminate human intentions means that Jesus’ own message is liable to its corrupting influence. According to Girard, Jesus presumes that his message will be misconstrued according to the resentments and animosities that inform the violent projections of his listeners, and some measure of his discourse indulges these projections. Raymund Schwager observes that from within the world closed in on itself by violent projections, God can only seem like “an alien and hostile power,” and Jesus’ message accommodates this expectation. This is particularly so in the parables, in which Girard recognizes a kind of reinstitution of the God of violence. Understood properly, in light of the Passion, the parables make an important contribution to the New Testament’s revelation. Understood in light of the resentments and projections they in fact presume, they yield a very different result. Jesus repeatedly warns his audience to consider his


words carefully—*Take care what you hear*—but his most solemn warning concerns the parables themselves.

And when he was alone, those present along with the Twelve questioned him about the parables. He answered them, “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside everything comes in parables, so that,

‘they may look and see but not perceive,
and hear and listen but not understand,
in order that they may not be converted and be forgiven.’

(Mk 4:10-12)

In the parable of the wicked tenants, for example, Jesus concludes the parable by posing a question to his audience, “What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenant when he comes?” (Mk 12:9, Mt 21:40; Lk 20:15). In Luke and in Mark, Jesus himself supplies the answer: “He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others.” (Mk 12:9; Lk 20:16). Girard regards Matthew’s version as most authentic because it maintains the character of a dialogue between Christ and his audience that allows the crowd’s thinking to speak for itself; it allows the audience to come to its own violent conclusion: “They answered him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons’” (Mt 21:41).

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764 Mk 4:24; Lk 8:18

765 In the passage from Isaiah that Jesus cites we are surely confronting another instance of Hebrew’s ambiguity with respect to the difference between “the active ‘causing’ and the passive ‘letting.’” Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus fully expects to be misunderstood. See Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, 131.

766 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 188. Girard speculates that the evangelists themselves or later scribes suppress the element of dialogue in the cases of Mark and Luke’s texts. Girard’s view may be supported by the noticeably greater violence present in the audience’s response in Matthew. Matthew is more comfortable voicing a great level of contempt and scorn for the tenants precisely because in the dialogue format he can alienate these violent sentiments from Christ himself.
A tension exists between the notion of God as an external judge prepared to visit his wrath upon the sinner, and the notion of “self-judgment,” where the sinner excludes him or herself from God’s love and mercy and prefers the violence and rivalry that attends making a god of one’s neighbor, which Girard refers to as “the hell of mimetic desire.” Schwager points out that in the key passages in Romans where St. Paul discusses the wrath of God, which is the most significant consideration of the theme outside the Book of Revelation, Paul never indicates that God intervenes in human affairs with violence, nor does he “incite other humans to punish evildoers.” Paul’s understanding is similar to the understanding of violence in the apocalyptic texts. The wrath of God is manifested as God delivers persons to their own “perverted and passionate activity” and the punishments they mete out to each other and indeed themselves. The unfolding of God’s wrath follows a course initiated with the “darkening” of the mind (Rom 1:21) that leads to idolatry, then to “degrading passions” (1:26) and an “undiscerning mind” (1:28). The judgment of God unfolds as desire becomes corrupted by deviated transcendent and the mind is rendered capable of reaching no further beyond itself than its own deluded projections. God delivers human persons “to themselves, their desires, passions, and perverse thinking.”

767 Girard, A Theatre of Envy, xv, 12, 77, 348.
768 Schwager, Must There Be Scapegoats?, 215.
769 Ibid., 216.
770 Ibid., 215.
The parables demonstrate that Jesus’ invitation to mercy and reconciliation is intelligible even according to the expectations of minds conditioned by rivalry and violent exclusion. If human persons can acknowledge the earthly wisdom of working to please “a hard man” who “harvests where he does not plant” and who “gathers where he does not scatter,” (Mt 25:26; Lk 19:21) they can be led to worship and follow the God who is generous and merciful, who “knows how to give good gifts” (Lk 11:13) and “makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5:25). Jesus knows better than all others that fear and resentment are powerful motivators, and in a world dominated by rivalry and violence they will be for many the only effective motivators.

When read in light of archaic conceptions of God, the parables seem to reinstate the gods of violence and validate resentments and violent projections. For this reason the parables must always be read in light of the key to the whole of God's self disclosure, which is found not in the preaching of Christ but in his Passion. Read in light of the Passion, the parables reveal a God very different from the gods of violence. We see in the Passion that far from being the harsh judge of the parables, Jesus is the one who is judged, and his experience of judgment corresponds to that experienced by those judged in the parables. The man who is found to be without the proper wedding garment in the parable of the royal wedding feast is “reduced to silence” (Mt 22:12), as is Jesus in the presence of his earthly judges (Mt 26:63; 27:12-14). Like the unmerciful creditor Jesus is “handed over to the torturers” (Mt 18:34). Both the man in the royal wedding feast and the worthless servant who buried his money rather than invest it are cast into the “outer darkness” (Mt 22:13;
25:30), which is an apt description of Jesus’ death beyond the city walls of Jerusalem. Indeed, a violent death recalling Jesus’ own is the fate of many of the parables’ evildoers (Mt 21:41, 44; 24:51; Lk 19:27). In the parable concerning the final judgment, the goats who are separated from the sheep are subject to a curse (Mt 25:41), which recalls St. Paul’s description of the human judgment of Jesus (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).771

Sin in the New Testament is its own punishment. It is an embrace of an idolatry animated by pride and envy that alienates the self from the fellowship of God and neighbor. The pride and envy of Dostoevsky’s Underground Man relegates him to an underground hell that binds him more tightly even as he struggles to assert his own Promethean freedom. Just as mastery leads to slavery within the practice of mimetism, so too sin presents itself initially as a triumph, a liberation from restraint, but in the end the sinner is bound by sin and cast into the outer darkness. The parables address both sides of these realities. They issue stern warnings regarding the dangers of the idolatry of pride and envy. The sinner is made to understand the consequence of sin and told emphatically to take responsibility for it and to seek conversion, but in light of the Passion, he or she is assured of the solidarity of Jesus. Jesus is the victim who sympathizes with all victims, including those who are the victims of their own sin.772

771 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama of Salvation, 195.

772 Ibid., 196.
4.16. The Pharisees

We have seen how the Gospels have served to undermine the efficacy of persecution as a means of social cohesion, and yet an important stumbling block for many is the perception that Christianity and perhaps the Gospels themselves have some relation to the practice of persecution throughout their history. This is particularly so in the case of Christian anti-Semitism, which has taken inspiration from various passages of the New Testament including those depicting the Pharisees. Here we confront a particularly tragic consequence of the manipulation of the text’s meaning according to the resentment of its interpreters. Jesus’ criticisms of the Pharisees are certainly very strong, but Girard points out that they cannot have the universal significance the Gospels attribute to them unless the Pharisaic culture possesses a kind of superiority with respect to all other earthly cultures.\textsuperscript{773} We have already seen in chapter three the way in which the Old Testament revelation freed Jewish sensibilities from many elements of the archaic sacred. Pharisaical culture stands as a further elevation. Pharisaism developed from precisely that sort of Judaism that could survive the experience of the exile because it had been purified of any substantive connection to Temple worship and its violent sacrifices. If this variety of Judaism with its strong devotion to the Law and the Prophets could not free itself from mimetism and all of its pernicious effects, then we can be sure that no other earthly culture will succeed in doing so.\textsuperscript{774}

\textsuperscript{773} Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 175.
And yet the excellence that Jesus’ criticism presupposes goes largely unrecognized, and the condemnations of Jesus together with other texts inspire or at least provide justification in the minds of persecutors for the vicious anti-Semitic persecutions that have been perpetrated by Christians since antiquity. As with every text, including as we have seen, the parables, the passages concerning the Pharisees must be understood in the light of the Passion, otherwise they may be made to “block the path to forgiveness and conversion.” The relentless and insidious effect of resentment and rivalry in distorting perception means that the misreading and misconstrual of Jesus’ message are inevitable, and we can see that Jesus presumes that his words will not have their desired effect among many. But as we have also seen that by his death and Resurrection, Jesus has initiated an even more profound movement within history than that which could have been initiated by his preaching alone. The activity of the Spirit of Truth acting in concert with his Passion means that all skandala, even those generated among his disciples in the name of Christ, will ultimately be made to serve the further elucidation of the significance of Jesus’ meaning for human history. As with all skandala, these will be made by the Spirit of Truth to play a role in liberating victims.

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774 Ibid., 175. “If anywhere in the world a religious or cultural form managed to evade the accusation made against Pharisees—not excluding those that confess Jesus himself—then the Gospels would not be the truth about human culture. In order for the Gospels to have the universal significance Christians claim for them, it is necessary for there to be nothing on earth that is superior to the Jewish religion and the sect of the Pharisees. This absolute degree of representativeness is part and parcel of the status of the Jews as the chosen people, which is never disavowed by the New Testament.”


776 Girard, Things Hidden, 177.
4.17. Now fill up what your ancestors measured out!

It is a terrible irony that Jesus’ message would ever be the source of skandal
and provide an impetus for persecution. This irony is perhaps most evident in the
last of the maledictions of the Pharisees (Mt 23:29-36), part of which we have
already examined, in which Jesus emphatically declares his willingness to take on
his historical role as a victim of persecution in order to undermine all persecution,
making of it a means by which his kingdom is built up.

Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those
who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!
You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of
Gehenna? Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets and wise men and
scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge
in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that there may come
upon you all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the righteous blood
of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered
between the sanctuary and the altar. Amen, I say to you, all these things
will come upon this generation. (Mt 23:31-36)

The text demonstrates Jesus’ willingness to be misunderstood and rejected, and to
make even of these the means by which the possibility of salvation is extended to all.
That such a text would ever be used to justify persecution can only be the result of a
terrible misreading, and such is the case here. Within Mt 25:35 of the malediction
there is found an anticipation of the infamous declaration of the crowd on Good
Friday—His blood be upon us and upon our children (Mt 27:25)—that has been
associated with anti-Semitic persecution throughout the history of European
Christianity.\footnote{777 “... no other single passage of scripture has been so influential in fostering anti-Semitism.” Andrew Simmonds, “Uses of Blood: Re-reading Mt 27:25,” Law and Critique 19, no. 2 (2008): 166.} Far from a call to persecution, 25:35 is Jesus’ declaration that his
death will be the means by which persecutors are included in the mystery of salvation.778

By the time of Jesus’ declaration of his maledictions, his conflict with the Pharisees has been vigorously rehearsed. His public ministry is the occasion for the accumulation of countless skandala among his enemies, including the Pharisees. Jesus indicates in the last of the maledictions that if he cannot convince the Pharisees to build his kingdom by abandoning these skandala and forgiving their enemies, he will enlist them in his work of revelation in another way. The skandala that Jesus’ message has provoked among them will be the means by which he recreates the conditions of the founding murder. Jesus’ exclamation, “...now fill up what your ancestors measured out!” (Mt 23:32) is not a spiteful dismissal of them in response to their rejection of his ministry. It indicates that Jesus has resigned himself to their rejection of his message, but remains determined to enlist their aid in effecting a full revelation in the only manner they will assent to. Jesus commands them to put their skandala to work by assuming the role of their ancestors, whom they have just condemned as persecutors. By taking up the role of the wicked tenants, they will be the ones to lay the cornerstone. They will be the means by which Jesus effects the final and decisive revelation of God, a revelation whose light


778 I mean to approach these texts with the greatest sensitivity. The role these texts have played in inspiring anti-Semitic persecutions is worthy of the most careful consideration, one that I have not the ability to give it in this context. I wish here to make three related points: first, that the anti-Semitic meaning attributed to these passages by persecutors is not an accurate assessment of the text’s meaning; second, that Jesus anticipates the abuse of his message and the possibility that it will serve as a pretext for collective persecution, the very thing he wishes to eliminate from human life; and third, that Jesus’ effect on the course of history is greater than the confusion cast onto Christian texts by Christian abuses.
will illuminate the founding murder and the truth concerning all victims. The emotion of Jesus’ tone indicates clearly that this is not the role he would prefer them to play. At the same time he acknowledges that this is the only role for which they are capable given the sovereignty of violence in their, and every, society.

Jesus’ willingness to make use of the *skandala* generated in the course of his ministry has an important precedent in the Old Testament. In the book of Exodus we see God the “hardening the heart” of Pharaoh in prelude to their liberation from Egypt (Ex 4:21). This hardening occurs by stages at the prompting of the ten plagues that God inflicts on Egypt. Girard recognizes in these plagues the reality indicated by all mythological plagues, the sacrificial crisis and its mimetic escalation, and this mimetic crisis is resolved in the same manner as those of myth and ritual, by the expulsion of a victim, in this case, the entire nation of Israel. Girard points out that the passage typically rendered “Let my people go” (8:1), is actually given in the active voice in the Hebrew, and so is properly translated, “Send my people out,” which underscores that their departure from Egypt is best understood as an expulsion. The successive hardenings of Pharaoh’s heart are steps in the escalation of a mimetic crisis precipitated by Moses and the Jews. They bring the crisis to the intensity required to precipitate the violent expulsion that will be the means by which the Jews are liberated from slavery and returned to the

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780 Ibid., 153. The root of the Hebrew word in Exodus 4:23 is פָלַח (shalach), which means “to send.” The verb form used in 4:23 is given in the active voice and in the “piel” case, which according to the rules of Hebrew grammar has the effect of intensifying the sense of the word it modifies. So not only does the Hebrew text indicate that Pharaoh will expel the Jews, but that he will do so eagerly and with vigor. See Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks, Colin Smith, eds., *Old Testament Parsing Guide* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 51.
Promised Land. Just as the hardness of Pharaoh is made by the providence of God to serve in the liberation of the Jewish people, so too the Pharisees’ descent towards the “immobility of granite”\textsuperscript{781} will occasion Jesus’ “exodus.”\textsuperscript{782}

The passages concerning the blood of Jesus (Mt 23:35, 27:25) indicate that the Pharisees themselves are not excluded from this salvation. As with the more notorious passage from Mt 27:25, the indication here that the Pharisees will have come upon them “blood of the righteous” (Mt 23:35) must be understood in light of Jewish cultic practice, where to receive the blood of a sacrificed victim is to experience the benefit of the offering.\textsuperscript{783} By their participation in the event of Jesus’ expulsion, by their filling this role made necessary by the structure of human culture, they too participate in the mystery of salvation. Just as the crowd on Good Friday inadvertently invokes the blessing of Christ by calling for the blood of his sacrifice to come upon them, so too, quite in spite of themselves,\textsuperscript{784} the Pharisees will fill a terrible but necessary role in the accomplishment of the work to which Jesus sets himself. Guided not by their own understanding but rather in spite of it, guided instead by the Spirit of Truth and the designs of God and his providence, even Jesus’

\textsuperscript{781} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 287.

\textsuperscript{782} “And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Lk 9:30-31).

\textsuperscript{783} Ex 24:6-8: “Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, “All that the Lord has said, we will hear and do.” Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.” See Simmonds, “Uses of Blood,” 168.

\textsuperscript{784} Simmonds, “Uses of Blood,” 177-178.
enemies, acting as his enemies, place themselves in close enough proximity to his saving work to be worthy of some hope of participating in its blessing.

4.18. ... and on this Rock...

The hardened heart is the heart of stone referred to by the prophets (Ez 36:26, Zech 7:12). It is the heart made reflexive, compulsive, mindless, and inhumane by mimetism. It is the heart that has been turned to stone by countless skandala, conflicts, resentments, frustrations and then the wrath that inevitably attend wild desires and sensuality. It is the heart as one finds it in the midst of the mimetic crisis, where mimetism is directed frantically in all directions. It is the heart of Pharaoh in the midst of his confrontations with Moses. We see it in the depraved cruelty and hallucinatory obsessions of King Herod. We see it formed too within the Pharisees in the course of their confrontations with Jesus.

