Poverty, Peacemaking and the Sacred: A Girardian Reading of the Early Franciscan Movement

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a structured dialogue between the theological and social concerns of the early Franciscan movement and the insights of the contemporary cultural theorist, René Girard. Acknowledging from the outset different historical contexts, different methodologies and different core commitments the thesis, nevertheless, indicates a fertile range of shared perspectives amounting to a new reading of the early Franciscan movement. This dialogue has a twofold purpose: to interpret the spiritual and social novelty of the early Franciscan movement from a new perspective, outside the hitherto dominant categories of medieval scholasticism, or indeed, the categories of mystical and ascetical theology, medieval hagiography and later, romanticism. A mimetic reading of the early Franciscan movement is helpful in transcending the limits of traditional interpretations, particularly the culturally dominant romantic interpretation. This thesis indicates how romantic and neo-romantic interpretations of Francis of Assisi and the early friars continue to obscure, more than they explain, both the founder and the movement. Secondly this thesis grounds Girard's mimetic theory in an historical moment within a concrete social and political reality. Mimetic theory, frequently criticized as an abstraction, at least with respect to any positive political expression, is here theoretically clothed in the garb of the early Franciscan friars. A social and political grounding of mimetic theory benefits Girard's theory even as his theory breathes new life into the narrative of early Franciscanism. A Girardian reading of the early Franciscan movement is by no means definitive in its scope. In the style of Girard it serves, rather, to draw together into new perspectives elements of an old story. In doing so it offers an established tradition of Catholic ecclesial life a voice on contemporary questions of desire, peace-making, violence and belonging.

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Statement of Copyright

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General Introduction

In his reflections on Christian eschatology, *Christian Life and Hope: Raids on the Inarticulate,* Rowan Greer deliberately engages with 'precritical' Christian theology, in part, because 'the thought remains uncluttered by critical preoccupations with historicity and with how to affirm religious claims in the context of purely empirical worldviews'.[1] Greer admits the impossibility of simply returning to pre-critical worldviews but argues that, 'as we move into a post-critical phase of Christian theology, our thinking can be informed by traditional approaches'.[2]

The postcritical Christian theology Greer alludes to requires a series of novel conceptual bridges and hitherto unacquainted dialogue partners. In this dissertation the pre-critical writings of Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), and the sources of early Franciscan thought and practice, are put into dialogue with the insights of cultural theorist René Girard (1923-2015). The dialogue partners I have chosen occupy different historical contexts, however, they share several core theological intuitions. These core intuitions are clarified and distilled in the course of this dialogue. A characteristic concern of both dialogue partners is the search for new categories and a conceptual language capable of escaping dominant (sacrificial) systems of thought and action.[3] The insights of cultural theorist René Girard transcend many of the critical preoccupations of modernity. Girard's mimetic theory is a hypothesis in search of its own proper idiom and its own specific categories, categories that would transcend the limits of rigid critical methodologies and siloed academic disciplines.

Girard's work, having recognizably modern and postmodern characteristics, has attempted to transcend both the critical limits of modernity and the limitless critiques of postmodernity. Where mimetic theory sometimes struggles to avoid contradiction within the

[1] Rowan Greer, *Christian Life and Christian Hope: Raids on the Inarticulate* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), p. 7.
[2] Ibid.
[3] What I refer to here as *sacrificial* systems are all cultural systems rooted in the 'archaic sacred', i.e., the largely unconscious processes whereby human violence is contained and social order is imposed by greater violence, resulting in victimage or scapegoating. In chapter two I will explore Girard's concept of the *sacred* which he has defined as 'the sum of human assumptions resulting from collective transferences focused on a reconciliatory victim at the conclusion of a mimetic crisis'. Cf. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metter (California: Stanford University Press, 1987) p. 42.

categories of modernity and postmodernity, it can demonstrate its specific explanatory power when placed in dialogue with precritical traditions and texts.

The shared concerns which invite exploration include: the Gospel as the revelation of the non-violence of God, the nature of desire and the role of desire in conflict, the role of mimetic conversion in Christian life and asceticism, and the sacrificial nature of social structures. Girard's mimetic theory is fundamentally a specific approach to texts. Girard considered himself primarily a 'reader of texts' and repeatedly 'expressed a preference for literature over both humanities and philosophy'.[4] In the course of his career he explored both the modern European novel and a variety of classical (predominantly Western) mythic and philosophical texts. Each text was probed for indications of what Girard termed 'mimetic realism'. It is his assertion that many foundational (mythical) texts of the Western canon disclose, upon close reading, references (textual traces) to a prior violent mimetic conflict. For Girard, founding myths refer to a prior, historical, founding violence. Each real, historical crisis, being a mimetic phenomenon, is experienced primarily as a loss of social differentiation and a rapid escalation and contagion of violence. It is typically resolved, at its highest pitch, by an act of generative violence: the violent expulsion of a marginal member/members (the scapegoat) by the whole group. According to Girard 'scapegoating' is best understood as something unthought, a 'mechanism'. Mimetic conflict appears in the texts considered under a variety of motifs which indicate undifferentiation (rivalrous twins, the 'monstrous doubles' of myth) and sudden, terrifying phenomena such as plagues, pestilence, floods and fires. For Girard, representations of the mimetic crisis are invariably misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the crisis itself. The mimetic principle which provokes and fuels each crisis is not recognised or understood. What is represented in the text are the effects of each crisis, the innumerable conflicts which were provoked and diffused by mimesis.

Associated with the early Franciscan movement, and especially Saint Francis of Assisi, are a body of texts – historical narratives, biographies or *legendae*, poems, *Rules* – and a considerable body of work which represent the authentic writings of the Saint. It is my contention that these historical texts invite a Girardian reading. Indeed, the texts associated

[4] G. Vanheeswijck, cited in Michael Kirwan S.J., *Girard and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009) p. 7.

with the early Franciscan movement achieve a certain clarity and coherence when approached through the lens of mimetic theory. A Girardian reading of the early Franciscan movement serves to clarify the historical concerns and theological values which brought the movement into being and determined its evolution. It is my contention that core theological and social concerns of the early Franciscan movement are helpfully retrieved and foregrounded by means of a Girardian reading. This is achieved, in part, by bracketing the dominant romantic and hagiographical interpretations of the early Franciscan sources, interpretations which tend to obscure these same core concerns. Though I will draw on historical sources this thesis is not a work of historical theology. Using the sources with discretion I aim to avoid unjustifiable and anachronistic assertions. My purpose is to argue that a Girardian reading of the texts offers the early Franciscan movement a fresh theological coherence and indicates a continuing relevance for Franciscan theology in the early twenty-first century. The retrieval of Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement from narrowly hagiographic or romantic representations, and their translation into the categories of mimetic theory, afford a movement of the early thirteenth century an uncanny relevance in the early twenty first century.

The Terms and limits of a Girardian Reading of early Franciscan Texts

Chapters four to seven of this thesis will draw on numerous historical texts relating to the early Franciscan Order. As I have stated above, it is not my intention to construct from these texts an alternative historical account of the early Franciscans. Rather, I propose on the basis of recent critical histories, one possible reading. It is a *Girardian* reading of historical and critical sources and may be compared to 'Liberationist' or 'Feminist' readings of an earlier theological tradition. A Girardian reading is justified on the basis that the relevant historical texts acquire a compelling coherence and are seen to be, in important ways, structurally comparable to Girard's own work. The Franciscan tradition is a living tradition. This thesis is an effort to translate foundational elements of the early Franciscan movement into a contemporary (theological) theory, concerned with the questions of desire and transcendence, peacemaking and conflict, culture and identity, inclusion and exclusion.

