

## Creative or “Loving” Mimesis Revisited

By Rebecca Adams

The paper below, “Loving Mimesis and Girard’s ‘Scapegoat of the Text’”: A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire,” has been in print for several years, but I was encouraged by several people to post it on the conference website as a background resource for the conference theme as the topic of positive or what I feel strongly should be called “Creative” mimesis comes to full fruition in this conference. Readers are asked to keep in mind that the following paper was written before the appearance of some of Rene Girard’s more fully developed theological analysis in *I See Satan Falling Like Lightning* and prior to some of James Alison’s and Raymond Schwager’s (among others) excellent work further developing an constructive interpretation of Girardian categories, so some of the points I make regarding logical and theological problems in mimetic theory (especially in the footnotes and the theological appendix) have since been addressed much more explicitly since the paper’s publication in 2000, though I am not sure if they still have been answered fully, even to date.

The purpose of this preface/statement (which is not meant to be a full nor original argument) is to summarize and situate the “Loving Mimesis” paper’s arguments in the context of where the discussion of “positive” or creative mimetic desire has developed in the last several years. I hope as well to indicate something of the magnitude of what is at stake, how ecumenical and imaginative our conversations need to be. Some of the things I say may be surprising. I could be totally wrong, in the original paper, or in my observations here. Like Rene Girard, I am not a formally trained theologian. But I challenge us to think deeply and collectively, as the COV&R group has always (mostly) congenially done, to teased out where the next phase of “exploring, developing and critiquing” the mimetic theory may lead.

James Alison writes: “One of the most frequent early theological criticisms of Girard’s writing was that he had no theology of creation. I always thought this was silly since it was judging someone for not having done something that was not in any case part of his brief as a theoretician of desire . . .” I disagree. There is a compelling reason why many people have, as of yet, found Girard’s mimetic hypothesis unconvincing, as powerful as it may be. In the paper below, I argue that the historic “lack” of a theology of creation or (more philosophically speaking) *a coherent account of constructive desire as metaphysically fundamental* is not a simple omission or outside the prevue of what should interest Girard and his followers, but corresponds exactly to unresolved logical and self-referential problems within the theory *in its claims to be a general theory of culture*. What the paper below attempts to show is how mimetic theory can be made compatible with *already existing* theologies of creation and worldviews which stress creativity as fundamental, so that those threads can now be developed and explored, by providing an internal adjustment necessary to make that bridge.

I remember vividly a passing remark made by a member of COV&R (who I did not really know at the time), just an hour before I sat down and tape recorded an interview with Rene for *Religion and Literature* in November 1992. I was brand new to the COV&R group and I was thrilled to have a conversation with someone well acquainted with Rene’s work. As he went out the door, the person I had been having a spirited conversation with said, “Rene’s work is so much more

profound than someone, say, . . .like Matthew Fox [in *Original Blessing*, a book I had just recently read].”\* I remember thinking to myself, “but they are compatible! They are actually talking about the same things!” At that time, I did not have any mechanism to explain how this could possibly be so, only a “dense intuition.” (I must say, no one else I knew seemed to have this kind of intuition, so I thought for a while I might be crazy!) I spent several years working out the justification for this intuition. For me, in my reconstructed understanding of Girard’s work, mimetic becomes not only the desire *for* God, but a description of the divine Desire or creative energy *of* God itself, or (non-theologically) a descriptor of a fundamentally creative, intersubjective reality in which we can all participate. This interpretation of mimetic theory is compatible with, among other things, Process conceptions of God/ultimate reality (whether cashed out as specifically theistic/Christian or not, Incarnational and creation-centered theologies, and the worldviews generally of many feminists and indigenous peoples.

[\*Note: This idea and its surprising relation to the general status of the present evolving discussion of mimetic theory I hope to develop in much more detail in an expanded version of these prefatory remarks, given in presentation at the 2006 COV&R conference and/or in a followup posting here. Fox is undoubtedly a controversial figure, but his work on Creativity and theology is important and should be given a careful hearing.]

I believe my reconstructed account of mimetic desire as Creativity accounts for and redeems, without being unduly defined by, the human turn toward tragedy and evil, as the Christian story (for one) and emphasis upon the sin as missing the original mark has always insisted. It is important to understand however, that apart from any theological, feminist or other ideological *content* considerations, an internal self-correction of mimetic theory is essential in purely formal terms from within the logic of mimetic theory itself: Rene Girard’s conception of the scapegoat (and the cultural violence the scapegoat engenders) is that it is a *structure*. A theory of scapegoating as a structure of illogic and exclusion as a founding mechanism of cultural meaning must not itself enact such a scapegoating structure within its own arguments. I locate what I believe is such a structure in the theory itself, which paradoxically powerfully confirms mimetic theory’s explanatory power--yet also simultaneously threatens to undermine it if the presence of such a structure cannot be satisfactorily explained or corrected. Typically, a self-referentially inconsistent statement or theory becomes self-defeating or unverifiable: That is, when a general theory’s statements are applied to *itself* and it fails to be consistent with them, it simply makes the theory useless, neither true nor false, or outright proves the theory must be false (at least as a general theory). I believe something unusual happens in the case of mimetic theory. I could be wrong, but I think that the very presence of the “scapegoat” or self-referential inconsistency pattern I detect works in the long run to strengthen and reorient the whole theory by flushing out the deep structure of what is truly at stake, especially theologically. I think we are on the brink of coming to terms with things that some feminist theologians, for instance, have been saying for many years, about the fundamental sin or source of violence being dualistic patterns of thinking themselves. Yet Girard also has much to give back to such discussions in return, can the connections be made. I quote James Alison again to give an indication what I mean:

Indeed, what has become apparent to me, is that the Yahwhistic project of making us participants in creation through involving us eucharistically in the life of Christ presupposes someone loving us so much that he could anticipate and be aware of all that spurned love, all that anger and hate and violence, and be so little upset by it that he could project to bring us through it and call us into being. [As Alison goes on here, I believe his statements take a turn

*which can also be read as not exclusively theological, but philosophical in nature.*] I am beginning to sense a creative project of love which is not really beyond resentment at all. It is so much prior to resentment that it has to hide a vast, playful laugh at bringing us into being, lest we misinterpret such playfulness and such joy from within our resentment and shrink back, refusing to believe that all that tenderly suppressed mirth is not “at” us but “for” us. (“Moving On: The Exilic Transformation of Anger into Love,” in *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (NY: Crossroad, 2001), p. 124.

My personal understanding is that mimetic theory is so explanatorily powerful that it survives its own self-referential critique (applying the theory to itself and having it both confirm its own insights and simultaneously “fail,” in some important sense, its own test). In the course of undergoing this self-critique, however, some of the basic tenets of mimetic theory (and the Christian claims they engage) have to be rethought in highly specific ways, particularly mimetic theory’s currently unduly pessimistic outlook about human institutions, human nature and human history. This pessimism is related to the Girard’s current theological emphasis on Jesus the Christ and the Holy Spirit’s primary significance as the historical revealer of scapegoating (which Jesus very well may be) and deemphasis on Christ and the Holy Spirit as the already existing, fundamental, Incarnational creative ground of being, through which grace is and was always at all times available in our human experience as THE fundamental reality. *We are in the ongoing process of that fundamental theological and logical rethinking now.* Raymund Schwager’s work on Original Sin and the scene of hominization (2003) has done much to try to distangle the confusing, illogical, and theologically unacceptable conflation of the creation of human subjectivity and culture, in a mimetic moment open to infinity and transcendence, with a simultaneous “fall” into violence, acquisitive mimesis, and collective murder. Nicolas Wandering (2005) has more recently developed Schwager’s ideas and his own in even more detail, by trying to spell out step by step, exactly what is metaphysically entailed in understanding Christ’s “imitation” of an “invisible God.” Some of the debate over reconciling Eric Gans’s Generative Anthropology and Girard’s mimetic hypothesis deal with these similar fundamental issues in a non-theological vein, though these discussions also tend to center around differing interpretations of an originary hominization scene. So far, the current discussion of mimetic theory’s possible internal contradictions has taken place mainly in theological terms, although I believe the conversation should and must be worked out in entirely non-theological terminology, as I tried at least partially to do in the original piece.

The paper below as it stands now is presented in a primarily theological treatment, assuming Christian categories and discourse, and situated within ongoing debates and conversations, especially within feminist and liberation theologies. I want to reiterate that the basic argument about the structural problems within mimetic theory in the paper, however, do not depend on theology at all but depend solely on self-referential application of the theory to its own claims and that this same argument/self-referential critique could be presented in an purely philosophical, non-theological way. My intent was always been to develop this alternative non-theologically dependant treatment of the same argument for an entirely different audience, linking my account of mimetic theory with feminist and poststructuralist treatment of desire, ethics, the Other, the economy of the gift, and what French feminist philosophers and psychoanalytic critics, working within a gendered symbolic framework, call “feminine” desire or the “Mother.” Creative mimetic desire as I understand it then is another, highly fruitful way of talking about excess Desire for the Other (and simultaneously the self), in ways that help clarify certain problems in postmodern/poststructuralist discussion of desire and the decentered self. I

remain convinced that profound and mutually-beneficial connections remain to be explored between what I have named “Loving” mimesis or Creative” mimesis and other poststructuralist/continental philosophical parallel accounts of desire, especially as a basis for ethics and applied action in the world.

Because I became ill about 10 years ago and have not been able to very actively participate in academic work, I have never been able to fully systematically develop the alternative philosophical treatment I envisioned. However, if others would like to enter into dialogue with me about it, perhaps it could be developed as part of a creative group project, with me as the moderator/(mediator?)/referee in an (eventually) online project, something like a Wikipedia entry. Direct inquiries and comments about this possibility to [radams102@yahoo.com](mailto:radams102@yahoo.com). I will do my best to follow up.

The first formal version of this argument (in a much shorter form) was given in a paper at COV&R at Loyola University in June of 1995. References in the paper to “in this volume” refer to *Violence Renounced*.

Rebecca Adams  
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# Loving Mimesis and Girard's "Scapegoat of the Text": A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire

Reprinted from Rebecca J. Adams, "Loving Mimesis and Girard's 'Scapegoat of the Text': A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire" in *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard Swartley (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., the original name of Cascadia Publishing House, 2000). Copyright (c) 2000 by Pandora Press U.S. Used by permission, all rights reserved.

