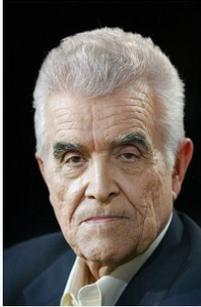


# RELIGION AND SOCIETY

DR. MARTIE REINEKE

RELS 4160

## VIOLENCE AND RELIGION IN A TIME OF TERRORISM



The tools that we will use to investigate this topic derive from the mimetic theory of René Girard. “Mimesis” is a Greek word meaning “to imitate.” This imitation can be of words, actions, or behaviors of another individual or group. For Girard, imitation is associated with desire, the desire to be another. Humans are subject to this form of desire because we desire the fullness of being. We desire being because we feel insufficient, inadequate, and impoverished (materially, spiritually, psychologically). Specifically, because we lack being and others seem to possess being (i.e., they appear to be self-sufficient, adequate or superior to their peers, and either literally or metaphorically wealthy) we look to others to inform ourselves of what we should desire in order to acquire being. We do this because the other already seems superior to us in their being: whatever they desire (and apparently have a track record of acquiring) should enable us, if we access it, to also access being.

As a consequence, looking to another to inform us of what we should desire in order to be, we find our attention drawn not toward the object that the other recommends but toward the other who we perceive is capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being. But the closer we come to acquisition of the object of the model's desire and, through that acquisition, to the model, the greater is our rejection or refusal by the model. Finally, the model becomes a monstrous double by whom we are repulsed and from whom we seek distance. This mimetic conflict ends in a sacrifice that we experience as conferring the plenitude of being we previously have sought.

Girard describes this conflict as a kind of *contagion* and notes that it can involve more than two individuals, increasing so as to place an entire society at risk. When mimetic conflict reaches a crisis point, a *scapegoat mechanism* is triggered. One person is singled out as the cause of this great disorder in being and is expelled or killed by the group. This person is the scapegoat. Peace is restored because people believe that with the sacrifice of the scapegoat, a fullness of being (and its attendant feelings of peace and harmony) has been achieved. Unfortunately, because humans continue to lack being and because mimetic desire is endemic to the human condition, the cycle of desire regularly begins again.

## OUR REFLECTIONS ON MIMETIC DESIRE

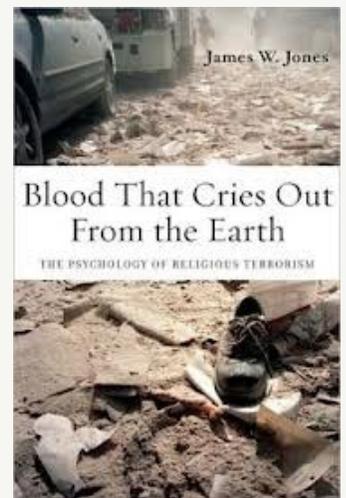
We will start with key texts in René Girard's theory of mimetic violence. Subsequently, we will turn explore the sacred narratives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in order to understand the phenomenon of scapegoating and mimetic violence within the context of these major Western faith traditions. Our guide will be Bruce Chilton who employs Girard's theory in his study of the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac. We will move on to examine religious terrorism, linking our reflections with our previous explorations of mimetic theory and scapegoating by reading the works of a psychologist of religion (James W. Jones). Finally, with Richard Beck, we will focus closely on one feature of a sacrificial worldview that regularly features in terrorism: purity and impurity.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

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### OFFICE HOURS

**Tuesdays:**

**Noon-1**

**Thursdays:**

**11-Noon.**

**Other hours by  
appointment.**

## GIRARD AND HIS IMPORTANCE

An historian by training, Girard won international recognition initially as a literary theorist rather than as an historian when he developed a theory of mimetic desire and applied it to literature, particularly in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Girard consolidated his scholarly reputation with an anthropology of religion set forth in *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Girard argues that mimetic processes he previously explored in literature are at the root of all violence.