A critical historical approach is outside the competence of this thesis. Although the second part of this thesis will explore historical texts and historical movements in some detail, it does so as *constructive theology*. It may be objected that reading the theological concerns of the early Franciscan movement through the lens of Girard's mimetic theory is improperly contrived and artificial. In the course of his engagement with literary theory and cultural anthropology, Girard was charged with a 'brutalization' of certain texts and ethnological evidence.[5] Girard insisted that his use of the texts and evidence was justified since, overall, mimetic theory continued to advance coherent explanations for a variety of (seemingly unconnected) cultural phenomena. This thesis, while drawing on much historical research, is concerned to demonstrate the possibilities for contemporary Franciscan theology. It is not an exercise in 'brutalizing' the sources, but in reading the sources through one possible lens, and in so doing, proposing a credible and compelling theological narrative.

Arguments and Aims of this Thesis

A Girardian reading of the early Franciscan movement not only serves to retrieve and reframe a specific tradition, it also contests a criticism of mimetic theory, i.e., that it lacks a positive, social, political and historical expression. This criticism has been levelled by theologian John Milbank who has viewed Girard's project in the problematic succession of 19th century sociologists of religion. Milbank maximises Girard's foundations in the post-Enlightenment social sciences and minimises his later theological and biblical work. In Milbank's view, Girard as a post-Enlightenment social scientist offends by attempting a diachronic-scientific explanation of sacrifice and religion.[6] In Milbank's view Girard, and his 19th century antecedents, have transgressed the boundaries of their disciplines.[7] A second major criticism of Girard's project is Milbank's assertion that Girard, whilst fascinated by sacrifice, has not articulated what a *non-sacrificial* world would look like. Milbank criticises Girard's theory which emphasises the exemplary role of Jesus in refusing violence and thereby

[5] Cf. Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, p. 18.
[6] Cf. John Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice' *Modern Theology*, 12, 1, (January 1996).
[7] In taking the view that the social sciences are rightly limited to 'descriptive synchrony' and when scientists venture upon 'diachronically causal explanation or ontological claims' they 'transgress' their limits, ('Stories of Sacrifice, p. 41) Milbank is insisting upon a distinction which continues to impede the dialogue of faith and science, i.e., that science must be concerned only with *efficient causes* and must eschew all claims to a *telos*.

ultimately exposing the scapegoat mechanism. In organizing his theoretical claims around this exemplarism Girard has declined to develop a plausible theory of what a non-violent, non-sacrificial community would look like when it takes 'a collective, political form'.[8]

I will argue that a Girardian reading of the early Franciscan texts goes some way towards describing the beginning of a non-sacrificial social reality in its historical context. If, as Millbank rightly insists, we require more than a mere 'idea' of non-rivalistic imitation, we are compelled to seek its concrete historical patterns in Gospel and in Church. In Millbank's view the lack of such social patterns reduces Girard's theory to something like Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Both arguments represent for Millbank an 'extrinsicist', theoretical approach; a 'compelling conceit' which may in fact add to the devotional life of the Church, but seems ultimately suspended from any necessary grounding in the Gospel narratives.[9] Fergus Kerr argues that Girard does, in fact, make efforts to ground his theory in the biblical narratives and in the exemplary practice of Jesus, though not to Millbank's satisfaction.[10] Girard is charged by Millbank with offering no more than 'the story of one city', 'the *civitas terrena* of self-perpetuating violence' and 'its final rejection by a unique individual'.[11] However, in applying the interpretative lens of mimetic theory to the Franciscan tradition, I argue that Girard's work maps onto a specific, historical, 'collective, political form'. The core theological and ascetical commitment of the early Franciscan Order, i.e., the conscious leave-taking of social, political and ecclesial structures of power, is indicative of a deep intuition of mimetic desire and its role in conflict. The social and ecclesial structures the early Franciscan movement sought to exit I will characterise as sacrificial, in the Girardian sense, i.e., they require the expulsion of surrogate victims (scapegoats) in order to function. These same social realities make the effective Christian proclamation of peace frequently ambiguous if not null and void. In the process of escaping social and economic sacrificial systems, Saint Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan community formed an 'asceticism-for-peace'. The early Franciscan community adopted a stance towards ecclesial and social systems and the emerging urban economy of their day which was decidedly non-confrontational, consciously

[8] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990) p. 395.
[9] Cf. Fergus Kerr, 'Rescuing Girard's Argument?', *Modern Theology*, 8, 4, (1992), 385-99 (pp. 397-98).
[10] Ibid, p. 398.
[11] Cf. Ibid, p. 396.

non-sacrificial, and directed towards non-rivalrous and peaceful social relations. In the early Franciscan movement, we observe the beginnings of patterns of desire which are consciously non-rivalrous and non-confrontational, taking a 'collective, political form'.

The Girardian and early Franciscan projects amount to what Walter Wink has termed 'a long laborious exodus out of the world of violence, an exodus plagued by repeated reversals.'[12] For both the Franciscan and the Girardian projects the crucial question is – how to escape sacrificial systems without creating new sacred boundaries and being absorbed back into sacrificial systems? In Girard's long and fruitful collaboration with Christian theologians certain concepts and terms from Christian theology which were initially abandoned were later reintroduced in forms which had been nuanced, 'dematerialized', 'sublimated', 'interiorized' and 'deepened'[13]. This process allowed for a more significant engagement with classical Christian theology, (welcomed by Dennis King Keenan, Louis-Marie Chauvet and Robert Daly SJ) but also marked an opening to an as yet 'sacralised' Christian tradition. An exodus from the world of violence suggests not a complete abandonment of the 'sacred', but a long and sustained withdrawal; one frequently marked by idolatrous lapses back into the sacrificial economy. Both mimetic theory and early Franciscan practice indicate the necessity of a holistic pedagogy, i.e., mere insight into the dynamics of desire is not enough; insight must be accompanied by an *askesis*.[14]

An exodus from the world of sacred violence depends on conversion, as Girard argues on a conceptual level, and early Franciscanism demonstrates historically. To undertake an exodus from the world of sacred violence without explicit reference to the category of graced (mimetic) conversion risks a disastrous retreat into even more virulent and disguised forms of sacred violence. The Franciscan charism and mimetic theory are defined in terms of a

[12] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) p. 84. Wink's comment relates to Girard's assessment of the Hebrew scriptures.
[13] Robert Daly S.J., *Sacrifice Unveiled, The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009) p. 7.
[14] The 'sacred' in the terms of mimetic theory represents an attitude towards violence, specifically, the choice of an orderly or 'justified' violence to displace what is perceived to be a 'disorderly' or 'illegitimate' violence. The 'sacred' is not, therefore, synonymous with the 'holy' since it produces a 'deviated' or 'false' transcendence. Naïve attempts to abandon the 'sacred', or a 'sacrifice of sacrifice' can lead unwittingly to concealed and pernicious forms of sacrificial thinking and action. Cf. Dennis King Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005) pp. 10-32.

