

COV&R 2025 Concurrent Paper Abstracts

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Spiritual Practice: Session 1a

Franciscan Spirituality through a Mimetic Lens

Liam Kelly

Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), and the movement which bears his name, had a profound influence on the late medieval Church and society. After a brief hiatus in early modernity the influence of Saint Francis, and Franciscan spirituality more broadly, experienced a significant renewal. The popular renewal of Franciscan spirituality in the 19th and 20th century was not unproblematic. It was tied to romantic representations of the Founder's, representations that did much to obscure the motives and aims of Francis of Assisi and his movement. A more satisfactory account of Franciscan Spirituality is achieved by reading the Founder and the movement through the mimetic lens. Firstly, by critiquing romantic representations of Francis of Assisi and taking seriously the mimetic component of his conversion. Secondly, by placing the Founder in the context of his movement. A consistent challenge for the Franciscan movement has been the appropriate imitation of the Founder. Mimetic theory can serve to explore the proper role of imitation and thereby release those drawn to Franciscan spirituality from distorted forms of imitation. A mimetic reading of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement, achieves a compelling and coherent account of a thirteenth century spirituality which remains vital and relevant in the early twenty-first century.

Strategies from The Cloud of Unknowing: A Mimetic View of Spiritual Knowing

Susan McElcheran

University of Toronto

In this paper I bring mimetic theory and contemplative theology together to question the view of humanity as essentially rational. This view underpinned an optimistic vision of the move away from religion to secular spirituality, in which naïve elements of liberalism assumed that the fall of religious authority would free humanity to follow peaceful modes of life governed by reason. Such a view ignores the affective, embodied character of knowing and the role of mimetic desire in perception of truth. In reality, both religion and secular spirituality are susceptible to mimetic violence, to what Girard calls "the false sacred." For example, Mindfulness Meditation is promoted in schools and businesses as a way of improving academic or professional performance, which can be a way of gaining a competitive edge on others. Mimetic theory analyzes the roots of illusion and self-deception in rivalrous mimetic desire. The Cloud of Unknowing, a fourteenth-century treatise on prayer, teaches a transformation of desire as a way to true knowledge. I argue that a mimetic reading of The Cloud can discover a nonviolent, affective kind of spiritual knowledge that can inform both religious and non-religious spiritualities, reducing violence by transforming desire from rivalrous to pacific

The Modern Mimetic Being: Secularism's Buffered Self and the Reclamation of Transcendent Desires

Brett McLaughlin SJ

Boston College

This paper will argue that recapturing and articulating the desires of holy women and men, the saints as illustrated in *Christus Vivit* and *Dilexit Nos*, sets forth models of transcendent social imaginary and desires for the modern self often mired in immanence. Mimetic Theory articulates the Human Subject as a fundamentally desiring being. These desires form the substructure of every individual, and orient human beings away from being governed by instinct; it enables human beings to step clear of the animal realm.

The transformation from the Pre-Modern to Modern secularism and secularism has led individuals to seek fullness and meaning in pluriform religious contexts. Recapturing Charles Taylor's "Social Imaginary" of the God-pervaded transcendent world, arrives through imbibing the being and means by which Christian saint-models envisaged their universe and societies themselves. What's more, the rebuttal of the Technocratic Paradigm in *Laudato Si* and *Laudato Deum* furnishes space to recover a Creation-theology in awe of a harmonious world. Once lost in an Immanent frame, meaning and significance are restored from the hierarchy of being.

Panel: Session 1b

Italian Art as a Pathway to Experiencing History, Spirituality, Religion, and the Sacred through and beyond an Illustrated Mimetic Theory

Mirko Ruffoni & Giuseppe Fornari

Italian civil lawyer & University of Verona

This presentation aims to share insights and experiences from a series of conferences I organized in Vicenza between 2012 and 2024. Originally intended for legal professionals, the events focused on the theme Art and Justice and featured contributions by the philosopher Prof. Giuseppe Fornari.

Art has proven to be a privileged gateway for exploring religion and spirituality through the lens of mimetic theory.

Art, the Infinite in the Finite – Agenda Giusta

Over time, these events developed into something far deeper than originally imagined. After the pause imposed by the pandemic, the latest conference centered on the work of Raphael, enriched by the release of a documentary film on the Sistine Madonna and the words of Vasilij Grossman—a bridge from the Renaissance to the Holocaust.

Together with Prof. Fornari, I will present this journey through Italian art, supported by visual materials and reflections on masterpieces such as:

Perugino's Delivery of the Keys and Raphael's Marriage of the Virgin and Transfiguration

Leonardo's Last Supper and Adoration of the Magi

Michelangelo's Last Judgment

Caravaggio's Conversion of Saint Paul and/or The Calling of Saint Matthew

Spirituality & Religion: Session 1c

The Agency of Friendship: A Missing Link Between Spirituality and Religion?

Curtis Gruenler

Hope College

The contrast between spirituality and religion follows from a larger tendency to dichotomize human agency as either individual or collective, one that has become more polarized in modernity by both greater individualism and more powerful collectivities. Obscured by this dichotomy is a third kind of agency that mimetic theory has called interdividual. The shared intentionality hypothesis of Michael Tomasello corroborates that interdividuality is more fundamental, the source of both individual and collective agency. Traditional and Christian discussions of friendship suggest how interdividual agency might also be seen as a fulfillment of personhood and community. If “spirituality” tends toward excessive individualism and critiques of religion rightly target collectivism’s tendency toward scapegoating violence, ideals of friendship point in a different direction as the true source and goal of both. Taking cues from Christ’s words about where two or three are gathered together in Matthew 18:20 and why he calls his disciples friends rather than slaves in John 15:15, I will explore what might be called spiritual friendship after the title of the twelfth-century treatise by Aelred of Rievaulx, who located it in robust conceptions of both contemplative spirituality and Benedictine religious community. In order to consider how a mimetic understanding of the ideals and practices of spiritual friendship might be revived in our fractured time, I will pursue a dialogue between the interdividual psychology of René Girard and Jean-Michel Oughourlian and writings on friendship by authors such as Augustine, Aquinas, Jurgen Moltmann, and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel

Rebalancing the Individual and Collective: Girard and Whitehead on Individual Spirituality and Religious Belonging in the Modern West

Andre Rabe

The Centre for Open and Relational Theology

This paper examines the “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon through the complementary theoretical frameworks of René Girard and Alfred North Whitehead. While Girard illuminates religion’s foundational role and helpfully critiques the emergence of a post-secular sacred, Whitehead’s process philosophy offers crucial insights into how civilizations advance through the continuous rebalancing of individual and collective elements. The synthesis of these perspectives helps explain why purely individualistic spirituality may be neither possible nor desirable, while also suggesting why current spiritual experimentation may be a necessary phase in cultural evolution.

Drawing on Whitehead’s insight that progress requires novelty—and that novelty necessarily entails risk—the paper argues that we are witnessing not a simple dichotomy between individual spirituality and organized religion, but rather a process of rebalancing. This rebalancing might generate new forms of religious community that maintain the benefits of collective religious experience while accommodating greater individual freedom. This framework moves beyond seeing the rise of individual spirituality as either a triumph of modernist individualism or as problematic fragmentation, suggesting instead that we are in a period of creative tension that could yield more adaptive forms of religious life.

"Religious, not spiritual." God, grief and the imagination in the work and life of Nick Cave

Daan Savert

Dutch Girard Society

Since the beginning of his career, Nick Cave's thematic preoccupations have included violence, love, death, the Devil and God. With his initial penchant for the disturbing and violent elements of religion (what Girardians might identify as 'the sacred'), Cave has at times been described as the "prince of darkness".

The death of his son Arthur in 2015 had an enormous impact on Cave's life, including his relationship with his fans. In the book *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, published in 2022, Cave speaks openly about his faith, that has grown over the years and has been deeply affected by his loss.

Today, Cave could be considered as a contemporary pastor, priest or a "missionary of grief", a substitute for traditional religion, who has stepped into the vacuum in a (post)secular context. And yet, Cave himself identifies as "religious, but not spiritual". He attends church, prays and reads Scripture, while at the same time remaining agnostic about the existence of God. It is hard to categorize Cave's faith or theology, but words as mystical, apophatic, imaginative and Christocentric (or even Christ-haunted) could apply.

Nick Cave is an example of what seems to be a new turn to religion in a (post)secular context. Despite the mimetic mass phenomena of fan culture around his persona (with all the risks involved), Cave could be seen as a model for positive mimesis, promoting a sense of transcendence and beauty, not rooted in a unity against a common enemy, but in the universal state of loss we share as human beings.

Mimesis in Fiction: Session 1d

Divine Magnetism: Melville, Plato, and Girard

Noah Dennis

Graduate student, University of Chicago

I will argue that we have good evidence to show that Melville took inspiration from Plato's *Ion* and *Phaedrus* in particular for his understanding of magnetism, mimesis, and the erotic energy that fuels Ishmael's narrative path in *Moby-Dick*. It has been well documented that Melville had read Plato's dialogues in the years prior to writing *Moby-Dick*, but the inspiration from Plato's *Ion* in particular has not been fully appreciated. To give further depth to this inquiry, I will use the conceptual framework of mimesis as it has been developed by René Girard and his followers to examine Plato's understanding of mimesis, positive and negative, and his use of dialogues and dialectic to foster conversion. I will argue that Ahab is an example of negative mimesis, which Girard terms acquisitive mimesis, while Ishmael is an example of positive mimesis, who ultimately can be described to have had a conversion-like experience that changed his relationship with the world and his understanding of himself. I will challenge Girard's interpretation of Plato's understanding of mimesis. I incorporate some of the recent work in *Homo Mimeticus II* that is relevant to the discussion of Plato's *Ion* and his condemnation of the mimesis of the poets.

Mimetic Desire in Chibimaruko-chan

Karen Hattori

Graduate School, Kinjo Gakuin University

Mimetic Desire in Chibimaruko-chan

There is a Japanese manga, Chibimaruko-chan, which strongly reflects mimetic theory. The story is based on the childhood of the writer, Momoko Sakura. She depicts everyday scenes with a sense of humor, and the comic has been loved by many generations. The main character is Maruko, which is the nickname of Momoko Sakura. Although she is lazy and usually unmotivated to do her schoolwork, she has an element of curiosity which is her attractive point.