The counter image to the heart of stone is given to us by Christ himself at Caesarea Philippi when he gives to “Simon, son of John” the name “Kephas,” which by way of Greek is translated into English as “Peter.” The rock bears a formal resemblance to the stone; the two words are practically synonyms in English. But

785 The English Peter is an Anglicization of petros. Since “rock” in Greek is a feminine noun, petra, it requires a new rendering to serve as a masculine name. This discrepancy in gender gives to the Greek an awkward aspect: “You are Petros, and on this Petra I will build my church.” No such difficulty exists in Aramaic, where the word for rock is kephas, which is masculine. It is evident from the letters of St. Paul that Peter was known as Kephas in the earliest years of the Christian Church (Gal 2:11). This points to the likelihood that this saying of Christ originates from the earliest stratum, and so is widely accepted to be among the ipsissima verba of Jesus. Stanley Jaki, And On This Rock, 73-78.
Jesus’ invocation of the image of the rock recalls those instances in the Old Testament, the Psalms in particular, where God is invoked as “the Rock.”\textsuperscript{786} In chapter three we saw that in these passages the Rock is a description of the safety provided by God against the mimetism of the crowd gathered around its victim. In the midst of the hallucinatory chaos of the mimetic crisis, the Rock is the place of stability and security, the place where the crowd and its delusions cannot exert their influence. As we saw in the earlier discussion of the event at Caesarea Philippi, Peter’s ability to stand apart not only from the crowd but even his fellow disciples indicates that he already bears within him a Rock-like independence from the influence of its mimetic contagion.\textsuperscript{787}

The scene at Caesarea Philippi at which this incident occurs underscores the theme of mimetic contagion. Caesarea Philippi was founded as a Roman town and served as the home of the Roman garrison, and so was thoroughly pagan in its culture. A pious Jew would typically avoid such a place. This is surely why the text notes that Jesus and his disciples are only “in the vicinity” the town rather than within its confines (Mt 16:10). Near the town, and certainly visible to anyone within its vicinity, was Mount Hermon. Atop Mount Hermon at the time of Jesus stood a temple to Jupiter built by Herod the Great as a gift to Caesar Augustus in gratitude for expanding his jurisdiction in Judea.\textsuperscript{788} Josephus mentions that the location of the

\textsuperscript{786} In fact, only God is ever referred to as “the Rock” in the Old Testament. Never is a human person ever referred to by that title. This cannot be said for any other title attributed to God, including Judge, Father, King, Lord, and Savior, and even God. Jesus himself cites an instance where the Old Testament refers to men as gods (John 10:34-35). Stanley Jaki, \textit{And On This Rock}, 69-72.

\textsuperscript{787} See page 25.
Temple was referred to as Panium, a name which refers to the shrine of the Greek god Pan located at the base of the mountain in a grotto near an immeasurably deep pool that was believed at the time to be the source of the Jordan River.789

The scandalous religious compromise and political toadyism visible in these elements of the landscape around Caesarea Philippi signify the sort of weakness before mimetic influence that Herod the Great must have passed on to his son, Herod Antipas, the executioner of John the Baptist. More significant even than this, however, is the shrine of the god Pan. Girard points out that Pan is a kind of recapitulation of the god Dionysus,790 whom he describes as the god of “homicidal fury” and “mob hysteria.”791 As his association with “panic” suggests, Pan is the god of the frenzied crowd, and like Dionysus, is associated with the sparagmos, the spasm of collective violence that brings the frenzy to an end.792 And whatever Pan has in common with Dionysus, he shares likewise with Hades. Girard cites approvingly the observation of Heraclitus who declares that “Dionysus and Hades are the same.”793 Thus, “the gates of Hades”794 referred to by Jesus in Mt 16:26 may


789 Josephus, The Jewish War, 703.

790 Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, 69.


792 Ibid., 100.


794 Modern translations feature words such as “netherworld,” “hell,” and “Sheol,” but Hades is the original Greek indicates “Hades.”

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very well have been within view of the disciples as Jesus declared that they would not prevail against the Church founded on Peter.

The next exchange between Peter and Jesus indicates that his freedom from mimetic influence is not total. Peter is able to stand apart from the crowd for the sake of making his confession, but he cannot conceive of Jesus becoming its victim. Peter’s misgivings concerning the Passion are taken quite seriously by Jesus who responds to them with a vehemence that must have shocked all the disciples—*Get behind me Satan, you are an obstacle* (skandalon) *to me!* (Mt 16:21). Peter’s aversion to the Cross is understandable in human terms, of course, but what he does not understand is that the Cross is the completion of the movement away from mimetism that Peter himself has just exhibited in his confession of Jesus as the Christ. The Passion that Jesus predicts to the disciples and the establishment of the place of the victim as the place of Truth are together the final overcoming of all that is represented by the shrine of Pan present at Caesarea Philippi, and Peter’s aversion to it shows that the mimetism and delusion represented there still have a hold on him. This hold is seen clearly during the course of Peter’s denial when the crowd’s hostility to Jesus becomes his own. By means of mimetic contagion Jesus becomes for Peter the same *skandalon* he is for the Pharisees, and in his cursing of Jesus where he exhibits the mimetism of a barking dog, Peter shows that he too has made the descent through the realms of the personal, the animal, and the vegetable to the mineral.\(^795\)

Peter is called the Rock by Christ, but St. Paul makes clear that he can be so only insofar as he is founded on Christ, the Rock (1 Cor 10:4).\textsuperscript{796} We have seen, in fact, that on Good Friday Christ is the only rock in a sea of mimetic turbulence that overwhelms even his closest disciples. Christ's renaming of Peter is a kind of anticipatory gesture, dependent on his taking up of the Old Testament image and bringing it to completion according to the pattern that he establishes in himself. He accomplishes this, of course, in the very moment when Peter fails to live up to his new name, during the Passion where he perseveres in mercy in the face of the crowd's violent mimetism, answering the blows struck against him with forgiveness and responding to the curses uttered against him with blessings.\textsuperscript{797} He resists the violent mimesis of the crowd and simultaneously establishes a new mimesis patterned on himself as the imitator of his Father's will.

The rock thus stands as a pattern of imitation that extends from God to the human disciples of Jesus. It is the icon of a mimesis that runs counter to the mimesis animating the archaic sacred and its transcendence. The “stone,” as we have seen, is the image of mimetism, the image of desire as it becomes increasingly obsessed by obstacles. The stone as the unyielding obstacle is the image of the only stability and rest that a reflexive fascination for all that opposes and negates can know. This species of desire generates the “transcendence towards the nadir”\textsuperscript{798} that Girard distills from the great novelists of Western literature. There a “mysticism of the

\textsuperscript{796} 1 Cor.: “All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.”

\textsuperscript{797} 1 Peter 3:9.

\textsuperscript{798} Girard, \textit{Deceit, Desire, and the Novel}, 241.
mediator” emerges that Girard notes bears the hollow outline of “true mysticism... dedicated to the service of God.”

The Rock as presented in the New Testament supplies the iconic symmetry of a “transcendence towards the zenith” that corresponds to the stone’s nadir. The rock is the place of fixity amid the wild swings in valuation associated with mimetism, the swings that can regard Job with awe and admiration one moment and then spit in his face the next, that welcomes Christ with shouts of “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday, and then shouts “Crucify him” on Good Friday. The rock indicates the steadfast resolve to refuse the mimetism of violence, to turn the other cheek and return curses with blessings. And finally, it is the preparedness to take the place of the victim and to understand it as the place of truth, the place free of the distortions of deviated transcendence, where God and neighbor can be understood and loved according to the truth. We see in Peter both images. On Holy Thursday we see him stone hearted by mimetism no less than Pharaoh and the Pharisees, but the name bestowed by Christ suggests another possibility that will be realized only when he himself takes the place of the victim according to Jesus’ prediction.

The symmetry of the stone and the rock point to a larger symmetrical relationship between archaic religion and Christianity. The aim of the next and final

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799 Ibid., 154.

800 Jesus predicts Peter’s martyrdom in Jn 21:18-19: “Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”
chapter will be to elaborate and explore his larger symmetry and consider its significance for a proper understanding of Christian life.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MIMETIC THEORY, SACRIFICE, AND THE EUCHARIST

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will consider further the symmetrical resemblance of archaic religion and Christianity in terms of their typological relationship. It will be seen that the symmetrical relationship between the deviated transcendence that Girard elaborates in the course of his literary criticism and anthropology and the “vertical” transcendence he attributes to Christian mysticism point to a larger resemblance between Christianity and archaic religion. Furthermore, it will be seen that this symmetry is established by the renewal within human nature and human culture that is effected by God through the resurrection of Jesus. The symmetry observed is the outcome of what St. Paul describes as the “recapitulation” or “reestablishment of all things in Christ (anakephalaiosasthai ta panta en Christo)” (Eph 1:10). The sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death on the Cross as well as the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist will be examined in light of the symmetry established by Christianity’s recapitulation of archaic religion. This will help establish the necessity of the notion of a Christian sacrifice, and the fully sacrificial nature of Christianity, matters of some controversy among Christian theologians influenced by Girard. The final sections of this chapter will consider the role of the Eucharistic sacrifice in

completing this symmetry and extending to humanity the renewal that Jesus accomplishes by his resurrection.

5.2. Sir James Frazer and Origen

Modern anthropology did not take long to notice a close similarity between Christianity and archaic religion. In the last chapter we briefly considered the observations of the eminent British anthropologist, Sir James Frazer, regarding the common features of archaic myth and ritual to the Passion narratives. In the estimation of Frazer and modern anthropology in general, these similarities are the result of a genealogical relationship between Christianity and its archaic antecedents. The former resembles the latter because it originates in it, and is simply another version of it. According to Frazer, the narrative elements common to archaic religions and Christianity originate in a primordial fertility myth centered on what he calls the "vegetation spirit," a mysterious intelligence animating the natural world’s oscillation between birth and death across the changing of the seasons. Archaic communities sought to ensure the return of the world’s fertility and their own prosperity by the ritual imitation of the cycle established by the vegetation spirit. Frazer offers as an example the myth and accompanying ritual


803 Girard notes that the recurrence of death and "resurrection" that is present in myth is found in the archaic societies of tropical regions where the cyclical progression of seasons is not observed. He insists that the cyclical character of myth and ritual does not correspond to the change in seasons, but to the mimetic cycle, the oscillation between stability and chaos that is experienced first in the event of the founding murder and is then imitated in sacrificial rituals. The obvious flaw
associated with the “King of the Wood” whose setting is Nemi, an ancient village situated near Rome. The community regarded its king as a kind of incarnation of the vegetation spirit, and when he arrived at an advanced age, he was killed ritualistically in order to clear the way for a successor capable of renewing the community. For Frazer, the “King of the Wood” is one of countless myths, rituals, and religious systems that originate in this primordial myth.

Under the names of Osiris, Adonis, Thammuz, Attis and Dionysus, the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians, Phrygians, and Greeks represented the decay and revival of vegetation with rites which, as the ancients themselves recognized, were substantially the same, and which find their parallels in the spring and midsummer customs of our European peasantry.

Included among these is the cult that gathers around Jesus, whose death and resurrection once again follows the pattern of the natural world’s decay and renewal. A commentator on Frazer writes:

However wide we wander, however deep we delve into the records of the past, we are always coming up against one being, the Vegetable God, who as decapitated Tescatlipoca or the dismembered Osiris is strange, but who is not strange at all, once our astonished gaze has recognized the likeness, as Jesus. Christianity is seldom mentioned; there is no need that it should be, for Sir James [Frazer] naturally assumes that the main articles of the Christian faith are known to his readers…. With Attis, Adonis, or Thammuz, we begin to close about the Christian altar. Behind them, as behind the slave who was King of the Wood, there looms, scarcely named, the shadow of that other God, who as Son of Man… died on the tree. And inescapably we are

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of this “seasonal” understanding of fertility cults resides in its failure to evaluate what is most significant in the rituals associated with them, namely the central role of violence in both the myth and accompanying ritual. There is nothing in the natural progression of winter to spring that suggests the need for violence, collective or otherwise, yet violence plays the central role in the rituals associated with the vegetation spirit. According to Girard, “Nature enters the picture later, when the ritualistic mind succeeds in detecting certain similarities between nature’s rhythms and the community’s alternating pattern of order and disorder.” René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 96.

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Modern scientists were not the only ones to notice the similarity between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the stories of archaic religion. The earliest Christians recognized them as well, but approached them in a spirit quite different from the modern skepticism of Frazer. The Church Father, Origen (185-253), compares the story of Jesus to the heroes of myth and tragedy.

He who was crucified quite recently accepted his death willingly for the human race, like those who died for their country to check epidemics of plague, or famines, or stormy seas. For it is probable that in the nature of things there are certain mysteries, causes which are hard for the multitude to understand, which are responsible for the fact that one righteous man dying voluntarily for the community may avert the activities of the evil daemons by expiation, since it is they who bring about plagues or famines or stormy seas or anything similar.\footnote{Origen, \textit{Contra Celsum}, i, 31. Quoted in Frances Young, \textit{Sacrifice and the Death of Christ} (Edinburgh: Westminster Press, 1975), 79.}

Girard’s analysis prepares us to recognize the “epidemics” referred to by Origen as indications of mimetic crises and the “righteous men” that he refers to as scapegoats of these crises. Origen may very well have had in mind a figure such as Oedipus, who according the Greek tragedy saves Thebes from the plague by disfiguring himself and banishing himself from the city.

Origen seems to ignore the fact that in the original telling of these mythological stories the heroes are responsible for the epidemics because of the crimes they have committed.\footnote{Origen, \textit{Contra Celsum}, i, 31. Quoted in Frances Young, \textit{Sacrifice and the Death of Christ} (Edinburgh: Westminster Press, 1975), 79.} Their deaths cure the epidemics because their
violent removal from the community eliminates the source of the contagion. In the course of Origen’s conflation, the original guilt of the “righteous men” disappears, covered, as it were, by the innocence of Christ. We see in Origen’s application of the Passion story to myth the beginnings of humanity’s ability to recognize the truth concealed beneath the strange displacements and transfigurations of archaic religion. We can observe further that the progress of his decoding is hampered by his inability to recognize in the images of “plague, famines, and stormy seas” indications of social crises, fully human events, as well as his own displacement of blame onto the “evil daemons” that he mentions. A complete understanding of the true nature of the events obscured by myth requires only a fuller application of the Passion narrative. In its light the “plagues, famines, and stormy seas” can be recognized as indications of undifferentiated communities united in accusation against their victims. The images are picturesque renderings of the violent crowd, agitated by mimetism, that the Gospels present unambiguously.

The comparisons of Frazer and Origen point to what is evident upon even a cursory investigation of religion, namely that the similarities that exist between archaic religion and Christianity invite and even demand comparison. For Frazer the comparison demonstrates that Christianity is simply one more instance of a benighted humanity’s attempt to make sense of what would only come to light with the rise of the modern empirical sciences. For Origen the myths he refers to are no less true than the Christian narrative even if less significant from the point of view of his Christian faith. While proceeding from very different starting points, both the

modern skeptic and the Church Father unite Christianity to archaic myth without
discerning any distinguishing feature. In the case of Origen, however, his faith in the
truth of the Christian text leads him to the truth concealed by myth. He cannot
express his knowledge precisely, much less systemize it. It rises only to the level of
intuition. Nevertheless, he demonstrates in a striking way the immediate effect of
the spread of Judeo-Christian revelation. As soon as it appears it begins to
undermine mythological representations. In the light of the Gospels the innocence
of the victims of collective persecution comes to light.

5.3. The Photograph and Its Negative

At one point in his Commentary on John Origen asks a question that he never
manages to answer completely.809

How does the sheep which is sacrificed contain an image of Christ, when the
sheep is sacrificed by those who are observing the law, but Christ is killed by
those who are transgressing it?810

This question poses a difficulty for Origen because he is not accustomed to
differentiating Christ from the victims to whom he compares him. Even as the lamb
is an “image” of Christ, it is killed justly, that is, killed according to the Jewish Law,
while the Gospel clearly presents Jesus’ death as an injustice.

The very same difficulty should have confronted Origen in his consideration
of the stories of those who died to save their people from epidemic. The lamb and


810 Quoted in Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 70.
the human victims of myth and ritual are images of Christ because they are victims of collective violence, but the accounts of their deaths are reversals of each other: Jesus is presented as innocent while the victims of myth and ritual are presented as guilty. This gives to the relationship between myth and ritual the same quality of inversion that characterizes the relationship of a photograph to its negative image. A photographic negative contains all the structural elements of the image to which it relates, but in a reversed manner that makes them impossible to recognize clearly. Only in light of the developed image, which presents the same features from a positive perspective, can the content of the negative be understood. The developed image comes last, but is the key to understanding the negative from which it develops.

The same temporal relationship characterizes the relation of the Passion to myth, ritual, and the founding murder from which they arise. Described in terms of the medieval scholastics, the Passion is second according to the “order of generation,” but is first according to the “order of understanding.” Even as the Passion comes last, it enjoys an epistemological priority as regards archaic religion in the same way that the image of a developed photograph makes clear the elements of its negative image. Conceiving of the relation of archaic religion in this way

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811 In the course of his discussion of Ivan Karamazov’s discourse concerning the Grand Inquisitor, Girard notes that “the Christianity that the Inquisition describes is like the negative of a photograph. It shows everything in a reversed manner, just like the words of Satan in the account of the temptation.” René Girard, *Resurrection from Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James Williams (New York: Crossroads, 1997), 130. A friend has warned me that in the age of digital photography this metaphor may not be as useful as it once was!

allows us to consider the similarities that observers, ancient and modern, never fail to notice, as well as the differences that have been proven more elusive but which come to the fore in the course of Girard’s analysis. This two-faced conception of the relationship allows us to consider fully the similarities between Christian revelation and archaic myth while simultaneously taking stock of the “unfathomable gulf” that lies between them.813

5.4. The type of the one to come

To say that archaic religion is an inverted image of Christianity is tantamount to saying that it is a “type” of Christianity, or an “image” of it in the same sense that Origen regards the Lamb of the Passover sacrifice to be an image of Jesus, even if he cannot precisely distinguish the two. In this way the mimetic theory draws close to the vast tradition of typological readings contained in the writings of the Church Fathers, a tradition developed extensively by Origen, but which originates in the writings of St. Paul, who describes Adam as a “type” of Jesus in Romans 5:14.