(personal, existential, as well as intellectual) collapse of faith in all 'archaic' sacrificial systems. The category of conversion occurs in Girard's early work and reappears in more explicitly theological forms throughout his career. In the early Franciscan tradition, the conversion experiences of Saint Francis are foundational. I will argue that Saint Francis's conversion may be understood as a *mimetic* conversion and argue that it produced in Francis and the early friars a shared *conversion intelligence*, comparable to what James Alison has described as the 'intelligence of the victim'.[15] The specific social and political forms of early Franciscan life may be coherently described as social expressions of this conversion intelligence. Indeed, as Giovanni Micoli notes, among the numerous episodes and diverse conversion experiences recorded of Saint Francis, the conversion experience Francis chose to emphasise in his *Testament* was 'the experience he lived through among the lepers'.[16] Francis's conversion and the specific 'intelligence' associated with it produced social and political forms distinct from the dominant social, political, and economic systems of his time, for whom, Théophile Desbonnets notes, the leper represented 'the element that was alien, irretrievable and repugnant, the physical projection, so to speak, of all the ills that society wanted to push away from itself'.[17]

The early Franciscan *forma vitae*,[18] and the work of René Girard may be read together as a dialogue between a pre-critical theological tradition and a postmodern theological-anthropology. An intuition about human desire and the possibility of overcoming rivalrous, violent conflict marks the common ground upon which both projects meet. Applying a

[15] The term is used originally by James Alison in *Knowing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2012), and in his subsequent work. According to Alison, the 'intelligence of the victim' is not 'a peculiar sort of intellectual brilliance', or 'an increase in intelligence quotient'. It is not a piece of arcane knowledge passed by a teacher to a group of initiates. Rather, it denotes an awareness that our consciousness 'has been formed in rivalry and the techniques of survival by exclusion of the other'. This 'intelligence' was always in Jesus of Nazareth and the particular way in which the Gospels are written (from the perspective of the innocent victim) indicate that, post-Resurrection, the disciples too shared this transformed consciousness. The intelligence of the victim produces specific forms of life and an idiom sensitive to our collective role in creating social order through victimizing. Cf. James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong, Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad Publishing company, 1998), pp. 79-83. It equates to what I term 'conversion intelligence' in the early Franciscan movement.

[16] Cf. Giovanni Micoli in Théophile Desbonnets, *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988) p. 11.

[17] Ibid.

[18] The term *Forma Vitae*, or 'form of life' (sometimes *forma vita*, but typically rendered in the genitive) appears in the writings of Saint Francis. It points to the specific commitments of the early Franciscan movement, such as, a creative living of fraternity/sorority, an orientation towards peace-making and voluntary poverty, a commitment to evangelism and the modelling of non-rivalrous social reciprocity.

Girardian lens to the Franciscan *forma vitae* provides a credible account of the original motivation and institutional novelty of the early Franciscan movement, its rapid expansion as a cultural force in the thirteenth century, and its ultimate failure to remain outside the sacrificial systems of wider society. If the historical 'triumph' of medieval Franciscanism signalled its return to the sacrificial systems of Church and society, it may yet be argued, that the *Vita Minorum*, the founding 'intelligence', continued to find some (obscured) expression within these same systems.

Tripartite Structure of the Thesis

Attempts have been made to describe Girard's expansive theoretical project in terms of a few core ideas or key questions. For example, Stephen Finamore proposed a five-fold division of Girard's project.[19] Michael Kirwan has described Girard's entire theoretical project more succinctly as an engagement with three simple questions: 'What causes social groups to come together and cohere successfully? What causes those groups to disintegrate? What is the function of religion in these two processes?'[20] Kirwan has furthermore indicated how these core concerns can be schematized and structured so as to explain the evolution of mimetic theory. Thus, the most common schematization of Girard's theory is tripartite, linking three core insights of mimetic theory with three major works of Girard:[21]

(1) Mimetic desire leading to rivalry and conflict (*Mensonge Romantique et Verité Romanesque*, 1961).[22]
(2) The scapegoating mechanism as a source of group cohesion and social order (*La Violence et la Sacré*, 1972).[23]

[19] Cf. Stephen Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*: *René Girard and the Apocalypse* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, 2009) p. 93.
[20] Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, p. 20.
[21] Cf. Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, p. 20. Scott Cowdell adopted the tripartite schematization in *René Girard and Secular Modernity: Christ, Culture and Crisis* (Notre Dame University, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2013).
[22] René Girard, *Mensonge Romantique et Verité Romanesque* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1961) in English translation: *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976).
[23] René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacre* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972), in English translation: *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)

(3) The power of the Judeo-Christian revelation as a vehicle of enlightenment concerning (1) and (2) (*Des Choses Cachées depuis la Foundation du Monde*, 1978).[24]

The tripartite schematization is helpful, with the caveat that the themes of Girard's early work reoccur in his later work, and developed themes of his later work occur in embryo in his early work. Scott Cowdell is sensitive to the limits of linking the stages of mimetic theory to Girard's three major works.[25] I propose, like Cowdell, to adapt the tripartite scheme to allow for a deeper exploration of Girard's work. Chapters one to three of this dissertation will broadly follow Kirwan's tripartite schematization of mimetic theory. However, to facilitate a fuller account of mimetic desire in chapter one, I will not limit myself to Girard's early work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.

My schematization of Girard's project is tripartite, organized under the categories 'literary', 'phenomenological/anthropological' and 'theological' Girard. In chapter one, therefore, I treat mimesis and rivalry as an aspect of Girard's literary work, referring not merely to an early work such as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, but also to Girard's mature work, *A Theatre of Envy*.[26] It may be observed in passing that, for some, 'literary Girard' is not a category of description or a mere stage in the development of mimetic theory, rather, it describes Girard's entire project, i.e., mimetic theory is fundamentally a literary theory.[27] Nevertheless, it is an obvious category through which to explore Girard's theory of mimesis. The three categories of my scheme broadly map onto the categories of 'early', 'middle' and 'later' Girard, but they allow for a unitary voice, even as the theory is explored in different registers and disciplines. The first three chapters, therefore, will explore Girard's work on the mimetic nature of desire, his theory of culture, and his engagement with the Gospels and Christian theology.

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[24] René Girard, *Des Choses Cachées depuis la Fondation du Monde: recherches avec J.-M. Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1978) in English translation: *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metter (California: Stanford University Press, 1987).

[25] In *René Girard and the Nonviolent God* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018) Cowdell shifts from a schematization linking the core ideas with Girard's principle works to a more fluid 'early', 'middle' and 'later Girard' schematization.

[26] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2000).

[27] Cf. Kerr, p. 399.

In **Part Two** of this thesis (chapters four to six), this same tripartite scheme will function as a heuristic device, clarifying the core values and concerns of the early Franciscan movement, in dialogue with mimetic theory. The tripartite schematization of Girard's work provides a helpful structure both to explore the core principles of mimetic theory, and to extend this exploration into a dialogue with the early Franciscan movement. The dialogue will proceed thus:

(1) Having explored Girard's critique of romantic notions of the autonomous self in literature (chapter one), I will attempt a critique of the 'romantic' interpretations of Saint Francis of Assisi, and the early Franciscan movement (chapter three). The critique of romanticism is an essential prerequisite to a genuine mimetic reading of the life of Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement. The romantic ('heroic') interpretations of Francis have dominated popular cultural representations of the saint and the movement he founded since the nineteenth century. The romantic ('heroic') Francis is still, perhaps, the dominant popular representation of the saint, having overshadowed earlier hagiographic representations. I will argue that the role of conversion (a core category of both mimetic theory and the early Franciscan movement) helps to rescue Francis and his movement from the limits of a romantic interpretation.