Some of the stories of Chibimaruko-chan strongly reflect mimetic theory, particularly because Maruko desires to do or to want everything which people around her do or have. One of her friends is Hanawa-kun, who is well known among Maruko and her peers to belong to a very wealthy family. Generally, since his style is distinctive from others there is no way to imitate his life. However, Maruko demands from Tomozo that she wants the same thing that Hanawa-kun bought. It annoys Tomozo and the rest of her family members. Such episodes typify Maruko's envy for other people's belongings or fashions.

Chibimaruko-chan belongs to the type of manga that are comic essays, in which readers can easily imagine themselves in the situation. The manga shows how mimetic theory is reflected in our daily life. In this way, mimetic theory is demonstrated in Chibimaruko-chan and constitutes a new approach to interpreting Japanese manga.

Conspiracy Theory without a Scapegoat: The Grail Myth and UFOs in Christopher Münch's The 11th Green

Todd Thompson

Biola University

"Dangerous collective behavior" has indeed accompanied the "increasing individualisation" connected with modern attempts to divorce "religion" from "spirituality." New Age spirituality has often evinced a skepticism towards traditional institutions, which has frequently led to conspiracy theorizing, a characteristically modern form of scapegoating. Christopher Münch's (1962-) film, *The 11th Green* (2020) addresses these issues as it meditates on American government secrecy regarding Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs). Münch's film intentionally alludes to the work of German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883), particularly Wagner's opera on the grail legend Parsifal. Like Parsifal, *The 11th Green* explores mimetic rivalry and ultimately offers a critique of scapegoating practices. This paper argues that Münch's work parallels Wagner's in its attempt to renew concern for genuine transcendence through artistic reflection in an age when formal religious adherence seems to be in decline while also offering a critique of the scapegoating prevalent in post-Christian spirituality. By doing so, it reveals unexpected connections between medieval and modern retellings of the grail myth and modern explorations of the flying saucer myth, which Rene Girard has criticized as the "neo-paganism of the masses." As a result, it shows one pathway contemporary spirituality might travel to recover central insights about the partially re-concealed sources of human violence.

Panel: Session 1e

Girard and Mimetic Studies

Lawtoo, Antonelli & Vorstenbach

It is well-known that Girard's is the founder of mimetic theory (MT), but it is only recently that his work has been re-evaluated from the perspective of mimetic studies (MS). Drawing on a series of publications born out of a EU-funded project titled, *Homo Mimeticus* (www.homomimeticus.eu) led by Nidesh Lawtoo (Leiden University) this workshop aims to discuss both the most significant continuities and conceptual differences between mimetic theory and mimetic studies. Taking the most recent outputs of mimetic studies engaging with Girard's work such as *(New) Fascism* (2019), a diptych on *Violence and the Unconscious* (2023), and *Homo Mimeticus I and II* (2022, 2024), as well as recent translations into Spanish, Dutch, Italian, and German, this workshop brings together international scholars, translators, and critics working at the creative juncture of MT and MS

Theology: Session 2a

Re-visioning Pneumatology through Girard's Understanding of the Spirit as Paraclete

Rebecca Pawloski

Loyola University Chicago

This paper argues for a shift in pneumatological emphasis - from a Spirit primarily associated with consolation, charisms, and gifts, to the Paraclete who reveals victims and convicts the world of sin (Jn 16:8). While contemporary ecclesial movements have often been heralded as manifestations of a "new Pentecost," Girard's pneumatological insight suggests that the Spirit's fundamental work on Pentecost lay in revealing hidden victims at the center of human communities and inspiring the conversion of persecutors. Through analysis of Girard's correspondence with Raymund Schwager and subsequent theological developments, I explore how this understanding challenges both individual spiritual approaches and purely structural ecclesial solutions. The paper examines how the Paraclete's path remains in creative tension with an "institutionalist" ecclesiology while not destroying the structures necessary for social cohesion. This re-visioning of pneumatology offers important insights for discussions of the abuse crisis, institutional reform, and ecclesial renewal.

David as a Type of Christ in the Story of Absalom's Rebellion

Mack Stirling

In *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World*, Girard first made a case for the nonviolence of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Girard saw several Old Testament texts, especially the Joseph story and Isaiah's Suffering Servant as anticipating this final revelation in Christ. Other Girardian scholars, particularly James Allison (*The Joy of Being Wrong, Knowing Jesus*), Scott Cowdell (*Rene Girard and the Nonviolent God*), and Anthony Bartlett (*Cross Purposes, Signs of Change*) have given significant attention to the idea of a nonviolent God. In *Signs of Change*, Bartlett traces the evolution of divine nonviolence in the Bible. In this paper, it is proposed that the portrayal of David in the story of Absalom's rebellion contributes to the biblical revelation of divine nonviolence. This article provides a new reading of Second Samuel 13-20, a text which may well be among the earliest composed in the Bible.

King David, his conquests, and the eternal covenant he received (2 Samuel 7) formed the basis for the messianic hope taken up in the Psalms and the prophets. Thus, David has served as a type of the coming Messiah. Yet, the historical David portrayed in the books of Samuel was at best an ambivalent character. He was guilty of deception, extortion, adultery, and murder (not only of Uriah), as well as persistent offensive warfare. However, in one self-contained literary unit (2 Samuel 13-20), centered around Absalom's rebellion, we see a different David. Here, David evinces humility in the face of mocking and accusation, patient submission to the will of the Lord, genuine grief and suffering, love, and forgiveness of enemies. David literally becomes a forgiving victim. Thus, in this text, David appears as a genuine type of Christ in many essential ways. Furthermore, Second Samuel 13-20 has a finely developed chiasmic structure. The first part of the chiasm, which describes the driving of David out from Jerusalem, has many parallels to and foreshadows the first coming of Christ. The second part of the chiasm, which describes David's return to Jerusalem, foreshadows the Second Coming of Christ. In this pericope, David's behavior reflects or incarnates the mercy and loving kindness of God, giving us a glimpse of a loving God beyond violence.

Theology and Spirituality of the Priesthood between the Violent Sacred and a Christian Call to Holiness

Nikolaus Wandering

Prompted by Wolfgang Palaver's book on the topic, the distinction between the violent sacred that originates in the scapegoat mechanism and a holiness that originates in the God of Love, has become more and more important to me. Looking into R. Schwager's thoughts on a theology of the sacrament of ordination in the context of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, I found that the distinction was quite enlightening here too.

At the COV&R conference in Rome, I propose to present some thoughts on what difference the differentiation between the holy and the sacred makes for a theology and spirituality of the priesthood and how this might play a role in either contributing to or diminishing the danger of sexual or spiritual abuse by Catholic clergy.

Panel: Session 2b

"René Girard Politico" Studies Center

Guglielminetti, Ferronato, Fornari & Barberi

University of Padua

This panel aims to present the Studies Center "René Girard Politico", established at the University of Padua's Department of Political Science, Law, and International Studies. The session will provide an overview of the center's mission and activities since its founding in 2021, as well as outline its future directions. The "René Girard Politico" Studies Center serves as a hub for scholars interested in exploring and testing the potential of collaborative initiatives centered on Girard's thought. The focus is especially on the political dimensions of his mimetic and victimary theory, approached through both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses.

While the center's core perspective is grounded in the history of political thought, philosophy, political science, it also welcomes contributions from comparative literature, international relations, anthropology, theology—viewed both in their expressive and broadly "political" dimensions.

In recent years, the Centre promoted knowledge of Girard's paradigm by organising conferences and lecture series that explored the relationships between Girard and Machiavelli, Hobbes, Schmitt. In 2024, the conference "Reading Achever Clausewitz: War and the End of History in René Girard" brought together scholars from different backgrounds, both experts on Girard and avid readers new to the Girardian paradigm.

Media & Mimesis: Session 2c

The fear, the media, and the mud. A mimetic analysis

David Atienza & David Garcia-Ramos

In this presentation, we propose to analyze fear: fear of violence, of death, ontological fear, fear of losing everything, in light of Mimetic Theory as a generator of the World/culture, the World as a theological concept opposed to the Kingdom of God, in the light of Christian Theology. Likewise, we explore Christ and Christians as small rejected groups in their mission of being salt, yeast, light, as an anti-cultural force in the sense of anti-World, allowing the same Words that reject them to continue existing.

In this line, we will also analyze certain strategies of the media in relation to phenomena such as COVID-19, some highly publicized wars like the Ukraine War compared to others that do not appear in any media, or the recent floods in Valencia, Spain, and its media coverage, among others. We consider that all these strategies aim to generate or maintain a constant level of fear which, in turn, produces culture, *communitas*, or social cohesion. This process can be interpreted through the lens of Mimetic Theory, as it echoes the mechanisms of primitive rituals and myths in pre-Christian religions, where communal fear and its resolution through ritual sacrifice served to maintain social order and cohesion, ultimately shaping the foundational structures of culture itself.

Sacred Revenge: Rooting for an Avenger, Altruistic Punishment, and Scapegoating

Marina Ludwigs

Stockholm University

As I am writing this conference paper proposal on the 9th of December, 2024, the hunt is still going on for the killer of Brian Thompson, the CEO of United Helthcare, a medical insurance company. More details will doubtlessly become known later. But what we know at this point is that United Healthcare has been criticized for their high claim denial rate. This is why some speculate that the killer might be avenging the death of a loved one, that might have resulted from being denied medical treatment. Whatever the truth of the matter, my interest lies in the following phenomenon: a groundswell of support for the killer has been forming with people calling him a hero. I will analyze, from the perspective of mimetic theory, the claim that, in being non-partisan, this support has brought a rapprochement between the left and the right and has had a healing effect on society in the climate of extreme polarization of the past few years. I will also put the perspective of mimetic theory into dialogue with William Flesch's theory of comeuppance and its altruistic-punisher explanation of why we root for literary characters. Finally, I will put my analysis to test by asking whether we always impose an avenger frame on narratives where we root for "bad guys."