But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come.

A type is some historical reality—a person in this case, but in others an event or an institution—that foreshadows or suggests another reality that is referred to as the anti-type. Rom 5:14 presents Jesus as the anti-type of the original reality, Adam,

whose significance as a type only emerges in the appearance of the fulfilling anti-type. Borrowing from the language of semiotics, we can say that a “sign value” inheres in the type that only becomes fully apparent with the appearance of the “significate,” that to which the sign refers.\textsuperscript{814} Again, in the case of Adam, his typological significance only emerges with the appearance of the significate, Jesus.

The appearance of the anti-type entails a re-presentation of the original reality, but in such a way that the original is perfected in the course of its re-presentation. Adam represents human nature in its sinful condition, turned away from God and refusing the goodness and truth to which God ordains him. Jesus represents this same human nature perfected and fulfilled, embracing and accomplishing the Father’s will. Whereas Adam falls in the Garden of Eden, Jesus is faithful to his Father’s will in the Garden of Gethsemane.\textsuperscript{815} The tradition of typology is thus closely allied to another Pauline notion, that of “recapitulation,” which appears in Ephesians 1:10.

\begin{quote}
In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ (\textit{anakephalaiosasthai ta panta en Christo}), in heaven and on earth.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{814} It may be useful to note that I rely here on the semiotic doctrine of John Deely, the lineage of which extends back to the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce and the Thomist commentator, John of St. Thomas, whom Deely refers to by his given name, Jean Poinsot. This doctrine of signs differs in important ways from that of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose theory of signs was an important inspiration for post-structuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida. Deely indicates that a sign is an irreducible relation of three terms, the sign vehicle (that which is typically referred to as a sign), the significate (that to which the sign vehicle refers), and the interpretant (the cognizing organism who recognizes the relationship). See John Deely, \textit{What Distinguishes Human Understanding?} (Notre Dame: St. Augustine Press, 2002), 104-106.

\textsuperscript{815} Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Lk 22:40; Jn 18:1.
The intimate kinship of the notions of type and recapitulation is first established by St. Irenaeus, who indicates that as the “new Adam,” Jesus recapitulates his type, that is, he re-presents in a healed and perfected manner that which is first presented in Adam of the book of Genesis. Irenaeus presents God’s recapitulation of human nature as the animating principle of the Incarnation. The Son of God takes the fullness of human nature to himself, living a fully human life through all its stages, in order to restore it and bring it to salvation.

The notion of recapitulation imparts to the type the same inverted relation that we have considered in terms of the relationship of a photograph to its negative. Any type will possess qualities that unite it to its fulfilling anti-type, but will also feature defects that distinguish it. As we consider Origen’s deployment of types, we can see that he is most inclined to identify the positive features of types and so seems to be at something of a loss when confronted by an image such as that of the sacrificial victim of the Passover lamb that cannot be related to Christ without the consideration of negative characteristics. The same is true of the mythical heroes he compares positively to Christ without noting their status as causes of the epidemics their deaths relieve.

This readiness and inclination to recognize positive anticipations of New Testament realities surely has to do with the fact that the Biblical typologies with which Origen is most concerned typically anticipate and foreshadow New


\[817\] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 2.22.
Testament realities, and so the positive correspondences between type and anti-type are emphasized. Positive relations play a greater role in Biblical rather than archaic types, because as we have seen in chapter three, the Old Testament has already transcended the archaic sacred to a significant degree. The truth of the victim’s innocence is already in view there, and so mythological transfigurations do not dominate its types. The recapitulation of archaic types is already underway in the Old Testament, and so less of a negative contrast characterizes the relation of its types to their anti-types. Even so, the primordial type, the starting point for this tradition of interpretation is the Biblical type, Adam. He is the “type of the one to come”; he is the figure in which Irenaeus is able to unite the notions of type and recapitulation because his capacity to prefigure Christ stands in perfect symmetry to those elements that distinguish him from Jesus and are in need of restoration and healing. This original type, in other words, possesses in full measure the quality of the negative image that Girard uses to describe the relation of archaic religion to Christianity.

5.5. The recapitulation of all things

In his consideration of Jesus’ recapitulation of human nature, Irenaeus discusses Jesus’ experience of the full sequence of the stages of human growth and development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, growth to maturity, and death. To this universal recapitulation of human nature described by Irenaeus can be added a notion implicit in St. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ childhood, namely that Jesus’ early
life is a recapitulation of the particular history of Israel. Any consideration of recapitulation, whether of human life in general or that of Israel, invites an obvious question: why the crucifixion? Does the form of Jesus’ death—an event that receives far more attention from the evangelists than any other event of his life—contribute to the recapitulation of human nature? And what is the relation between the particular form and content of the crucifixion and its status as the high point of divine revelation?

Girard, of course, has an immediate response to these questions. The crucifixion stands at the heart of Jesus’ recapitulation of human nature for being the recapitulation of the decisive moment of hominization, the founding murder, which, by way of its simulacrum, sacrifice, plays a catalytic role within the development of human nature and culture. The crucifixion thus re-presents the decisive moment of the developmental process whereby all that is signified implicitly in the figure of “Adam” comes to be. If the Incarnation can be understood as God’s “descent” into history, the mimetic theory helps us understand in concrete terms how the crucifixion functions as the end point of this descent. In the final episode of his earthly life God in Christ arrives at the moment of human origins.

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This visitation of the founding murder is not a simple repetition of the original event in its original form. Were this the case, its full significance would remain unknown. The collective violence would activate the transfiguring mechanisms of the archaic sacred and be concealed by mythological transfigurations. The original event is repeated, but with the addition of distinguishing characteristics whereby its true nature can be recognized, and in whose light other events of collective persecution, including myth and ritual can be understood clearly. Most importantly, Jesus’ anticipation of the event includes the formation of a community of persons that will be able to recognize his innocence and will be capable of telling the story of the event from his perspective as a victim. As the account of Peter’s denial makes plain, Jesus’ disciples will succumb to the mimetism of the crowd, but its hold on them will be temporary and they will remain close enough to the event to provide an accurate account of it.819

The relation of the founding murder to sacrifice means that the recapitulation of one necessarily entails the recapitulation of the other. And because of the role played by sacrifice in the development of cultural forms, its recapitulation presents the possibility that the effects of Jesus’ recapitulation will extend to “all things,” just as St. Paul indicates in Eph 1:10. What is envisioned here can be described in terms of Bernard Lonergan’s notion of “sublation,” which refers to the renewal of an entire system not by its deconstruction and replacement, but by the renewal of its foundation, which then effects the renewal of the entire order on

which it is founded. The place of the victim gives to God an immediate access to the locus of the conjunction of human nature and human culture, the origin and inspiration for all that is human. For this reason the entire Incarnation is ordered to the occupation of that place, and the establishment of a Christian sacrifice is the fruit of this visitation.

5.6. Christian Sacrifice

This elaboration of Girard’s thought has sought to emphasize its typological character, an approach to his theory that Girard himself affirms. If a true recapitulation occurs over the course of the Incarnation we should expect that all of the elements of the original structure will be represented in some fashion in the represented reality, just as the photograph represents the elements of its negative image. All that Girard discusses, no matter how problematic it may seem in its original context—mimetic desire, sacrifice, the sacred—must be represented within Christianity if Christianity truly recapitulates its original type. These too must find a place among the “all things” written of by St. Paul.

820 Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, vol 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 36-37. “... I wish to introduce the notion of sublation, not exactly in Hegel’s sense, but rather in a sense used by Karl Rahner. Let us distinguish, then, between a sublating set of operations and a sublated set. The sublating set introduces operations that are quite new and distinct; it finds among them a new basis and ground; but so far from stunting or interfering with the sublated set, it preserves them integrally, it vastly extends their relevance, and it perfects their performance.” Lonergan continues on 359: “We have seen that the Christian religion as lived is the sublation of the whole of human living.”

Even as Girard provides the basis for this typological understanding of the relationship between archaic religion and Christianity he can seem to resist a full application of it. His most forceful resistance appears in his 1978 work, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, which remains the most comprehensive elaboration of his thought. At this point in the development of his ideas he could still see in sacrifice only a violent venting mechanism, and on this basis rules out the possibility of an authentic Christian sacrifice. According to this early view, a “sacrificial reading” of the Gospels that owes more to the concepts and categories of archaic religion emerges during the Patristic period and develops to maturity in certain atonement theologies of the Middle Ages.\(^\text{822}\) These characterize the God of the New Testament in terms nearly identical to those of the archaic gods: The sin of man triggers the wrath of God. Only the venting away of this anger can occasion the possibility of humanity’s salvation, which is accomplished in the death of Christ. God discharges the entirety of his accumulated anger by violently crushing an innocent victim, Jesus, and only after having been pacified in this way can he approach humanity with mercy. This conception restores to divinity the violence that the Gospels assign to humanity.\(^\text{823}\) This, Girard adds, is the theological vision informing the culture of “Christendom,” a culture recognizably Christian in


\(^{\text{823}}\) St. Anselm tends to take most of the blame for the formulation of this view of atonement. See Robert Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled* (New York: Continuum Books, 2009), 4, 100. Daly admits in the course of his analysis that his view of Anselm may be a bit incomplete, and depend too much on hasty readings of Anselm. For a more positive view of Anselm’s theory of atonement see David Bentley Hart, “A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7 no. 3, (1998): 333-349.
important ways, but with strong attachments to the stabilizing power of archaic myth and sacred violence.824

Later in his work Girard reverses his assessment of sacrifice, due largely to the influence of Fr. Raymund Schwager.825 Schwager builds his case on the Old Testament account of the judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28). Here King Solomon is confronted by two harlots, each claiming to be the mother of an infant. Solomon proposes to settle the dispute by cutting the child in half so that each mother may have an equal portion. One agrees to this solution while the other relents and agrees to part with the child in order to save its life. Solomon realizes that the mother wishing to save the baby must be the actual mother, and so awards her possession of the child. Schwager is able to convince Girard that in this narrative are present, side by side, the two opposed sacrifices of archaic religion and the Judeo-Christian tradition.826

Schwager’s intervention allows Girard to clear this impasse. Girard is able to see that sacrifice is not rejected by Christianity, but healed and restored. Within his later works Girard clearly affirms the notion of a Christian sacrifice, and even

824 Girard, Things Hidden, 181.

825 In interviews and reconsiderations of his own work Girard notes the importance of his collaboration with Schwager in effecting this turn. Girard, The One by Whom Scandal Comes, 43. See also, René Girard, “Epilogue: The Anthropology of the Cross, An Interview with René Girard,” The Girard Reader, ed. James Williams (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 272. “I have come to be more positive about the word sacrificial, so I would like first of all to make a distinction between sacrifice as a murder and sacrifice as a renunciation. The latter is a movement toward freedom from mimesis as potentially rivalrous acquisition and rivalry.”

826 We might further recognize that the story presents them side by side in typological symmetry.
affirms the typological nature of his thought with respect to sacrifice.\footnote{Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 215.}

Nevertheless one still encounters indications that Girard hesitates to embrace fully the typological logic of his own thought. In these moments he seems to accept that distinguishing Christianity from archaic religion requires the elimination of some feature of the original structure, either anthropological or cultural. In his discussions of mimetic desire, for example, Girard will often describe it in univocally negative terms, as though it were inevitably associated with rivalry and scapegoating, something to be overcome and done away with in the course of conversion to Christian life.\footnote{Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 158, 166.} These descriptions of mimetic desire often seem like imprecisions in the expression of his thought, but he exerts more serious opposition to the notion of a Christian sacred. Up to and including his final works and interviews he associates it exclusively with the violent sacred of archaic religion, and clearly regards the notion of a “sacred” as alien to Christianity.\footnote{“The sacred is violence.” Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 32. Girard notes that the influence of Christianity is such that we can no longer achieve “the true sacred” by which he means that we can no longer divinize victims of collective violence as was done in archaic periods. Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 37. Girard comments on Jean-Luc Marion’s book, \textit{God without Being}. It is evident in passages such as the following that late in his career Girard equates “the sacred” with sacred violence and scapegoating: “I had struggled with the book. I think the title, “God without being” could be translated as “God without the sacred”—God without sacred violence; God without scapegoating.” René Girard, \textit{The Girard Reader}, “Interview with René Girard,” ed. James Williams (Lexington: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1996), 282. In his last major work, \textit{Battling to the End}, Girard remarks that Jesus “frees holiness from the sacred.” Girard, \textit{Battling to the End}, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 129.} Girard begins his anthropological reflections with archaic practice, and works his way to the Christian institution. Girard begins with what is first in the order of generation, and
while he acknowledges the priority of Jesus’ death on the Cross in the order of understanding, there are clear indications that the archaic practice has left the deepest impression on his thought, making it difficult for him to feel completely at ease with the notion of the archaic elements of sacrifice in the restored Christian context.

The thesis of this dissertation is that the symmetrical structure of the type characterizes the whole of the relationship of Christianity to archaic religion. This thesis necessarily proposes to correct Girard on this issue, but as has already been made clear, by applying more comprehensively the essential insight of his own theory.\(^\text{830}\) It also proposes this view of Girard’s theory in order to settle disputes that still exist among certain followers of Girard, who regard sacrifice with suspicion and assign to it an ambivalent role in Christian theology,\(^\text{831}\) or who regard sacrifice as a theme to be diminished in Catholic life and worship.\(^\text{832}\) This issue is of great importance to assessing properly the significance of Girard’s theory to Christian theology inasmuch as Girard’s initial refusal of sacrifice contradicts the longstanding Christian teaching that regards Jesus’ death on the Cross as a sacrifice. Specifically

\(^{830}\) Girard remarks that Blaise Pascal indicated that it is only permissible to correct the Bible “by invoking the Bible’s help.” I propose something similar with respect to the mimetic theory, to correct Girard with the help of his theory. Girard, Things Hidden, 276.


\(^{832}\) Robert Daly, for example, favors the practice of translating Catholic liturgical texts in such a way that diminishes the sacrificial themes present in the original Latin versions. He expresses strong disapproval of the most recent translation of the Roman Sacramentary that restore the Latin’s references to sacrifice. See Robert Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled (New York: T & T Clark International, Continuum Books, 2009), 132-133; 198-199.
Catholic teaching likewise regards the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.\textsuperscript{833} We can note further that the notion of a sacrifice-less Christianity runs counter to the long standing attitude of Christians towards the moral life and the life of service that are typically regarded as involving the offering of countless sacrifices after the example of Jesus. The words of St. Paul in Romans seem to confirm this longstanding view: “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (12:1).

As is hopefully clear by now, the whole of Girard’s thought, from his literary criticism to his anthropology, elucidates the typological symmetry that exists between the deviated transcendence of archaic religion and the transcendence of Christianity. The logic of the theory demands that a notion of sacrifice be present in the positive image that appears as a result of the original structure’s re-presentation. Even more basically, Girard argues strenuously that sacrifice leaves an indelible mark on human nature. The course of human development establishes a permanent bond between humanity and sacrifice that becomes a kind of anthropological constant fundamental to the integrity of human nature. Sacrifice and desire reciprocally inform one another: desire leads to sacrifice, and is in turn impelled by it. To deny the possibility of a Christian sacrifice is to deny that Christ came to transform human life in its entirety, or even in any significant way. It is to deny the

\textsuperscript{833} “If anyone says that in the Mass a true and proper sacrifice (\textit{verum et proprium sacrificium}) is not offered to God or that the offering consists merely in the fact that Christ is given to us to eat, let him be anathema.” Heinrich J. Denzinger, \textit{Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals}, ed. and trans. Peter Hünermann (San Francisco: Ignatius press, 2010), Council of Trent, canon 1: Denz 1751.
completion of the recapitulation effected by Christ, and to diminish to insignificance
the effect of the Incarnation.