Cultures respond to violence and put an end to it through the sacrifice of a scapegoat (e.g., the persecution of Jews during the Inquisition, the witch hunts of early Establishing that society and religion are built on a mechanism of scapegoating and that collective rituals of sacrificial violence are recorded in cultural myths, Girard offers scholars a theory about the most basic roots of human behavior. Girard's mimetic theory, albeit controversial in its broad scope, has garnered increasing interest and recognition by scholars, confirming his standing as one of the most important thinkers of our time. Girard is a member of the prestigious *Académie française* in recognition of his outstanding contributions to philosophical anthropology, joining previous members that have included Victor Hugo, Louis Pasteur, Alexandre Dumas, and Voltaire. The growing secondary literature on Girard spans the disciplines and includes theorists and empirical researchers. Seven journals have devoted special issues to Girard's work; he has been the subject of four *fest-schrifts*; and his books have been translated into fifteen languages. My website contains a page "Violence and Religion" that highlights key organizations devoted to the study of Girard.

WHETHER IT'S  
THE RACE FOR  
PRESIDENT, THE  
LATEST  
SQUABBLE  
AMONG  
CELEBRITIES,  
RACE RELATIONS  
IN FERGUSON, OR  
THE DYNAMICS OF  
FAMILY  
GATHERINGS AND  
DEPARTMENT  
MEETINGS, A  
"GIRARDIAN"  
TAKE ALWAYS  
BRINGS AN  
INSIGHT THAT WE  
CONSTANTLY TRY  
TO FORGET.  
-GRANT KAPLAN

### COURSE TEXTS:

Bruce Chilton, *Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.

James Jones, *Blood the Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*.

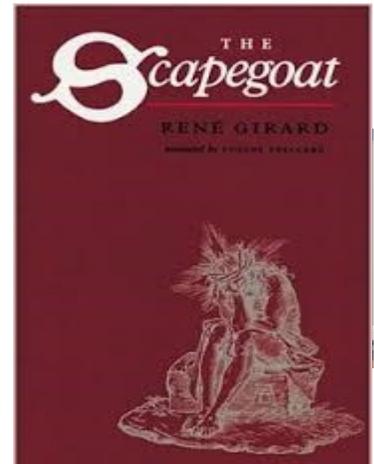
Richard Beck, *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*

### ESSAY PACKET:

"Reconstructing "Evil:" A Critical Assessment of Post-September 11 Political Discourse," by Sina Ali Muscati. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 23/2, October 2003, 249-269.

"Chapters 1-3." *The Scapegoat* by René Girard. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

"Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism" by René Girard. *The Berkshire Review*, Vol 14, 1979, pp. 9-19.



## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Engage in effective oral and written communication.
- Prepare descriptive and reflective accounts.
- Problem-solve.
- Implement and sustain critical analyses.
- Enhance your understanding of how scholars who study of religion think.

## COURSE PHILOSOPHY

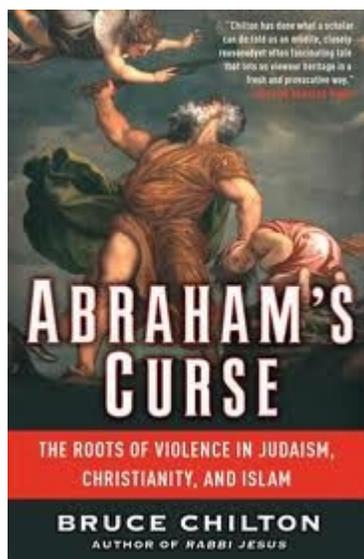
Students are encouraged to place critical thinking skills at the center of their course goals. Critical thinking does not mean “finding fault” with persons or ideas. When we think critically, we work to “illuminate a previously hidden topic or experience by means of careful judgment and evaluation.” For example, as you begin the course, you may have very little awareness of how scholars assess the relationship between terrorism and religion. By the end of the course, what was previously in the shadows will stand out. You will be able to offer thoughtful analyses and comments about violence and religion in a time of terrorism.