(2) In recent decades a new interpretation of Francis has emerged, particularly in certain critical and academic literature. In the work of Kenneth Baxter Wolf and Brian Hamilton, Francis is presented as a type of 'anti-hero'. Superficially a departure from nineteenth-century romantic interpretations, the 'hero' and the 'anti-hero' are both, from a Girardian perspective, romantic inventions. Both interpretations serve to minimize and obscure the mimetic characteristics of early Franciscan life.

Girard's second phase (phenomenological/anthropological) was an engagement with the origins of culture and the role of violence in societies. Drawing on Girard's cultural theory will enable me to deconstruct the neo-romantic figure of Francis; Francis the 'anti-hero'. Chapter five, therefore, will ground Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement in the historical/social and cultural context of the late Middle Ages. I will

explore the context of late-feudal societies of northern Italy, specifically how the economic, political and ecclesial structures functioned as 'sacred' or excluding social realities, entangled in rivalrous conflicts and reciprocal violence. By foregrounding the questions of mimetic violence and peace-making, I will argue (against Baxter Wolf and Hamilton) that early Franciscan voluntary poverty was chiefly a strategy for peace-making and non-rivalrous social relations. Franciscan voluntary poverty, understood through the lens of mimetic theory, is a social and political expression of a prior mimetic conversion, i.e., the 'intelligence of the victim', taking a social and political form.

(3) In the third phase of Girard's work, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (and especially the Gospels) are presented as the hermeneutical key which reveal what is consistently hidden in culture and especially in myth: the collective role of the community in excluding/murdering the innocent victim. Simultaneously, the Gospels reveal the absolute non-violence of God. In chapter six I will explore how early Franciscan asceticism can be understood as spiritual strategies which function to interrupt the early stages of mimetic conflict and foster a non-rivalrous social order. In this chapter I will explore the Gospel category of *skandalon*, and suggest that this concept provides a bridge between Girardian theory and early Franciscan practice.

In adopting this tripartite schematization, I hope to facilitate a mutually enlightening dialogue between a pre-critical social, religious and theological tradition, and a (theological) post-critical theory of origins. The tripartite division is methodological, not organic or essential. Rather, it serves to group themes and core concerns which are shared in both mimetic theory and in the early Franciscan tradition. It will become obvious that any treatment of Girard's mature work requires a return to themes and motifs which were introduced and examined in earlier stages of his work (hence my reluctance to limit the sweep of Girard's theory to specific moments or stages). Girard's literary method of 'shuttling back and forth' between author and text and between complementary motifs and themes gives the impression of a slow crescendo. Sandor Goodhart has observed, for example, Girard's career-long return to and

application of the Oedipus myth in each stage of his work.[28] I will argue that the dialogue facilitates a more robust, radical, and coherent reading of the early Franciscan movement (and the role of the founder, Francis of Assisi). In a mutually beneficial dialogue, the dynamics of early Franciscan thought and action are re-presented in terms of a contemporary (and influential) theory of culture. Simultaneously, Girard's insights, frequently criticized as ahistorical abstractions, are given an historical embodiment.

The first six chapters form a double 'triptych', structuring the dialogue. In chapter seven, to advance my argument that the early Franciscan movement was attempting a deliberate withdrawal from the dominant sacrificial economies of their day, I will engage with the work of Franciscan scholar, David Flood OFM, Jacques Le Goff and others. Flood, especially, has argued that the early Franciscan movement was a complex religious, social and economic movement in search of its own idiom and praxis. For Flood, the early Franciscans attempted an exodus from violent and excluding structures through a unique understanding of labour. In chapter seven I will argue that Flood's theory of early Franciscan labour supports my reading of the early Franciscan movement as a non-rivalrous, peace-making community, with its own shared (mimetic) 'conversion intelligence'. The Franciscan manner of working becomes a locus of this 'conversion intelligence' and allows us to describe how it functioned in the context of the late medieval economy. I agree with Flood that the early Franciscan movement did not successfully complete its 'exodus' and is, therefore, historically a negative as well as a positive example of non-competitive, non-violent social and political life.

Finally, I will conclude by evaluating the merits of a Girardian reading of the early Franciscan movement and consider the benefits of such a dialogue for a contemporary, postcritical Christian theology.

[28] Cf. Sandor Goodhart 'Oedipus and Greek Tragedy' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion,* J. Alison and W. Palaver, editors (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017) pp. 151-6. The Oedipus myth is used by Girard to explore mimesis in literature in the 'first phase' of his work. Girard's theory of culture ('second phase') explores Oedipus, by way of contrast to its use in Freud's psychoanalysis and Levi-Strauss's cultural anthropology. Finally, Girard explored the Oedipus myth in his theological, 'third phase'; exploring the structural similarities and differences between Oedipus and the account of Joseph in the Book of Genesis, 37ff.

Chapter One

Introduction to René Girard and Mimetic Theory

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce René Girard's work, specifically, his exploration of the mimetic nature of desire in literature. Girard's theory of mimetic desire is frequently associated with his early work, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. While drawing on this foundational work, my purpose in this chapter is to offer a more complete, less historically limited, account of Girard's theory of mimetic desire, principally in a literary register. My scheme is, like the two possible schemes mentioned in the General Introduction, basically chronological. However, it honours a characteristic mark of Girard's entire project; that, as Girard maintained:

> [e]verything came to me at once in 1959. I felt that there was a sort of mass that I've penetrated into little by little. Everything was there at the beginning, all together. That's why I don't have any doubts. There's no "Girardian System". I'm teasing out a single, extremely dense insight.[29]

Even in his early work, elements associated with the 'middle' and 'later' stages of mimetic theory are taking shape. As Cynthia Haven has observed:

> If his words are to be taken at face value – why shouldn't they be, really? – he had the glimmerings of all the future phases of his work, from imitative behaviour, to the nature of desire, to scapegoating, to lynching, to war, and ultimately, to the ends of the world, all in this intense period of several months.[30]

This chapter is divided into four parts:

1. The first part of this chapter introduces Girard in the context of a variety of mid-twentieth century concerns frequently considered influences on his work.

[29] René Girard, *When These Things Begin*: *Conversations with Michel Treguer*, trans. Trevor Cribben Merrill (Michigan: Michigan State university Press, 2014) p. 129.
[30] Cynthia Haven, *Evolution of Desire*: *A Life of René Girard* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2018) p. 112. Haven's brief summary indicates how, in mimetic theory, desire is frequently associated various forms of violence and exclusion.

2. The second part of this chapter is an exploration of the meaning(s) of mimesis and the role of mimesis in Girard's theory. Operating at both the phenomenological (genetic) level and at the level of literary representation, mimesis is, for Girard, the most significant determining principle of social and cultural processes. As I will indicate, Girard's treatment of this principle emphasises the relationship between mimetic desire and conflict.
3. Treating Girard's critique of the 'romantic' concept of spontaneous desire, I suggest the outlines of a helpful methodology for chapter four: a mimetic deconstruction of 'romantic' narratives of Francis of Assisi. Other important elements of mimetic theory, some of which are characteristic of the anthropological and theological stages of Girard's work will be introduced. Themes characteristic of Girard's mature work (e.g., how mimetic desire leads to scapegoating, the relationship between desire and reason and desire in relation to social boundaries) merit reference in relation to his literary work.
4. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the literary category of 'conversion'. A theme in Girard's early and literary work, I argue that the category of conversion ensures that Girard's project is not fundamentally a negative one, rather, Girard conceived of mimetic desire as an openness not only to what is human, but also to the divine.[31] Conversion situates mimetic theory against a theological horizon and provides another helpful bridge towards Francis and the early Franciscan movement.