5.7. A Definition of Sacrifice

The task of defining sacrifice is difficult. Girard himself never truly does so,
offering instead a broad vision of sacrifice that continuously juxtaposes it with
scapegoating.\textsuperscript{834} At the center of this vision is Girard’s account of sacrifice as it is
practiced at the earliest stage of human development, where it presents within
ritual and myth the clearest form of the single victim mechanism. This form of
sacrifice provides the paradigm by which the institution as a whole is understood.
In time, human communities develop other institutions that replace sacrifice as the
means by which they maintain social control and restrain violence. With the advent
of the state and systems of jurisprudence, the practical need for sacrifice nearly
disappears. Sacrifice and other religious institutions are then free to develop
according to other concerns, such as theological or social symbolisms or aesthetic
interests. Much the same is true of mythology, which often undergoes a regimen of
censorship as communities come to be scandalized by the violent contents of their
own religious texts. Even so, the conservative tendency often means that

\textsuperscript{834} “So someone will ask: ‘How can we avoid falling once more into that state of crisis?’ And
the obvious answer will be: ‘Repeat the resolution of that state of crisis; choose the sacrificial victims
ourselves and relive the crisis. Disorder will purposefully be created, and ended via the collective
destruction of those victims, in the hope that this will produce the same result as before.’ If you
accept this definition of sacrifice, you will see how it helped resolve problems, and in turn help us
understand why men are convinced that such sacrifices bring about peace.” René Girard,
“Psychoanalysis and Sacrifice,” \textit{In Freud’s Tracks: Conversations from the Journal of European
Psychoanalysis}, eds. Sergio Benvenuto and Anthony Molino (New York: Rowman and Littlefield
Publishers, 2009), 146.
indications of the texts’ original function are still present. They often retain indications of their origin in collective violence, but in some cases do not.\textsuperscript{835} This, Girard argues, explains later sacrificial expressions that do not exhibit the essential features of the original practice.

Other anthropologists take a different view. Where Girard sees an origin for sacrifice and a comprehensible if confused pattern of development from that origin, other scholars see irreducible fragmentation. Many anthropologists have given up on the possibility of a unified understanding of the purposes and aim of sacrificial rituals. John Milbank regards Girard’s attempt to find coherency within the vast body of data is a “last gasp of the Enlightenment.”\textsuperscript{836} Marcel Detienne has claimed that the diversity of archaic religious practices defies all attempts at categorization and that there is, in fact, no such thing as “sacrifice.” The term, he insists, ought to be placed on the “rubbish dump of such other nineteenth century Western projections as ‘totem,’ ‘taboo,’ ‘mana,’ and the ‘sacred.’”\textsuperscript{837} A more moderate view of the data before us, but one still skeptical of Girard’s claim to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, is given by Louis Dupré who rejects the possibility of discovering an origin of sacrifice that provides us with a window onto

\textsuperscript{835} Plato, for example, advocated the censoring of myths so as to render their content exemplary from a moral standpoint. This would often include the elimination of violent or transgressive elements, the “crimes of the gods,” as Girard calls them. Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 43, 72, 76.


its essence or provides us with a “common denominator” uniting all sacrificial practices.\textsuperscript{838}

Even as he rejects the Girardian project, Dupré points, perhaps in spite of himself, to the possibility of an understanding of sacrifice that unites the diversity of forms found in religious traditions. After having insisted that the endless “mutation” of sacrifice rules out a “univocal definition,” Dupré then notes that sacrifice’s development becomes “ever more analogous in the course of its development.” This may simply be a case of saying more than he intends, but if sacrifices develop “analogously,” the appearance of differences in the course of their development must not do away entirely with some common feature that unites them, the “common denominator” that he initially rules out. In that case, a definition of sacrifice would simply be a description of the feature that unites them without ruling out what may well be other significant differences. In other words, an adequate definition of sacrifice must be as all definitions are, univocal, but to be fully useful in this case, it must provide a basis for distinguishing sacrifices of all types. What we require is a univocal \textit{definition} of sacrifice capable of contributing to the description of an analogous \textit{relationship} between sacrifices.\textsuperscript{839} For the purposes of the discussion at hand, what we require is a definition of sacrifice that applies equally well to both Christian and archaic sacrifice, but which contributes to our ability to distinguish them as well.


\textsuperscript{839} Dupré, “The Structure and Meaning of Sacrifice,” 258.
Robert Daly warns us against understanding Christian sacrifice in the terms of the history of religion, but in fact we learn a great deal about the nature of sacrifice from Girard’s analysis of archaic sacrifice. We learn in particular that sacrifice functions to rid the community of mimetic rivalries wherein persons encounter one another as obstacles to their desire. It functions, in other words, to rid the community of skandalα, the obstacles to desire. This, it is proposed here, is an essential feature of sacrifice that unites all of its forms. We saw too in Girard’s analysis that the efficacy of archaic sacrifice depends on the offering of something tangible and concrete. In those instances considered most closely by Girard, this takes the form of a living victim, animal or human, upon whom the skandalα of the community are projected in order to be expelled violently. It will be seen, however, that this need not be so, and so the violent aspect of archaic offerings need not be attributed to what is most fundamental to sacrifice as a concept, nor included in the definition. Likewise, the skandalα that concerns sacrifice need not be limited to the obstacles of mimetic rivalry and violent conflict that form the main object of Girard’s study. Obstacles of all kinds may be included in our consideration of sacrifice, and the term “obstacle” should be taken henceforth to include the skandalα associated with mimetic rivalry and the double mediation of desire, but also whatever else might be considered an obstacle to the desire of an individual or group of any size, any difficulty that impedes human happiness. All of this taken

840 Robert Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 6.

841 Dupré, “The Structure and Meaning of Sacrifice,” 256.
together leaves us with the following definition of sacrifice: a sacrifice is an offering of the flesh that serves to eliminate obstacles to desire.

This definition resembles that of the 20th century ethnologist, Marcel Mauss, who described sacrifice as an act “which, by the consecration of a victim, modifies the moral state of the sacrificer or of certain material objects with which he is concerned.” This is accurate in many cases, but is still too specific to serve as a definition applying to all that might be considered a sacrificial act. The “flesh” offered need not be a victim, human or animal. It may be time, energy, money, or any material reality that serves to remove or otherwise overcome any obstacle to desire. Likewise, the “modification of the moral state” must be construed broadly to include anything that liberates the individual from an impediment to happiness, the ultimate object of desire. Mauss’s definition exhibits the flawed approach of many anthropologists, including Girard in the earliest stage of his thought, which gives to archaic religion too much say in the formulation of the definition of sacrifice. Any proper definition must be able to describe archaic practice, but a definition derived from archaic practice will inevitably yield a definition that locates the essence of sacrifice in the categories of archaic religion and its violence.

This definition covers the classic approaches to Christian sacrifice, including the notion of atonement inasmuch as atonement may the thought of as the clearing away of obstacles between God and human persons. The definition also describes the essential feature of other sacrifices that do not receive much attention from

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Girard, including the offerings of food items to God or gods that are found within the Bible and throughout the anthropological record. The definition applies in these specialized contexts examined by anthropologists, but also countless others far removed from the categories of formal religion. The definition, in fact, points to the banality and ubiquity of sacrifice. The expenditure of any amount of personal energy or any other resource for the sake of making life better in any way for oneself or others can be regarded as sacrifice. Giving money to the poor, working to make money for oneself to procure food and shelter, investing time and energy in the production of a tool that allows one to accomplish a task: according to the definition given above, these are all sacrifices.

This is not to say that any and all sacrifices are good or wise or just sacrifices. Still less is this to say that all sacrifices are Christian sacrifices. The definition itself does not provide the criterion necessary to make such an evaluation. So too it should be noted that religious and cultural systems create their own conditions that will generate obstacles of their own that can be removed by the sacrifices called for within the system. If a person is convinced by his religious beliefs that the pouring out of a gallon of milk on the first new moon of the year will guarantee a successful harvest, then the performance of that sacrificial gesture may very well relieve a great deal of anxiety and contribute to the sacrificer’s happiness.
5.8. A Definition of Christian Sacrifice

The sacrifices associated with Christianity, including Jesus’ death on the Cross, is just as liable to the description we have applied to all sacrifices, including those of the rituals of violent scapegoating. As noted above, theologies of atonement may be thought of as descriptions of the obstacles that exist between God and humanity, and the manner by which they are removed. The theme of reconciliation that dominates the Gospels, whether between human persons or between God and humans, may be described in terms of the removal of obstacles between the relevant parties. And so it remains for us to identify the distinctive aspect of specifically Christian sacrifice. If Christian, archaic, and all other types of sacrifice seek to eliminate obstacles to desire, what distinguishes them?

The Christian sacrifice is distinctive inasmuch as it seeks to eliminate skandala without recourse to a skandalon. The efficacy of archaic sacrifice relies on a single skandalon to be the means by which lesser skandala are gathered and expelled in the act of violent sacrifice. If the object of sacrifice is the elimination of obstacles, archaic sacrifice operates by removing all obstacles minus one, the scapegoat who by way of mimetic projections comes to incarnate for the persecuting community all opposition to its peace and prosperity. Christian sacrifice seeks to eliminate obstacles without remainder, the remainder that the apocalyptic discourses warn will return with a vengeance. In other words, the Christian sacrifice seeks to accomplish the work of sacrifice—the elimination of obstacles—more completely than archaic sacrifice. For this reason, contrary to many of Girard’s interpreters and Girard himself in his earliest works, Christianity is
properly regarded as more, rather than less, sacrificial than its archaic predecessors for aspiring to a perfect sacrifice, to one that accomplishes a complete and total elimination of obstacles.

This distinction within sacrifice provides us with a criterion by which to judge sacrifice. If a sacrifice removes obstacles and creates happiness, but in so doing creates other obstacles, either for the sacrificer or for others, it is a failure as a Christian sacrifice. Attempts to achieve happiness may succeed at first, but then result in a re-imposition and strengthening of the original obstacle. Recreational drug use and drug addiction provide a convenient example of this phenomenon. We see a similar removal and re-imposition of obstacles within the domain of technological development. Throughout the entirety of its history humans have relied on technology to overcome bodily limitations and to overcome environmental obstacles. In our own time it has become apparent that the industrial technology modern humanity has relied on to overcome obstacles and satisfy desires will impose environmental degradation on future generations. The use of the technology in this way amounts to an abuse from the perspective of Christian sacrifice.

The definition’s emphasis on the role of the offering of flesh may be regarded as a kind of resistance to those conceptions of sacrifice that seek to distinguish Christian sacrifice by understanding it as an allegorization of archaic or Old Testament practices. There may be some truth in the importance of allegorical descriptions of sacrifices, but the sacrifices associated with the elimination of the *skandalon* never lack a bodily dimension. A case in point is provided by the New
Testament story known traditionally as “the widow’s mite” (Mk 12:43; Cf. Lk 21:1-4). In this story Jesus directs his disciples’ attention to a poor widow as she places two small coins into the Temple treasury. It is true that part of Jesus’ point in citing the example of the widow is to relativize the importance of the size of widow’s offering, but any understanding of her offering as “spiritualized” must not neglect the important fleshly or bodily dimension of her offering. Jesus’ point in saying that she is making her donation “out of her whole livelihood” (Mk 12:44) is to indicate that her sacrifice is larger than it looks because it constitutes the entirety of what she has to satisfy her material needs. However much we might describe her sacrifice in spiritual terms, it includes an important material dimension that precedes all others.

Something similar can be said for the reinterpretation of Old Testament sacrifices that some have described in terms of “spiritualization.” Understanding the practice of mercy and forgiveness as “worth more than all whole burnt

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843 Frances Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*, 62. St. Paul uses the term “spiritual” and “spiritualize” to describe both sacrifice and the bodies of the resurrected, including Christ’s own risen body. This should not be taken to indicate a body lacking a physical component. Augustine, *City of God*, 13.20. “...so, when the flesh serves the spirit, it will justly be called spiritual. Not that it is converted into spirit, as some fancy from the words, “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption” 1 Cor 15:42), but because it is subject to the spirit with a perfect and marvelous readiness of obedience, and responds in all things to the will that has entered on immortality, all reluctance, all corruption, and all slowness being removed. Cited in Patrick J. Fletcher, *Resurrection Realism: Ratzinger the Augustinian* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 214.

offerings”\textsuperscript{845} as a matter of spiritualization, where spiritualization is understood in terms of an allegorized metaphor, can only be part of the picture, and not the most important element. Forgoing the cathartic effects of the collective violence associated with the efficacy of violent sacrifice means committing oneself to the conversion or at least the suppression of the very bodily appetite for revenge. We saw in chapter two that sacrifice makes use of and cultivates humanity’s capacity for mimetic violence. The inclination to adrenaline fueled bursts of anger means that yielding to enemies, turning the other cheek, and otherwise refusing to be scandalized by enemies involves a very material sort of sacrifice deeply rooted in human flesh. A formula such as “circumcise the heart”\textsuperscript{846} is liable to an allegorized interpretation, but nevertheless both original surgical procedure and the Christian understanding proposed by St. Paul and the author of the Book of Deuteronomy are united in their shared relation to the body. In fact, the personal transformation indicated by the phrase “circumcision of the heart” seems likely to entail a more profound bodily response than the surgical procedure in whose terms it is described.

5.9. Sacrifice and the “Flesh”

We have argued for an important role for the flesh in the offering of sacrifice and the clearing away of obstacles. The flesh has an intimate association with obstacles because it is itself an obstacle, and not only is it an obstacle, it is the first

\textsuperscript{845} See Mk 12:33.

\textsuperscript{846} Deut 30:6, Rom 2:29.
obstacle encountered by desire. In the proper interaction of the mind and the body, the fleshly component of the human person is the body's immediate contact with the physical environment. The sensory information collected there is made available to the intellect by way of the imagination. According to classic philosophical anthropology, the senses act mimetically by creating copies of sense objects. This process of sensory mimesis produces in the imagination images to which the intellect “turns” as the raw material for the formulation of abstract concepts. This turn is referred to as the conversio ad phantasmata, which is symbolically rendered as “the heart,” the psychosomatic core of the human person.847

Properly understood and experienced, the flesh and its senses are the passageway to the external world, a means of access. However, this means of access is finite. The intellect, and more significantly for the present discussion, desire, are infinite.848 The disproportion of the flesh and the spirit means that desire is continually forced to enter by a narrow gate.849 Aroused and fed in any inordinate way, as it is in the case of mimetic desire and rivalry, desire quickly outstrips the ability of the flesh to possess and consume. Within the domain of the novel this is dramatized often within the context of sexual desire. Girard notes, for example, that the “conquerors” of André Malraux’s novels are often “haunted by impotence,”


848 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I-II, Q. 30, art. 4.

849 The spiritual and infinite nature of desire proposed by St. Thomas may be a matter of considerable controversy for contemporary thought, but for the purposes of this argument one need only concede that human persons are capable of desiring objects that the flesh cannot fully possess or consume and the result is the same.
which signals a desire that has exceeded the body’s ability to participate in its satisfaction.  

The flesh is both the means by which the spirit extends itself into the world and its obstacle in the accomplishment of this extension. Experiences of the former constitute the greater portion of human happiness, while experiences of the latter generate the frustration and rancor that fuel the projections of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating. An important part of the work of achieving happiness lies in transforming experiences of opposition within the flesh to experiences of liberation, and as we have tried to demonstrate, sacrifice plays an essential role in that work. Girard insists on the kinship of art and sacrifice in this regard, and in the story of John the Baptist we see the role of dance in liberating an audience from the experience of opposition. As we saw in chapter four, the thrilling effect of Salome’s dance elicits within King Herod an eagerness to identify himself with her. His offer to her of his own desire—*I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom*—shows the intensity and the depth of his identification with Salome. Her graceful movements suggest a spirit unimpeded by the flesh that it animates beautifully, and her audience is eager to identify with such a spectacle of freedom. Through the movements of the flesh the dancer mediates a temporary respite from the unhappiness of the audience members’ own experience of the body.

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852 Mark 6:23. Herod’s specification that Salome may ask for as much of “half” of his kingdom underscores that no matter how grandiose his promise may be, it is finite, and therefore not adequate to satisfy desire. Ultimately it will not satisfy Salome’s desire any more than it has satisfied Herod’s.
as an obstacle. This is the substance of the delight that such a performance provides to an audience, and the appeal of all art can be understood in these terms. Stendhal famously declared, “Beauty is nothing other than the promise of happiness.”\textsuperscript{853} We can translate this into the language of the skandalon and sacrifice by rendering it, “Beauty is the promise of freedom from obstacles.” And the most immediate aspect of this freedom is that exhibited in the beauty of a dancer who presents the vision of a body free of impediment.

The intimate relation of art and sacrifice means that the performer runs a terrible risk in the face of his or her audience. A graceless display will serve to thrust back before the audience a painful reminder of its own experience of opposition within the body, which may produce a reaction quite different than admiration. Girard relates a legendary account of Salome’s death that underscores the precariousness of the position occupied by the artist. According to the legend Salome loses her “balance” while ice skating. In the course of falling she strikes her head on a piece of ice and is decapitated. She comes to experience, in other words, the same fate as John the Baptist whose head she demands “on a platter” (Mk 6:25).\textsuperscript{854}

The story of Salome’s death must be understood as a counterpart to what we learn of her from the Gospels, and for this reason we must recognize that she is not truly alone on the ice. The ice reflects her movements, and this mirror image


suggests the mimetic double and the crowd that gathers around both the artist and the victim. The legend underscores the dangerous game that Salome plays before King Herod and his guests. One loss of “balance,” one lapse from grace to disgrace, will suddenly thrust before her audience the infirmity from which she promised to deliver them, and she might then be made to deliver them by another means, by becoming their sacrificial victim. The legend thus points to a way of understanding the enormous incidence of “the lame, the blind, and the crippled” in mythological texts. In their awkward movements and imbalance the disabled seem to incarnate the most unpleasant experiences of bodily infirmity. Such persons attract the cruel impulses of others because they afford persecutors the chance to externalize and lash out at what they regret most about their own existence.