## PEDAGOGICAL VALUES OF THIS COURSE

- Critical thinking is a learnable skill. A professor and her or his students collaborate as resources for each other in learning this skill. We are all learners.
- Problems, questions, and issues serve as the source of motivation for learners in this class.
- The goals, methods, and evaluative components of this course emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.
- Learning is strengthened when students formulate and justify their ideas in writing and through oral communication.
- Learning is strengthened when students exchange information and resources with each other rather than work in isolation from each other or sit passively listening

“EACH PERSON  
MUST ASK  
WHAT HIS  
RELATIONSHIP  
IS TO THE  
SCAPEGOAT. I  
AM NOT AWARE  
OF MY OWN,  
AND I AM  
PERSUADED  
THAT THE SAME  
HOLDS TRUE  
FOR MY  
READERS. WE  
ONLY HAVE  
LEGITIMATE  
ENMITIES. AND  
YET THE ENTIRE  
UNIVERSE  
SWARMS WITH  
SCAPEGOATS.”

- RENÉ GIRARD



## WHY COME TO EVERY CLASS?

- Because we do small group work daily, when you aren't there, your absence is really noticed. Classmates miss you and your contributions.
- You don't get homework points if you are absent. A student who has earned an A on the exams but has missed a lot of homework will earn a B or C in the course.
- At the beginning of most class sessions, your confidence that you understood the reading assignment will be fairly low. By the end of each class session, you and your classmates will have moved forward significantly in your understanding. You will have the confidence to write about what you have read!

## POLICIES ON LATE WORK

Late Work other than exams: You are urged to remain current with assignments. If you have not completed an assignment on the day listed in the calendar, you will be ineligible for points on that assignment. Students often have very good reasons for late homework or for missing class (e.g., illness, car accidents, etc.). However, late submissions will not be accepted for points because the points are awarded for **using your homework to help your group do its work in the classroom**. If you haven't done the homework on time or if you aren't in class, you can't help your group.

Late Exams: If you are unable to submit an exam on time, you must inform me beforehand or no later than the next day. Messages may be left at 273-6233 or on e-mail.

## ADA ACCOMMODATIONS

The ADA provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities will want to arrange for such accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. The ODS is located in 103 Student Health Center (273-2676).



## E-MAIL POLICIES

E-mail Accounts: It is **required** that you obtain and use your university e-mail account for this class. I will use e-mail to communicate with you. You will receive assignments, information about changes to the syllabus etc. As a general rule, you should check your e-mail DAILY for class announcements

E-mail Etiquette: While I encourage you to communicate with me via e-mail, it is important that you consider this communication as a formal dialogue between professor and student. Employers regularly report that one of their primary issues with recent college graduates is that they do not know how to send professional e-mails. As you work on developing this skill in this class, here are some recommendations:

- Begin your e-mail with a formal address:  
Dr. Reineke.
- Conclude your e-mail with your complete name, section number, and small group name/number.
- If you are making a request, word it appropriately. For example, if you are asking me if you can do something, be sure the body of the e-mail includes, at a minimum, the word "please."
- Symbols and abbreviations that you use to text with your friends are a foreign language to most professors. I should not have to ask my daughter how to translate your e-mail.
- If a professor writes you as an individual (not a class mailing), you always need to respond to that email, indicating that you have received it. Etiquette in the workplace for ending an exchange of e-mails is this: the lower-ranked person always responds to the e-mail of a higher-ranked person unless the higher-ranked person specifically releases the person from that obligation with a phrase such as "no need to reply."

E-mail Submissions: Course work may be submitted by e-mail only with prior permission of the professor. A paper copy **MUST ALWAYS** follow an e-mail submission for which you have received prior permission.