René Girard: Background and Influences

René Girard (1925- 2015) began his distinguished academic career as an historian. He studied at the École des Chartes in Paris 1943-1947, specializing in medieval history and palaeography. Girard's first doctoral thesis, *La Vie privée á Avignon dans la seconde moitié du XVe siècle* (1947) was followed by a doctoral thesis entitled *American Opinion on France 1940-1943* (University of Indiana, 1953).[32] His intellectual formation at the École des Chartes was contemporaneous with, among others, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and historian

[31] Cf. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightening* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis 2001), p. 13.
[32] René Girard*, Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 191.

Emmanuel Le Roy Laduire. At this time Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Le Goff and Jean-François Lyotard were students at the Lyceé Louis Le Grande.

The wider social context of the Second World War, the humiliating defeat of France to Germany, and episodes of violent post-war scapegoating provided an epic historical background to some of Girard's central intellectual themes. Cynthia Haven has drawn attention to the national mood in post-war France, analysed by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1945. Sartre explored the 'bad conscience' of the Parisians whose wartime association with the occupying Nazi authorities became a source of unspeakable shame after the war. Haven notes that the rush to punish collaborators after the liberation of France in 1944 led to public rituals and violent acts of social exclusion, directed specifically towards vulnerable social groups. In the immediate aftermath of the war more than 20,000 women in France had their heads shaved by avenging *tondeurs*.[33]

Girard's work has been shaped, to some extent, by the great ideological struggles of the twentieth century, as well as personal experiences of exclusion.[34] His early experiences of belonging and exclusion are set against what Paul Fletcher describes as 'a pessimistic heritage of twentieth century French anti-humanism that has witnessed the emptiness and despair resulting from the failure of utopian projects in both political and intellectual contexts'.[35] Girard's work on sacrifice has tended to emphasise the 'darker side of human nature' and has been understood to parallel, to some extent, post-war 'death of God' theologies.[36]

Given Girard's typically negative treatment of human desire, and his interest in the role of violence in creating social order, it is inevitable that mimetic theory has been

[33] Haven cites Anthony Beevor's 'An Ugly Carnival', (*The Guardian*, June 4th 2009): women in France 'were among the first targets as they offered the easiest and most vulnerable scapegoats, particularly for men who had joined the resistance at the last moment […] Revenge on women represented a form of expiation for the frustrations and sense of impotence among males humiliated by their country's occupation'. Haven, p. 54.
[34] In the early chapters of Cynthia Haven's *Evolution of Desire* biographical details of Girard's formative years are provided, indicating experiences of personal exclusion against a background of wider social violence. During his schooling in Paris Girard's accent and manners marked him out as a 'Southerner' and he was treated as an outsider. Girard described his years at the École des Chartes (1943-47) as 'the worst experience of my life'. p. 28.
[35] Paul Fletcher, *The Broken Body and the Fragmented Self: Theological Anthropology after Girard*, (Doctoral Thesis, Durham University, 1999. Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1527/> p. 97.
[36] Cf. Ian Bradley, *The Power of Sacrifice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995) pp. 215-16.

considered a largely pessimistic response to mid-twentieth century conflicts. While Girard allowed that an emotional response to various forms of exclusionary violence was necessarily a component of his work, it was so, 'quite indirectly'. He insisted that the central role of generative violence (what he would describe as 'scapegoating') in his mature work was rooted not in emotion, 'but in a certain attitude towards textual interpretation'.[37] His interest in the study of violence was intellectual rather than moral or existential; violence in relation to mimetic desire served to explain and connect a variety of seemingly disparate phenomena, within a single scientific theory.[38] Efforts to explain (or reduce) mimetic theory to a post-war pessimism about human nature, or to Girard's personal experiences of exclusion, tend to obscure what Haven has termed the 'intuitive genius' appreciable in his early work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Here, and in his later work, he demonstrates the capacity to integrate a variety of observations, insights and research into robust and fertile argument.[39] Mimetic theory, according to Girard, emerged from a unique approach to the text. He insisted, in what was at that time an unfashionable assertion, that the text can have a real relation to cultural dynamics and historical events.

French academic culture during the mid to late 1940s has been described as an 'intellectual environment still dominated by, yet emerging from, the shadow of Sartre's humanist existentialism'.[40] Robert Doran has explored the influence of Sartre on the early work of Girard.[41] Both Girard and Sartre are drawn to questions of desire and authenticity, but, whereas Sartre uses the categories of existence and essence, Girard's work is defined by the concepts of Self and Other. Thus, Girard gives priority to the concept of *alterity* over that of *being*.[42] As Girard developed his ideas of how social order is determined by group violence

[37] Rebecca Adams and René Girard, 'Violence, Difference and Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard' in *Religion & Literature*, 25, 2 (1993), 9-33 (p.13) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059554> Accessed: 20-12-2018.
[38] Cf. René Girard, *The Ideas of René Girard: An Anthropology of Violence and Religion*, edited by David Cayley (Wrocław: Amazon Fulfillment Poland, 2019) p. 101.
[39] Cf. Haven, p. 64. Haven explores Girard's experience of living in the segregated American South in the 1950s, where racially motivated mob violence was not uncommon. Girard rejected the suggestion that his scapegoat theory developed primarily from his experiences in the segregated South. Cf. René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes,* trans. By M. B. DeBevoise (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2014) p. 128.
[40] Fletcher, p. 88.
[41] Robert Doran, 'René Girard's Concept of Conversion and the "Via Negativa": Revisiting "Deceit, Desire and the Novel"' in *Religion & Literature*, 43, (2011), 170-79.
[42] Ibid, p. 176. Privileging alterity over being is characteristic of a postmodern approach.

against an innocent victim(s) he came to disassociate himself from Sartre's political views, specifically Sartre's dream of the 'mobilized crowd'.[43]

Girard's academic formation in France was influenced by Alexandre Kojéve's lectures on the philosophy of Georg W. F. Hegel, particularly Hegel's understanding of consciousness and desire in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[44] In Hegel, desire is both intentional and reflexive, always directed to the object or to the Other, and at the same time, it is a mode or process in which the subject is discovered and articulated. Hegel's conception of the subject has been compared to the fictional Don Quixote: 'an impossible identity who pursues reality in systematically mistaken ways.'[45] Judith Butler argues that Hegel's philosophy (for Kojéve) provided a context for enquiry into certain questions relevant to post-war society in Europe, specifically, a way to discern reason in the negative, that is, to derive the transformative principle from every experience of defeat. The destruction of institutions and ways of life, the mass annihilation and sacrifice of human life, revealed the contingency of existence in brutal and indisputable terms. Hence, for Butler, the mid-twentieth century turn to Hegel among many French intellectuals can be seen as an effort to excise ambiguity from the experience of negation.[46]

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* antecedent influences, such as Sartre and Hegel are present, but important concepts are already reinterpreted. Whereas Hegel sacralises violence, placing it at the centre of the structure of desire, Girard avoids this, leaving open the possibility of desire without violence.[47] The Master/Slave dialectic is apparent in Girard's presentation of mimetic desire, but Hegel's concept of desire as the desire to be desired/recognised is replaced by the principle of triangular desire. Sartre's ontological terminology is evident throughout *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, but Girard's work is not pursuing Sartre's dialectic between existence and essence (between the 'for-itself' and the

[43] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 17. Haven notes that Sartre 'valorizes "Terror against the traitor" and "the practical bond of love between the lynchers". According to Haven, Sartre 'reflects the same dynamic that had dismayed Girard, but he celebrates it, rather than renounces it'. Haven, p. 74.
[44] Cf. George Erving, 'René Girard and the Legacy of Alexander Kojeve', *Contagion*: *Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture,* 10 (2003), 111-125.
[45] Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire, Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) p. 23.
[46] Cf. Butler, p. 62.
[47] Cf. Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), p. 33.