Mimesis, Theosis & Porneia

Matthew Tan

Catholic Institute of Sydney

This paper investigates the theological dimension of the cultural pull of pornography, with particular attention to mimetic theory. It submits that pornography's cultural power stems from its being a performance-based theological reality, a crucial dimension of which is a management of rivalry mediation. The paper looks at the way pornography elides two things. First, building on observations on rivalry as the opening up of a void, pornography hides under a veneer of profound embodiment, and traffics a deviated divinisation via the transcendence of the image. Second, and precisely because of the deviated transcendence trafficked, pornography both engineers and masks an underlying mimetic rivalry under the guise of championing the sovereignty of the consumer. The locus of this rivalry is between the image of the co-star in the film, who exercises dominance over the porn star, and the consumer in front of the screen. This orchestrated rivalry and management of mediation between the rivals engenders a heightening of self that comes, not with the satisfaction of the erotic appetites, but rather in the anticipation of it.

Human Behaviour: Session 2d

Economics

Paul Duggan

In this presentation we will compare modern, global economics and contemporary religion, in three stages. We will find that, despite the view that one is science and one superstition, they share some surprising similarities. This in turn can shed light on the disjunction between religion and spirituality, and also on the current escalation of mimetic desire in the global economy - raised as a general issue by Girard in 1961. Understanding economics as a justifying religion (or anti-religion) helps us to see this global escalation more clearly.

First we will measure economics against a modern definition of religion, from anthropology, and see that it has its own divine agents, sacrificial practices, promises of salvation, and communal rituals. Second, we will examine it for other irrational beliefs and signs of a religious leaning (e.g. prophecy, vocational training, binding morality). Thirdly we will look more closely at one variety of economics - free-market fundamentalism - which has additional similarities to religion (e.g. charismatic gatherings, evangelism). Finally we will add two contrasting economists - Marx and Milton Friedman - to the mix of religion and spirituality, clarifying the disjunction.

From Desire to Design. A Prototypal Empirical Methodology for Detecting Mimetic Behaviour in Urban Regeneration

Emanuel Muroi

University of Cagliari

In urban regeneration processes, it is often assumed that individuals can express their "desires" regarding urban transformations, spaces, services, and amenities, and that during participatory practices, researchers or planners simply need to ask residents and stakeholders "what they want". This dominant approach fails to consider what mimetic theory suggests— namely, that desires are dynamic and evolving, and that they are shaped by mimetic processes, often during the participatory processes and public debate, rather than formed ex ante.

In this context, the paper contributes by addressing that blind spot through a field-based experimental methodology grounded in René Girard's mimetic theory. Building on previous research focused on historical reinterpretations, we move toward ongoing case studies. We propose an empirical methodology to track the evolution of interests and detect mimetic desires as they unfold in the contexts of urban transformations. By introducing an experimental setting based on controlled "spatial perturbations", through "generative architecture", participatory interventions, and ethnographic observation, we explore how alternative spatial configurations may emerge.

This perspective opens up new avenues for urban planning and social policy, especially in areas affected by spatial disputes and urban regeneration challenges.

Simulating the Scapegoat: A Computational Approach to Mimetic Theory

Carlos Albuquerque Paes da Silva

Independent Researcher / Tulane University

The scapegoat phenomenon has been widely explored within René Girard's mimetic theory, with implications in literature, sociology, and human evolution. However, studies have primarily focused on historical cases rather than empirical observations. Due to methodological and ethical constraints, direct observation is challenging. This study presents an agent-based simulation developed in NetLogo to empirically analyze the underlying mechanisms of the scapegoat phenomenon and explore patterns of social propagation. The model simulates the distribution of tension among agents, crisis dynamics, and the emergence of leadership, offering insights into victim selection and social stabilization mechanisms. The results suggest that network structure, cultural attitudes, and skepticism play crucial roles in mitigating or intensifying victimization cycles.

Workshop: Session 2e

Escape from Mimetic Rivalry A Guide to Overcoming Scapegoating Through the Fourth Step of Alcoholics Anonymous and Openness to Grace

Lillian Dykes

Independent Practitioner

My question since the first meeting of the 1996 Colloquium was, "I believe what Girard says about nonviolence; how do I put it into practice?" My years of studying Girard and working the steps with others has answered that question. My paper will illustrate how the teachings of the nonviolent Jesus, the Girardian revelations of borrowed desire and scapegoating, together with working the fourth step can lead to a change of mind. The fourth step together with the understanding Girard has given us provides an opening for the working of grace in the practice of spirituality versus religion. I will discuss the working of the fourth step of Alcoholics Anonymous to recover from our addiction to conflict/violence (Metanoia). The protection of self-interests, all mimetic in nature, is the root of our resentments and our fears. The steps, the fourth step in particular, offer a way out.

The workshop is on how to work a fourth step using the theories of Girard and the nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels. Participants would work the step with me and thus acquire a tool for self-examination. The process of working step four provides a framework for a change of mind that both Girard and Jesus envision. Participants would experience a tool that we can use and suggest to others.

Panel: Session 3a

Capital Punishment in the Pentateuch: Why the Bible Prescribes Ritual Killing (Bloomsbury, 2022) by Simon Skidmore

Simon Skidmore, James Alison & Sandhor Goodhart

Through the application of mimetic theory, Skidmore examines the social impact of capital punishment upon the community, and explores the cathartic nature of this practice within key Pentateuchal texts. Skidmore shows how Mimetic theorists such as Girard advance a view that a community ravaged by vengeance and blood feuds may be saved from extinction by scapegoating one of their own. As the community select a common scapegoat, and vent their collective violence upon this person, peace and order are restored. Though an in-depth analysis of various passages, Skidmore reveals this process in key Pentateuchal texts concerning capital punishment. These observations suggest that biblical capital punishment may have functioned as a means of protecting the Israelite community by managing rivalry and violence.

Girard in Dialogue: Session 3b

Defending Girard against accusations of Gnosticism

Jorge Federico Marquez Muñoz

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Time and again, since the 1970s to the present, as we will see in the exposition, Girard has been accused of being a Gnostic thinker, of interpreting the Gospels according to Gnostic criteria, and of creating a Gnostic science. We will also see that Girard and his followers have responded to this by denying this accusation, both from theological and philosophical perspectives, anthropological perspectives, and political theory.

We will examine the weakness of these attacks against Girard. These attacks have been weak for various reasons: on the one hand, some of them have not even defined Gnosticism, none of them have used current sources on Gnosticism, and still others have simplified and even distorted Girard's texts; they have skewed his work to make Girard say the opposite of what he has said.

Some cases in this regard are notable, such as those of Richard Cohen and Pierre Manent and Paul Valadier, who clearly seek to make Girard their scapegoat, accusing him of being a "Gnostic thinker." However, these attacks have not been seriously challenged. Girard himself said very little on the subject, and his followers have begun to outline some responses. In this presentation I hope to offer some arguments that respond to these accusations, most of them drawn from a more careful reading of Girard and some authors of mimetic theory and, also, less frequently, from some of the sources of contemporary translators and interpreters of ancient Gnostic texts -i.e. David Brakke and Karen King.

My argument will be since those who accuse Girard of being a Gnostic have skewed his work and overinterpreted his theory. For example, Cohen takes his interpretation of Girard to such an extreme that he makes Girard an enemy of those in Western history who defend victims, when, in essence, Girard's work gives voice to numerous victims—that is the essence of his demystification of sacrifice. In the case of Valadier, he accuses Girard of de-Christianizing Christianity, of Gnosticizing it, by turning it into a mere social science. If this were true, it would be difficult to understand why Girard was a relevant and respectable author in contemporary theological debate.

Andersen e la fiaba liberata

Pietro Somaini

Gruppo Studi Girard

La lettura delle Fiabe di Andersen non permette soltanto di riscontrare quella struttura del desiderio triangolare e quel meccanismo sacrificale, che hanno trovato esposizione teorica attraverso l'opera di Girard. Se ciò è vero per tanti racconti tradizionali, di origine più o meno antica, alcuni tra quelli composti dallo scrittore danese si caratterizzano per due ulteriori elementi di particolare interesse da un punto di vista girardiano.

Il primo è che Andersen dimostra una certa consapevolezza delle dinamiche che descrive, non si limita a riportarle o addirittura le travisa, costringendo di conseguenza l'interprete girardiano a un'operazione di decostruzione del testo per farle emergere: in alcune sue fiabe la natura mimetica del desiderio e il meccanismo del capro espiatorio sono esattamente le tematiche centrali e le questioni problematizzate. Ciò è interessante nella misura in cui viene confutata l'ipotesi che il linguaggio mitico-fiabesco sia necessariamente "menzognero" e non possa essere invece "romanzesco" nel senso di "veritiero".

Il secondo elemento è che proprio grazie al fatto che le dinamiche rivalitarie e sacrificali non costituiscono il fondamento nascosto ma il focus della narrazione, alcune fiabe di Andersen offrono spunti di particolare interesse per individuare possibili vie d'uscita. La tesi è che l'attenzione dell'autore non sia tanto rivolta ai capri espiatori, definiti tali dalla violenza, quanto a quelle figure ai margini dell'escalation mimetica che tengono aperta la possibilità di una sua inversione.