In the story of John the Baptist Salome liberates her audience from bodily impediment by presenting to them a vision of grace and beauty that elicits a satisfying identification with her. In the legend of her death, she offers to her “audience” a vision of bodily infirmity onto which they can project their own experience of the opposition of the flesh. As sacrificers gather around their victim they unite into a singularity represented in myth by monstrous forms such as the “many headed hydra” or grandiose monsters with countless arms, legs, and eyes. In the experience of the mob, unified by its own violence, the individual participant overcomes the private experience of his or her own bodily limitation and participates in the overwhelming power of the mob. In the unity of the crowd the

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856 Girard, The Scapegoat, 31.
individual experiences the extension and magnification of his or her own bodily power. In the original experience of collective violence this thrill of violent collaboration can only have been heightened by the preceding terror of the sacrificial crisis, which emphasized the isolated vulnerability associated with bodily existence.857

The projection of opposition in one’s own flesh onto the flesh of another allows one to experience the thrill of revenge against all obstacles, beginning with the flesh itself. In chapter one we noted Girard’s admiration of the novelistic vision for its ability to consider the full scope of human experience because it “never closes the circle of the observation of events.”858 The demonological vision considers specifically the range of opposition experienced within the novelistic vision, and interprets them in the personal terms of the harassing demon.859 To this we might add the “skandalological” vision if that rolled off the tongue with any more grace.860 These “visions” are brought home, as it were, to the body.

Some measure of corroboration is provided by the nature of neurotic symptoms associated with increased levels of stress. These inevitably involve bodily reactions such as heart palpitations, an increased rate of breathing, and headaches, but even more telling, the biting of nails or the pulling of hair and skin.


858 Girard, Resurrection from Underground, 139.


860 Girard, The Scapegoat, 194.
The discomfort of stress is “taken out” as it were, on the body’s flesh, especially those parts of the body that are the least animate, those that have the most in common with the animal, vegetable, and mineral world. The flesh is the locus of decay and is the site of the worst experiences of pain and degradation. The opposition experienced on all levels of existence—personal, familial, social, political and religious, even cosmic—recalls the continuous confinement and opposition imposed upon desire by the flesh. The accumulated rancor and frustration generated by obstacles in every context of life can find an outlet in an act of vengeance directed against the flesh once they have been projected beyond the self and onto the flesh of another.

This overcoming of the individual solitude imposed on the body, especially inasmuch as that solitude is experienced as an obstacle, imparts the sacrificial character of the archaic sacrifice according to the definition given earlier. The institution of sacrifice establishes the experience of the transcendence of the body as a fixed principle within the culture of human communities. As we have seen, this first transcendence sets the stage for the development of all the subsequent means by which humanity transcends and extends its desire beyond the confines of the body. Most importantly it provides the catalyst for the development of the spiritual capacities of symbolic thought and cultural signification that indicate humanity’s transcendent essence. Language creates the ability for human persons to reach out to one another across the boundary of the flesh and communicate the ideas that make sophisticated forms of social collaboration possible. The development of these spiritual capacities sets the stage for all subsequent cultural developments,
including those of art and technology, both of which serve, albeit in very different ways, to extend the strength and scope of the powers of the flesh.

5.10. The Word Made Flesh

St. Paul writes of Jesus that he who was “rich” chose to become “poor” (2 Cor 8:9). We might render this description of the Incarnation into the language of scandal by describing the Incarnation as God’s submission to the ambivalence of the flesh. It becomes a means of access to humanity whereby God can make himself visible and communicate his word. It also means that God is subject to the opposition and constraint of the flesh, a constraint that he explicitly laments: “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!” (Lk 12:50). In the miracles of healings he performs he is seen to use the occasion of his own confinement to liberate others from theirs.\footnote{Jesus refers explicitly to the “constraint” to which he is subject in the course of his earthly life: “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!” (Lk 12:50).} These healings thus become prefigurations of the more profound freedom from obstacles of all kinds that Christ seeks to achieve through the Incarnation. In several instances, Jesus’ ministry of healing restores persons from the final and absolute consequence of human infirmity, death itself.\footnote{Mk 5:21-43; Lk 7:11-17, 8:52-56; Jn 11.} Of particular significance is the raising of Lazarus, which foreshadows both the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here we encounter symbolic elements that point to the intimate association of the obstacles of rivalry and
conflict with the obstacle imposed by the flesh itself. The sum of all obstacles is presented in the enormous stone sealing the tomb in the case of both Jesus and Lazarus, which is corroborated by the funeral garments that bind both Lazarus and Jesus. Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus and orders the stone removed—*Take away the stone!* He then calls to Lazarus—*Lazarus, come out!*—and orders the funeral garments removed—*Untie him and let him go.*

As we have noted already, the Bible is never picturesque. The repeated references to the stone seals and the funeral garments should alert us to a symbolic significance for these images. We are well prepared by now to recognize the kinship between the stone seal of the tomb and the stone of opposition, the *skandalon*. Jesus himself directs us to the significance of the funeral garments when he orders those present to “untie” or, as it is put in other translations, to “unbind” Lazarus. We can note as well that these garments recall the detail provided by St. Luke where he notes that Jesus as a child is “wrapped in swaddling cloths” (Lk 2:7), a symbolic indication of the binding to which God submits in the course of the Incarnation.

If the Incarnation can be described as God’s acquiescence to being bound by the flesh, then his resurrection is his release from this constraint. Unlike the case of Lazarus and all of the other healings that Jesus performs, the removal of the obstacle in the case of Jesus’ resurrection is absolute, and the evangelists make clear in the course of their resurrection accounts that the bodily condition of the Lord no longer entails any aspect of confinement. St. Paul will describe the condition of the resurrected body of Jesus as “spiritualized,” a condition that removes from the flesh  

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863 Jn 11:39, 11:44.
the quality of finitude that makes it prone to the opposition of obstacles (1 Cor 15:44). It is not divested of all materiality, but is now as extensive as spirit for not being confined by space and time. In his discussion of the qualities of the resurrected body, St. Thomas Aquinas identifies four characteristics: “Impassibility” or freedom from suffering; “subtlety,” or the ability to pass through solid matter; “agility,” which describes the ability of the risen body to be in many locations at once, and “clarity” or a luminous radiance. All told Thomas describes a body that is fully liberated from obstacles, and this liberation coincides with the full and complete satisfaction of desire.

5.11. Mediator of Desire and the Spiritualized Body

St. Paul makes clear that Christ invites us to possess such a body ourselves when he explains that Christ will change our “lowly bodies” into bodies like his.

864 As we have seen, St. Augustine makes clear that the spiritualized body of the resurrection is a body of physical substance rather than an entity of pure spirit. The original Greek that is often rendered “spiritual” is logikos, a word that is often also rendered “rational.” The risen body can be thought of as a “rational body” in the sense that the body is transformed such that it no longer exhibits the inert qualities that unite it to the non-rational world. The resurrection of the body thus features the perfection of the psycho-somatic union that characterizes the body even in the historical condition in which it is subject to obstacles. St. Augustine, The Writings of St. Augustine, vol 4: Christian Instruction, trans. John J. Gavigan (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 441. See also Brendan Byrne, Sacra Pagina: Romans, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 365.


866 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, IV, 86, 3. “For weakness is what we experience in a body found wanting in the strength to satisfy the desire of the soul in the movements and actions which the soul commands, and this weakness will be entirely taken away then, when power is overflowing into the body from a soul united to God.”
The spiritualized body that St. Paul describes is the goal of the Christian, and an important means by which we attain this glory, he makes clear, is imitation.\textsuperscript{868} This brings us back to mimetic desire, where Girard begins. We can recall from chapter one that imitation is inspired by the mediator of desire, whose “greater plenitude of being” arouses the imitation of admirers.\textsuperscript{869} The risen Christ discloses his possession of the greatest plenitude of being in his perfect freedom from obstacles, and the imitation of Christ can be understood succinctly in terms of acquisitive mimesis. The imitator of Christ seeks to appropriate the surpassing being of the risen Jesus by becoming as perfectly like him as possible.

Others besides Christ may truly possess a greater plenitude of being relative to imitators and so be worthy of imitation. Children, for example, correctly perceive a greater plenitude in their parents and older siblings, and imitate them in the course of their development. The difficulty every imitator faces is perceiving the proper proportion of this greater plenitude, and balancing correctly the relative worth of the countless models that are imitated in the course of a life lived. Lapses of excess can be described in terms of idolatry, and lapses of defect can be described in terms of sacrilege. The idolatrous imitation of an unworthy model will inevitably result in the sacrilege of neglecting more worthy models. In all cases, great and small, the essence of idolatry is attributing to a creature a means of access to being that it does not actually possess. This misperception of the source of being is at the

\textsuperscript{867} “He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself” (Phil 3:9).

\textsuperscript{868} 1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6.

heart of all deviated transcendence, and as we have considered extensively, the mimetism aroused by obstacles generates the greatest distortions in this regard. The opposition exerted by obstacles generates the false impression of their worth, and they become fascinating beyond their real value. As the struggle escalates, the quest for being becomes increasingly confined to unworthy objects. The great novelists are keen to consider cases where persons in the thrall of mimetism give themselves to the most pointless pursuits and conflicts, while neglecting what is of real value, a real source of being. Mimetism directs desire towards the obstacle, the very thing from which desire longs to be free, and sets aside that which can actually impart freedom and being. In his analysis of mimetic rivalry, Girard concerns himself mainly with the elimination of the skandalon, the rival who fascinates by his or her opposition. He or she is the scapegoat, the exile, the one who is cast off in order that “all minus one” might live in harmony and peace. We see here, however, that the first victim to be cast off by mimetism is being itself. The obsession with worthless objects of desire and the turn of enemies towards one another involves first a turning away from being and its concomitants, goodness and truth.\textsuperscript{870}

5.12. Idolatry and the Cannibal

Deviated transcendence’s inordinate location of being in finite obstacles undergoes a kind of an anthropological \textit{reductio ad absurdum} in the phenomenon of

\textsuperscript{870} Classical philosophy regards goodness and truth as aspect of being. Together the three—being, goodness, and truth are referred to as the “transcendentals.” See Schindler, \textit{The Dramatic Structure of the Truth}, 350-351.
cannibalism. Not all archaic cultures practice cannibalism, and it is not unknown for one archaic population to look with shock and horror at the cannibalistic practices of another. Nevertheless the practice of cannibalism is in keeping with the logic of scapegoating that animates all incidents of collective violence, especially violent sacrifice. The intensity of mimetism that characterizes the onset of the sacrificial crisis intensifies the fascination of the community with its victim as its obstacle. At the height of the crisis the community can only be satisfied by “destroying and absorbing” the victim, thereby turning the violence attributed to the victim into a beneficent force that unites the community. In all cases, whether enclosed in a tomb or consumed cannibalistically, the flesh of the victim is regarded as the mysterious source of the strength of the community renewed by violence. Cannibalism thus exhibits the profoundly divergent ambivalence characterizing the sacred itself. The victim begins as a towering menace before the community, but the mimetic development of that stature locates in him or her a supernatural violence that the community seeks to appropriate for itself and seems to accomplish in the act of immolation.

The ambivalence of the archaic sacred is clearly seen in the practice of cannibalism among the Tupinamba, a tribe of American Indians in northern Brazil.

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that first came into contact with Europeans in the 16th century. The Tupinamba and the neighboring tribes were racially identical and very similar to one another in terms of language and culture. The divisions and nearly continuous war among the tribes seems entirely arbitrary until one realizes that they formed the basis for the tribes’ symbiosis. The divisions provided for each tribe a frontier across which to project their respective skandala. The tribes “agreed never to agree” in order to make use of the ameliorative effects of collective violence. The tribes were enemies, and by the very enmity each directed towards the other, each performed for the other the important service of providing a skandalon against which each society could unite.

The Tupinamba were spectacularly cannibalistic. The reports of Jesuit missionaries indicate that the consumption of human flesh was a daily reality for the tribes, and the collection of prisoners of war yielded a constant supply of it. Persons killed in the midst of battle were typically cannibalized on the spot. Those taken as prisoners underwent a period of integration into the captor community. During this time they were encouraged to work, marry, and otherwise function as normal members of the community. At times they were shown special favors, not unlike those afforded to archaic kings; at other times they were insulted and abused. Their execution was prepared for ritually. Typically they were forced to transgress one or more of the community’s taboos, and then forced to attempt to escape, at which time

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874 Among the earliest well documented contacts was the one described by Hans Staden in his 1557 report that he titled, “The True History and Descriptions of a Country Populated by a Wild, Naked, and Savage Man-munching People, Situated in the New World, America.” See Hans Staden, Hans Staden’s True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil, ed. and trans. Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2008).

875 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 249.
they were “captured,” killed, and eaten. The victim is thus transitioned repeatedly from “hated enemy” to “adored friend,” back to “hated enemy,” and finally, in death, to the source of being itself. This is precisely why the victim was eaten. Its violent death seems to confirm his or her flesh as the source of “peace, strength, and fecundity.”

5.13. A body you have prepared for me

The disposition of the Tupinamba towards flesh of their enemies can well be described as religious. Their devotion to it forms a close analogue to the attitude of Catholics towards the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist. The Jesuits relate stories of tribesmen asking for one last bit of human flesh as they lay dying in order to ensure a peaceful death, very much like a devout Catholic wishing to receive the Eucharist as viaticum. The following is taken from the 1550 report of the Jesuit missionary João de Aspilcueta Navarro:

... they are strongly rooted to [the practice] of eating human flesh, in such a manner that, when they are about to pass out of this world [i.e., die] they immediately ask for human flesh [to eat], saying that they have no other consolation than this, and if they don’t get it, they say that they go [to die] the most miserable of men on earth; their consolation is their vengeance. I spend most of my time censoring this vice. The answer that some [Indians] give me is that only the old women eat it. Other [Indians] tell me that their ancestors ate [human flesh], so that they must eat it too, that is their custom to avenge themselves in that manner, for their enemies eat them: so why do I want to take from them their genuine delicacy?

876 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 277.

877 Quoted in Forsyth, “Jesuits and Tupinamba Cannibalism,” 164.
The formal resemblance of the consumption of the Eucharist and the eating of human flesh extends to the rationale of both gestures. Both the Catholic communicant and the cannibal consume the flesh of the mediator of their desire in order to appropriate his being. The difference between them extends to their essences. The being sought by the cannibal is the being disclosed from within the context of the archaic sacred, a being whose source is the violence to which the victim is subjected. Archaic sacrifice discloses the logic animating the being of the archaic sacred, one where the ground of being is a violent “taking.” The Eucharist discloses the logic of the Christian sacred where being manifests itself as a generous “giving.” This logic is explicated by Christ himself at the Last Supper. The disciples are to “take” his body, but only because Jesus has prepared it for them as a gift.\textsuperscript{878}

The resurrection imparts to the body of Jesus an infinitude such that its distribution and consumption cannot be a violent destruction. Christ gives himself to his disciples in a new mode of being, one adequate to physical consumption. St. Thomas Aquinas specifies that this new mode is the mode of the sign, the sacrament; Christ gives his body \textit{per modum sacramenti}.\textsuperscript{879}

Anscar Vonier insists that all fruitful discussions of the presence of Jesus’ body and blood must take continual stock of its sacramental nature. Vonier notes that many confusions and misstatements arise from the tendency among theologians to depart from a fully sacramental mode of understanding. If Christ

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{878} Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:17.
\item \textsuperscript{879} Anscar Vonier, \textit{A Key to Understanding the Doctrine of the Eucharist} (Bethesda: Zaccheus Books, 2003), 143-144.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
gives himself per modum sacramenti, his gift must be understood in those terms as well. Vonier insists that the understanding of the Eucharist most faithful to the teaching of both the Catholic Church and St. Thomas Aquinas is one that is fully semiotic, that is, one that considers it always from the perspective of its status as a sign. The Eucharist is given special honor as the “Blessed” Sacrament because it is perfectly efficacious, making fully present precisely what it signifies. The theological ideas of transubstantiation and the real presence, therefore, must be thought of as collaborating with the sign value of the Eucharist rather than simply supplementing it as though making up for a deficiency.