'in-itself'). Sartre's ontological interpretation of Self-Other relations relegates alterity to 'a secondary and contingent status', whereas, for Girard alterity is primordial.[48]

Mimesis: A Theory of Human Desire

Introducing Mimetic Desire

Girard's theory of desire breaks with the traditional understanding that our desires respond/are drawn to the inherent value which radiates from an intrinsically desirable object, a view held at least since Plato. Alternatively, desire has been understood as something innate; 'immaculately conceived' in the mind of the desiring subject. This is a view associated particularly with Romanticism. In his classic work of literary criticism, *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque*, Girard, as the title suggests, distinguishes between the 'novelistic truth' of 'borrowed' or mediated desire, and the 'romantic lie' of spontaneous desire.[49] Girard asserts that both the 'objective and subjective fallacies' of desire depend 'directly or indirectly on the lie of spontaneous desire' and the illusion of subjective autonomy.[50] The true nature of desire is 'triangular', having a subject, an object, and a model, who mediates desire. The 'lie' of spontaneous desire may be observed in the relatively uncomplicated interactions of children in a nursery. One child's initial interest in a particular toy frequently excites the interest of another child. The initial interest hardens into desire as each child unintentionally confirms for the other the value of the toy. Attempts to appropriate the desired object provoke reciprocal gestures of violence, further confirming the value of the desired object. Among children mimetic rivalries are usually ended by the intervention of an adult (familiar proxy of the law) who attempts to separate the rivals from one another and from the toy. Not uncommonly the adult may adopt a loud, reproving tone of voice, 'ensuring that a certain violence will attach to the empirical apprenticeship of possession'.[51] This is the essence of 'triangular desire': 'The mediator's prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value. Triangular desire is the desire which transfigures its object'.[52] Girard

[48] Doran, p. 176.
[49] Cf. Girard, *Deceit,* note on pp. 16-17 for Girard's treatment of the terms romantic and Romanesque.
[50] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 16.
[51] Cf. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1995) pp. 116-17.
[52] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 17.

consistently ranks all literature according to its success in exposing the lie of spontaneous desire and simultaneously revealing the role of the mediator: 'Only the great artists attribute to the mediator the position usurped by the object; only they reverse the commonly accepted hierarchy'.[53]

Mimetic theory has its proper 'grammar', which is somewhat fluid.[54] The mediation of desire is 'external' if the subject and model occupy different worlds (i.e., do not share physical and psychological proximity) and are unlikely to come into close contact with each other, or the desired object. Contrariwise, 'internal' mimesis indicates a greater risk of conflict, since the subject and the model inhabit the same world and their reciprocal gestures tend to accelerate into *acquisitive* desire (mimesis of appropriation).[55] When desire is acquisitive the rivalry becomes acute. As mimesis drives desire the desired object may drop entirely from view or may be destroyed as 'each rival becomes for his counterpart the worshipped and despised model and obstacle, the one who must be at once beaten and assimilated.'[56] Such rivals are typically termed 'twins' since from the point of view of the antagonism, nothing or next to nothing distinguishes them: 'Each looks on the other as an atrociously cruel persecutor. All the relationships are symmetrical; the two partners believe themselves separated by a bottomless abyss but there is nothing we can say of one which is not equally true of the other'.[57] Acquisitive mimesis divides two or more individuals by inciting competition for the desired object. *Conflictual* desire has the effect of uniting two or more individuals, forming alliances against a marginal individual or group, whose violent expulsion has the result of reconciling the community and restoring social differentiation.[58]

Our desires and our sense of self are inextricably linked. Through desire, our sense of self is continuously borrowed from, or mediated through, the social Other (model or rival). While romantic literature maintains the illusion of spontaneous desire and of a quasi-divine

[53] Ibid, p. 14.
[54] Girard tended to speak of 'metaphysical desire' more in his earlier work. 'Imitative desire' and 'mimetic desire' are used interchangeably.
[55] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 8-19
[56] Ibid, p. 25.
[57] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 100.
[58] Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 26-27.

autonomy, the social 'other' is in fact what constitutes my sense of self.[59] The social Other 'reproduces itself effectively in us as highly malleable participants', largely unnoticed and unacknowledged.[60] 'Desire according to another, as opposed to desire according to oneself' constitutes the subject.[61] One's subjective sense of independence from the model depends on an unconscious 'unknowing' or 'forgetfulness'. Following Girard, James Alison asserts that without this forgetfulness, 'the "me" formed by desire could not come into existence'.[62] The nonrecognition of the Other's role in my genesis is unproblematic if the Other is taken as model and not as rival. However, if the other is taken as a rival, not as a model, 'this "unknowing" becomes a self-deception, something pathogenic. It becomes an insistence on the radicality of the "me" as being the origin of its desire […] the "me" tries to identify itself over against others, in reaction to whom it is constituted'.[63] The idea of a 'borrowed' sense of self, which is still a true or authentic self, is analogous to the concept of autonomy in creation. In his work on the doctrine of creation, Simon Oliver writes, 'creation is autonomous because it is not God, but that is no autonomy at all because creation's "otherness" is always received from God in his act of creating *ex nihilo*. God "holds back" creation from himself in order that creation can be itself'.[64] Just as, in an absolute sense, the only autonomy possible in creation is the autonomy we participate in through God's gift, so too, the only self we can lay claim to is the self we have 'borrowed' from the Other.

For Girard, triangular or mediated desire bears upon, but does not void our freedom. Indeed, the ability to describe and distinguish mimetic desire, to sift through the debris of human conflict and discover rivalrous tendencies and the evidence of borrowed desire, as the great writers do, indicates that the desire which shapes my sense of self is not identical with *the self*. If the mimetic mechanism is a closed, natural system, as Girard argues, then our freedom to step outside this system requires an intervention from outside the system, a

[59] Cf. Ibid, pp. 28-9.
[60] James Alison, *Palgrave,* p. 2.
[61] Cf. Girard, *Deceit*, p. 4.
[62] Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* p. 32.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Simon Oliver, *Creation, A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2017) p. 146. The analogy only goes so far: God is absolutely different from what God creates, whereas the human self is a contingent self, mediated through other contingent selves.

supernatural revelation.[65] Even so, within the exigencies of mimetic desire, and assisted by supernatural grace, Girard asserts that there is a real human freedom.[66] It is not clear how a person adopts her mimetic model and how the chain of mimetic desiring begins.[67] Girard stated that,

> People influence one another and, when they're together, they have a tendency to desire the same things, primarily not because those things are rare but because, contrary to what most philosophers think, imitation also bears on desire. Humans essentially try to base their being, their profound nature and essence, on the desire of their peers.[68]