Desiderio e violenza: l'antropologia del conflitto in Hobbes e Girard, il desiderio di dominio e l'importanza della trascendenza in dialogo con Kant e Nietzsche

Federico Vit

Università degli Studi di Pavia

Il presente contributo intende confrontare le antropologie del desiderio elaborate da Thomas Hobbes e René Girard, mettendo in luce affinità e divergenze teoriche, con particolare attenzione al nesso tra desiderio, violenza e ordine sociale. In entrambi i pensatori il desiderio umano è concepito come strutturalmente relazionale e potenzialmente conflittuale: nella "guerra di tutti contro tutti" hobbesiana come nel desiderio mimetico girardiano, la relazione è insieme fonte di legame e di minaccia. Tuttavia, se Hobbes risponde alla violenza con una soluzione politica — il Leviatano, corpo artificiale fondato sulla legge positiva — Girard propone una via escatologica fondata sulla rivelazione cristiana e sull'imitazione non violenta di Cristo. A partire dal contributo di Maria Stella Barberi, il paper introduce la distinzione tra desiderio di potere e desiderio di dominio, quest'ultimo inteso come forma mimetica produttiva che consente la creazione razionale di ordine e cultura. Questo concetto permette di reinterpretare la costruzione hobbesiana del potere sovrano come risposta razionale alla finitezza umana e alla crisi mimetica. Nella seconda parte, il lavoro si propone di aprire un dialogo tra Hobbes, Girard, Kant e Nietzsche intorno alla tensione tra legge naturale, religione e trascendenza, con un focus sul concetto di "trascendenza orizzontale" elaborato da Girard in *Menzogna romantica e verità romanzesca*. In questo modo, il paper intende offrire un contributo originale all'interno della letteratura girardiana su Hobbes, ampliandola in direzione filosofico-politica e mostrando la possibile rilettura del Leviatano alla luce della teoria mimetica.

Function of Religion: Session 3c

Religion without the Sacred: the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas and Jan Sokol as a complement to René Girard's theory

Jan Hresko

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia

Religions differ in the cultural forms of their rituals and who they address, but they are united in expressing something important. According to Emmanuel Levinas, ethical responsibility is the true core of religion. Levinas elaborates on how the ethical relation constitutes a form of transcendence that is deeply religious – biblical and Jewish – yet universal. Genuine religious experience is inseparable from the moral imperative to care for the Other and expressed in generosity. Spirituality means the openness of the human spirit to inspiration that does not come from itself. Jan Sokol, Czech philosopher and anthropologist, emphasizes that religion was originally a social phenomenon. Its internalization and individualization to personal spirituality came later. Religious expressions are the visible response of human beings to the gift of life. Religion expresses gratitude and a desire to preserve what is most precious. According to both thinkers, the Bible shows, through the history of the nation of Israel, the evolution of religion from reverence for sacred objects to the fear of God and respect for neighbours and from tribal particularism to universalism – the idea of one God for all mankind and the understanding of man as a guardian of his brother and of creation.

Beyond Violence: Mimetic Theory and the Sacred in Girard and Bataille

Jeffery McNeil

Independent Researcher

This paper examines the interplay between René Girard's mimetic theory and Georges Bataille's concept of the sacred, addressing their divergent perspectives on violence and its role in human culture. Girard's framework emphasizes sacrificial rituals as mechanisms to contain mimetic violence and sustain cultural cohesion, while Bataille highlights sacred communication through collective effervescence, offering an alternative path to unity. Drawing on Freud, Durkheim, and Mauss, this analysis illuminates how mimetic contagion operates both as a destructive and cohesive force, reshaping our understanding of spirituality and its relationship to organized religion. The paper further explores the implications of Girard and

Bataille's theories for contemporary crises of violence, individualization, and the fragmentation of the sacred. By proposing a synthesis of their ideas, it suggests a way forward that transcends the binary of religion and spirituality. This study contributes to the conference's exploration of mimetic theory by offering a nuanced perspective on the dynamics of violence, the sacred, and their roles in the genesis and maintenance of culture.

Religion as Scapegoat

Emilio Moreno Villanueva

Master's Student in Religious Diversity in a Globalized World (Erasmus Mundus Program), University of Groningen | University of Coimbra

This paper explores the contemporary discourse that positions religion as a scapegoat for violence and irrationality, contrasting it with the idealization of spirituality as a rational and peaceful alternative. Drawing on René Girard's mimetic theory, the paper examines the dichotomy between religion and spirituality, which is rooted in a set of fallacies that obscure their shared function in regulating violence. While religion is often vilified as an outdated and violent force, spirituality is portrayed as a modern, individualistic journey toward self-understanding. However, this distinction overlooks the fact that both religion and spirituality, despite their supposed differences, serve similar functions in society—regulating violence and providing a framework for the sacred. The paper argues that the vilification of religion and the glorification of spirituality form part of a broader ideological narrative that excludes religious practices from public discourse while justifying secular violence. Through a mimetic lens, it is shown that the scapegoating of religion reflects a deeper cultural mechanism of exclusion and violence that operates within both religious and secular frameworks. The paper concludes by urging a reconsideration of the role of religion in public and political life, emphasizing its centrality in understanding violence in both religious and secular institutions.

Is Religion to Blame? Violence Was Here First – Rethinking Through Girard

Liyi Wang

MA Student, University of Amsterdam

This essay offers a theoretical exploration of the relationship between religion and violence, arguing that violence is not inherent to religion itself but to human nature, of which religion is a cultural expression. Drawing on René Girard's mimetic theory, including the dynamics of desire, rivalry, and scapegoating, the essay reframes religious violence as a response to conflict rather than its cause. By starting from violence rather than religion, Girard's approach avoids common binary assumptions and offers a layered framework that integrates symbolic, structural, and systemic dimensions of violence. Comparative discussions with Johan Galtung's violence typology and Hector Avalos's resource-based theory further highlight the depth and flexibility of Girard's model. The essay also distinguishes between the sacred and the holy, critiquing how religion often ritualizes violence while also holding transformative potential. In closing, the essay emphasizes the need to expand Girard's theory, especially to account for gendered, non-Western, and colonial contexts, transforming his insights into a broader tool for understanding how violence is made meaningful and maintained in society

Pre-Modern Insights: Session 3d

The Hippocratic Oath: A Compact of Protection Against Mimetic Violence

Brian Quaranta

Duke University Medical Center

The Hippocratic Oath is an ancient document of unknown provenance. It has been variously attributed to the historical physician Hippocrates, or to his disciples, or a sect of physicians who followed the sect of Pythagoras. In addition to its mysterious origin, it holds other mysteries as well; why did it call upon doctors specifically to avoid assisting in suicide, or in abortions, when both procedures were often practiced in classical Greece? And most confusingly, why did it forbid the oath-taker from performing surgery, when the Hippocratic corpus often describes the use of surgery, and the oath even allows the oath-taker to refer the patient to "practicing men in this doing"?

In this paper, I propose that Girard's mimetic theory can explain many of the mysteries surrounding the oath. I will compare the Oath to the Decalogue of the Hebrew Scriptures. Using Girard's analysis of the Decalogue, I will break down the Oath, line by line, and show how it, like the Ten Commandments, is designed to protect the group – in this case, Hippocratic physicians – from the dangers of mimetic rivalry and contagion. The Hippocratic Oath, then, can be seen as a compact between the physician and the community; paraphrasable as "Allow me to heal, and I swear that I will not bring violence, neither directly, nor by creating dangerous mimetic contagion."

An unexpected conversion in Rome. Boccaccio's Decameron I 2

Marco Stucchi

University of Milan

In the second tale of his Decameron, Boccaccio depicts a surprising conversion, as a Jew,

acknowledging Roman Church's deep moral corruption, decide to convert to Christianity, not in spite of this corruption but because of it. Some interpreters have read this novel as another proof of

Boccaccio's taste for paradox and surprise; however, this perspective systematically ignores Author's relevant philosophical and theological commitments, since among his sources there are Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas of Aquino and Dante. Moreover, nobody has ever read this short story bounding it to the cogent interpretation of the first Decameron's tale given by Giuseppe Fornari, according to

which ser Ciappelletto put on stage not just, and not properly, a false confession, but a true conversion. In my talk I will compare these two conversions, highlighting Boccaccio's thought concerning the spiritual value of literature and some essential features of Christian religion.

This study presents two major points of interest for mimetic theorists. First, it is known that Boccaccio has been a relevant inspiration for Shakespeare and Cervantes, two of the most important authors that Girard read to build his mimetic theory. Therefore, a better understanding of Boccaccio's thought might be significant in order to shed light on the historical evolution of the concept of mimetic desire. Secondly, although Boccaccio was aware of the relational dimension in religious conversions, he does not think that this phenomenon can be completely reduced to imitation.

Chronicling Conversion: Repentant Unanimity in the Icelandic Sagas

Alexandra Tax

Independent Researcher

My presentation aims to introduce a neglected and largely obscure genre of literature: the Icelandic sagas. Written after the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity, these stories present us with a collective reflection of a people's coming to terms with their own violence. Often inspired by real people and events in society grounded on hereditary blood vengeance, the sagas constitute a "missing link" between myth and the modern novel. An outstanding example of positive mimesis through storytelling, the sagas are essential reading for all Girardians.

I will discuss the structure of two sagas in my presentation. The first, *Laxdæla saga*, is the story of a woman whose own pride and jealousy drives the rivalry and violence of the men who love her. After the loss of all her husbands, she finds atonement through the new faith and attains a holy redemption as an anchoress. The second, *Njal's Saga*, is the great epic of the genre, inspired by a real event in which a revered lawyer and his family are burned alive in their home, despite his efforts to maintain peace. The law of vengeance now ruptured, the ensuing crisis leads to a collective repentance of the whole community, ending with a pilgrimage to Rome.

Workshops: Session 3e

Peacebuilding amid Polarization: Psycho-Spiritual Competencies to Resist Mimetic Binaries

Vanessa Avery

Sharing Sacred Spaces, Inc / Yale Divinity School

Amid the issues currently polarizing the United States, we are in a mimetic crisis on multiple fronts. It seems everyone is affected by the crises in some way, and our social fabric of basic trust and civility has been torn. We need people who can stand outside of the mimetic binaries

— I call them peacebuilders — more than ever.

The preliminary questions I wish to address in this workshop are therefore: What is a mimetic binary and what does it mean to stand outside of the mimetic binaries as a peacebuilder? What is peacebuilding and what does it look like? What are some key practical, and also psycho- spiritual techniques that one must have for peacebuilding? What are its challenges and the risks it brings? What is the empirical, social, and personal impact peacebuilding will have on one's context?

Second, I wish to address the theme of the conference in relation to peacebuilding. What is the difference between religious peacebuilding and spiritual peacebuilding? How do peacebuilders describe their own work? What are the destructive and constructive ways that religion can affect efforts towards reconciliation?