RENÉ GIRARD IS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN as a theorist of violence. In his work of the last four decades he has developed a powerful hermeneutic of suspicion and a compelling theory of culture derived from his reading of literary texts, myths, other theorists (such as Freud), and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Alongside his general intellectual project, moreover, he has developed a religious and ethical interpretation of the human condition.

Most of us find that when we try practically to understand why there is violence in our world, however, we need more than a theory of violence: we need an alternative vision of what human beings could be, or are meant to be. What is Girard's contribution to this constructive enterprise? How can a theorist concerned with the deep structure of violence help us to discover a way to transcend violence?

Girard has developed insights that have profound implications for theology, peacemaking, and social transformation. His influence and following, especially among theologians and those in pacifist traditions, attest to this. At the same time, as many have noted, there are problems with his theory related to the nature and exclusivity of his claims about the Christian revelation, even with the very claim that his theory constitutes a comprehensive thesis about violence and culture.

Girard's theoretical account of how human subjectivity<sup>1</sup> and social relationships may have originated in prehuman times, as well as how they function in the present, can be understood anthropologically as an origin myth. His work can also be read in a theological sense as an interpretation of the Genesis creation and garden stories, as well as a commentary on such basic theological categories as original sin, salva-

tion, and atonement. Girardian theory has seemed to many to offer a powerful anthropological and theological understanding of violence and its relation to human subjectivity. I believe the theory could, in a reconstructed form, also provide a constructive paradigm of human relations and spiritual reality that is truly nonviolent and able to offer a philosophical basis for a praxis of peacemaking and social renewal.

In this chapter I reconsider the basic conception of *mimetic desire* from which all else in Girard's work derives, addressing hard questions many have raised regarding the ultimate adequacy of Girard's theory as a comprehensive theory of human consciousness and culture. In essence, I am proposing that we examine the Girardian theory itself as a metanarrative to see how it performs according to its own insights about violence. We must ask what happens when we read the theory itself as a myth, in the general sense of a paradigm that seeks to offer universal anthropological and theological claims. Does it have a scapegoat? If so, what is it and where is it? I believe the answers lie in a careful analysis of what Girard and others have said about mimetic desire, together with a positive reassessment of that central concept. As I will indicate, this reassessment has far-reaching implications for theology, politics, and theory and practice of peacemaking.

### GIRARD'S "SCAPEGOAT OF THE TEXT"

*When we feel we understand a large number of connected phenomena, except for one that keeps occurring again and again and does not quite fit the general picture, the chances are that our whole system of representation has already failed. In order to discover a better one, we should not shove under the rug the phenomenon that stubbornly resists our efforts—this the myths themselves already do. We should actively focus our attention on it.—René Girard, *Violent Origins**

Objections to Girard's mimetic hypothesis seem to have a common theme, which suggests a systematic distortion, and possibly a "scapegoat," in Girardian theory itself. The basic objection to the theory seems to be something like that stated by Jonathan Smith, in dialogue with René Girard in *Violent Origins*:

I guess what I want to know is, what can't you account for? I have no problem with the fact that there are an enormous number of myths that have what you're calling a scapegoating pattern, but there are a great many myths, at least to my eyes, that bear no resemblance to them. And they are often found simultaneously in the same cultures, told about exactly the same object, in exactly the same situa-

tion. So what I really want to know is, is this a partial theory? . . . Or is there a way of reducing all of the mythic strategies to one?<sup>2</sup>

To this question, Girard answers, admirably, “I don’t know.” However, the same objection raised by Smith recurs repeatedly in different forms. George Frear Jr. argues, for instance, that Girard’s theory describes “not the origin of religion and culture as he maintains, but distortions in religion and culture” and points to “legitimate desires, the social nature of humanity, wholesome expressions of the sacred and sacrifice, and Christianity’s embeddedness in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Theological objections, such as those I raised in a 1992 interview with Girard, take the form of understanding the theory as implying absolute original sin, with no account of the primordial goodness of human beings, as represented by their biblical creation in the “image of God” (in fact, the creation of human subjectivity through mimesis in Girard’s thought is logically conflated with its “fall” into violence.)<sup>4</sup>

This systematic pattern of objection to the Girardian theory also converges on Girard’s central generative conception of mimetic desire, which many find inadequate.<sup>5</sup> Especially psychoanalytic feminist critics of Girardian theory have claimed that, like Freud’s, the Girardian schema excludes the “feminine” or the “Mother” and all she represents. Such critics mean that in Girard’s paradigmatic triangle of desire as currently conceived, his theory does not consider the desire represented by the psychoanalytic Mother, who could function for the “Father” (i.e., mediator and subject) and the “Infant” (the one who does the imitating) —not only as an *object* of desire but also as a *subject* in her own right *and thus crucially as another potential model of desire*. In degendered language, their critique is that Girard cannot account for positive, non-violent desire, what they call *feminine* desire or *the Feminine*.<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, those who object to the universal pretensions of the Girardian hypothesis and who quarrel with his fundamental concept of mimetic desire might express an appreciation for the explanatory value of much of Girard’s analysis of violence. However, they ultimately reject violence as *the* primordial generating principle of human subjectivity and culture, “the origin and father of all.”<sup>7</sup> Conversely stated, all of the above examples boil down in some fashion to the critique that Girard does not adequately account for a truly ethical, constructive type of desire—at least not in any originary sense such as he assigns to the “founding murder” or the scapegoat mechanism. For these critics, such desire, or genuine Love, is the partly visible and only partly demystified scapegoat of the Girardian hypothesis. Thus in

choosing to defend this scapegoat in the interest of an adequate ethics, these critics are forced to reject or expel the current formulation of Girardian theory, at least as a metanarrative.

I believe this “scapegoat” of constructive desire in the current Girardian text is real and problematic. I also believe this “scapegoat” is not central to the structure of the mimetic hypothesis but is, ironically, an effect created by not following the hypothesis through to its logical conclusion. I will not claim that Girard himself ends up having a scapegoat because he evades speaking centrally of positive desire, nonviolence, or love as *the* fundamental metaphysical and/or ethical reality. This he actually does. Rather, I will analyze Girard’s tendency to conceptualize and speak in a way that remains in the very violent system of representation he seeks to undo. In doing so, he inadvertently relegates love, and thus ethics, and ultimately even his own concept of mimetic desire, to the realm of what he calls *the Sacred*.<sup>8</sup>

My contention is that when Girard’s insights about violence and the scapegoating mechanism are applied to his own theory, its “scapegoat” disappears and Girard’s theoretical framework becomes self-referentially consistent: That is, when applied to itself, the theory passes its own test for truth as an overarching hypothesis or metanarrative about the origin and nature of violence.<sup>9</sup> I also believe that revealing and rehabilitating the theory’s scapegoat actually strengthens the general claim of the Girardian theory as an explanatory model and a practical framework for ethical action in the world, providing what the theory currently lacks: an adequate model of a genuine, nonviolent sacred, of the human person, and of love.

My thesis will be that Girard *can* account for constructive, nonviolent desire as a fundamental generative principle but has yet to find a way to do so that is itself conceptually nonviolent, as well as logically, anthropologically, and theologically coherent.<sup>10</sup> Girard’s recent remarks regarding the fundamentally good nature of mimetic desire are in my view not yet arguments but statements of intent, of commitment to understand mimetic desire more constructively. In fact, Girard has been making suggestions of this type for some time. In *Violent Origins* he states, “violence does not play a primordial role in my perspective; only mimesis does. This point is often misunderstood.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, however, since he himself and others have reiterated the “inevitable” connection between violence and mimesis so many times, statements such as these seem simply to have no meaning or to be directly inconsistent with his previous analysis of mimetic desire as primarily conflictual. The task I undertake here is to logically detach violence and

the scapegoating mechanism from mimetic desire itself. I will show that this connection, though as real a danger as Girard says it is, does not inevitably arise *logically* from within the nature of mimesis itself, and that there is a singular set of conditions under which mimetic desire is nonviolent, even primordially *creative*.

Girard himself has been responsible for some of the misunderstanding surrounding his central term of mimetic desire because of misleading terminology he has used and inconsistent statements he has made. Willard Swartley, for instance, in his original conference paper, pointed out one of the key contradictory (and much-quoted) statements by Girard regarding the nature of mimetic desire, from the final pages of *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*:

The Gospels and the New Testament do not preach a morality of spontaneous action. They do not claim that humans must get rid of imitation; they recommend imitating the sole model who never runs the danger—if we really imitate in the way that children imitate—of being transformed into a fascinating rival. . . . On the one side are the prisoners of violent imitation, which always leads to a dead end, and on the other are the adherents of nonviolent imitation, who will meet with no obstacle . . . . *Following Christ means giving up mimetic desire* (italics added).<sup>12</sup>

This passage contradicts itself. What Girard must mean is that “following Christ” means giving up scapegoating, or violence, or participating in the victimage mechanism. But because Girard occasionally asserts yet never consistently explains how mimetic desire *itself* can be positive or creative in a fundamental sense, the contradiction does not appear glaring and it is easy to miss it: it appears that giving up these things does indeed logically entail giving up mimetic desire. This is a conceptual leap. Many readers, friends and foes of Girardian theory alike, however, appear to have taken the italicized sentence at face value without going on to think through the contradiction and to decide the last sentence must be an erroneous statement.

In recent years Girard has expressed frustration at having mimetic desire repeatedly misunderstood. In a 1992 interview he clarifies his terminology and states his position on the subject.

**R[ebecca] A[dams]:** At the end of *Things Hidden* you make the statement that to follow Christ means to “give up” or renounce mimetic desire, yet the hominization section [on Fundamental Anthropology] implies that mimetic desire is the only kind of desire there is.

**R[ené G]irard:** A simple renunciation of desire I don’t think is Christian; it’s more Buddhist. . . . As to whether I am advocating “re-

nunciation” of mimetic desire, yes and no. Not the renunciation of mimetic desire itself, because what Jesus advocates *is* mimetic desire. Imitate me, imitate the Father. So the idea that mimetic desire itself is bad makes no sense. *It is true, however, that occasionally I say “mimetic desire” when I really mean only the type of mimetic desire that generates mimetic rivalry and in turn is generated by it. . . .* I would say that mimetic desire, even when bad, is intrinsically good, in the sense that far from being merely imitative in a small sense, it’s the opening out of oneself.