An awareness of the 'other', and with that, some awareness of one's own ontological lack gives birth to desire.[69] Whereas our appetites automatically suggest their own object, our desires have no immediate object, therefore, the subject looks to the 'other' to 'inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire […] being'.[70] Mimetic desire, which 'unthematically aims at being' has been translated by later Girard (and Girardians) into the quest for transcendence, an explicitly theological category.[71] When Girard wrote of 'metaphysical desire' he used the term in a partly ironic way. His aim was not to discount metaphysics in a deconstructionist manner; however, he was convinced that appeals to 'metaphysics' frequently masked or misread, a real, prior, mimetic conditioning. When metaphysical desire is unshackled from a proper anthropological grounding, it invariably creates the illusory autonomous self of romance.[72] Despite a tendency to emphasise the conflictual nature of mimetic desire in his early literary work, Girard increasingly understood mimetic desire to be the necessary condition for a relationship with God.[73] In terms of human

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[65] Cf. *Things Hidden*, p. 435. Paisley Livingston accepts that 'the mimetic figures Girard has described amount to a fundamental discovery because they indeed model important features of patterns of social interaction.' However, unlike Girard, he insists that the mimetic mechanism need not be a closed system, but rather a 'self-organizing system', allowing for the mimetic patterns Girard described, but capable of change on account of 'diverse processes and factors in human existence'. Cf. *Violence and Truth*, pp. 125-28.
[66] Cf. Girard and Adams, p. 23.
[67] Cf. Loughlin, 'René Girard', p. 97.
[68] Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 11.
[69] Cf. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 164.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Cf. Petra Steinmair-Pösel, 'Original Sin, Grace, and Positive Mimesis' in *Contagion*, 14 (2007), 1-12 (p. 4).
[72] Cf. Erving, pp. 117-18.
[73] Cf. Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* pp. 22-33. A capacity for transcendence, i.e., the conditions for 'ontogenesis' in humans is based in our prior capacity for sociogenesis and psychogenesis, both possible only through repetition or mimesis in space and time. Therefore, mimesis makes possible an openness to the concept of being, and openness to God. Cf. Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 13.

relations, the desire for the model is typically mistaken for the desired object, an object whose value increases the more it is withheld:

> Once he has entered upon this vicious circle, the subject rapidly begins to credit himself with a radical inadequacy that the model has brought to light, which justifies the model's attitude to him. The model being closely identified with the object he jealously keeps for himself, possesses – so it would seem – a self-sufficiency and omniscience that the subject can only dream of acquiring. The object is now more desired than ever. Since the model obstinately bars access to it, the possession of this object must make all the difference between the self-sufficiency of the model and the imitator's lack of sufficiency, the model's fullness of being and the imitator's nothingness.[74]

According to Girard, in the later novels of Dostoyevsky, a painful existential void makes the hero dream of absorbing and assimilating the mediator's being: 'He imagines a perfect synthesis of his mediator's strength with his own "intelligence". He wants to become the Other and still be himself […] the wish to be absorbed into the substance of the Other implies an insuperable revulsion for one's own substance'.[75] The 'traces' of desire are within the social realities which our desires are continuously manufacturing and replicating.[76] The linguistic and cultural realities our desires create (and recreate) encourage our 'forgetfulness', providing the subject with an endless supply of apparently 'authentic' identities, over against other opposing or less authentic identities. Mimetic desire moves unseen through the cultural realities it produces, as Paul Griffiths has stated:

> A world is learned as the house of language is entered and its taxonomies (this is a dog, that is a sunset, here you fall on your knees, there you curse, this is disgusting, that is beautiful) spins the child's cognitive and affective web with threads so strong that they seem given rather than made, natural, rather than a matter of technique or artifice. Culture thus brings, experimentally, the very order of things into being and shapes the individual's desires to harmonize with that order.[77]

The Meanings of Mimesis

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[74] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 296.
[75] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 54.
[76] Cf. Andrew McKenna, 'The Ends of Violence. Girard and Derrida', *Lebenswelt*, 1, (2001), 112-126 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279489919_The_ends_of_violence_Girard_and_Derrida>
[77] Paul Griffiths, cited by Grant Kaplan, 'Saint Versus Hero: Girard's Undoing of Romantic Hagiology' in *The Postmodern Saints of France: Refiguring the 'Holy' in Contemporary French Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) pp. 153-163 (pp. 154-55).

Mimesis as a Genetic Principle

Mimesis, has a variety of meanings and has been described as 'having the body of an eel'.[78] For Girard, the mimetic principle is not an exclusively human phenomenon.[79] Girard's use of the term mimesis is particular and even 'idiosyncratic', embracing the observable forms of imitation across a variety of species of biological life, and the aesthetic and the social expressions of representational mimesis in human beings.[80] At the biological level Finamore observes that,

> when a harmless insect evolves the colours of a stinging insect in order to discourage predators, using its new colouring to deceive them by representing itself as something else, the process involved is mimetic. The lie, the false representation, is responsible, to some extent at least, for the insect's improved prospects of survival and thus for its improved performance as a species.[81]

At this elementary, purely biological level, imitation *misrepresents* reality and functions competitively, as a strategy of species survival. The fundamental drive toward imitation or mimesis is a characteristic of many animal species. This imitative drive achieves exceptional results in humans, far beyond the elementary forms of mimicry observed in other species. Girard has noted that 'there is nothing, or next to nothing in human behaviour that is not learned and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings ceased imitating all forms of culture would disappear'.[82] The anecdotal and observed instances of mimesis in human behaviour have received significant confirmation from recent research in neuroscience.[83] Grant Kaplan cites Scott Garrels's conclusion on this research: 'Human infants are thought to be immersed in a rich social matrix of self-other reciprocity and intersubjective experience

[78] Graham Ward, 'Mimesis: The Measure of Mark's Christology', *Literature and Theology*, 8, 1 (1994), pp. 1-29. (p. 3) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23924717>
[79] Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 32.
[80] Cf. Finamore pp. 59-83. Girard's sense of the term *mimesis* exceeds its normal use in literary criticism (representational mimesis). Indeed, for Girard, representational mimesis is but one category of the wider phenomenon of mimesis.
[81] Finamore, p. 62. Finamore notes that Girard sees mimesis as a tool for survival functioning somewhat differently in human societies: 'we use mimetic phenomena to protect ourselves from our proclivity to violence'. Ibid.
[82] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 9.
[83] Cf. Scott Garrels, 'Scientific Evidence for the Foundational Role of Psychological Mimesis' in *Palgrave*, pp. 430-38.

from the very beginning of life.'[84] Kaplan states that humans 'do not learn to imitate as an act of departure from an earlier, more spontaneous autonomy; imitating itself is innate to human nature, as Girard had argued before this ground-breaking research'.[85] Girard's theories have benefitted from corroborating evidence in developmental psychology, neurobiology and evolutionary theory.[86] At the end of his career, Girard continued to insist that scientific discoveries aligned with and supported the philosophical and theological claims of mimetic theory.[87] If Hegel considered desire to be 'the "engine" of world history',[88] Girard insists that the 'engine of history' is 'fuelled' by the genetic datum of mimesis: 'imitation is the initial and essential means of learning; it is not something acquired later on. We can only escape mimetism by understanding the laws that govern it'.[89]