Formatted as a workshop, I will address the above questions while also including practical exercises for participants to engage their own capacities for peacebuilding, and a reflective exercise for creative visioning outside of mimetic binaries.

The Creative Experience after René Girard: sharing stories of how mimetic theory affects creativity

Felipe Mello

Writers and other artists, whether professional or aspiring, have often experienced a shift in their creative vision after encountering the works and ideas of René Girard. As a screenwriter based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Girard's hermeneutic—his way of reading texts and human behavior—has not only illuminated aspects of my most personal work, but also, and more importantly, it has proven deeply helpful when working with others in a collaborative environment, such as the writer's room. This is an experience that I would like to share.

The proposed panel is an open invitation to anyone with a creative practice—whether in fiction, screenwriting, theater, poetry, or other media—who, for better or worse, has crossed paths with mimetic theory. Some have found it to be quite helpful; others found it to be a stumbling block. What happens to our characters, themes, and writing process when we begin to take seriously the dynamics of desire, rivalry and scapegoating? Has Girard clarified the meaning of your artistic instincts, or did he make you question your narrative, your beliefs, even your relationship with God, religion and spirituality? Has his lens unlocked something new and revelatory, or has it introduced a new form of paralysis—and if so, how did you move forward? And finally: how far do you think you are from the ideal of “artistic conversion”?

Rather than a formal presentation of papers, this panel will be a conversational space to share experiences, fragments of work, and questions about method and creativity. It's a space for artists to reflect on how mimetic theory is lived out in the creative trenches— how much it helps; how much it hurts... Whether Girard has helped your imagination flow or complicated your creative choices, your perspective will be most welcome.

Nationalism & Politics: Session 4a

Christian Nationalism – Sacralizing the Gospel

Wilhelm Guggenberger

University of Innsbruck

Recently, two religious-political phenomena have made an astonishing comeback in the Christian world: fundamentalism and nationalism. The two are by no means identical, since integralism seeks to subject state policy to the rule of the institutionalised church, whereas nationalism uses religion to serve state policy. Nevertheless, the two movements agree in identifying politics and religion with each other and in negating the distinction between what is Caesar's and what is God's. In this sense, they represent the parties in conflict in the medieval Investiture Controversy in a modern way. According to Girard, the Pope resolved this controversy in his favour, but only in the 20th century, when he left the arena of mimetic rivalry.

Integralism and nationalism both necessarily produce scapegoats, since exclusion is part of their very essence. Even if both are to be rejected from a gospel perspective, Christian nationalism at the political level is likely to be more threatening at present. It exacerbates national conflicts by abusing the Christian message and even using the concept of love (*ordo amoris*) to justify exclusion.

In my paper, I would like to give some arguments for the theological untenability of Christian nationalism and, on a pragmatic political level, put forward the cosmopolitanism without illusions of Seyla Benhabib as an alternative. The philosopher sees nation states as a necessary tool of politics, but one that remains free of sacralisation. To realize such a political reality will be decisive for mankind in these days. Since the quasi-religious glorification of the state cannot be reconciled with the message of Jesus, it will always fall back into archaic sacrificial cults.

The Spirit of (New) Fascism 2.0: From Girard to J. D. Vance and back (via Mimetic Studies)

Nidesh Lawtoo

University of Leiden

Politics was not a central preoccupation of René Girard's mimetic theory, but this does not mean that this theory cannot be put to critical use to unmask and condemn both old and new forms of fascist politics that rely on scapegoating mechanisms to come to power. Stepping back to Girard's insights into the workings mimetic rivalry, crowd contagion, and myth helped to anticipate "(new) fascist" tendencies that already materialized in anti-democratic "insurrection" (Lawtoo 2019, 2022). In the wake of the re-election of Donald Trump in 2024, this paper reflects on how a mimetic theory driven by a non-violent spiritual message (*logos*) could be coopted by (new) fascist leaders to promote political violence and suffering (*pathos*) for innocent victims.

In particular, it takes US Vice President nominee J. D. Vance as a case study. Vance not only aligned his spiritual conversion with the discovery of mimetic theory as he wrote: “it was his [Girard’s] related theory of the scapegoat—and what it revealed about Christianity—that made me reconsider my faith” (Vance 2020); he also ran a campaign that turned scapegoating mechanisms of immigrants and the violence it entails to political advantage. Drawing on the paradox of mimetic patho(-)logies that turn a pharmakos (scapegoat) into pharmakon (cure/poison), this paper explores how Girard’s anti-violent mimetic theory could, paradoxically, turn into a weapon for a (new) fascist pathology in political practice. In the process, it combines insights from mimetic theory and mimetic studies to develop non-violent forms of spiritual sym-pathos vital to overcome a plurality of crises in an epoch of post-secular sacred

Esoteric Nationalism and Spiritual Conservatism: Mimetic Desire, the Reconfiguration of the Sacred, and the Political Uses of Spirituality

Aranza Rubio Osornio

Graduate Student, UNAM

The contemporary shift from organized religion to individualized “spirituality” reflects a reconfiguration of the sacred rather than a simple rejection of religious structures. This paper explores how mimetic desire underpins the rise of esoteric nationalism and spiritual conservatism, sacralizing political and cultural identity. These movements serve as alternative political theologies aimed at restoring a sense of lost sacred authority.

Nationalist movements increasingly incorporate esoteric and spiritual frameworks, from Indo-European mystical revivals to reinterpretations of Christian esotericism. These formations construct the nation, race, or civilization as sacred entities under existential threat, reinforcing cycles of rivalry and exclusion. Focusing on Christian nationalism, this paper examines how religious impulses transform into new sacralized identities, positioning outsiders as scapegoats.

Right-wing esoteric movements frame their political struggles as a cosmic battle between tradition and modernity, often in apocalyptic terms. This paper aims to challenge the binary opposition between secularization and sacralization, illustrating how esoteric nationalist movements sacralize political identities and cultural narratives. It sheds light on the persistent role of the sacred in shaping contemporary political and social dynamics, revealing how religious impulses continue to influencing modern conflicts and demonstrating the enduring power of the sacred in an allegedly secular age.

Trump, realism and religion: A Girardian analysis of current geo-politics

Johann Rossouw

University of the Free State, Bloemfontein

In René Girard’s last book, *Achever Clausewitz (Battling to the end)*, he extends his usual focus on interpersonal conflict in modernity to interstate conflict. While the bulk of the book does this by analysing increasingly catastrophic relations between Germany and France from 1800 to 1950 as the most important case of geo-political mimetic rivalry of that period, he ends the book with important remarks on the growing possible mimetic rivalry between China and the West.

With the election of Donald Trump for a second term as American president in November 2024, everything now points to a new mimetic rivalry between the USA and China. This takes place against the background of the collapse of the 80-year dominance of the idealist paradigm in the West, of which “spirituality” was a counterpart – and the return of the realist paradigm under Trump, with religion experiencing renewed vigour in politics.

This paper will analyse these matters with reference to Battling to the end; conflict and war in Ukraine and the Middle East; and how the USA, Russia, India, Turkey and China are now positioning themselves in geo-politics against the background of their religious traditions.

Salvation & Conversion: Session 4b

Can Our Metaphysical Lack of Being Be Fulfilled?

Jean-Marc Bourdin

Association Recherches Mimétiques

If René Girard can help us elucidate the current competition between spirituality and religion, it is undoubtedly first and foremost because of his insistence on our ontological insufficiency of being. We could say that to be is to lack being! He sees this as the origin of all our desires, desires that are probably one of the most tangible distinguishing marks of our humanity. As early as 1961, in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, he insisted on the metaphysical meaning of desire. The term ‘metaphysical’ appears more than 200 times.

Metaphysical desire is in fact the desire to be another, to be other, or to reach one's authentic self. But what is the spiritual quest if not the search for an additional being hidden within us that can be found through the systematic practice of exercises such as meditation, introspection, yoga, prayer, certain rituals, etc.?

I would therefore like to address three questions: Is it reasonable to hope to make up for our inadequacy as metaphysical beings? Is this possible other than by following Jesus? And what if the soul, and a fortiori its survival, existed only in the imagination of believers and spiritualists alike?

Maria Montessori: A Conversion Story

Suzanne Ross

Raven Foundation

The Italian educator and social reformer Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) is popularly known as the founder of the Montessori Method, a system of education for preschool age children. In her early career, before there was a Montessori Method, she was someone who “desired her own glory most of all”. But as she observed children set free from what she called the “tyranny” of adults, she underwent a conversion that enabled her to find joy in being “nobody.. [in] being able to forget I even exist”. In this session we'll examine the connection between Montessori's Catholic faith and her insights into the deleterious impact of rivalry on early childhood development. As René Girard noted in *Battling to the End*, “The aspect of Christ that has to be imitated is his withdrawal” and this is the posture she insisted be embodied by her teachers. Dr. Montessori believed that “Christ appears to men also under the guise of a child” but only to those humble enough to look for him there

“Epiphanies of Identity.” Mimetic De-Escalation and Dramatic Kairology

Willibald Sandler

Institut für Systematische Theologie

Is there a way back from an apocalyptically escalating mimetic crisis of undifferentiation into a ‘good transcendence’? In ‘Battling to the End’, Girard rejects any dialectically derivable and available ‘epiphany of identity’ as an illusion. Nevertheless, he goes some way towards accepting Benoît Chantre’s suggestion of an ‘innermost mediation’.

In the context of the ‘great christian narrative of creation, sin and salvation’, Catholic theology and spirituality can take up Girard’s intuition in a differentiated way. In this context, salvation happens as God’s saving answer to the tragedy of a good transcendence that was established by creation but perverted by the Fall. It is realised exemplarily in small and smallest salvific events, which— mediated by the Holy Spirit – occur in countless ways in the whole creation and, even in the midst of mimetic crises, allow traces of a good transcendence to break through again and again unexpectedly. This undermines and ‘disturbs’ mimetic desire, so that it is almost immediately rejected with various cultural techniques – not least in the churches. But even then it remains like a thorn in the flesh, a judgement on oneself, but also with the possibility of reviving the original offer of salvation (Acts 2:39). Examples of such breakthroughs from the Bible, literature and biographical testimonies will be presented and discussed.