**RA:** Openness to others.

**RG:** Yes. Extreme openness. [*Mimetic desire*] *is everything. It can be murderous, it is rivalrous; but it is also the basis of heroism, and devotion to others, and everything. . . .* I hear this question all the time: “Is all desire mimetic?” Not in the bad, conflictual sense. Nothing is more mimetic than the desire of a child, and yet it is good. Jesus himself says it is good. *Mimetic desire is also the desire for God.*” (italics added)<sup>13</sup>

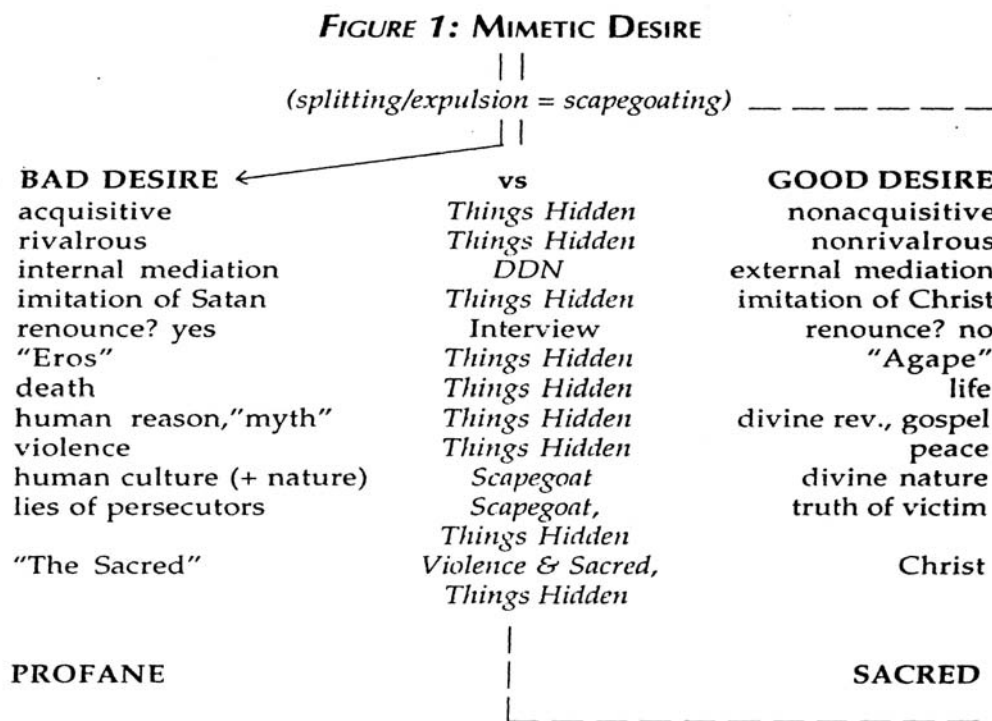
The theological ramifications of this statement seemed to suggest a surprising turn of emphasis in Girard’s thought at the time. Since then some scholars have begun arguing for and developing a fuller understanding of a constructive mimetic “imitation of Christ” (as Swartley and Fodor develop biblically and theologically in their much-needed treatments in this book).<sup>14</sup> Key for our purposes is to point out that in this statement Girard provides a crucial clarification of his terms. In effect he admits he has at times split and verbally as well as conceptually scapegoated the term *mimetic desire* itself by forgetting to stress that mimetic desire is also sometimes, or even fundamentally, good.

Because Girard’s positive conception of mimesis is not only undeveloped in his work but inconsistently stated, others similarly continue to “split” and scapegoat the concept (i.e., “forgetting” about good mimetic desire) by simply designating it as inherently violent or by inconsistently referring to it as violent but then (as in the interview) admitting its fundamentally dual “good/bad” nature. Narrative theologian John S. Dunne, for instance, contrasts mimetic desire, which leads to violence, with his positive conception of “heart’s desire,” which is non-mimetic, authentic, and peaceful.<sup>15</sup> Biblical scholar Kirsten M. Anderson sets up a similar dichotomy between Girardian violent mimetic desire and positive non-mimetic desire. Yet she quickly problematizes this understanding of Girard’s work by admitting he is the critic who best understands that mimesis is paradoxically both commanded and forbidden in the Genesis garden story with respect to God.<sup>16</sup>

Girard’s remarks in the interview illuminate why there has been so much confusion about the “good” versus “bad” nature of mimesis it-

self. This passage, as we shall see in more detail, however, also provides a clue that the problem goes deeper than the mere use of terminology and lies in the current actual formulation of the concept itself. Splitting involves more than mere confused usage. It involves dividing a concept in half, then expelling the undesirable half while at the same time obscuring and/or mystifying the remaining half. Yet in this process, it proves impossible to rid oneself entirely of the evidence of the in-consistent, divided usage or of the concept's original unity.<sup>17</sup>

Both Girard's and Anderson's statements about mimetic desire reveal traces of a dualistic and inconsistent pattern of thought characteristic of the textual distortions of scapegoating: the term *mimesis* or *mimetic desire* or even *acquisitive mimesis* has *already* undergone a process of splitting and expulsion revealed by contradictory uses of the term in the same text. The tendency to equate mimetic desire with violence and something "bad," a temptation to which even Girard sometimes yields, presupposes a good/bad dichotomy in which half the concept, the "good," "feminine," "ethical," "nonviolent" half, has been either obscured, diminished, or mystified in Girard's work (Figure 1)



In the split conceptual schema illustrated by Figure 1, we can see how everything on the bad side of this representation is sharply contrasted with and then expelled (demonized, rejected, or erased) in favor of affirming (divinizing, making central, or elevating) everything on the “good” side. The theory itself therefore harbors a paradigm of warring doubles, rivalry, and expulsion at the level of general theoretical and theological concepts! The good side supposedly represents nonviolent imitation and the bad side violent imitation or mimesis, but as we shall see below, Girard offers no real account of good mimetic desire *of a type human beings could possibly have or even imitate with God as mediator*. Thus it is easy to slip into the simple equation of mimetic desire with violence and something “bad.” This is why many people, to defend human ethics, have expelled the concept of mimetic desire altogether and even the Girardian hypothesis itself.

When his critics do this, Girard objects to being misunderstood. He attempts to defend the concept by claiming that mimetic desire “itself” is “good.” Clearly, as Girard points out, merely designating mimetic desire “bad” is inadequate: Jesus himself says mimetic desire is “good,” and our intuitions seem to confirm the possibility of constructive imitation. More importantly, however, to think otherwise is implicitly to resort to a mythical and expulsive conceptual schema of the very type that Girard critiques. Conversely, however, it is easy to see on closer analysis that to simply call mimetic desire fundamentally “good,” as Girard has more recently tried to do, simply participates in the same splitting and mystification of the term: *although the term is retained it cannot be referring any longer to anything on the bad side, nor for that matter on the good*. The point here is that although mimetic desire might conceivably be the desire *for* God (as an object)<sup>18</sup> in the schema illustrated in Figure 1, it cannot, as we shall see, be the desire *of* God, which is what we are supposed to be “imitating” when we engage in good mimetic desire.

“Good” mimetic desire in this split framework ends up being a type of divine desire which by definition excludes the human and the left side of the dichotomy. Girard’s current schema requires maintaining an absolute distinction between violent imitation “on the one side” and nonviolent imitation “on the other.” The crucial objection to this construct, however, is whether God’s “desire” in this scenario (if truly “nonacquisitive”) is really desire in any recognizable sense, and how we could possibly “imitate” it. Girard must suppose God’s good and nonacquisitive desire to be so utterly metaphysically different from violent, acquisitive human desire to maintain metaphysical distance be-

tween God and us and thus ensure lack of rivalry. But it is then hard to understand what this imitation of God could consist of. At best, this imitation seems to have little content. So it seems that either this godly desire cannot really be imitated by human beings or that it could only be imitated by them at the cost of having to expel their own humanity. Worst of all, this divine order ultimately implies the expulsion of mimetic desire itself, since desire which cannot really be imitated or which can only be imitated through some act of expulsion cannot be good mimetic desire. Girard's "solution" to the problem of violence and mimesis remains in the very double bind the solution is trying to transcend.

"Good" mimetic desire thus cannot be describing the nonviolent, nonacquisitive desire of God *itself*, as Girard must intend. Instead, this desire of God is implicitly represented in this split schema as being something other than mimetic desire, which is once again (covertly) expelled onto the bad side of the dichotomy. Accordingly, escape or "salvation" from the victimage mechanism and sin as violent desire in Girard's current theological framework is always conceived as *conversion* to an entirely separate divine order as represented by the right hand of this dichotomy. Because there is an insuperable metaphysical gap between the two sides of the dichotomy, mimetic desire as a concept is propelled out of the realm of recognizable human life and understanding and into the realm of the "sacred" (in Girard's negative sense) by being expelled at times as purely demonic (bad, acquisitive, and human) and elevated at others as purely divine (utterly good, nonacquisitive, and of God).

Simply calling mimetic desire *either* of these, as we have seen, however, logically makes no sense. Throughout his work Girard theoretically understands mimetic desire as a power which fundamentally transcends the good/bad dichotomy (even though he himself lapses sometimes into equating mimetic desire with violence). However, whenever he talks about the solution to the problem of violence as coming solely from a realm of nonviolent divine love which is wholly Other, he is forced onto one side of the dichotomy or the other, neither of which is satisfactory. In his own recent remarks about mimetic desire as fundamentally "good," the concept of mimetic desire has been just as mystified /expelled as in the thought of those who "misunderstand" him, but this time it has been divinized by Girard instead of demonized by his detractors. Girard, ironically, ends up repeating an opposition of a kind he explicitly repudiates in Nietzsche (only with the values reversed) between good desire (the "will to

power”) and a bad one (“*ressentiment*” or reactive “love,” with which Nietzsche associated Christianity and thus dismissed it as the religion of slaves).<sup>19</sup>

These objections, along with Girard’s own inability adequately to correct them, point toward the lack of a genuine creative sacred in Girard’s work as well as toward theological conceptions of both sin and salvation which continue to fall into a mythical, scapegoating structure. In fact, the way Girard currently conceives a nonviolent religious orientation and social reality logically entails insisting on absolute difference between human love and divine love,<sup>20</sup> between human reality and divine revelation, then scapegoating everything human.<sup>21</sup> The injunction at the end of *Things Hidden* to “imitate Christ” and share in nonviolent love (“good” mimetic desire in Girard’s thought) thus entails renouncing or expelling a fundamentally violent human nature/culture. This deep, structural, conceptual scapegoating at the most basic metaphysical and theoretical level, glaring to many, seems invisible to Girard himself, even though his work unmasks so many similar constructs.