Signification is before and behind the Eucharist. It is an efficacious sign effected by an act of signification, and as an act of signification, it takes its place in the history of cultural signification. St. Thomas considers the specific importance of the form taken by Christ’s declaration at the Last Supper. Jesus says, “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” which remain the essence of the form of the words associated with the Eucharist. Jesus does not say, “Let this be my body” after the

880 Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 123.

881 Vonier cites the example given by St. Thomas of an image of a person. One might point at a picture on the wall and declare, “That is Cicero,” referring to the fact that the image represents and to some limited extent “re-presents” the historical figure Cicero. The doctrines of transubstantiation and the real presence indicate that the Eucharist is a more perfect sign than the image of Cicero because the sacrament perfectly “re-presents” what is represents, i.e., the Eucharist makes fully present what it signifies. Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 96. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, Q. 83, A. 1.

882 Vonier is keen to point out that transubstantiation is an explanation of the power of the sacrament as a sign, rather than the sacrament itself: “Transubstantiation is not the Eucharistic sacrifice, but it is the hidden power that makes the sacrifice a reality and not a mere symbol.” Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 117.

883 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III Q. 78, A. 4, ad. 3.
pattern of God’s speech acts of creation in the book of Genesis where we hear God say, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). God’s original act of creation had no precedent. There were no heavens, earth, light, or darkness, and so the contingent character of these realities is indicated in the imperative form of his utterances.884 The form of God’s words in Genesis indicates that God is establishing the nature of these realities by his creative acts of signification. Christ’s words at the Last Supper take the form of a declaration that presumes not only the realities created by God in the beginning, but also the “intermediate world” of cultural signs that occupy the modal space between nature and divinity and “partakes of both.”885 In other words, in his acts of signification Jesus presumes the cultural transcendence that arises in the wake of the accusatorial gesture towards the body of the victim. But even as he presumes this transcendence, his words and gestures towards his body provides a new basis for cultural transcendence originating in the founding murder.

In the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, cultural signs are made to indicate what human nature and cultural forms themselves could have never discovered; they are made to signify what only an intelligence not caught in the “vicious circle” of humanity’s relationship could reveal, the truth declared through his body, his innocence as a victim.886 Cultural signification emerges from the crowd and its accusatorial gesture, but now cultural signification meets a sign that emerges from the victim. The Eucharist carries the disciple to the place of the victim, to

884 Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 66; Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III Q. 78, A. 2, ad. 2.

885 Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 27.

understand the event it signifies from his perspective, to recognize it as an epiphany of God’s love and the revelation of the true nature of divinity. As the pattern and impetus of discipleship, the Eucharist impels the believer to seek and find being in the place where Christ reveals it to be founded in a gift of self, rather than in the place of the crowd where it is sought in violent taking.

5.14. The Effects of the Passion

So far we have considered the representational effects of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The real sacrificial heart of the Eucharist, the quality of the Eucharist that imparts its sacrificial character is its role in communicating the effects of Jesus’ passion.887 Here again we see that the Eucharist derives its power from its relationship to what it signifies, Jesus’ offering of his flesh on the Cross, and it serves the goal of salvation by bringing human persons into communion with that offering. The Passion of Christ renders all of the sacraments effective, but the Eucharist is the greatest of the sacraments because of the special intimacy that exists between it and the Passion.888

The immediate effect of the Passion is the forgiveness of sins. Within the Passion narratives themselves we see the mercy and forgiveness that Jesus directs towards even his betrayers and executioners.889 In the terms of the mimetic theory

887 Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 96.

888 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, Q. 73, A. 1, ad. 3.
we can recognize this as his practice of humble love within the very heart of the
collectivization of pride and envy, the founding murder and violent sacrifice. The
mercy of God is thus communicated to humanity in the course of the recapitulation
of the event where humanity shows its greatest hatefulness and delusion, the
founding murder.

As in the Old Testament story of the wisdom of Solomon considered earlier,
the Passion presents a juxtaposition of the two analogous sacrifices, the archaic and
the Christian. Not only does Jesus overcome the inclination to avenge the malice
directed at him, he is seen to grasp for any basis to see what is best in his
persecutors. This is seen particularly in those instances in the course of the Passion
where Jesus responds to questions posed to him as though they were statements.
All four Gospel relate the incident where Pilate asks, “Are you the king of Jews?”
Jesus replies, “You say so.”890 The verbal form of Pilate’s question is identical to a
statement: Su ei o Basileus tov Ioudaion. Its initial status as a question would have
depended on Pilate’s inflection: “You are the king of the Jews?” vs. “You are the king
of the Jews.” Jesus responds, in other words, not as though this is a question, but a
statement, a kind of inadvertent profession of faith in which he catches Pilate.891
There are other ironic gestures of praise directed at Jesus, as though the archaic
sacred were declaring its presence by its parody of Christian worship. The soldiers

889 Andrew Simmonds, “Uses of Blood: Re-reading Matthew 27:25,” Law Critique 19, no. 1

890 Mt 27:11; Mk 15:2; Lk 23:3; cf. Jn 18:34. See Simmonds, “Uses of Blood,” 181.

891 Jesus does something nearly identical with the Jewish authorities who condemn him (Mk
14:61; Lk 22:70; cf. Mt 26:63). Simmonds notes that in ancient times “unwitting oaths” were
regarded as binding, as the Bible makes clear in several instances, including Esau’s forfeiture of his
mock Jesus by declaring, “Hail King of the Jews.” The chief priests and the scribes are heard to declare, “This is the King of Israel,” and Pontius Pilate affixes to the Cross the inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

The profound significance of Jesus’ cryptic responses and the presence of these ironic indications of this authority emerges in light of their analogous relation to the repeated attempts of his enemies to “catch him in his speech” in the course of his public ministry. The evangelists follow Jesus’ practice of recognizing inadvertent acknowledgements of Jesus’ authority and the power of his sacrifice, and these are presented as positive inversions of the accusatorial fault finding directed towards him by his opponents. Jesus’ accusers are agents of a crowd that is united by malice according to the logic of the archaic sacred, while he is in the place of the victim, animating the logic of the Christian sacrifice by his patience, mercy, and forgiveness. He is no less determined to avoid skanda as they are to sow them.

In the terms of the mimetic theory, Original Sin can be regarded as the notion that all human persons begin their existence on the side of the crowd and by default seek being according to the logic of the violent sacred. Grace is the transfer across the divide between the crowd and Jesus, and the first means of this transfer is faith.

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892 Mk 15:8.
893 Mt 27:42.
894 Jn 19:21. Matthew and Mark indicate that the Roman soldiers rather than Pilate himself are the source of this title. Cf. Mt 27:37; Mk 15:26. In Luke’s account there is no sign mentioned, rather the soldiers are heard to mock Jesus as the King of Jews (Lk 23:37).
895 Mt 22:15; Mk 12:13; Lk 20:20.
Vonier describes faith as a “real, psychological contact with Christ.” 896 Again, in terms of the mimetic theory, we might say that this psychological contact is the initial identification of the believer with Christ, the recognition of him as the source of being for the believer and the world. 897 If faith is the initial identification with the victim in the understanding, the subsequent gifts of grace that come through the sacraments work through faith to effect the complete transfer of the believer—mind, body and soul—to the place of the victim. 898

Vonier remarks that, “The sacrifice of the Cross belongs to the whole world, but the Eucharistic sacrifice belongs to the Church only.” 899 For the world, the Cross of Jesus is a blessing and a curse. As a blessing it is the redemption of humanity from the power of Satan and his “monarchy of evil.” 900 In the terms of the mimetic theory it is a decisive break in the violent sacred’s control over humanity. It is the means by which the arbitrariness of victims can be recognized and the pointless “circularity” of revenge is recognized. 901 This knowledge by itself does not impel persons to approach one another in the charity and forgiveness that would make true peace possible. The truth about scapegoating alone does not eliminate


899 Vonier, *The Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 150.

900 Ibid., 112.

resentment and hatred from human life, it simply prevents resentment and revenge from being transformed into a source of social cohesion. The Cross by itself activates the dissolution of the unanimities achieved by collective violence. The Cross, considered in isolation from the specific meaning Jesus gives to it and the transformation it is intended to effect in persons and communities, raises the specter of apocalyptic violence, a humanity no less prone to mimetism and violence, but deprived of the means by which it can control and divert those forces away from the social order.

The sacraments show that the apocalypse is not the principal aim of the Cross. God does not reveal and undermine the founding mechanisms of culture for the sake of handing humanity over to its own violence; Jesus does not die on the Cross in order to provoke the self-immolation of human nature and culture. The sacraments demonstrate that the meaning of the Cross is fully achieved in the establishment of a new community whose culture is inspired by the sacraments as the principal signs of its culture. Just as the first human communities draw their life from the bodies of their victims, so now the Church draws its life from the body of Jesus, given first in at the Last Supper, then Cross, and forever more in the Eucharist.902 Humanity first experienced in the founding murder the capacity of a shared hatred to unite persons. In collective violence persons experienced a transcendence of the self that enlarged their experience of the flesh. The Church

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gathered by the celebration of the Eucharist is called to be the locus of an inversion of that experience, where the love communicated by the flesh and blood of Christ is the means by which persons transcend the limitation of their own flesh through the practice of love and mercy. The Cross and Eucharist collaborate to reveal that within the founding murder there is a communion of persons and a unity of spirit, a transcendence of individual flesh that is capable of being distinguished from the grim purpose of the original context in which these are experienced. This is the structural feature of the original negative image that reappears in the positive form of their recapitulation.\textsuperscript{903}

Like the archaic community that receives its life cannibalistically from its victim, the Church draws its life from the body of Christ. The community is built up from individual believers who approach his flesh and blood as the source of “peace, strength, and fecundity.” The grace imparted in the sacrament is one of likeness to the one received. It inspires the recipient to imitate the sacrifice of Christ and to offer his or her own flesh in imitation of the offering of Jesus, in order to “find herself fully through the sincere gift of herself.”\textsuperscript{904} The sacrament makes use of and directs the natural capacity for imitation proper to human nature, but is not limited to it. The imitation of Christ as a description of Christian discipleship is not

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\textsuperscript{903} We can say further in the light of Christian theology that the unity of persons achieved by sacrifice is an intimation of the unity of the persons in the Trinity, where the three divine persons transcend their individuality by their gift of self to one another. This is the unity among human persons for which Christ prays Jn 17:22-22: “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

\end{flushright}
determined by the disciple, but by Christ. Catherine Pickstock warns against understanding the imitation of Christ, especially in a sacramental context, in a way that reduces it to a “pedagogic instrument” that serves a “self originating substantiality.” The mimesis associated with the imitation of God is associated with the “highest authenticity” because the creature first requires a “borrowing” of being from God. In order to be, one must first copy. We are led to an understanding of imitation reminiscent of Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of the “reverse intentionality” that he attributes to the experience of “icons.” In the case of imitation, we typically regard imitators as taking the initiative with respect to imitation, consciously undertaking steps to increase their resemblance to models. In the case of the divine gift of grace, however, we confront a reversal whereby the model imparts a communion of likeness that elicits a desire in the imitator for a yet greater likeness. Grace imparts a likeness to the disciple that initiates the course


906 Pickstock points to the need to understand imitation in terms of the notion of grace as a created participation in the being of God. Pickstock, “Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist,” 170. “For now, one can note that Aquinas’s logic of imitation both anticipates and surpasses in advance a postmodern treatment of mimesis. For the latter also, imitation is constitutive of the imitator and precedes the original. And yet postmodernism, as if still echoing negatively a suspicion of all mimesis which it (falsely) attributes to Plato, regards these circumstances as entirely disruptive of all identity. More radically, Aquinas thinks of identity as reception, and of perception as receiving” [emphasis in the original].

907 As intentionality typically operates, the viewer intends the image, apprehending it according to his or her categories of understanding. An icon is characterized by a quality of “excess” that exceeds the intentionality of the viewer. This excess thwarts the viewer’s ability to “fix” it by apprehension, and overwhms the attempt to circumscribe it according to his or her own finite “gaze.” Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 19. Marion’s description of the nature of the icon is closely associated with his description of the saturated phenomenon. See Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” Philosophy Today 40, no. 1 (1999): 114-115.
and pattern of discipleship; it arouses a desire to become more perfectly like the one who has aroused and directed desire.

St. Thomas describes the Eucharist as “a pledge of future glory.”\(^{909}\) The glory pledged to us is the glory enjoyed by the flesh that is received in the sacrament, the glory of a body completely uninhibited by obstacles. This freedom is first exhibited in the course of his earthly life, where Jesus offers his bodily service to the preaching of the kingdom, gathering together the lost, healing the sick, and offering a path of discipleship for others to follow that consists of the practice of mercy and moral goodness inspired by his word and example. Now in the life of the Church the freedom is offered in the possibility of a bodily union with Christ through the sacrament of the Eucharist, which imparts to the believer the sacrifice of Christ as the means by which the believer will achieve this freedom.\(^{910}\) In the Eucharist the human zeal to seek freedom from obstacles by imitation and sacrifice is met and exceeded by the will of Christ to create a perfected likeness in his disciples and impart to them his own divine freedom from all obstacles.


\(^{910}\) St. Thomas indicates that the recipient of the Eucharist receives not simply the grace of Jesus sacrifice, but the sacrifice itself (*verum Christi sacrificium*). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 22, A. 6.
5.15. Discipleship and the Return to the Real

The one subject to mimetism experiences the world as a place of weird transformations and transfigurations. Friends appear as enemies and vice versa without warning, objects of no value occasion the most bitter disputes, and life itself comes to consist of the pursuit of glittering prizes that yield no satisfaction. Mimetism renders desire an “idiot,” “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”911 The imitation of Christ and the embrace of his sacrifice restores and reorders desire such that it is capable of responding to and signifying the real worth of objects. Jesus as the new mediator of desire leads the disciple away from skandala and the deviated transcendence they generate. Freed from mimetism, the disciple enjoys a clearer perception of the world and is put in more intimate touch with “the truth of all things,” things as they really are.912 Even as the Eucharist imparts a “pledge of future glory” and promises the unimaginable future life of heaven, it simultaneously directs the Catholic towards the concrete reality of created things in the here and now. It restores desire to the truth such that the disciple is able to desire created things and persons according to the “proper proportion” of their goodness rather than according to the wild inflations of mimetism.913 The life of discipleship animated by Christ’s sacrifice has a similar effect on the believer that Christ himself

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has on the Gerasene demoniac who is found at last, “clothed and in his right mind,” restored to reality by the restoration of his desire.\textsuperscript{914}

A living of the truth describes the aim of the Christian moral life, and we see here that Girard’s understanding of conversion echoes conceptions of morality that emphasize the role of reason. Notions of natural law, for example, emphasize the clear comprehension of objects and their real goodness as the essential starting point of morality.\textsuperscript{915} The Christian moral vision can be understood in these metaphysical terms, but cannot be limited to it, at least not in the existential sphere. A purely metaphysical description that depends on the clear perception of the real cannot take into account the circumstance from which the Christian sacrifice emerges, the sacrificial crisis. Crises, whether personal or social, have the effect of obscuring the real. The hallucinatory confusion of the crisis is the result of a runaway mimetism that confuses and overwhelms the higher faculties. The strange imagery of myth provides an indication of this aspect of the crisis, as does the testimony of the Psalmist and the experience of Peter in the accounts of his denial of Jesus. In the midst of the crisis the only place of truth is the “place of the victim,” and the one committed to the truth must be prepared to assume this place and remain there in the midst of terrible confusion. The disciple of Jesus must be prepared to be faithful to the sacrifice of Christ even, and we might say especially, in circumstances where a clear perception of the real is not possible.

\textsuperscript{914} Mk 5:15; Lk 8:35.

\textsuperscript{915} Josef Pieper quotes the observation of Goethe: “In our doing and acting everything depends on this, that we comprehend objects clearly and treat them according to their nature.” Pieper, \textit{Living the Truth}, 112-113.
Girard’s analysis of culture and the progress of history points to the fact that the modern world continuously confronts the Christian with a sort of low-grade but omnipresent version of the mimetic crisis that continues to escalate. As the archaic sacred continues to decompose, the structures of order it generates lose their integrity and skandalon begin to proliferate, bringing with them the distortions of deviated transcendence. In his anthropological analysis of Christianity Girard will describe this as an effect of the Passion narratives on social unanimities of all kinds, and in his literary criticism Girard notes that it confronts the novelist with a peculiar problem. As the “madness” of mimetism spreads across the cultural world, it becomes increasingly difficult to depict it. The madness of Don Quixote, for example, is relatively easy to dramatize. Cervantes can describe it against the background of those who are “ontologically healthy.” In a world completely dominated by mimetism—the worlds of Dostoevsky and Proust—the task becomes more difficult because the entire cultural background has been destabilized by the advance of internal mediation. All persons are increasingly affected by mimetism, and so new literary methods are required.