Text as Theory: Session 4c

Death (and Mimesis) in Venice: Richard Russo’s “Voice” and Critique of the Spiritual Therapeutic in Universities

John-Paul Heil

Mount St. Mary's University

Pulitzer Prize-winner Richard Russo has made a career out of skewering academia. Throughout his short stories and novels (most famously, the recently adapted-for-television *Straight Man*), Russo takes dead aim at the therapeutic atmosphere cultivated by contemporary colleges. Russo criticizes the university policies which emerge in these environments by showing how, despite their original intentions to protect students and teachers, they unwittingly foster mimetic violence. His novella “Voice” builds out a complex Girardian critique of how a college milieu that focuses on therapizing students through unreasonable psychological accommodation ultimately leads to the scapegoating of the most vulnerable. The novella’s protagonist, Nate, is a disgraced college professor traveling to Venice’s Biennale; he was recently fired for intervening to protect a mentally disturbed student from being ostracized by her peers. By juxtaposing the religious realities of Venice with the false therapeutic spirituality of the college, Russo depicts how universities fail to form the desires of their students to become mature and healthy. Rather, they “support” students’ unhealthy desires with an emotivistic cult of belonging, trying and failing to fulfill their spiritual needs—which results only in violent communal exclusion.

The Limits of Logic and the Boundaries of Belief: Rene Girard and Benjamin Labatut

Jonathan Ivry

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

In *I see Satan Fall Like Lightning*, Rene Girard links the repetitive cycle of mimetic violence and its temporary containment to verses in the Gospels where Jesus alludes to the paradox of Satan casting out Satan. In Girard's reading, "Satan" refers not so much to an actual entity as to a process – the ongoing oscillation between violent chaos and the imposition of a false order through the scapegoat victim.

Organized as a series of accounts of historical figures from twentieth-century math and physics, Benjamin Labatut's "nonfiction novel" *When We Cease to Understand the World* explores the limits of human rationality, powerfully blending biographical and historical facts with fictionalized recreations of key moments in the history of quantum theory and mathematics. When a mysterious Satanic figure appears in a climactic scene in a bar with Werner Heisenberg, Labatut finally reveals the demonic heart of the scientific imagination.

In this paper, I compare the idea of the Satanic in Girardian theory and Labatut's novel, in particular the role rationality plays in both authors' conceptions of an evil force. For Girard, the Christian break with the scapegoat mechanism represents a turning away from the falsehoods of irrational myth to what is, perhaps surprisingly for a religion, a more rational understanding about how violence functions. Seeing the scapegoat as deserving victim and using the scapegoat to restore order is, after all, an error in logic. Labatut's novel explores the outer limits of rational thinking, particularly in quantum theory. In his novel, the Satanic character is the one who, chillingly, whispers to Heisenberg about the secret breakdown in rational understanding, to expose the deeper level of irrationality that lurks beneath.

Richard Powers' *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* as Mimetic History

Andrew McKenna

Loyola University Chicago

Richard Powers' first novel engages reflections on violence in modern history in a way that resonates acutely with René Girard's "mimetic history" of war in *Battling to the End*. Powers' narrative is inspired by a photograph, supplying the seemingly innocuous title to his novel, of *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (1985). But we learn from research on the time and place of this the photo of festive country folk that we are on the threshold of World War I, that these three farmers are on their way to Armageddon, to total war that began with Napoleon and threatens us still. As a computer scientist long based at University of Illinois lab, Powers has perforce been preoccupied by systemic relations, by overlapping and recursive patterns of all sorts, that he has explored in subsequent novels. His first novel is especially concerned with issues of punctuality and continuity, event and context, singular occurrence and overriding structural patterns. *Three Farmers* is also a chronicle of its own research into historical continuity, philosophical speculation, and scientific theory, from classical physics through relativity and quantum physics, as well as the institutional processes of technological progress, industrialization, and mechanization over centuries. Powers rightly includes insights available literary masterpieces, (Proust, Gide, Mann, Broch, among others) in order to provide readers with a wide-angle meditation on human agency and responsibility as available to our understanding of the all too human dynamics of rivalry, revenge, and violent reciprocity that Girard has brought to light.

Images: Session 4d

Contrasting Divine Images in The Wizard of Oz and a Nazi “Homeland” Film

Ethan Blass

Wartburg College

My talk will trace a parallel reading of the 1939 American classic *The Wizard of Oz* and the 1934 German “Heimat” film *Der verlorene Sohn* (*The Prodigal Son*). To be sure, a similarity between these films has already been recognized in the scholarship: they are both about figures who leave home and then return. I will show, however, that the parallels between the films are more complex. Specifically, both films investigate the role that quasi-divine images play in structuring a society. In the talk, I will approach this theme by drawing on René Girard’s account of the scapegoat.

Der verlorene Sohn begins with the stunning shot of a crucifix perched amidst the mountains of South Tyrol (the main character’s homeland). Since this crucifix is placed alongside a wayside path, it strikingly echoes another figure who, in *The Wizard of Oz*, is also nailed to a wooden pole next to a path: the scarecrow. The contrast between these two victim images encapsulates the fundamental difference between the films. For, while Dorothy helps the scarecrow down and saves him from victimization of several occasions, the victim in the German film is effectively frozen in place. The crucifix in *Der verlorene Sohn* becomes a kind of cultic symbol that paradoxically serves to endorse victimization. *The Wizard of Oz*, by contrast, performs a critique of such cultic images. In a word, both films contain quasi-divine images and icons, yet they view them in vastly different ways.

Monsters for Good: Apotropaic images in the thought of René Girard and Michel Serres

Tania Checchi

Colegio de Saberes, Mexico City

In his first volume of “Foundations”, entitled “Rome”, Michel Serres takes up the task of recounting Titus Livius history of the eternal city from a Girardian perspective. All throughout his moving and lucid account sacrificial figures are highlighted and restored in their true light. Among them and occupying a notable place in Serre’s oeuvre is Tarpeia, the Roman priestess that supposedly “betrays” her countrymen giving access to the enemies of the city. Tarpeia becomes a foul figure but also the fearsome warrant against any type of political crimes, a sort of Erynne turned Eumenide. Following Serres lead, we would like to reflect on her and other female figures of Roman and Greek myth to ponder the mimetic origin of apotropaic images, that is, figures of fear and damnation that are used to counteract bad influences, exemplifying in a clear manner what René Girard called “double transference”: from transgressors to benefactresses. Inasmuch as this mechanism goes unchecked, the monstrous character attributed to them will make it impossible to discern their function and, more importantly, their human faces and their true sorrow

Modern art between religion and spirituality: A Girardian analysis of Picasso's Guernica and Chagall's White Crucifixion

Lana Starkey

This paper examines the relationship between religion, spirituality, and violence through a Girardian analysis of Marc Chagall's White Crucifixion (1938) and Pablo Picasso's Guernica (1937). It contends that the central challenge facing the West is not simply a clash between the modern categories of "religion" and "spirituality," but rather the need to distinguish between systems—whether religious or secular—that perpetuate cycles of scapegoating and those that expose and resist them. In this context, revelatory art occupies a unique role in bringing these cycles of violence to light and challenging their persistence.

Three interconnected claims structure this argument. First, Guernica and White Crucifixion embody René Girard's theory of the scapegoat mechanism by refusing to redirect blame onto new victims and instead exposing the innocence of those sacrificed to social violence. Second, these works transcend the modern divide between religion and spirituality by grounding their critique of violence in religious tradition while transforming its symbolism for contemporary audiences. Third, the Girardian ethos present in these paintings offers a model of sacred witness, revealing shared complicity in violence and sustaining the fragile hope of redemption.

Panel: Session 5a

Mimetic Theory and Christian Spirituality: The ordering of desire

Hodge, Astell, Kirwan & Lynch

This panel explores how mimetic theory can be enhanced and complemented by practices and concepts from Christian spiritualities, particularly in their common focus on the ordering and redemption of desire. These spiritualities – that emerge from a religious community and tradition – help fill out Girard's conceptions of desire, particularly in terms of how positive forms of desire can be ontologically and spiritually contextualised and maintained in practice. Moreover, these spiritualities can be conceptually developed and deepened by mimetic theory as it provides an anthropological foundation and framework for understanding human desire and spiritual practice. One area of Christian spirituality that is particularly relevant to this panel's theme is Ignatian spirituality, especially as a framework for discerning desire. In particular, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola provide a spiritual and mimetic framework for intentionally discerning desire, accompanied by the incarnate and transcendent Other. They also raise unsettling questions about the operation of violent political-religious ideology, and how it is to be identified and overcome.

Workshop: Session 5

~~A World in Formations: Learning the Real through Sacred Rites of Passage and Interindividual Technologies~~

~~Jeremy Welch~~

CANCELLED

Secularity & Modernity: Session 5b

Secularity and Violence. Possible Correlations between Total Enemy and the Scape Goat

Cossette Galindo Ayala

PhD student, Iberoamerican University, Mexico City

With this presentation, I'll propose some correlations between the category of enemy in Carl Schmitt's political theory and the notion of scapegoat by René Girard. I will consider the problem of secularization analyzed by Jean-Claude Monod (2002), where secularization (*Verweltlichung*) doesn't mean to eliminate the theological but to transform it into juridical, political, or economic forms, not in a simple linear sequence but through a dialectic. In an age of mutual confrontation between sovereign European states (XIV-XIX c), the concepts of *iusta causa* and *iustus hostis* functioned as a way of making war in rational terms. But in the XXth c, as part of a tendency towards totalitarian regimes and to universalism by the liberal State, war takes a totalitarian dimension, and the *iustus hostis* becomes a criminal subject, so object of punitive action in the name of 'humanity'. One can say that Modernity has created the illusion of a duality between religious and secular structures, depending on power dynamics in what William T. Cavanaugh has called the myth of religious violence (2009) but, as Girard's analyses argue, mimetic violence is a pattern of persecution within any society, «religious» or «secular». Therefore, the notion of a total enemy (*die un mensch*, the unhumane), which Monod refers to, could be correlated with the notion of scapegoat in Girard's works as a way of punitive violence in the realm of secular society. In addition, this can bring some other correlations of what would be to acknowledge collective behavior in the realm of an individualistic society.