#### FURTHER REVELATION OF THE SCAPEGOAT: PROBLEMS IN THE “IMITATION OF CHRIST”

Girard’s answer to violence, as I have noted, is always theological. In particular, Girard claims that the Christian gospel uniquely exposes the scapegoat mechanism as the foundation of human culture and disarms it through gradual historical revelation. Robin Collins addresses in detail both strengths and problems with this thesis in the context of the Christian doctrine of the atonement and offers his own reassessment on this point. Others, including Swartley, Fodor, and James Alison, have critiqued and extended Girard’s positive notion of the “imitation of Christ” in ways helpful not only for understanding Girard’s claims but also more generally in understanding this often misused concept.<sup>22</sup>

I believe, however, that I can clarify some of the logical and theological problems which remain unexamined in this latter concept as it functions in Girard’s framework, by adding some observations. First, from both a feminist point of view and from within the standpoint of his own theory, Girard’s current solution to the problem of violence by appealing to the imitation of Christ is problematic for those who actually occupy the position of “victims” in the violent, most general system of representation (i.e., that of human culture itself) his theory is trying to

unmask. Feminist theologians have long pointed out the problem for historically victimized peoples with interpreting this imitation as submission. They have identified problems as well with those related traditional formulations of sin and salvation which tend to leave deeper levels of violence unchallenged, or even inflict more violence through conceptual exclusion. As Andrew Sun Park, a Korean theologian, points out, “traditional doctrines of sin and salvation [which] focus primarily on the moral agency of the sinner . . . fail to deal adequately with the pervasive *reality* of the suffering of the victims of sin.”<sup>23</sup> Park argues that

the traditional doctrine of sin has been one-sided, seeing the world from the perspective of the sinner only, failing to take account of the victims of sin and injustice. . . . To bring the good news to the poor and downtrodden, we need to develop a proper analysis of the problems of the world viewed from the perspectives of both the sinner *and* the victim.<sup>24</sup> [italics added]

In the context of the Girardian framework, this critique points to the problem of conceiving of the imitation of Christ as simply the “giving up” of power, agency, and desire, or, conversely (and more subtly), as voluntarily taking on the position of the victim *in the sense of giving up one’s position as a persecutor/perpetrator of violence*. This injunction paradoxically leaves *actual* victims disempowered, with no possibility of agency or desire of their own, and reifies them in exactly the same social, political, and metaphysical position as before—in the position of *victims*. The particular problems of actual victims of violence therefore go unrecognized in this formulation, because it fails to see their genuine difference within historical experience in relation to violence, and thus their different subjectivity.

If we consider the perspective of historically victimized peoples, we begin to see the indispensable need for an adequate understanding of nonviolent empowerment rather than a dichotomous choice between violent power on the one hand and a nonviolent “resignation” or vague acquiescence to the will (desire) of God on the other. Neither option effectively speaks to and has the capacity of liberating actual victims from real violence. This dichotomous choice is one I believe Girard would not want to maintain, yet within his current formulation it forces itself on actual victims of violence simply through sustained omission.

Second, the (current) Girardian solution to the problem of violence not only suffers from this omission of the victim’s perspective, it renders it invisible while retaining telltale traces of its absence/pres-

ence. This leads to the interesting conclusion that the entire theory is (in its unreconstructed form), in Girard's own terminology and according to his own criteria, still partly a "myth" or "persecution text." In other words, it remains a story told from the point of view of the persecutor (i.e., those with relatively more power in the system of representation assumed by the theory), a story which hides the viewpoint and innocence of real victims (i.e., those with relatively less power in this system). Note that the "solution" offered by the theory speaks mostly to and from the position of the powerful. After all, it is primarily those more likely to play the role of persecutors/ perpetrators of violence than that of victims in this system of representation who need to "give up" excessive or inappropriate desire and "repudiate [the] will to power" through "renunciation of divinity."<sup>25</sup>

Note, however, that those with relatively less power do not exactly need to give up their desire to agency and subjectivity. Instead, they need to give up their *lack of will to appropriate* subjectivity, desire, and agency as those made in the Image of God.<sup>26</sup> Self-emptying, *kenosis*, and suffering are still meaningful terms for historically victimized peoples, but their meaning, it is important to note, is quite different for someone who enjoys relatively little social power or for those who have been repeatedly scapegoated. Kenosis for such persons will entail their giving up the falsely constructed subjectivity, abject will, and captive agency created by the false system of representation they have been forced to inhabit.

In Girard's thought, anomalous statements regarding "giving up" the desire for power, agency, or *being* continue to betray an understanding still partly situated in a mythical framework unconsciously informed by a persecutor/powerful perspective.<sup>27</sup> Critiques of traditional theologies of original sin and guilt similarly point out that these theologies scapegoat humanity by presupposing that all human beings are equally, unproblematically, and ahistorically guilty in having a fundamental *desire for self*. The reality is that some people are genuinely more victimized than others. Such people have a different and positive relationship to this desire for selfhood, power, agency.

As Park and many others have noted, theologies that tend to reduce sin to guilt and individual moral agency overlook the genesis and consequences of sin as a cultural system that enmeshes people, *often against their will*, in violent social and ideological structures. (At the same time, it should be stressed that the concept and reality of guilt remains valid for understanding some of the ways in which everyone *willfully* turns away at times from this creative intersubjective reality by engaging in

violence against self and/or others.) In Girard's antidote to the problem of violence, he leaves the assumption of universal human "guilt" unquestioned, though from the standpoint of his own theory he ought to be suspicious of this "story" of culture as having all the marks of a "persecution text."

If, as Girard argues, we must uncover and take the viewpoint of those excluded from/within a system of representation to discover its "truth," any genuine solution to the problem of violence must account for how the actual victims of history can be nonviolently empowered. How can they be brought to subjectivity, gain appropriate agency, and exercise desire in a framework that benefits both them and others? A genuine solution, theoretically speaking, would also need to account for how such "victims" already to some extent experience themselves as something other than or reducible to victims, how they already partly escape this system of representation which is really a myth. As Girard himself perceives, the entire mythical system of representation, with its fixed categories of "persecutor/victim" or "master/slave" and its "good/bad" dichotomies, is precisely what we see from the true perspective of the victim.

This means that a solution to the problem of violence must centrally include an account of constructive desire, the taking on of a new, nonvictimizing, *and nonvictimized* perspective. Girard clearly understands these two latter principles in theory, and in fact they are one of the key themes of his work. Yet he has been unable clearly to see his own scapegoat and split system of representation, as well as how his own theory fails to achieve this solution because of his own viewpoint in relation to the theory.

The imitation of Christ thus must mean something strong, active, and liberative, simply to include, let alone privilege, the perspective of those who have been real victims. In addition, to be truly intellectually compelling and practically useful, a complete theory of violence must not only *tell* us that we can take on this new perspective, but it must also *show us how* those who have been victims can actually cease to be victims *by ceasing to identify with their victim position*. This account is lacking in the Girardian theory as a whole, so it cannot (in its present form) be a universal theory of culture or provide a satisfactory theological account of the human predicament. Girardian theory fails itself to escape the kind of mythical structure it seeks to expose. Like the Mother in the psychoanalytic triangle, the victims in Girard's representation of the structures of culture and religion are incompletely recognized as subjects: They are not recognized as occupying this special point of

view in relation to the entire system and thus offering (even demanding) another potential model of (constructive) desire. The theory still unwittingly expels the victims in its very formulation of the solution to the victimage mechanism.

### LOVING MIMESIS: A CREATIVE REASSESSMENT OF MIMETIC DESIRE

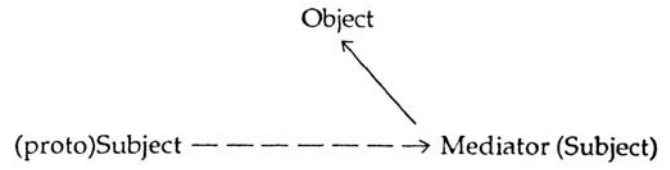
Thus far I have laid out the self-referential problem in the current Girardian theory and located the theory's own "scapegoat," which is a nonviolent, nonscapegoating, constructive concept of mimetic desire. Next I will offer what I believe is a solution, a way forward which arises from inside the logic of the mimetic theory itself. The crucial question I believe Girard never explicitly asks is this: What does God desire? This is the question Girard's current account of mimetic desire and originary violence cannot answer in a satisfactory way. Yet the answer is the key to following Girardian theory through to its logical conclusion to make the theory itself nonviolent.

It is crucial to understand that uncovering any scapegoat—even Girard's own—amounts to challenging the entire Manichean system of representation which breaks reality into dualistic oppositions, including that of "good" and "bad" themselves. Such dualisms are a construct which Girard recognizes as suspect from the beginning in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* and later persuasively links with scapegoating in his analysis of "doubling." The *Good*, or what some feminists have called *the Feminine*, or what I will call the genuinely *Ethical or Sacred* therefore *cannot be defined front within this violent dualistic type of system* but instead must be understood as belonging to an act of undivided thinking before the act of conceptual splitting /expulsion.

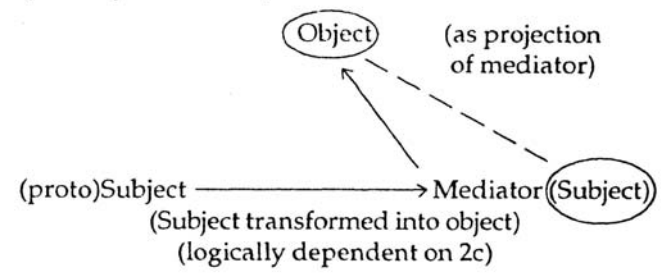
To ask what God desires and what we are imitating when we imitate this desire—to ask, in other words, how mimetic desire could be truly nonviolent—means being willing to give up this split system of representation itself, that is, to see it as *already* a *misrepresentation*. To see if mimetic desire could be understood in a way that does not once again replicate this system of representation, we need to return to the fundamental paradigm of mimetic desire and its variations (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: FOUR CONFIGURATIONS OF MIMETIC DESIRE

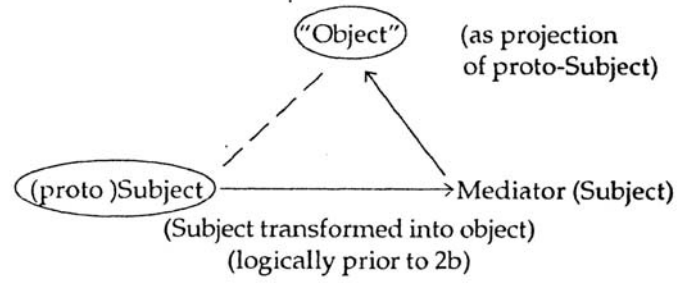
2a. Classic Triangular Desire



2b. "Coquette" phenomenon; romantic "love"



2c. Colonization



2d. Love

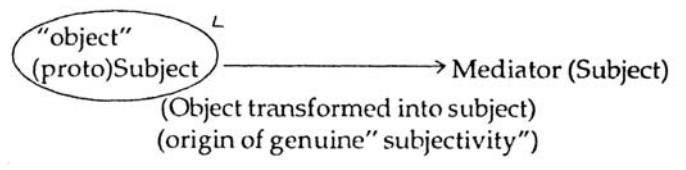


Figure 2a represents that paradigm of triangular mimetic desire with which we are all familiar. Here imitation of the mediator (subject) by the proto-subject<sup>28</sup> automatically leads, as Girard has demonstrated to rivalry, then doubling, then escalation and the mimetic crisis of undifferentiation, and ultimately the scapegoat mechanism.