The novel ultimately describes the world confronting the modern Christian. The loss of any rational basis for morality and the growing disregard for what Peter Geach calls the “inbuilt teleologies of the body,” can be taken as the marks of a

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916 Girard, Things Hidden, 135; Evolution and Conversion, 13, 62, 240.
917 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 41.
918 Ibid., 139-152.
world increasingly affected by mimetism, one increasingly deaf to the “voice of the real.”

Likewise, in previous generations Christian thought could rely on appeals to reason as a means by which to engage secular thought. The Church now conducts its intellectual life and apologetics in a cultural space dominated by the escalating mimetism observed by the great novelists. Moral and metaphysical apologetics based on appeals to rationality will be thwarted by a growing inability of the culture at large to perceive the true nature of things. The dissolution of the archaic sacred ultimately serves the discovery of the truth as victims of all kinds emerge more clearly as such, but the full measure of the truth and the ability to live in accord with the truth of all things are increasingly localized in the place of the victim, a place surrounded by the confusion of modern conditions that increasingly characterize a uniform global “monoculture.”

In the face of this destabilizing cultural condition Christians will increasingly have to rely on the end of the natural law, Jesus himself, as cultural norms and customs become increasingly unreliable as indications of the true nature of created realities. In the face of the escalating disorientation the Catholic will have to rely increasingly on the culture of the Church formed by the sacraments, especially on the Eucharist, the sign of Christ’s sacrifice, in order to maintain one’s position in the place of truth and gain access to the proper proportion of the goodness of objects.

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922 Melina, Sharing in Christ’s Virtues, 84.
The Christian will have to rely increasingly on the sacrifice of Christ somewhat like the Jesuit missionary described by Paul Claudel in the beginning of his play, *The Satin Slipper*, who floats on the ocean lashed to the stump of the mainmast of his ship and is heard to declare, “So I am really fastened to the Cross, but the Cross on which I hang is not fastened to anything else. It drifts on the sea.” The sacrifice of Christ, his word and example, will increasingly serve as a only refuge from the turbulence generated by the disintegrating effect of mimetism.

5.16. Conversion and the Novel

A “return to the real” characterizes the most important scenes in the novels that Girard considers. This return takes the form of moments of conversion where the literary character experiences a sudden and life-changing freedom from mimetism. These conversions do not occur in the context in which Christians typically expect them, in the context of discipleship and the patient cultivation of virtue. They occur as a result of the exhaustion of desire, which is described in terms of a “death.” The repeated experience of deviated transcendence—striving desperately after objects of desire that turn out to be worthless; engaging in social rivalries that are as exhausting as they are pointless—culminates finally in a cessation of desire. Convinced at last of the vacuity of the objects of desire, and

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perhaps suspecting the vacuity of all possible objects of desire, desire simply gives up. Mimetism dies, and at a stroke the identity of the hero, built up in opposition to rivals and mediators, collapses. Again, the final condition of the Gersasene demoniac describes well the one subject to the death of desire: exhausted, stunned, but finally well: “clothed and his right mind.” The subject can look out at the world with a vision freed of the distortions of mimetism, and possessed of this renewed vision the subject feels him or herself to stand on the threshold of a new experience of life. The great novelists themselves, regardless of their religious convictions, cannot help but describe these experiences in terms of resurrection.925

Girard insists that these experiences of death and resurrection in the characters of the great novelists correspond to real experiences undergone by the novelists themselves. The novelists’ own experience of liberating disillusionment is the spiritual center of their work. It provides for the two perspectives that characterize the great masterpieces of novelistic fiction: the perspective on life and the world from within mimetism, and the one from without.926 In terms of chronology, conversion within the novel comes last: on his death bed a lucid Don Quixote renounces knight errantry and tears up the medieval romances that drove him mad; from within the confinement of jail Julien Sorel of The Red and the Black is


925 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 312-313.

liberated from his frenzied ambition and the relentless drive to dominate; during his imprisonment in a harsh labor camp Raskolnikov of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* finally abandons his Promethean pride and is capable of embracing a love of others, especially Sonya, the devoted woman whom he formerly treated with cruelty. But in terms of the structure of the novel, conversion is first; all of these stories are told from the perspective it provides. In the light of conversion all that precedes it—the jealousies, the strife, the pointless anguish and cruelties—can be seen and critiqued fully but with serenity, in the absence of resentment.927

These experiences of resurrection are powerful, but in the novel they occur in memory only, in hindsight, after the original experiences have receded into the past. This is especially true of the Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, where resurrection is literally a restoration of memory. The life of the character Marcel was dominated by insecurities, jealousies, and social antagonisms, and as a result his memory is fragmented and dim. In powerful moments of conversion these memories come flooding back, and the joy of this resurrection is the recollection of the former episodes of his life apart from the anguish and bitterness that attended the original experiences. If he could not experience the persons and places of his life free of the anguish of mimetic rivalry he can at least delight in the serenity of his memories now that they have been liberated from the self-concern of his former morbid competitiveness.928

927 Girard, “Conversion in Literature and Christianity,” 270.

928 Girard, “Marcel Proust,” 59-60.
Girard emphasizes that this conversion, like all of those appearing in the great novels, takes place as a result of the death of desire.929 “Novelistic” conversion takes place not within desire, but in its absence. The question remains: can desire itself undergo a conversion? Can this freedom be enjoyed only in hindsight, only in memory, or can it be experienced in the original moment itself in the company of a lively and active desire? Can mimetic desire itself participate in the resurrection of conversion? Girard’s response is ambiguous. In many instances the answer seems to be in the negative. With some consistency he indicates that the experience of freedom from the distortions of deviated transcendence comes only with “a liberation from mimetic desire.”930 On the other hand he will note that the novelists never regard death an end unto itself. The novelistic conversions found there always point to a new beginning. This is especially true for Dostoevsky whose conclusions are always “fresh beginnings... either among men or in eternity.”931

5.17. Fulfilling the type

Even as Girard will occasionally indicate that mimetic desire is inevitably associated with deviated transcendence, and that this can only be dispelled by the cessation of mimetic desire, his literary analysis points to conversion’s comprehensive resurrection of the human person, mimetic desire included. This is

929 Girard, “Conversion in Literature and Christianity,” 265.
930 Ibid., 270.
931 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 290-291.
especially evident in the work of Dostoevsky, who presents to us both the full measure of the destructiveness of mimetic desire and the clearest picture of its healing and restoration. Among the novelists Girard considers, Proust is last chronologically, but in terms of his grasp of mimetism Dostoevsky is more advanced. We never see in Proust, for example, the end point of triangular desire, the mediator of desire who has become fully the obstacle of desire; we never quite see the full measure of idolatrous violence, the admiration that wishes to “kill its object.”

Unlike Proust, for whom the childhood home of Combray is a refuge to which Marcel may return, Dostoevsky shows us the effects of double mediation on the most intimate sphere of human relations, the family, and on the most vulnerable of persons, children. Dostoevsky gives us complete portraits of persons in the throes of hysterical mimesis, who launch themselves at the feet of the most cruel obstacles who are simultaneously the most fascinating mediators.

And because Dostoevsky arrives at the nadir of transcendence he can also present to us its zenith. Across his characters the negative and positive sides of the analogy of transcendence are the most symmetrically developed. His heroes and anti-heroes experience antithetical deaths. Stepan Trofimovitch, Raskolnikov, and Dmitri Karamazov experience the renewing death of conversion. Their deaths are a liberation of the spirit by which the whole world including themselves appear in a new light unobscured by deviated transcendence. Stepan exclaims on his death bed: “I’ve been telling lies all my life. Even when I told the truth I never spoke for the

932 Ibid., 41-42.

933 Ibid., 41.
sake of the truth, but always for my own sake. I knew it before, but I only see it now.”934 Stavrogin and Svidrigailov, on the other hand, experience a death that is an “extinction of spirit,” as brutal and isolated as they are.935 Dostoevsky’s exploration of transcendence is typological, and so at its most developed it moves in two directions, positive and negative. Driving transcendence in both directions is the mediator of desire. In the case of the Underground Man the mediator is possibly anyone, but ultimately the skandalon, the obstacle who fascinates. In the case of the converted in Dostoevsky’s works, it is someone who directs the hero to Christ. Stepan Trofimovitch from The Demons receives illumination from Sofia Matveevna, the “Gospel woman” he meets at the inn where he falls ill.936 Sonya plays a similar role in the conversion of Raskolnikov by convincing him to confess to his crime and accept the punishment that precipitates his conversion. In both cases these catalysts of renewal direct the sinner to the Gospels. For Stepan it is the story of the Gerasene demoniac, the Gospel story by which he understands his final conversion. For Raskolnikov it is the story of Lazarus, raised from the dead and unbound by Christ.938

The recapitulation of the mediator found in Dostoevsky’s works points to the recapitulation of desire, a full liberation and resurrection within and of desire. We

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935 Girard, Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, 291.

936 Ibid.

937 Dostoevsky, The Demons, 655.

see this fully in an experience of resurrection experienced by Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is saintly and kind, but beset on all sides by temptations. Everyone in his life threatens to scandalize him in some way, even the saintly Fr. Zossima whose corruption in death arouses the suspicions of his fellow monks and precipitates a crisis for Alyosha. During a visit to Fr. Zossima’s cell Alyosha encounters a monk keeping vigil and reading aloud from John’s Gospel. Alyosha falls asleep during his recitation of the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana. He dreams he is at the wedding feast with Fr. Zossima. He tells Alyosha to be happy, and assures him of the salvation of Grushenka, the woman of ill repute who has begun to make moral and spiritual progress under the influence of Alyosha. Alyosha awakens from his dream renewed and inspired, yearning “for freedom, space, and vastness.”

He leaves the cell and comes out into the autumn night and has an experience of conversion that is manifestly an anticipation of bodily resurrection. He is a man free of all obstacles, connected to the world and all that is in it by a spirit of love and mercy. Freed from obstacles he can behold the harmony of all creation. He marvels at the beauty of the Milky Way, whose “soft shining stars” gleam in the sky beside the domes of church. He beholds the “gorgeous autumn flowers slumbering in their beds” and sees that “the mystery of the earth is one with the mystery of the stars.”

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941 Livio Melina points out the connection between stars and desire. The Latin for desire is *desiderium*, which means something like “from the stars.” This etymology suggests, “the sacred
In the midst of his rapture he throws himself to the earth, hugging it, eager to embrace its goodness and to “water it with the tears of his joy.” He is moved by the connection he feels to “other worlds” that “come together in his soul.” He is moved to forgive everyone and to ask for forgiveness “for all and for everything.” He is consoled to realize that others are asking for his forgiveness too. In that moment he feels something as “firm and immovable” as the “heavenly vault” descend into his soul. He falls to the ground a “weak youth,” but now he arises a “champion.”

To this “resurrected” Alyosha we can compare the Underground Man in precisely the manner of a type. Both are devoted to mediators of desire: Alyosha to the saintly Fr. Zossima; the Underground Man to Napoleon. Literature plays an important role in the formation of both: the Gospels in the case of Alyosha; Byron and other Romantic sources in the case of the Underground Man. Both long to be connected to “other worlds”: the worlds referred to by Alyosha, the communities of persons in solidarity with one another by prayer and good will; the Underground Man’s to his absurd fantasy world and his dreams of domination and revenge. Both display a steadfastness, one that recalls the images of the “rock” and the “stone” from the first chapter: Alyosha’s resurrection renders him as “firm and immovable” as the firmament, committed more than ever to the mediator of his resurrected language of the oracles, of anxiously searching the stars for some sign of assurance that the heart’s hopes will be fulfilled.” Livio Melina, *The Epiphany of Love: Toward a Theological Understanding of Christian Action*, trans. Susan Dawson Vasquez (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann’s Publishing Co., 2010), 10. It is noteworthy too perhaps that the Bible associates stars with the resurrected. St. Paul exhorts his congregation at Philippi to be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world” (Phil 2:15). This recalls the prophecy of Daniel: “But those with insight shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever” (Dan 12:3).

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desire, Fr. Zossima and the scriptures informing his wisdom; the Underground Man remains fascinated by the skandalon that appears in every instance of opposition and which feeds his burning resentment. Each symmetrical element of the type serves to emphasize the spiritual gulf that divides them, a gulf that is indicated by the nature of their “deaths.” In Alyosha is fulfilled the novel’s epigram, which is taken from John’s Gospel: “Unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it falls to the ground and dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). As for the Underground Man, Dostoevsky does not give us much hope. At the conclusion of his discourse the Underground Man writes that he does not wish to write any more “from Underground,” but the fictional editor of his “Notes” remarks that he could not help himself, and his memoir goes on much longer. He is not happy there, but in the end he remains in his “dark cellar” and seems destined for the fate that he assigns to Liza, a lonely death in a squalid cellar, his body not raised but taken away for disposal, buried in a swampy grave from which there is no escape.943

943 At one point the Underground Man sees a coffin of a little girl being brought up from a basement in the Haymarket, and later torments Liza by predicting that she will die in the same way as the little girl, abandoned in the corner of a basement and buried in the “mud and swamp” of a neglected graveyard, forever trapped underground: “They’ll cover you up quickly with wet blue clay and go to the pot-house... That’s the end of your memory on earth; other people’s graves are visited by children, fathers, husbands, but at yours—not a tear, not a sigh, not a prayer, and no one, no one in the whole world will ever come to you; your name will disappear from the face of the earth—as if you’d never existed, as if you’d never been born! Mud and swamp, go ahead and knock on your coffin lid at night, when dead men rise: ‘Let me out, good people, to live in the world! I lived—but saw nothing of life, my life was used up like an old rag; it got drunk up in a pot-house on the Haymarket; let me out, good people, to live in the world one more time!’” Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 89-90, 102-103.
5.18. The Type and Parody

The type formed by the Underground Man and Alyosha has the quality of a parody, where a parody is understood as a re-presentation of all of the elements of a given thing for the sake of subverting or contradicting its original intention.\textsuperscript{944} Described in terms of the photograph and its negative image, the re-presented elements of the parody constitute the elements shared by the image and its negative, while the subverted intention demarcates the abyssal difference between them. The genetic and structuring cause of the parody established by Alyosha and the Underground Man is mimetic desire. Alyosha imitates the being of mediators who have a real likeness to the Trinitarian being of a God who is communion and fellowship, a being generous and open to others. These mediators disclose a divinity that is self-sufficient, but whose self-sufficiency is founded on the reciprocal gift of the divine persons. The being sought by the Underground Man is the one he falsely attributes to his mediators, an autonomous self-sufficiency. Pride speaks to pride, and the mediators that fascinate him are those who seem already to enjoy a self-possession indifferent to all others. This pursuit of being is synonymous with the pursuit of a finite self-enclosure, and so the infinitude of desire is tricked into closing in upon itself. The dissatisfaction this produces might otherwise alert the Underground Man to his error if it did not simultaneously add to the luster of his mediators, whose perfect self-satisfaction seems all the more impressive in light of his misery. The infinitude of desire is directed obsessively towards that which is

least able to satisfy it, what is most inert and lifeless, the perfect motionlessness of stone. In this we have a parody of the notion of the beatific vision, the eternal rapture of the saint before God, endlessly fascinated by the source of all happiness, the divine mystery of love and life. But the goal of the beatific vision has been subverted; the votary of the skandalon is continuously fascinated because in continual anguish.

5.19. The Type and the Obstacle

At its most revelatory the novel is typological, exploring human transcendence in both directions. In this it forms a close analogue to Biblical revelation. The Bible unfolds its anthropological and theological revelations in two directions, towards the nadir and the zenith of transcendence. As the truth concerning God becomes clearer, the human parody of that comes more clearly into view as well. The perfect revelation of God in Christ perfectly discloses the parodic content of Adam. Not all Biblical types are characterized by the full measure of parody seen in the Adamic type. Adam is a representation of the common human starting point, the humanity fully implicated in and indebted to sacred violence.\linebreak[0.5]\footnote{945 In his \textit{Theology of the Body}, John Paul II describes Adam of the book of Genesis as a “collective concept of the human species,” a “corporate personality.” John Paul II, \textit{Theology of the Body}, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 158.}
The figures forming the points of origin for other Biblical types reflect that divine revelation and the overcoming of sacred violence are already underway in the Old

\linebreak[0.5]
Testament. By divine inspiration the Jewish people seek increasingly to be constituted apart from the unanimity of collective violence. The skandalon is less important to their communal identity, and so specifically Judeo-Christian types are less parodic than the one formed by the relationship of archaic religion to Christianity. This renders them what St. Thomas Aquinas will call “apt prefigurements” of grace.

A precise understanding of the uniting and differentiating elements of types helps us consider with sensitivity important and controversial issues associated with the historical practice of typology. The history of typology’s practice by Christians has included approaches that obviate the importance of Old Testament figures. Allegorical approaches to typology come in for particular criticism. These render the original types no more than “textual signifiers” that are superceded and replaced by New Testament realities. The concrete historical reality indicated by the Old Testament comes to be replaced with “generic and universalized meanings.” The reinterpretation of the elements of Judaism “spiritualizes” them to point of “evaporation.” The perniciousness of this “supercessionism,” where type is “erased” by anti-type, comes fully into view

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946 Robert Daly notes that the contemporary scholarship increasingly agrees that “the original matrix of Christianity was not precisely the Hebrew Scriptures, but rather the religious Judaism of the post-Biblical, intertestamental period.” Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 41.