Dis-enclosing Violence and the Sacred: Taylor on the Persistence of Categorical Violence in the Secular Age

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This article examines the persistence of categorical violence in secular societies and its connection to the sacred, drawing on Charles Taylor's critique of exclusive humanism. Taylor identifies categorical violence as an existential, rather than biological, phenomenon, rooted in the human quest for meaning. Exclusive humanism, emphasizing rationality and horizontal transcendence, overlooks the existential significance of violence, fragmenting matrices of meaning and perpetuating or even exacerbating violence. This work situates Taylor's insights within a broader philosophical exploration of violence, the sacred, and secularism. It argues that secular humanism must either embrace vertical transcendence to reinterpret violence meaningfully or risk becoming a rigid and exclusionary paradigm. The article concludes by proposing a dialogical framework for dis-enclosing violence and the sacred in contemporary society, introducing Georges Bataille, René Girard, and Giorgio Agamben as possible interlocutors in this debate.

Evolution and Religion: Modernity as a Christianity Induced Environmental Mismatch

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This paper discusses Girard's work on religion in the context of two evolutionary issues: The byproduct versus adaptation debate on the origins of religion, and the possible role of environmental mismatch in modernity.

Evolutionary explanations for the ubiquitous human phenomenon of religion can be broadly divided into either byproduct or adaptationist hypotheses. Adaptive benefits that have been suggested include cooperation, group cohesion, and conflict suppression. Although Girard clearly regarded religion to have been essential to human survival, implying an adaptation, he also posited that it emerged from pre-existing cognitive tendencies, thereby also having some commonality with the byproduct view.

His analysis of modernity might be understood, from an evolutionary perspective, by using the concept of environmental mismatch. This refers to a species being in an environment that differs significantly from the one that it evolved in, with traits that were adaptive in one environment persisting into the other. The environmental change in this case would have been brought about by the efficacy of the scapegoat mechanism being undermined by the Christian revelation concerning the innocence of the victim, with traits, such as spiritualism, or the tendency to inaccurately attribute guilt, that arguably evolved with the adaptive function of enhancing the scapegoat mechanism, continuing to manifest themselves today.

Apocalyptic Futures: Session 5c

AI, Girard, Desire and Incarnation - An Exodus to Transformation and the New Creation: destiny of human desire in an autosapient world

Nikolai Blaskow

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At the outset (following Bratton (2015) I dismiss three misconceptions:

that AI desperately wishes to be human (Spielberg, AI, 2001; (Columbus, Bicentennial Man 1999);

that AI is “malevolently fixated on our destruction” (Cameron’s The Terminator 1984);

that “it merely reflects our desires, paranoia and narcissistic self-image,” (Brooker, Black Mirror 2017, all cited in (Millar 2021 pp.20-21)

As Bratton suggests, the perception of AI as human, while being “a valid point of departure, is not [necessarily] a valid conclusion.” But given the rise of a new species, autosapiens, speculated by some in the Harvard Business Review to be agentic (they act); adaptive (they learn); amiable (they befriend), and arcane (they mystify) (Heimans and Tims 2024), suggests that not only do these AI actors threaten to displace experts and humans they also call into question the divine.

However, while I concede that

mimetic human desire in such a context will inevitably fall prey to “scandal” and will continue to be responsible for the ‘false infinity of mimetic rivalry’ (Girard 2001 26)

and that this all-machine phase transition of digital capitalism bears witness to a dangerous “new mode of thought and control” (Parisi 2015 126)

I argue that the world of algorithm and its ‘incomputable ‘ Omega number (cited Parisi 127) is more than matched by another Omega and understood by Mimetic Theory in such a way, that it exposes and reveals human desire’s most likely final destiny.

Divine Absence and Christian (In)Stability in Battling To The End

Lyle Enright

Independent Researcher

In Battling to the End, René Girard makes a curious argument for the necessity of God’s (felt) absence in modernity. His line of thought proceeds as follows:

It is necessary for Christ to “withdraw” to the Father in the Ascension to avoid being captured by immanent mimesis and thus the violent sacred.

The human imitation of divine withdrawal paradoxically manifests in more deeply connected and transformed communities and relationships here and now.

Human attempts (especially Christian attempts) to rescue the divine from this (deliberate) absence and “re-present” it inevitably return to the violent sacred.

This passage in Girard merits further engagement and interpretation given the rise in Christian (or Christian-coded) social movements which make a sacred divine “presence” an explicit political goal. I argue that Girard pushes us to explore Christianity’s unique vulnerability to “archaic regressions” towards the violent sacred, a vulnerability which challenges our understanding of Christian identity. Finally, I suggest that Girard’s speculations on divine absence and the Ascension also give us a theological basis for articulating a Christian spirituality oriented less towards “apocalypse” and more towards “the time that remains,” and a form of life forged in the “not yet” of the parousia.

Faith and the Sacred: Girard's breakthrough from a messianic perspective

Bernard Perret

Faculté Loyola, Paris

In his major works, René Girard approaches the Gospel as a critical instance of the Sacred and not as the foundation of a new religion. He belatedly criticizes his own notion of "sacrificial Christianity," but does not replace it with an elaborate vision of the Christian religion as a set of beliefs, rites, moral norms, and community practices. His apocalyptic pessimism even leads him to the problematic diagnosis of a failure of historical Christianity. At first glance, this does not help to think positively about the relationship between spiritual life and established religion. In Girard's anthropology, Christianity can be considered, in a certain sense, as the "religion of the end of religion" but, unlike Marcel Gauchet's perspective, this overcoming is a spiritual adventure that cannot be reduced to secularization. Girard sees it as an apocalyptic process that will culminate in a violent crisis that will also be a final revelation. However, it can be argued that Girard's breakthrough can be more fruitful for spiritual life and the self-understanding of religion if it is placed in a messianic perspective that goes beyond any apocalyptic view of human history: the "time of the end" (Messianic time) is not the same as the "end of time."

History, Sacrifice and Power: Session 6a

A Dialogue on the Witch Hunt: Silvia Federici and René Girard

Marina Beraha

Università degli Studi di Milano

One of Federici’s relevant contributions is her comparative study of the modern witch hunt with the contemporary persecution of alleged witches in developing countries. She never mentions Girard, favouring a feminist, Marxist approach. From a Girardian perspective, the Marxist framework proves interesting in the connection between the early modern crisis and the “original accumulation” – of capital, the basis for the development of capitalism, but also of “differences and divisions”, though the dissolution of the solidarity bonds, generating a mimetic crisis so acute, both in modern Europe and in contemporary Africa, as to justify supernatural accusations in an increasingly disenchanted world.

However, Federici fails to recognise the mythological nature of the accusations, which leads to many inconsistencies. Witches are portrayed as old custodians of tradition, accused of opposing the new monetary economy, then young – because they are feared for their sexual power; poor and therefore excluded from the new economy, then wealthy because they own land that is expropriated through their persecution; economic parasites then merchants. In this talk, I will show that, although Federici clearly has some insights into the scapegoating nature of witches, pointing to their victimary signs and mentioning some Girardian themes, such as transfiguration, sacrifice, and indifferenciation, she remains a victim of the mythological representation of modern witchcraft. My aim is to bridge the gap between these two perspectives.

Girard's analysis of spirituality at the origin of political power

Palmira Arias Lopez

The central thesis of this paper is based on René Girard's theory of kingship which establishes that political power is never separated from the sacrificial mechanism. However, I explore what the political elite did to escape their fatal fate: lynching. Spirituality is understood as a force capable of demystifying primitive and archaic religion, of "revealing" the mechanism of the scapegoat. It is made clear that the development of political power, with elements such as "the advantage of the diagram," "writing," and "the calculation of future events," allows us to conceive the risk of using sacrifice as a method to remain in power, given that, as Girard demonstrates, those who have the political power are always potential scapegoats. This analysis is developed with a historical example: the Armana revolution in ancient Egypt. This movement is the pinnacle of some sociopolitical elements that allowed the distancing between the ruler, in this case Akhenaten, and the sacrificial mechanism. But it is also a product of the need to concentrate power, which led the pharaoh to weaken the priestly caste and keep its sacrificial work in check

"Vengeance is Mine," Says the Lord: Eschatological Terrorism of Early Christian Martyrs in the Roman North Africa

Filip Sedlak

Charles University in Prague

This paper aims to present early Christian martyrdom from the perspective of the conflict between the personal spirituality of the martyrs and the religion of Rome (but also the Church itself) on the example of Roman North Africa in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Although the martyrs are characterized by a perspective of self-sacrifice in which they, by imitatio Christi, continue in the revelation of the scapegoating mechanism, the paper would challenge the idea that the perspective of sacrifice immediately implies non-violence, as we ordinarily believe. Martyr stories live within the horizon of John's Apocalypse and, as such, call for satisfaction and vengeance. They exist in a narrative of a cosmic struggle with evil and demons (Roman gods) in which the martyrs are fierce fighters and not merely victims. The paper further seeks to show that this struggle is motivated by the mimesis not of Christ but of the Romans, whom early Christians see as their rivals in ruling the world. Because they seek the same, they enter into a conflict that is largely initiated not only by Rome but also by the martyrs themselves, as they attack Rome with their sacrifice through a kind of eschatological terrorism using the means available to them at the time

Workshop: Session 6b

Defying Gravity: Hollywood's Wicked and (Non-)Violent Resistance

Ross & Enright

Raven Foundation

The musical *Wicked* has been a pop culture touchstone since it hit Broadway in 2003. The release of a two-part film adaptation in 2024 and 2025 has reinvigorated discussions around its timeless—and timely—themes of rivalry, political violence, and propaganda. Some even consider the musical a “political Rorschach test” as viewers identify with the character Elphaba’s choice to resist rather than collaborate with the Wizard’s plan to violently silence his scapegoats. Wrapped up in these readings is an altogether more difficult question: Is it possible, or even advisable, for scapegoated populations to recover their voice and exercise power nonviolently?