Figure 2b shows a fascinating and gender-relevant variation of this basic triangle, the phenomenon of the "coquette."<sup>29</sup> The coquette, as a mediator, desires her/his own body or self as

*an object*. The triangular structure of mimetic desire, though less obvious than in the original model, is still present in 2b, because the mediator's subjectivity is split into a subject who desires and the desired imaginary, projected object. Other proto-subjects, or "suitors," then imitate the coquette's desire for her/his body and/or self, resulting in rivalry with the mediator for possession of the object, and so forth. (In some ways Figure 2b offers a clearer picture of rivalrous mimetic desire than 2a, since, as Girard makes clear, the object in triangular desire is relatively unimportant in itself and gains its value primarily as a projection of the perceived *being*—i.e., subjectivity and capacity for agency—of the mediator.<sup>30</sup>)

In Figure 2b, the mediator coquette's desire is narcissistic. But the coquette's narcissistic subjectivity (which Freud construed as the natural state of the female psyche!) conceals a further hidden violence and a further configuration of mimetic desire which logically precedes it. How could the coquette (here, for convenience, considered female) desire herself as an object if she had not already imitated someone else's desire for herself as an object? Before the scenario described by 2b, the coquette was herself a proto-subject. Figure 2c thus illustrates another extension of mimetic desire which Girard has not explicitly analyzed but which provides the blueprint for colonization of all kinds.

As in Figure 2b, the object in 2c is a projection of a split desiring subject, but this time it is a projection of/on the proto-subject, who is desired by the mediator *as an object*. The proto-subject then imitates the mediator's desire and desires himself or herself *as an object*. This responsive action simultaneously creates the coquette phenomenon and a split, inauthentic, and/or derivative subjectivity "colonized" by the subjectivity of the mediator. In fact, Figures 2b and 2c are simply two halves of the same scenario, seen from the two different perspectives: that of the colonized (coquette) and the colonizer.

Figure 2c shows why the Girardian theory is potentially such a valuable resource for historically victimized peoples, for it has the power to theoretically describe the process through which internalized oppression is actually generated and propagated, via the specific mechanism of mimetic desire. On the other hand, this scenario seems more than ever to leave historic victims stranded in the persecutor/victim dichotomy, seemingly with no way out.

Or is there? If we look more carefully at this last case of scenario 2c, it is important to take note that violence (to the subjectivity of the proto-subject) *arises in mimetic desire prior even to a formal scapegoat mechanism, preempting its function*, which is to establish order and difference. Is mimetic desire therefore even more insidious than we thought, rather than less? I think not. In fact, mimetic desire as represented in Model 2c suggests that violence is somehow bound up with the nature of *objects*, or the nature of *turning things into objects*. I believe mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism, though as real and as generative as Girard claims, are themselves but logical expressions of this more primordial violence, that of “object”-ifying.

Kirsten Anderson comes near to something like this conclusion in her analysis of the mimetic imperative regarding the imitation of God in Genesis 1-3. Though Anderson tries to talk about the two creation texts (P and J) “negotiating” between two different *kinds* of desires, she seems to admit the problem really lies elsewhere. She observes, in a way actually inconsistent with her thesis, that

No doubt mimesis is a highly ambiguous category. Rene Girard seems to be the one critic, who most appropriate to P and J, describes humanity as caught in a double-bind, a contradicting double-imperative, whereby every command: *Imitate me!* immediately is followed by another command: *Don't imitate me!* In Girard's terms that really means, *don't appropriate my object.*<sup>31</sup> [Last italics added; Anderson is quoting here from *Violence and the Sacred*.]

Now I would argue that in paradigms 2a-2c, it is clear we are *already* dealing in a realm (a system of representation) in which objects are assumed. How do objects, or acts of objectifying, generate violence? Girard says that “appropriation [presumably of objects] is the domain where imitation is conflictual.”<sup>32</sup> Here he reiterates his basic view that objects and their appropriation, and not the nature of imitation (*mimesis*) *per se*, is the locus of violence in mimetic desire.

In *Violent Origins*, Jonathan Smith makes the observation that origin myths ask the fundamental question of how we “get” something.<sup>33</sup> Let's put Anderson's and Smith's observations together and ask the question, Under what condition do we genuinely get something without appropriating it (as an object)? In the language of the double bind, how do we acquire an object *without* acquiring it? I suggest that there is one instance of mimetic desire that can simultaneously answer this question, solve the double bind, and make the scapegoat of the Girardian framework disappear, thus transforming the entire theory by rendering it a self-referentially consistent “myth of origins.”

Model 2d illustrates a case of mimetic desire I have not seen discussed by anyone to date, including Girard. What happens if the object desired by the mediator is the *subjectivity* of the proto-subject? After all, the proto-subject, being unformed and thus not yet truly a subject, *is* a kind of “object.” In this scenario, if the proto-subject were to imitate the desire of the mediator, then the proto-subject would desire his or her own subjectivity. *Model 2d thus creatively fulfills both conditions of the double bind* (Imitate me! Don’t imitate me!), *which are really a seamless simultaneous command*. That is, if proto-subjects fulfill the first half of the command and desire their own subjectivity, they also by definition fulfill the second: They will not merely imitate the mediator’s subjectivity.

Furthermore, no rivalry ensues from this act of mimetic desire, since the object of desire by definition is that which cannot be appropriated by (reduced to the subjectivity of) the mediator. Yet the mediator and proto-subject both get or acquire something through this act of acquisitive mimesis—that is, greater subjectivity, desire, and relationship than either had before. Also in this case, if the mediator reciprocally imitates the proto-subject’s desire, once again they both end up desiring the proto-subject’s subjectivity.

The case of model 2d suggests mimesis as an event that generates between subjects an escalating circle of desire, but not a vicious one, as once again no rivalry ensues. In fact this idea of circular movement is really a way of describing something that is not a dialectic between two autonomous subjects at all but a single, unified dynamic of intersubjectivity which has generative power.

What of the idea that our own natural desires are selfish and we must adopt a somehow foreign, yet morally superior selfless attitude in relation to others (often called altruism or theologically equated with the imitation of Christ)? We have already seen how this notion makes little sense for those downtrodden as real historical victims; it also offers little motivation for those who enjoy relative positions of power. In this new scenario, however, if I am the mediator, I will be inclined to desire another’s subjectivity (even assuming that desire comes out of my own lack or self-interest) because it enriches *both* of us to do so. It is *both* selfless (altruistic) and self-interested (selfish, narcissistic) to desire the subjectivity of the other, since I also desire my own subjectivity in the process. By definition, in desiring your subjectivity I get or acquire an intersubjective relationship with you, the proto-subject, but I do so without acquiring you as an *object*.<sup>34</sup>

This paradigm of intersubjective participation through self-reflexive mimetic desire does not negate or replace but transforms our under-

standing of classic triangular desire. If I as proto-subject imitate the mediator's desire more generally (i.e., imitate the mediator's desire for the subjectivity of third, external objects), I end up desiring not only myself but others and indeed potentially *everything around me* as a subject—as something alive with its own irreducible being, yet in dynamic, loving, intersubjective relation to me. Entering into and participating in this dynamic relation could be understood theologically as adopting the same unconditional relation of love that Christ exemplifies in relation to the Father, or imitating him.<sup>35</sup>

Model 2d demonstrates that the source of violence is not in mimesis itself. Rather, violence originates in the very split way of thinking that conceives of subjects as autonomous and in opposition to one another and therefore allows things, including human beings, to be conceived as objects of appropriation. The essence of the scapegoating process is that someone or something is turned into an *object*. This temptation to turn things into objects instead of subjects, even ourselves or God, might be called Idolatry. In a violent or mythical system of representation, something or someone must play the role of object so something or someone else can be a subject.

Though Girard sees through this exclusionary logic at the textual level over and over again, his current theology reaffirms this conceptual violence at the most general level with regard to the human self and God as mediator/Other. Model 2d suggests a system of participation (not representation) that gets beyond a false and violent subject/ object dualism and the splitting characteristic of mythical thought. This dualism generates violent and misleading representations because it already does a more primordial violence to a unified intersubjective reality.

Mimetic desire in the case of Model 2d, however, particularly undoes many traditional theological and philosophical dichotomies. Some of the most compelling are those between self versus other, Eros versus Agape, persecutor (and the active will to power) versus victim (and *ressentiment* or love as renunciation of active desire for self), and humanism versus Christianity. This model allows for both/and. It suggests that subjects need not be conceived as emerging out of an inevitably violent opposition and exclusion but could be understood as the creative product of the dynamic of loving mimesis itself. Idolatry might be perceived as the attempt to quash this dynamic of creative mimesis by dividing the world up into subjects who act and objects who are acted on, perhaps out of fear, or to try to control things by giving them fixed meanings. Note that the scapegoat mechanism seems to work by

putting things back in their “proper” place, then representing this distorted order of things as “natural.” Perfect love, however, casts out (that is, transforms) this fear of mimetic play.