## WRITING CENTER ASSISTANCE

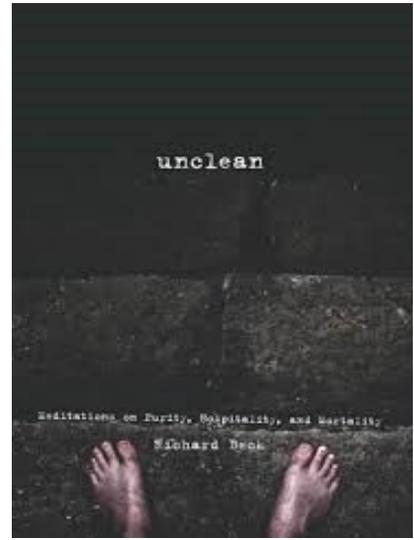
The Writing Center offers one-on-one writing assistance open to all UNI students. Writing Assistants offer strategies for getting started, citing and documenting, and editing your work. Visit the Online Writing Guide at [www.uni.edu/unialc/writingcenter/](http://www.uni.edu/unialc/writingcenter/) and schedule an appointment at 008 ITTC or 319-273-2361.

## COMPONENTS OF YOUR GRADE

The study of religion is a communal, conversational effort. Class discussions comprise a major part of this course and evaluations will reflect this focus. Graded course units will be:

Daily work:	3-5 points each
Content quizzes:	5-10 points each
Essay exams:	35-50 points each

**NOTE:** You will want to maintain a file of assignments in this course. Plan to have a loose-leaf notebook, with pockets. Save all handouts, written assignments, and class notes. We return to work completed earlier in the semester later in the semester.



### CELL PHONES AND OTHER DEVICES

All devices should be used **ONLY** for class activities. Your full participation in group activities will result in a more positive assessment of your contributions to your group by other group members.

### NEED TIPS FOR WRITING, GROUP WORK, ETC.?

Check out "Teaching and Learning" on my website:

### ACADEMIC ETHICS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL WRITING

In this course, UNI's Academic Ethics Policies are strictly enforced. Students are responsible for knowing these policies. These Policies are posted here: <http://www.uni.edu/policies/301>

In order to support students' efforts to use college-level writing skills and not engage in "patch-writing," a form of plagiarism, course work is submitted to Turnitin, and students can review the results. Instructions will be given with the first exam.

**COURSE CALENDAR FOR RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

1-12	Introduction to the class. <b>Unit I: Mimesis, Violence and Scapegoating: Key Girard texts</b> <b>YouTube videos on mimetic theory</b>
1-14	Essay Packet: "Reconstructing Evil"
1-19	Essay Packet: <i>Scapegoat</i> , 1-30
1-21	Essay Packet: <i>Scapegoat</i> , 31-44
1-26	Essay Packet: "Mimesis and Violence"
1-28	Introduction to Gasset edition of Girard's work (to be e-mailed to class); essay exam on Unit I assigned
2-2	Essay exam on Unit I due. <b>Unit II: Mimesis, Violence, and the Scapegoat in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</b> Guest lecture by Professor Burnight as an introduction to Chilton, <i>Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</i> .
2-4	Chilton, 1-43
2-9	Chilton, 44-80
2-11	Chilton, 81-94; 130-140
2-16	Chilton, 143-170
2-18	Chilton, 171-195
2-23	Chilton, 196-224
2-25	Chilton wrap-up; essay exam on Unit III assigned.
3-1	Chilton essay due. <b>Unit III: Psychological Reflections on Strangers, Scapegoats, and Mimetic Theory</b> Lecture on Jones, <i>Blood the Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism</i>
3-03	Jones, 1-28
3-08	Jones, 29-50
3-10	Jones, 51-70
3-22	Jones, 71-88
3-24	Jones, 88-114
3-29	Jones, 115-142
3-31	Jones 142-171. Essay exam on Unit IV assigned.
4-05	Essay exam on Unit III due. Conversation with Jones.
4-07	<b>Unit IV: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Strangers, Scapegoats, and Mimetic Theory</b>  Beck, 13-30
4-12	Beck, 33--70
4-14	Beck, 73-119
4-19	Beck 120-153
4-21	Beck, 154-174
4-26	Conversation with Beck.
4-28	Beck 175-197; essay exam on Unit IV assigned
Final	Consultations in Lang 20: 9-9:50 am and 3-5 pm on Tuesday, May 3. Also 9-9:50 am on Wednesday, May 4. Essay exam due at my door (BAR 2101) and on Turnitin by 5 pm on Wednesday May 4.