948 John David Dawson cites the critiques of the Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin. Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 10.

949 Ibid., 6.

950 Ibid., 209.
against the background of twentieth century anti-Semitism and typological approaches that insist on the original type's destruction by the new.951

In the course of his discussion of these issues, John David Dawson points out what seems undeniable: Christian faith by necessity entails at least some measure of supercessionism.952 The question before us is whether or not there exists a practice of typological reading that respects the integrity of Judaism and valorizes its historical existence. Dawson defends the tradition by pointing out that the proper practice of figural readings, including the readings of St. Paul and the Church Father Origen, maintains the importance of types both as "historical realities" and as "textual signifiers."953

The key for Dawson is to understand the type and its fulfillment as united by "a divine, transformative performance in history."954 Girard's anthropology of religion helps us understand concretely the nature of both the divine performance and Judaism's historical existence.

951 Ibid., 9–11. Daniel Boyarin notes that the "destruction" of the original historical reality by Christian allegorical interpretation formed a prelude to the destruction of the bodies of those who appeal to the text for their existence and self-identification. Dawson cites a similar though less urgent concern of Erich Auerbach that allegorical approaches "dissolve" the text's historicity. Auerbach differs from Boyarin by distinguishing allegorical from "figural" interpretations that attribute more importance to the original historical reality.

952 Ibid., 217. "This is fundamental disagreement between Judaism and Christianity about the characterization of the meaning and purpose of human history, as that history comes under the working of divine agency as represented in the Bibles of the two religions. Consequently, Christians committed to the traditional practice of figural reading can escape some, but perhaps not every, implication of the term 'supercessionism.'"

953 The scripture commentaries of Origen come in for particular criticism in critiques of allegorical interpretations. See Ibid., 10.

954 Ibid., 7. Dawson cites the importance of the "transformative performance of God in history" without elaborating precisely what that is, perhaps assuming that the resurrection of the dead and the salvation of humanity are sufficiently implied. The understanding of the relationship between religious practices and the removal of skandalē provided by Girard is presented here as providing a more precise understanding of the specific content of that performance.
and the historical realities that undergo transformation. To the modern interpreter, circumcision is ripe for allegorization because the original concrete purpose of the practice remains obscure. Girard's analysis suggests that the practice is a vestige of an original sacrificial practice that was ordered, as all sacrificial practices are ordered, to the removal of obstacles from within the community. The Biblical practice pursues its object in part by functioning as an identity marker, contributing to the peace and harmony of the community by fostering a shared ethnic identity that includes the demarcation of Jew and Gentile. So in addition to removing obstacles from within the community, circumcision operates by establishing an obstacle between the community and its outside.955

Recognizing the physical act of circumcision as a type of the spiritual circumcision does not require the erasure of its real historical role in removing obstacles, it simply requires acknowledging what is in fact obvious, that as an instrument by which to remove obstacles, it operates imperfectly. By identifying it as a type, the Christian interpreter is simply identifying within its imperfect operation a sign value that can be recognized with the appearance of its significate, the complete elimination of obstacles effected by the resurrection of Christ's body. Other types can be understood in precisely the same way. The Promised Land, for example, is described in the Book of Joshua as a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Josh 5:6). This description indicates that God has promised his people a home where life is lived with a greater freedom from obstacles than would be the case in a

less bountiful land. As such it stands as a type of the condition of the resurrected body, a body that encounters no obstacles. It goes without saying that however bountiful, no earthly region can be entirely free of difficulties, and what is more, the book of Joshua recounts that the gift of the land requires the violent destruction of the pagan peoples already there (Josh 8:24-26). Recognizing Joshua’s entrance into the Promised Land as a type requires only that we acknowledge the imperfection of the original event as a solution to the problem of obstacles, and the condition of the resurrected Christ as a more perfect freedom from obstacles.956

The fulfilled reality of the anti-type does not call for the destruction of the original reality, nor is it entirely at odds with the original aim. The anti-type accomplishes fully the concrete historical task to which the original type is ordained, again, the removal of obstacles.957 As noted earlier, a type is an irreducibly triadic sign. The destruction of the original type would obscure the meaning and relevance of the significate.958 The concrete historical condition that requires the removal of obstacles contributes to the recognition of the significate as an answer to a real need.

956 Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 89. Something similar can be said for all of Jesus’ miracles, including the miraculous resurrections he performs. They are clear prefigurements of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, but as prefigurations they are imperfect inasmuch as they are temporary. All miracles of healing can be understood in terms of the type: they are removals of obstacles that point to a more complete fulfillment yet to come and recognizable in the risen body of Christ.

957 I can finally deliver on the promissory note I issued in note 32 of the Introduction where I promise to explain my use of the terms “Old” and “New” Testament. I follow John David Dawson for regarding allegorical interpretations as an inadequate approach to typology, one that fails to respect the concrete reality of the Jewish antecedents. The typology I advocate is one where the shared historical projects of types and anti-types is recognized and highlighted. Identifying typologies means identifying a real continuity of purpose between type and anti-type. This unity of purpose forms the basis of the continuity suggested by the use of the terms “Old” and “New” Testaments. See *Ibid.*, 89.

addressed incompletely in and through the religious and cultural practices of human communities, Jew and Gentile alike.\textsuperscript{959}

As the great novelists intuited powerfully, understanding the experience of resurrection and conversion entails the exploration of previous attempts to pursue being and happiness. The legacy of all of humanity’s attempts to free itself of obstacles, from most parodic to the most apt prefigurements of grace, form humanity’s ability to recognize the workings of God’s providence. The novelists themselves were like the woman at the well in Samaria who runs from her encounter with Jesus exclaiming, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done” (Jn 4:29). The novelists realized that “all I have ever done” would be a continual source of revelation in light of the experience of conversion. “All I have ever done” is the typological starting point that gives shape and substance to its fulfillment. This is why the song of Easter morning, the \textit{Exultet}, can sing of the “happy fault” and the “necessary sin of Adam.”\textsuperscript{960}

\textbf{5.20. The New Passover}

Circumcision and the entrance into the Promised Land are not entirely free of parody, but their status as apt prefigurements of the resurrection is supported by

\textsuperscript{959} Girard notes that the elements of violence present in the Old Testament are “logically necessary” because they “prefigure the refusal of violence that is at the center of the Gospels.” Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 218.

their participation in both the Bible and the Jewish cult, which increasingly seeks
the truth concerning victims, and which as we saw in the case of the Suffering
Servant songs of Isaiah, comes tantalizingly close to revealing the single victim
mechanism. During the inter-Testamental period the sympathy for victims and the
aversion to collective violence continue to inform the Jewish understanding of
theological reflection and religious practice. Theological developments during this
period increasingly take their inspiration from the Akedah, the “binding” of Isaac
(Gen 22:1-14), as well as certain elaborations of the story that highlight and
underscore the importance of Isaac as a victim of sacrifice.

Girard notes that many of the passages of Genesis and Exodus are concerned
with a historical period when Israel transitions from the practice of sacrifice,
particularly of the first born male, to a cult whose “only legitimate blood rites” are
circumcision and the immolation of animal victims. In the Akedah this transition
is placed before our eyes in the substitution of the ram for Isaac. Israel is not unique
for having made such a transition. The consistency with which cultures transition
from human to animal victims indicates that archaic communities realize the
precariousness of using murder to prevent murder. Likewise, many cultures arrive
at a stage of civilizational development where they no longer rely on the violence of
sacrifice for their social organization. As this transition unfolds the violence of their

961 As the story is told in Genesis, Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac, but while Abraham is preparing to deliver the killing blow, an angel appears who tells him to substitute a ram for his son (22:12-13).

own rituals and myths becomes scandalous to them, and they subject their religious practices to a regimen of censorship where their violent content is eliminated or concealed beneath picturesque elements.\textsuperscript{963} But rather than mark a real overcoming of sacrificial violence and scapegoating, these substitutions and acts of censorship serve a mythological purpose. They serve to conceal further the violence on which the community was originally founded and to which the community continually returns albeit in other forms.\textsuperscript{964}

The substitutionary theme present in the \textit{Akedah} revelatory of the victim. The story itself never lets us lose sight of Isaac, the original human victim, and the tradition of interpretation that follows emphasizes his role. During the inter-Testamental period a belief in the resurrection of the dead became widespread within Judaism, and the \textit{Akedah} became an important textual referent.\textsuperscript{965} The angel’s return of Isaac to Abraham was interpreted as a resurrection, and there is a strong tendency in inter-Testamental literature to speak of him as though sacrificed by Abraham.\textsuperscript{966} This is the case in the Haggadic commentary on Exodus 12:42 called

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Girard, \textit{The Scapegoat}, 66-70, 76. Speaking of the development to which myth is subjected, whereby its original violent content is suppressed and perhaps finally eliminated.
\item Girard regards the contemporary aversion to assigning any epistemological value to religion as serving a similar mythological purpose inasmuch as it serves to conceal the role of collective violence in human origins and beyond. Girard, \textit{Things Hidden}, 184, 441.
\item Daly, \textit{Sacrifice Unveiled}, 47. Indeed, the prophet Zechariah seems to foresee a future event very reminiscent of the \textit{Akedah} where the victim is, in fact, “thrust through” or “pierced”: “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of mercy and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have thrust through, they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and they will grieve for him as one grieves over a firstborn” (Zech 12:10). These references to the only, firstborn child are clear references to Isaac (cf. Gen 22:2).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
“The Poem of the Four Nights.” In its consideration of the Akedah, the role of Isaac is highlighted and emphasized. He is portrayed as a thirty seven year old man, assenting voluntarily to be sacrificed, and the poem speaks of him as through he were, in fact, sacrificed. Isaac rather than Abraham is the principal agent in the sacrificial act, and he instead of Abraham receives a vision of the “perfection of the heavens.”

To the Akedah was attributed the efficacy of the entire Jewish cult, and a particularly close association emerges in Jewish thought between the Akedah and the Passover sacrifice, the latter coming to serve as the liturgical sitz im leben of the former. A close kinship was ascribed to the ram given to Abraham and the sacrificial lamb of the Passover, and the three days elapsing between the selection of the Passover lamb and its immolation were regarded as a symbolic counterpart to the three days journey taken by Abraham and Isaac to Mt. Moriah. The efficacy of the Passover sacrifice was attributed to God’s remembrance of Isaac at the sight of the sacrificed lambs in the Temple. We have examined already in chapter four the themes of expulsion and victimization present in the Exodus story.

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967 The poem locates the most important events in Jewish salvation history in four “nights.” The first is the night on which God began creation. The second night combines events associated with Abraham, the covenant of Gen 15 and the Akedah of Gen 22. The third is the night of the Passover, and the fourth is the night on which the world will end. Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 47.

968 The poem refers to the “ashes” and “blood” of Isaac. Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 47.

969 Ibid., 48.

970 Ibid.

971 Ex 12:3-7; Gen 22:4.

972 Daly, Sacrifice Unveiled, 47-48.
commemorated by the Passover ritual. The Akedah and the Passover thus combine in Jewish thought to draw attention to the place of the victim of sacrifice, and rather than serving a mythological purpose, the substitutionary theme whereby the human victim is spared at the expense of an animal moves attention away from the sacrificer to the sacrificed, and engenders a revelatory sympathy for the victim of violence. In its cultic practice ancient Israel embraces the substitution of animals, but in its belief and thought does not allow this substitution to serve a mythological purpose; the original human victim is remembered and venerated.

We have considered already in chapter three the fruit of this sympathy. In the Old Testament, within the Jewish Law and the prophets in particular, the Jewish sympathy for victims yields a significant overcoming of the distortions of the mimetism that dominates archaic religion and culture. The Jewish cult seeks to be free of the violent projections of archaic sacrifice, and becomes increasingly committed to a conception of God free of violence. The movement beyond archaic religion’s devotion to the *skandalon* frees the descriptions of the Old Testament from the unreality of mimetism and deviated transcendence that dominates myth. The typological character of the novelistic conversion thus has a foundational precedent in the Old Testament: a future free of obstacles comes also with a more precise awareness of their role in the past.

All told, the course of the inter-Testamental developments in Jewish thought enhance the anticipatory features the Akedah and the Passover, rendering them even more apt as prefigurations of Christ. In those instances where the Akedah is referenced New Testament authors continue to speak of Isaac as though having
been sacrificed,\textsuperscript{973} and the repeated references to Christ as the “only” and “beloved” Son of God evoke God’s descriptions of Isaac in Genesis.\textsuperscript{974} The New Testament authors recognize Isaac as a type of Jesus, because Jesus is the fulfillment of the typological revelation underway in Isaac. And the frequent references to Jesus as the Lamb of God repeat the association of this new Isaac with the Passover sacrifice.\textsuperscript{975} Within the mystery of the New Passover, the Paschal drama of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, humanity’s point of origin, the founding murder, the event where the \textit{skandalon} comes to be regarded as a sacred means of expelling \textit{skandala}, is fully re-presented, and within that same drama Jesus discloses the possibility of an eternity free of obstacles. The Bible’s typological revelation is fully extended in both directions, to the point of origin and the point of destination, to the alpha and the omega.

This Eucharist bears the same typological character as revelation itself. In the gesture of consuming the body and blood of Christ the Catholic recapitulates the history of religion from “alpha to omega.”\textsuperscript{976} By the words and the signs of the celebration of the sacraments the recipient is incorporated into the history of salvation,\textsuperscript{977} the history of God’s effort to lead persons away from the \textit{skandalon} to a

\textsuperscript{973} James 2:21: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?” Hebrews 11:17-18: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’”


\textsuperscript{975} Daly, \textit{Sacrifice Unveiled}, 14, 54.

\textsuperscript{976} Girard, \textit{Evolution and Conversion}, 217.
real and complete freedom from obstacles. In the sacraments grace is communicated in a public way such that the recipient him or herself is a living sign of the entire transformative performance of God.\textsuperscript{978} The sacraments contextualize the believer’s transformation within the history of all such transformations. The sacraments allow for the believer’s transformation to be understood at every level, personal, familial, cultural, and cosmic, inasmuch as the renewal and liberation of the believer can be understood as a real beginning of the “new heavens and the new earth” (Rev 21:1). The sacramental vision is as universal as the novelistic, demonological, or “skandalological” vision we have already discussed; it presents the disciple’s transformation and liberation from obstacles within every context of human life, within the context of the entirety of humanity’s will to be free of them and God’s will to liberate his creation from them.

The Eucharist presents the parodic starting point of idolatry, the desire to find being cannibalistically, as it were, at the expense of others. It also presents the believer’s determination to seek being according to the manner in which he or she receives it in the sacrament, as a gift. This feature of the sacrament indicates that the believer’s personal transition parallels that of the transition of humanity as a whole—Jew first, then Gentile\textsuperscript{979}—in the course of salvation history, from the full parody of faith in the devotion of archaic religion to the skandalon, to the devotion

\textsuperscript{977} Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{978} Vonier points out that God is free to transform the human heart by a gift of grace that is entirely private, but in the sacraments grace is given in the company of signs, words and gestures, that indicate the relation of God’s gift of grace to the rest of salvation history. The sacraments provide a fuller picture of grace whereby it is understood that the inner transformation of the recipient is only one of the things signified. Vonier, The Doctrine of the Eucharist, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{979} See Rom 1:6.
to God as revealed in Christ, the victim who forgives. The Eucharist also indicates
the liberation of desire that the novel, and Girard, seems reluctant to give us. The
gesture of consuming the mediator recalls the frenzied mimetism of the cannibal,
and indicates that the grace of the Eucharist intends to impel and enliven human
desire by a no less intense devotion to its mediator, the risen Christ, who offers an
incomparably greater gift of being than could be taken from any earthly mediator of
desire. The sacrifice received in the Eucharist sends the believer forth to love the
world and the persons in it according to the truth of Christ’s word and example.
Indeed the desire kindled by the Eucharist must necessarily be greater than that of
mimetism. It is a desire that never loses touch with reality, both the reality of
human nature and the reality of the external world. Only superficially does the
archaic sacred and its sacrifices set desire loose. More profoundly they frustrate it,
confining its periodic frenzies to a narrow sphere, directing it away from its true
object to substitutes and surrogates. They send persons to seek the satisfaction of
an infinite desire in finite mediators. The Christian sacred sets sacrifice loose by
making it “rational and acceptable,” putting it into direct contact with the truth, the
truth first of the victim, then of the world. The Eucharist encompasses all attempts
at humanity’s perennial quest, to free to be free of obstacles, even as it extends to
humanity a foretaste of the fulfillment of that quest.
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