Theologically, I believe this new paradigm of mimetic desire describes genuine love, not as still conceived from within a split system of representation as mere nonviolence, a set of prescriptive ethics, or self-renunciation, but love conceived as a truly creative, revolutionary force. The concept of creative mimetic desire puts ethics (love) and power back together. Unlike Nietzsche, who tried definitively to take them apart and who rejected Christianity in the process, I claim that this paradigm makes possible a more adequate interpretation of true power as the will to intersubjective creative love of Self *and* Other.

This fourth configuration of mimetic desire fully meets the criteria Girard exhaustively sets out as characteristic of mimetic desire: it is “acquisitive”; it leads to doubling; it escalates in a feedback loop; it transforms subjects and objects; it has a metaphysical character; and it even describes a “twin narcissism” (wherein desiring you is really desiring myself).<sup>36</sup> Yet in this case all these characteristics are not only nonviolent but actively constructive.

Mimetic desire can be understood therefore as fundamentally positive, or more accurately, *creative*, not only in the sense that it is capable of generating new forms (which Girard claims of the scapegoat mechanism) but also in the sense that it is theoretically capable of doing so without violence. Yet real love is not mere peace or harmony, and creativity is not merely positive or pretty. Real love is the powerful force which liberates victims and perpetrators as well, which will not allow us to remain small or static, a prospect which can indeed be frightening. Real love continually brings new things into being.

How is this ethical, loving mimetic desire creative in practical human relationships? From within this new paradigm we can see that intersubjective relationships must continually be created. Moreover, new experiences, responses, and solutions to problems between people or groups must be negotiated and created in ways that honor the reality of this fundamental intersubjectivity—meaning without expelling someone as a scapegoat. This means not scapegoating even those we see as enemies or perpetrators of violence. This is the most difficult step in giving up our entrenched violent patterns of thought, because—for victims especially—it will be tempting to believe that renouncing the false power to scapegoat also jeopardizes power to identify and resist evil. So how do we prosecute evil without scapegoating, or on the other hand, forgive without excusing evil?

Marjorie Suchocki has given a fine analysis and definition of forgiveness which suggests how this is possible: Forgiveness is the transcending of this false system of representation, its violent reciprocity, and even its false and inappropriate indifferenciation between perpetrators/persecutors and victims, by “willing the well-being of the victim and violator in the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violence. . . . Forgiveness [is] living and acting from the will toward well-being.”<sup>37</sup> This could also be interpreted here as living from within the paradigm of mimetic desire I have offered, or living out of “the mimesis of new creation” (Swartley) or following in “the way” of disciple-ship (Fodor).

Understood in its fullest sense, however, living from this will toward well-being involves more than forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing of the wounds of sin (with which Suchocki is concerned). Such an orientation must ultimately be understood as participating in an ongoing, active power toward and from the divine Good. What I call this “will to love” expresses itself not only in transcending (renouncing) one’s previous imprisonment and identity as a perpetrator or victim. In addition, as suggested by the experience of real victims of violence, it also will result in appropriate anger and resistance in the face of new violence. The will to love becomes the impetus toward justice; creative negotiation with people or things that might have previously been obstacles; and finally, experiences of discovery and joy leading to ever deeper and more complex experiences of subjectivity and relationship with God and others. Living out of this new dynamic is to be an active co-creator with God in the divine and originally good created order of things (the kingdom of God), which might also be called the Order of Love.

#### THEOLOGY, POLITICS, AND PEACEMAKING: SOME THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

Despite fears and objections we might have regarding how any kind of totalizing theory, even of violence or liberation, tends to reinscribe violence, there is an emerging, even urgent sense, among theologians and philosophers as well as ordinary people that we need a new global myth or paradigm. What would be on a wish list for such a paradigm?

A general consensus seems to be forming: this paradigm needs to be nonviolent; it needs to be cross-cultural, affirming both our diversity and common life; it needs to have deep spiritual and/or psychological

insight, yet not be reductive to human realities; and it needs to be capable of practical application in concrete, immediate terms helpful to us in dealing with the growing threat of physical, environmental, economic, and ideological violence rising everywhere around us.

It is easy to see why the sweeping claims and explanatory power of Rene Girard's theory of religion and culture, combined with the theory's tremendous fruitfulness in a diversity of applications, have made his work compelling to many, even those who have been put off by his totalizing claims. With the revisions I have proposed, the mimetic theory becomes much more convincing as a general theory, one on which we might build a common ethic, understanding of human beings, and practice of peacemaking.

In addition, I believe that taken as a metanarrative, Girard's overarching philosophical/theological paradigm now not only escapes the problem of replicating violence but actively promotes an ethic of peace, understood in a strong sense as human flourishing in the interconnectedness of all life and as the unfolding of God's creative life and purposes. I will just briefly touch on a few further consequences of my reassessment, the ramifications of which are far-reaching.

### **THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

I have already suggested above how this revised account affects general theological categories such as sin, salvation, and sacraments (or participation in divine reality), as well as the Christian concept of love. It can be seen as a corollary conclusion of my analysis that although Girard also has tended to split/scapegoat such terms and concepts as *myth*, the *sacred*, and *sacrifice*, this reconstructed concept of loving mimesis makes constructive interpretations of all of these possible. Indeed, this reassessment provides a powerful basis for a theology and worldview (*myth*) in which all of life and human relations may be viewed and treated as *sacred*, a gift offered back to God as *a sacrifice* of praise and thanksgiving. And though Girard has often focused on the Paraclete as the "defender of innocent victims and *the destroyer of every representation of persecution*"<sup>38</sup> (italics his), we might also remember that the Holy Spirit is first of all the divine energy which brings forth creation and life.

In addition, this reconstruction makes the Girardian theory compatible with theologies of historically victimized peoples. The theory now provides an adequate philosophical underpinning to the claims and prophetic challenges of theologies with a liberation emphasis (which stress justice for the oppressed) as well as feminist theology and

theory (which are concerned with understanding and transcending the violence toward women and other victimized peoples embedded in both thought and social structures).<sup>39</sup>

This new paradigm also is more truly in keeping with Girard's fundamental theological stress on the prophetic nature of the Gospels. It also overcomes the tendency of his current formulation to fall back into an Augustinian "City of God" versus "City of Man" dichotomy with regard to human nature/culture. Such a dichotomy reinforces an excessively eschatological understanding of the kingdom of God and pessimism regarding human beings. Jesus says that the kingdom is among us, and it is now, for those who have "eyes to see and ears to hear" in a new way. This change of perspective involves a type of conversion, but not a conversion away from mimetic desire or to a sacred which is wholly Other. Rather, it is the conversion to a new viewpoint which recognizes the *already existing reality* of the deeply intersubjective, interdependent, and unfolding nature of human relationships and life.

The needy already see this more naturally than the socially powerful. Taking into account the viewpoint or corrective perspective of those who have tended to be the "victims" of others' violence, we must come to the conclusion that original sin must not be desire itself, especially the desire for selfhood, agency, and subjectivity, as is often claimed in traditional theologies of pride. Rather, original sin can be understood as a powerful name for the refusal or loss of this open system of intersubjective and unconditional relation to God and others by which we are constituted. That is, original sin is a description of the perversion and enslavement of mimetic desire in representations of idolatry, *within which it inevitably leads to violence*.

### **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Girard's current religious views still partly participate in a dualistic and implicitly violent theology which has actually obscured his fundamental early insight about the mimetic, social nature of desire and the human person, as well as the brilliant extrapolation of his literary textual readings into a variety of anthropological domains. Though I believe I have shown this particular theology to be inadequate, I do agree with George Frear Jr. that Girard's current analysis clearly and powerfully describes those cultural and religious distortions, and the violence they engender, traditionally named *sin*. It also describes the system of representation feminists call *patriarchy*. For this reason, the theory has a potentially revolutionary character in its ability to identify

victims, the mechanism of their internalized oppression, and the violent political, social, and ideological structures which engender injustice.

At the same time, the general political implications of this theory have seemed reactionary to some. The pessimistic view of human nature and institutions it proposes might be interpreted as reinforcing the political status quo. Some have seen it as advocating the largely passive awaiting of a historical evolutionary process of revelation, with an implied need for law and order—or even scapegoats—until this new order comes into being. Although Girard may not intend for his theory to be interpreted in a politically conservative way, it contains elements making such an interpretation possible, even likely.

A reconstructed view of the Girardian theory, however, maintains that the victimage mechanism, though a social and political reality, is not the foundation of culture; rather, mimetic desire is. Though this may seem a simple clarification, it in fact changes much of what Girard and his followers have said about human institutions such as religion (ritual) and the law (taboo). In Girard's current thought, these cultural institutions arise from and are means of holding back and regulating violence. On the other hand, in the revised view these institutions have an ambivalent and not simply negative relationship to love and freedom. Our common sense tells us human institutions serve both to regulate violent mimesis *and* to express and propagate our highest ideals. This suggests they are founded on mimetic impulses which originate both in scapegoating and in creative love.

Our job as Christians or citizens, then, is to desire the subjectivity of these and all human institutions to embody the redemptive reality that humans are made in God's image and to nurture and reflect our common life. The task then will be prophetically to call institutions to become what the better ones claim to be and to challenge those with an inadequate and violent ethic to become what they are not. Thus my reconstructed model, rather than allowing the theory to remain open to authoritarian politics, as some have charged of Girard's work, aligns itself with the best impulses of democracy. This better befits the theory's truly radical nature.

### ***IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACEMAKING***

A theory and praxis of peacemaking implicitly or explicitly relies on a theory of human nature, agency, and desire, since it presupposes that we engage in violent acts to get what we want, but that either these desires or these acts must be curtailed. This implies that a general

theory of human relations must adequately understand subjectivity and desire. The notion of loving mimetic desire I have proposed has direct consequences for our conception of a practice of nonviolence and reconciliation, whether in formal conflict mediation or in the more general circumstances of our lives.

In peacemaking, a theory and practice of mere nonviolence that allows the system of representation that generates violence to itself go unchallenged is not enough. When dealing with real and powerful conflict, the threat of violence and scapegoating of actual people or things, we need a correspondingly powerful theory of subjectivity and agency to effectively address these practical conflictual situations and call for alternatives.

We have seen how any concept of the imitation of Christ or Christian “love” as mere self-sacrifice or servanthood on behalf of others, even if understood as “positive” mimetic desire or discipleship, can tend to encourage actual victims of violence to keep scapegoating themselves and encourage others to do so. It can even encourage self-scapegoating of the peacemakers themselves. Girard’s work, however, if taken to its logical conclusion as I aim to have done, can challenge and empower the Christian theologian and peacemaker as well as those who have experienced victimage. In overcoming evil, peace as “the will to love” is an active, even a powerful concept, able not only to confront injustice but to create new realities, yet without itself lapsing into violence or scapegoating. In addition, this powerful love as mimetic desire will be just as contagious when whole and creatively directed as it was when split and inclined to violence.