This roundtable invites members of the COV&R community to close-read one of the musical’s most famous songs, “Defying Gravity,” from a mimetic theory perspective. Together we will ask: How do we define violence and nonviolence, resistance and aggression? What responses are possible when resistance is interpreted as violence by violent systems? What contributions can mimetic theory make to a spirituality of nonviolence?

Ecology & Religion: Session 6c

In search of the lost man: a critical comparison between René Girard and Walter Burkert

Vincenzo Ferro

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The contribution aims to focus on the dialogue between René Girard and Walter Burkert for analysing their anthropological theories of religion. The discussion will deal with the anthropological assumptions of *homo mimeticus* and *homo necans*, with the purpose of developing the main themes of the debate that took place, between the French anthropologist and the German philologist, in California in 1983. I will argue that, between the lines of the querelle, it emerges a confrontation on the question of human nature. In Burkert’s perspective, the origin of sacrifice is understood from an identification between man and animal (*homo homini lupus*), through the experience of hunting; whereas, for Girard, sacrifice concerns a field integrally covered from anthropogenesis (*homo homini homo*). Therefore, I'm going to try to go deeper into mimetic theory, in a critical perspective on the contemporary “ecological holism”, in which the problem of identification between animal and man finds a new shape. The proposal is to highlight the difference between the concept of trophic chain that rules ecological realms and mimetic desire which could be interpreted as the milestone of an ethic of desire.

“The Kingdom of God is Like a Tree” (Matt 12:21-23): Sacred Trees, Mimetic Desire, and the Climate Crisis

Pahl & Wallace

United Lutheran Seminary / Swarthmore College

Sacred trees and plants dot the history of religions, from the Bodhi Tree to the Baobab to Holy Basil. For traditional people of faith, finding God in woody plants facilitates the flourishing of the human and the more-than-human worlds. But the modern world, in contrast, has developed exploitative and extractive behaviors that turn trees and plants into commodities. In contrast to how acquisitive mimesis leads to the abuse of trees as market assets, Girard’s theory of positive mimesis provides a new model for how people of faith can envision trees and plants as sacred, sentient beings deserving of our care. Following Hildegard of Bingen’s neologism of *viriditas* or “greening-power” as the expression of God’s power incarnate in Jesus Christ, we see attending Wild Church services, growing a garden, working to protect forests, or advocating for sustainable agriculture as forms of verdant discipleship, worship or prayer (non-violent mimetic exercises). One might even call such practices a type of vegetal *imitatio Christi* vis-à-vis Christ’s nonacquisitive love of trees and plants as embodied in his agricultural parables and earth-friendly actions – and as a warning to human flourishing if we continue to deny the Spirit’s presence within these differentiated, yet living, arboreal kinfolk.

Teologia Maya or The Maya Theology Movement in Mexico: its yearning for authenticity, ecological holism and a recovery of meaningfulness – a post-modern inverse of ancient values and identities.

Fr Miguel Rolland

This paper examines the oppositional relation of ancient corporate vs. modern individual expressions of “spirituality” among Maya indigenous in southern Mexico, illustrated by the *teologia india* movement (Indigenous Theology). Three groups are notable: Maya Mayense (customs); Maya Catholic Christians (Vatican II); and Maya Protestant Christians (Evangelical Presbyterians). The paper probes how identity and praxis alternate between similarity and dissimilitude; cooperation and competition. Mimetic Theory illuminates rival aspects of “spirituality”, as individual cultural expressions seek individuation while embracing iconic corporate ideals. Examples of corporate spirituality from ancient Mesoamerica and the colonial period illuminate problems of misrecognition for current expressions of spirituality. While the movement seeks to be dialogical and ecumenical, extant praxis generates intra-ethnic tensions in unexpected ways. Ethnographic fieldwork from Chiapas, Mexico unveils a common yearning for authenticity, ecological holism and a recovery of meaningful ethnic identity while noting historical conflicts and modern religious dilemmas. Ironically, *teologia india* produces a post-modern inverse of ancient values when the mimetic desire for authenticity embraces the enigmas of “new age” spirituality within a “post-capitalist” Mexico.

Psychiatry: Session 6d

What Does It Mean To Sacrifice A Mind?

Isak de Vries

Psychoanalyst in Private Practice, New York

The presentation would tie together Girard and Oughourlian's work on psychosis with that of Hyman Spotnitz, the founder of "Modern Psychoanalysis." Spotnitz demonstrated that psychosis is an intricately organized mental situation designed to defend against destructive action. Under the pressure of mounting rage and destructive aggression toward needed others, the patient opts to sacrifice the object field of their mind rather than the community of needed others. In sum, the community of needed others is protected through the sacrificial obliteration of the patient's mind and body. Spotnitz designated this organized mental situation the "narcissistic defense" and demonstrated that it is the nucleus of psychologically reversible schizophrenia. Spotnitz's insights complement Girard and Oughourlian's conceptions of psychosis, the role of rivalry emphasized therein, and the sacrificial structure they outline and develop. Perhaps most interestingly, Spotnitz's theory of treatment involves a series of interventions that draw on induced transference and countertransference states - or, in Girardian terms, contagious thoughts, feelings, emotions, affects, and mental states that the patient unconsciously and mimetically induces in the analyst. Of course, in some cultures, the schizophrenic person is then viewed, by their self and by their community, as having either sacred status or access to the sacred. My paper will develop some of the overlapping connections offered by Spotnitz, Girard, and Oughourlian concerning psychosis and psychotic process, and if space allows, I will mention recent trends in psilocybin use for trauma healing and the development of spirituality. Or, in other words: drug induced psychosis in the name of spirituality.

Spiritual experience, psychopathology and mimetic theory

Berry Vorstenbosch

Dutch Girard Society

In this paper I will focus on David B. Yaden's and Andrew B. Newberg's *The Varieties of Spiritual Experience: 21st Century Research and Perspectives* (2022). In this book spiritual experiences are studied empirically. Focus is on the description and categorization of the experiences themselves without going into the metaphysical or religious views they might inspire.

Spiritual experiences are thus kept outside theological debates and taken for how they are experienced and may evolve in a human life-time. 'Spirituality' in this context provides an experiential and sometimes therapeutic space that can be of use in approaching psychopathological experiences like psychosis.

In a separate chapter Newberg and Yaden treat the diverse existing philosophical approaches on the origins of spiritual experiences. In a paragraph on evolutionary perspectives they mention theories of 'group selection', ending with a reference to the work of Émile Durkheim.

Also Girard's anthropology is based on 'group selection', or the idea of communities not being able to survive unless they manage to channel internal violence. Whereas Durkheim focuses on the way rituals bring about social cohesion, Girard pays attention to the way prohibitions have to be observed, that is awe-inspiring. The object of my paper is to show and explain how the evolutionary perspectives on the origins of spiritual experiences could be extended by encompassing the mimetic theory of René Girard.

The Mystical Politics of the Cross: Lonergan, Girard, and Ellacuría in Dialogue

Matthew Cuff

Boston College

René Girard and Bernard Lonergan both offer theologies of the Cross that recognize God as having definitively marked history through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. For Girard, the Cross reveals God as fundamentally the God of the innocent victim, as well as our own tendency to scapegoat and create victims. Lonergan notes that "the just and mysterious law of the Cross" and the redemption that emerges from it has resulted in a "change for the better" in history. Despite these claims of the efficacy of the Cross in both Girard and Lonergan, the scandal of social sin on a grand scale persists. How can this be? And what does this persistence mean for politics - our shared social life - today? This paper offers tentative insights into this problematic by placing Girard and Lonergan in dialogue with Ignacio Ellacuría and his mystical-political theology of the "crucified people." Taken together, these authors offer important principles for a Christian political and spiritual praxis rooted in a non-rivalrous and mysterious love capable of taking the crucified people down from the Cross.

Yearning for the Sacred in a World Without Faith: Death and Violence in Snakes and Earrings

Aimi Okizaki

Kinjo Gakuin University

Snakes and Earrings is a Japanese novel by Hitomi Kanehara, published in 2004. It won the prestigious 130th Akutagawa Prize and was adapted into a film by Yukio Ninagawa. This narrative reveals, through violence, the view of life and death of a-religious Japanese youths, while depicting mimetic desire in a multilayered way. Set in a store named "Desire," three characters desire each other. An intensifying and deadly love triangle between the three characters finds its resolution in a sacrificial murder. They imitate each other on the surface by having the same tattoos. More profoundly, on a deeper level, they desire life through death. From the perspective of mimetic theory, characters in this work encompass a paradoxical structure in which the subject desires life but also looks to death as the means to feel alive. The murderer in particular can only feel alive through the suffering of others but considering how piercings and tattoos are central to the story, all three characters mediate their desire for life through violence. In this relationship, the subject faces the contradiction of approaching death to obtain the life one desires. This friction results in the murder of one of the characters as a scapegoat. Through the revelation of mimetic desire, this narrative reveals the relationship between life and death in contemporary Japanese culture and sharply illustrates the contradictions of the structure of desire.

Benjamin and Girard: Towards a Dialogue on Conflict Resolution

Luis Sokol

This essay establishes a dialogue between Walter Benjamin and René Girard on conflict resolution, with Slavoj Žižek as a mediator. Benjamin, in *Critique of Violence*, distinguishes between mythical violence, which founds and preserves law, and divine violence, which destroys it without establishing another. In contrast, Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, identifies the sacrificial mechanism as the basis of cultural violence and proposes the imitation of forgiveness and Christian nonviolence as a way to escape the cycle of mimetic violence. Although both authors acknowledge the unsustainability of this cycle, their solutions seem difficult to apply to contemporary contexts. Benjamin does not clarify how divine violence would manifest, while Girard's proposal, revealed two millennia ago, has yet to prove effective. Through Žižek's concept of the "real political act," this essay suggests an alternative that breaks with the sacrificial logic and offers a concrete possibility for nonviolent resolution. The essay concludes that this approach may help overcome the limitations in Benjamin's and Girard's theories.