What of Girard’s claim that the Christian gospel uniquely reveals the scapegoating basis of human culture? As I have said, mimetic desire reconceived as love overturns the claim that violence and scapegoating form the basis of human experience. It is not hard to see theologically that love of this type cannot be confined to the special revelation of Jesus. Thus it cannot be, as Girard currently claims, *the* unique claim of Christianity to unmask the violent victimage mechanism and reveal nonviolent love in its place, though of course Christianity does this.

In fact, this love, and God, are already partly revealed in our common experience, in what has been conceded even by conservative theologies stressing sin and depravity as “general revelation” and “common grace.” Such grace is possible in our most intimate family relationships, where we learn how and what to desire, as well as the larger social realm, not only in some separate metaphysical realm. These

realms are all one. The words of 1 John are the Christian affirmation of the simple unity of familial, social, and divine realms, and our intimate human access to creative desire: “Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God, and he who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God for God is love” (1 John 4: 7-8).

From a reassessed Girardian point of view, the implication is that to imitate (follow in the way of) love in the way I have described *is* to “imitate Christ.” To participate in an intersubjective dynamic of loving creativity with others through mimetic desire is to imitate, image, or reflect God. I do not believe it is essential to have the Judeo-Christian Scriptures to understand, or more importantly, to participate in this truth.<sup>40</sup> However, I do believe Christianity does have a unique claim regarding the gospel revelation from a Girardian point of view, a claim which has been made by no other religious tradition or human system of thought: that is that Jesus is the full, historical incarnation of this love which is both fully human and fully divine, and this love is stronger than any system of death which tries to contain it.

## NOTES

1. I use the terms *subject* and *subjectivity* in my discussion to refer to one’s sense of selfhood, as well as the point of view from which one perceives, desires, and acts in the world. In the broadest sense it also refers simply to the sense of human existence and/or consciousness which seems to need explanation and whose origin and nature can be speculated upon.

2. Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Violent Origins: Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert Hammerton-Kelly (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 136.

3. George Frear Jr., “René Girard on Mimesis, Scapegoats, and Ethics,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1992), 115-133.

4. “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: An Interview with Rene Girard,” *Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: Conversations on Myth and Culture in Theology and Literature*, ed. Rebecca Adams, *A Special Issue of Religion and Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993), 11-33 (henceforth, Interview, R&L). See also Fodor’s summary of this problem in Jim Fodor, “Christian Discipleship as Participatory Imitation: Theological Reflection on Girardian Themes” (246-276 in this volume).

5. See, for instance, Robert Greer Cohn, “Desire: Direct and Imitative,” *Philosophy Today* 34, no. 4 (1989), 318-329, who objects that “Girard’s concept of desire which heavily features imitation is excessively unidimensional” and argues, as have others, that there must be other—and more constructive—kinds of desire.

6. See Sarah Kofman, “The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard,” *Diacritics* 10, no. 3 (1980), 36-45, and Toril Moi, “The Missing Mother: The Oedipal Rivalries of René Girard,” *Diacritics* 12, no. 2 (1982), 21-31.

7. Girard particularly uses language of this type, or makes explicit claims about violence as an originary principle within human culture, in discussions linked with the principle of Satan as the “Father of lies”; see, for instance, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 165-6.

8. The *sacred*, like the term *myth* and usually *sacrifice*, is always negative in Girard’s thought and refers to the religious and/or metaphysical (mis)representation created by scapegoating, and the mystifying process by which the scapegoat is simultaneously demonized and expelled from this system of representation, yet also divinized and paradoxically made the cornerstone of the system. The scapegoat, therefore, is that thing the sacred system excludes, yet without which the system cannot be what it is and whose presence and true nature it cannot entirely efface.

9. This kind of self-reflexive confirmation is essential in maintaining the validity of any general or universal claim, but it is especially crucial that any theory about violence would itself be nonviolent. What would be simply a logical problem in some other theories would also become an ethical problem within a theory of nonviolence.

10. Girard does make reference to positive forms of mimetic desire in his work, but I believe they are inadequate or even self-refuting. In his early work, Girard speaks of external mediation as the key to nonviolence, in which rivalry becomes impossible through sheer distance and the impossibility of appropriating the mediator’s “object.” Girard’s argument about God as ideal external mediator depends on maintaining a strong, even absolute “spiritual” (metaphysical) distance /difference between human and divine, in particular with regard to God himself as the object in question. Thus if this distance *were* to begin to collapse, rivalry would ensue. In fact, this collapse into rivalry with God is what we see in stories about the fall of Satan and human beings, who experience the double-bind (Imitate me! Don’t imitate me!) in a mimetic imperative with respect to God as an object of desire; they try to appropriate and *become* God.

In his later work, Girard seems largely to abandon the terminology of *distance* as a satisfactory solution to the problem of rivalry and instead insists upon maintaining a distinction *in kind* between God’s desire and human desire. This distinction (which is really just another kind of distance) is implicit in his understanding of the Imitation of Christ, which involves the idea both of God as proper (distant) object of mimetic desire *and* as proper mediator of (divine) desire. The Imitation of Christ therefore can be seen as a modified form of external mediation (a conversation with Paul Nuechterlein helped clarify this issue). The distance/difference so essential to the whole idea of external mediation is not only unstable, however, it leads to an unresolvable dilemma within the theory. If there is not enough “spiritual distance” between created beings and God, external mediation lapses into rivalry; on the other hand, if this distance/difference is maintained absolutely, the theory itself lapses into conceptual expulsion and scapegoating of the concept of mimetic desire itself, and specifically of human desire and subjectivity, as I show

later in the text. Thus all Girard's current formulations of positive forms of mimetic desire/mediation are both logically and theologically highly problematic, and come at the cost of the theory itself having a "scapegoat."

11. Girard, *Violent Origins*, 123.

12. Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 430-1.

13. Interview, *R&L*, 24-25.

14. Willard M. Swartley, "Discipleship and Imitation of Jesus/Suffering Servant: The Mimesis of New Creation" and Fodor, "Christian Discipleship as Participatory Imitation" (218-276 in this volume).

15. John S. Dunne, C.S.C., *The Peace of the Present: Art Unviolent Way of Life* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 2.

16. Kirsten M. Anderson, "Imago Dei and Desire in Genesis 1-3: To Eat or Not to Eat; or Rather To Eat or What to Eat," *Literature and Theology* 6, no. 3 (1992), 254-267; 255.

17. As a systematic distortion, Girard's anomalous remarks regarding the "good" versus "bad" nature of mimetic desire appear almost exclusively in contexts that deal with the issue of finding a solution to or escape from the violence entailed by mimetic desire. I want to reiterate that this splitting of the term and concept, a systematic distortion which, as we shall see, can be observed in the interview and elsewhere, is anomalous within Girard's general intellectual project. That project is exactly in the business of analyzing such splitting and expulsion phenomena (particularly textually) as evidence of scapegoating. Furthermore, this distortion is contrary to his general conception of mimetic desire as fundamentally "ambiguous" (hence his stress upon the double-bind, and the simultaneous "good"/"bad" character of mimesis it implies). Therefore, what is at stake here is whether the theory is self-referentially inconsistent, or to use Girard's own terminology and criteria, whether his theory is itself a "myth" which founds itself upon a scapegoat and then conceals its own violence.

18. Girard's remarks about God as the *object* of desire do not really solve the problem of rivalry at all and lead to illogicalities. In Girard's current analysis, he claims that God is the only safe object of desire (the only object which does not lead to rivalry), presumably because God is an *infinite* object. This idea, however, leads to two major problems. First, the idea of God as infinite object tends readily to collapse, as I point out in a related discussion in footnote 10, into one of God as finite object that one then attempts to possess or even displace, as in the extreme case of Satan in the temptation story of Jesus. Examples such as this set up God and created beings as rivals much as the coquette is in a "love/hate" rivalry with her suitors for impossible possession of his or her person (my Figure 2b). Thus it may be that the idea of God as an infinite object is simply an oxymoron which still conceals the double-bind. Finally, I would point out that even if it were possible to desire God as an in-finite object as Girard proposes, this solution provides no help in obtaining positive desires directed outward toward the world. Without such positive

desire, we are left with the dilemma of being able to engage with the world only through “bad” mimetic desire, or with having to renounce desire from and toward the world altogether, which Girard refers to as a “living death” (*Things Hidden*, 399).

Taking God as object of desire would imply the need to imitate someone else who desires God as object, which leads naturally to the idea of the “Imitation of Christ.” Christ (God the Son) is to mediate desire for God (the Father) and also our imitation of God the Father’s desire itself. Yet how can Christ’s imitation of God not be rivalrous if Satan’s is? It must not just be because Christ takes God as the object of desire, which Satan also does, and not only because Christ perfectly imitates the desire of the Father, *in the sense of taking God as a mediator*, which Satan also does. Girard’s remarks about the imitation of Christ and God as an object of desire are therefore really only a logical detour which ends in a *cul de sac* and which misleads the reader from his central claim, which is about the nature of God as a mediator of desire *and specifically about the nature of God’s desire*. It is exactly here that Girard makes a conceptual leap by claiming that God’s desire is of a different *nature* from mimetic desire, that is, it is *nonacquisitive*, whereas Satan’s, and the rivalrous disciples, and human desire in general, is violent (even if God is the “object”) because it is *acquisitive*. This confused and partially concealed conceptual leap constitutes an act of conceptual splitting and expulsion, as I go on to demonstrate in detail in my text and in Figure 1.

19. See *Things Hidden*, 426, where Girard rejects Nietzsche’s “sacrificial and victimary distinction” and also the desire to differentiate between the “guilty” and the “innocent.”

20. In this he follows a traditionally constructed dualistic theology of love such as that elaborated by Anders Nygren in *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); see *Things Hidden*, 277.

21. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 142-146, where according to his own definitions his theoretical position on Christianity can be characterized as “romantic criticism” which falls prey to “Manichean” thinking and “absolutes,” and which still unwittingly participates in what he himself has called the illusion of “romantic singularity.”

22. In addition to Swartley and Fodor’s discussions, see James Alison’s treatment of the Imitation of Christ as what he calls “pacific mimesis” in *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

23. Andrew Sun Park, *The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

24. *Ibid.*, 11, 13.

25. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 292 and 294, respectively.

26. In fact, Girard says something very like this at the end of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* in his discussion of the “conversion” of the protagonist, where Proust’s Marcel must give up “seeing himself in the role of the eternal victim,”

(p. 299) “in an act of “creative renunciation” (p. 307); and Girard even hints at some positive notion of empowerment (“resurrection”) in the sense that the novelist gains the ability to act in the world by writing the novel.

27. This is the point made in the feminist critique of the Girardian theory made by Susan Nowak, to which Girard has seemed unable, or has not seen the need, to make a satisfactory response. Because Nowak’s analysis of this problem is presented in feminist categories and terminology instead of terms intelligible solely from within the theory itself, this point apparently has remained unclear; conversely, Nowak’s critique lacks a developed constructive proposal for fixing this problem in the theory. See Susan Nowak, “The Girardian Theory and Feminism: Critique and Appropriation,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994), 19-29.

28. I call the imitating “subject” the “proto-subject” because his or her subjectivity is unformed or incomplete prior to the act of imitation represented in the paradigm. The paradigm attempts to describe the mechanism by which subjectivity is created and thus, in effect, itself qualifies as a myth of origins.

29. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 370-371; and *Deceit Desire and the Novel*, 105.

30. Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 53.

31. Anderson, 255. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

32. René Girard, “*To Double Business Bound*”: *Essays in Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 201.

33. Girard, *Violent Origins*, 136-137; “How did something that wasn’t come to be?” (130).

34. As I have shown, it is not wrong or dangerous to want to acquire the right things under the right conditions. I therefore propose using the terms *appropriate* and *appropriative* desire instead of the misleading term *acquisitive* desire, the latter of which is another term that has been “split” and scapegoated within the Girardian framework. I have demonstrated that *acquisitive* mimetic desire can be nonviolent, nonrivalrous, creative, and *appropriate*. *Appropriative* desire, on the other hand, is the term I will use for wanting to take something that is *not* appropriate with regard to maintaining a loving relationship with oneself and with others.

35. David Burrell, John Dunne, and James Alison all make this point, but without offering an explanation of what conditions exactly constitute this relation as I have done. For instance, James Alison asserts the reality of this imitative relation as different and constructive rather than providing an explanation of the mimetic mechanism for what he calls “pacific” mimesis. His treatment also overlooks the logical problems posed by external mediation and God’s desire as different in kind. As such, his treatment is not so much wrong as incomplete, and it suffers from very much the same problems as Girard’s original statement. (One can see how Alison’s discussion of pacific mimesis is [possibly] subject to the same subtle splitting and expulsion I have described in Girard’s work, this time of the word/concept of “peace,” which I believe still appears in his treatment as somewhat in opposition to power and thus

still implicitly tied to ideas of subordination.) See David Burrell, "René Girard: Violence and Sacrifice," *Cross Currents* 38, no. 4 (1988-89), 443-447; 445.

36. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 8-9; *Violence and the Sacred*, 161; *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 96-98; 17 and 19; 67, 77 and 119; and 108, respectively.

37. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), especially the discussion on pp. 148-150.

38. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 207.

39. I believe Girardian theory, though certainly still partially patriarchal in its current formulation, could provide an invaluable resource for feminist analysis if it took into account the reassessment I have outlined. Furthermore, Girard's conception of mimetic desire provides not only a gender-neutral term and concept, but also a fruitful description of the *mechanism* by which a desire of *difference* is generated and an ethics that could be immediately graspable in concrete, practical terms. For an analysis of the relationship of Girardian theory to feminist theory generally, and the possibility of a beneficial mutual critique, see Susan Nowak and also Jennifer Rike, "Mimesis and Scapegoating: Rene Girard on the Violent Origins of the Sacred and Feminist Constructions of Selfhood," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* 3, no. 2 (1996), 21-42.

40. My religious conclusions regarding mimetic desire, since less exclusivistic than Girard's, might seem to call for jettisoning theology altogether and understanding mimetic desire in purely philosophical or anthropological terms. This is not the case. Whereas my new paradigm may be understood as coherent and consistent on a purely logical or humanistic level, I believe there are good reasons also to retain a specifically theological understanding of these issues. For instance, given the new model I have proposed, it is reasonable to propose that love as the dynamic of intersubjective creative mimesis is itself personal (participates itself in subjectivity) rather than impersonal. I also accept Christian theological formulations such as the Trinity and the incarnation (properly understood) not only as valid but rich elaborations of this paradigm; see for instance, Catherine Mowry La Curia, "God For Us: The Trinity," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 83-114; and Robin Collins's treatment of incarnation and atonement as necessary for our participation in the divine life (132-153 in this volume.)

At the same time, I believe that my reassessment provides a strong basis for dialogue with other religious traditions and points of view. Others have noted Girard's tendency to overlook both religious and literary texts that portray constructive or ambiguous cases of mimetic desire. These texts, however, clearly exist, as do loving religious and cultural practices outside of, or prior to, contact with Christianity.

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#### APPENDIX: Theological Elaboration of the Four Models

*(The following additional material was omitted from the published text above in the interest of space, but was presented orally and in hadnout form at the Colloquium on Violence and Religion Annual Meeting in Atlanta, GA, in June of 1999)*

I say that Girard never gets as far as asking what "object" God desires, other than claiming that the nature of this desire is *nonacquisitive*, but one can easily extrapolate the possible logical answers, of which there appear to be four (the theological analysis in the next four paragraphs parallels the more general analysis I make in the main text regarding the four basic configurations [**Figures 2a-2d**] of mimetic desire):

**a)** God desires no *object*, at least not in the sense of desiring to *acquire* it. God is unchanging, absolute, and loves entirely out of metaphysical fullness or presence, having no metaphysical lack out of which acquisitive desire could be generated. (Certainly such "desire" or "love" would be profoundly un-human, invulnerable, and even impassive. This is a classic objection to the construct of divine love as "agape.") In this scenario, only God has genuine subjectivity and desire, which are self-originary; everything not God is derivative (mimetic). Girard's current solution to the problem of mimetic triangular desire could be interpreted as implying that God selects no "object" of appropriation and thus there is no "object" to a disciple's desire (and thus no rivalry) when he or she "imitates" the desire of God. This type of external mediation relies on an absolute metaphysical distance and difference between human beings and God, between human desire (*eros*) and divine desire (*agape*), which is highly problematic in itself both logically and from the theory's own point of view on scapegoating. The crucial objection to this view we must consider is whether God's "desire" is really desire in any recognizable sense, and how it is that we could possibly "imitate" it. I believe that the theological conclusions of the Girardian theory as they are currently formulated remain mired in something like this view **a** (also perhaps mixed with elements of views **b** and **c**), though the ramifications I have sketched here are not apparent in Girard's current discussion.

**b)** God desires God's self as an object. This possibility makes God into a "coquette," and the desire of God "narcissistic," turned inward. This desire could be nonacquisitive in the sense that since the "object" God desires is God's self, God *already* "possesses" this object and thus does not strive to "acquire it." If we accept this option, however, as some theologies seem to (particularly dualistic mystical theologies), we must then ask why we find narcissism immature and unhealthy if practiced by human beings but find it acceptable if applied to God. This **b** view also contains the unpleasant corollary that human beings are much like God's distant eternal suitors, in rivalry with God for possession of his/her being in a state reminiscent of Romantic "love" (DDN 159-160). Lack of violence would depend entirely on hopeless distance (the utter transcendence of God both as mediator and as an object), as in external mediation and option **a**. However, one could argue that violence is done to the subjectivities of the "suitors" in such a situation, as this kind of "love" tends to alienates oneself from authentic relationship with self, reality and the world as one is always striving to transcend them for the sake of something beyond, something that the self is perceived to lack. This view is still thus locked into the problems of external mediation which scapegoat human desire, and the "suitors" might also might run the risk of becoming narcissistic through their imitation of God's "narcissism." Furthermore, it is not clear that even God would have genuine subjectivity in such a scenario. This scenario makes God into a "objectified" subject, attributing a possibly tragic and violent split subjectivity even to God. And since God's

desire in this model is “inward,” this model, furthermore, does not give any account of how we could have positive desires directed outward toward the world, which means we are left in the dilemma of having to engage the world only through “bad” finite mimetic desire, or with having to renounce desire from and toward the world altogether, which Girard refers to as a “living death.” (*Things Hidden*, p. 399).

c) God desires us (created beings and things) as objects. This explanation seems to fit better than a) or b) the notion of "Agape" as outward directed love. Yet this scenario sets us up as God's rivals immediately. If we imitate God's desire, we desire ourselves (and other created things) as objects, rivaling God for possession of them. This scenario leads directly to the double-bind, in which successfully imitating God leads to idolatry (desiring created objects or people rather than God) and pride, as exemplified by Satan entering into rivalry with God for possession of himself as an autonomous being (which is the same thing as becoming narcissistic). Within this framework, the only way to avoid rivalry is rigorously to keep in view that any "object" God desires, even ourselves, is merely a projection of God's being itself, and thus this view requires that we desire ourselves as objects (and actively repudiate any desire for our own subjectivity). Augustine appears to accept this scenario when he says we should *use* created things (as means to God) but should *love* (desire) only God. Once again, in this scenario, only God has genuine subjectivity; created beings and things are forever "objects," their "subjectivity" derived by adopting the subjectivity of the mediator. This theological construct is a master /slave relationship which corresponds to **Figure 2c**, with God as colonizer and created beings/things as the colonized. This position represents one of the major strands in Christian theology and is the most clearly patriarchal/hierarchical.

d) The "object" God desires is the subjectivity of all things. That is, God is in a loving intersubjective relationship with created beings and things, and even God's own self, via mimetic desire, which is not only human desire but also the creative desire of God. This desire is simultaneously "inward-" and "outward"-directed for all who participate in it. Mimetic desire as the imitation of God therefore causes us to desire our own subjectivity, that of others, and God's as loving creator, in which no rivalry or narcissism results, but a creative unfolding relationship of intersubjectivity. Broadly compatible with Incarnational and creation-centered theologies and worldviews, including many feminist, liberation and indigenous/native peoples traditions. This is the position I take in the text and the only one of the four choices which I believe does not participate in conceptual splitting and expulsion. It is therefore the only choice which is self-referentially consistent within the Girardian theory, and the only solution which more generally does not reify metaphysical violence.

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