Since mimetic theory has as its object a genetic principle accessible to scientific study, Girard claims his theory of desire avoids the 'metaphysical postulate of absolute human specificity, still present in Marx and Freud, without espousing the simplistic assimilation of man and animal practiced by the ethnologists'.[90] Mimetic theory is not, however, reductive in the sense of 'explaining away' the human capacity for transcendence.[91] Perhaps Girard's most controversial move was to insist that a close reading of the Gospels provides the most compelling justification for mimetic theory. In this sense, the Gospels surpass the ordinary human sciences, without abrogating them. Mimetic theory brings together under the category of 'imitation' or 'mimesis' all the phenomena which specify human society and animal behaviour 'as well as the first concrete means to differentiate the two, concrete in the sense that all observable analogies and differences between the two types of organizations become intelligible'.[92]

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[84] Grant Kaplan, *René Girard; Unlikely Apologist*: *Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016) p. 18.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Cf. Depoortere, pp 63-83. Author cites an extensive range of scientific studies which add support to Girard's mimetic theory.
[87] Girard, *Battling to the End*: *Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. By Mary Baker (East Lancing: Michigan State University Press, 2010) *Introduction*, x.
[88] Cf. Butler, p. 45.
[89] Girard, *Battling, Introduction*, x. Girard, at times over-emphasizes the scientific nature of mimetic theory; the 'laws' of mimesis. However, an intellectual understanding of the laws of mimetic desire are clearly not sufficient to escape the conflictual possibilities of mimesis. Girard has supplemented the ordinary sense of knowing with the theological categories of graced conversion/apocalypse and asceticism.
[90] Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 35.
[91] Cf. Livingston, *Violence and Truth*, pp. 122-125.
[92] Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 35.

Representational Mimesis in Classical Literature

Aristotle notes the dual role of mimesis both in how a work of art or literature functions, with respect to the world 'out there' and as 'an anthropological *a priori*, whereby human beings were educated and socialized'.[93] Aristotle understood the aim of art as the completion of nature (e.g., the production of tools) and the *imitation* of nature, i.e., the production of an imaginary world which is an imitation of the real world.[94] For Aristotle mimesis allows humans to not merely imitate nature as we find it, but to complete and idealize it. Inasmuch as others are our models and we are prepared to imitate and learn from them, society advances pacifically. Aristotle's view of mimesis is markedly less contemptuous than Plato's, but still, it fails to account for the role of conflict and rivalry in imitation. Frederick Copleston suggests that, '[n]ot believing in Transcendental Concepts, Aristotle would naturally not make art a copy of a copy, at the third remove from truth'.[95] For Copleston, Aristotle's more positive understanding of imitation and of art 'inclines to the opinion that the artist goes rather to the ideal of the universal element in things, translating it into the medium of whatever art is in question'.[96]

Girard perceives in Aristotle, and especially in Plato, an anxiety expressed as contempt, for imitation. Girard argues that this disdain was based, not so much on the abyss between ideal forms and less truthful, imitated forms, but on the more urgent dangers of violent conflict, always inherent in rivalrous (acquisitive) mimesis.[97] For Girard, Plato carefully avoids addressing acquisitive mimesis in the *Republic*, and he 'eventually refuses mimesis, because he knows the danger of conflict behind imitative ideas and practices, which are not simply related to art, but to human affairs in general'.[98] Girard argues that the ancient Greek authors intuited the dimension of conflict in mimesis but carefully avoided opening the

[93] Graham Ward, referring to Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1448a, 1448b) 'Mimesis', *Liturgy and Theology* Vo. 8, No. 1 (March 1994) https://www.jstor.org/stable/23924717 p. 3.
[94] Aristotle, *Physics,* (199a 15): 'Art […] imitates the works of nature' and 'art […] completes that which nature is unable to bring to completion'. Cf. Ibid.
[95] Frederick Copleston*, A History of Philosophy, Vol. I, Greece and Rome* (London: Search Press, 1976) p. 360.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Cf. Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 32,
[98] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 43. Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee, (London: Penguin Classics, 1955) 395e-396b.

'mimetic wound'.[99] It is here that Girard's treatment of mimesis is notably original: the imitation of the desire of the Other leads invariably to reciprocal gestures of appropriation, with respect to the desired object. By imitation, our mediated or borrowed desires are habitually trained on objects whose value increases the more they are withheld. While Girard's work engages with representational mimesis, it is the link between mimesis and victimhood that fascinates Girard, not mimesis itself: 'It is this insistent linking of the two sets of data about human beings – the mimeticism of desire, [and] exclusionary violence – that forms the very core of Girard's mimetic theory'.[100]

'Men Become Gods': True and False Transcendence

Girard invariably employs the term 'mimesis' in preference to 'imitation', since imitation in human beings usually connotes a deliberate, conscious activity and mimesis describes a mechanism or dynamic in which the conscious participation of the agent is not presumed. From Plato on, the term 'imitation' suggests something 'inauthentic' or patterns of early childhood learning, whereas mimesis denotes a process which continues to influence human behaviour no less in adult life than in childhood. In human behaviour imitation is frequently disguised, appearing not so much as a slavish repetition of the model, but as 'symmetries' in behaviour. For example, a model and a rival desire to distinguish themselves from each other and this desire to distinguish may produce systematically opposite gestures or behaviours. What appears to be the demonstration of difference (or indifference) is frequently a slavish and largely unconscious reciprocity. Mimesis, then, refers to forms of imitation which are frequently mistaken as distinctions or differences.[101]

In Girard's sense mimetic/triangular desire can be understood as an aspect of our capacity, drive, or instinct towards imitation. It is, therefore, a natural phenomenon which is highly developed in humans. Nevertheless, he has stated that, 'desire is not of this world'. For

[99] Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 18. Girard accepted that the risks of exploring mimesis in the contemporary West are much less than those of ancient societies, where rapid escalations of mimetic conflict were contained by arcane ritual, prohibitions and taboo. The ancient authors went as far as they safely could go.
[100] Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, p. 12.
[101] Cf. Dumouchel in Girard & Caley pp. 12-13.

Girard, to desire 'is to believe in the transcendence of the world suggested by the Other'.[102] Girard has stated that, 'there is nothing less "materialistic" than triangular desire. The passion that drives men to seize our possessions [acquisitive desire] is not materialistic; it is the triumph of the mediator, the god with the human face'.[103] Desire which produces false or 'deviated' transcendence makes us 'gods to one another', but it suggests, by way of a *via negativa*, the possibility of a true or non-rivalrous trajectory of desire, and a true transcendence. Even in his works of literary criticism Girard was compelled to describe the journey from false to true transcendence in the terms of traditional Christian faith. Dostoyevsky's Stavrogin,[104] is nothing less than the 'anti-Christ' and the 'universe of the possessed' is the reverse image of the Christian universe.[105] The entire distorted mysticism of internal mediation, has its 'luminous counterpart in Christian truth'.[106] What Girard describes as novelistic transcendence is the Christian ideal of the kingdom of God.[107]

Novelistic Truth and the Romantic Lie

From External to Internal Mediation

Deceit, Desire and the Novel, opens with an exploration of Miguel Cervantes *Don Quixote*.[108] The protagonist, having being inspired by courtly literature has decided to become a knight errant. His choice of model in this enterprise is Amadis de Gaul, whose chivalrous attributes Don Quixote ranks higher than other heroes of courtly literature; he chose the *best* model. Don Quixote's desires are directed towards an entirely fictional character and in this classic example of 'external mediation' the subject of desire and his model are fated never to meet and never to become rivals. The most likely rival for desire in the novel is Don Quixote's vassal and companion, Sancho Panza. The vassal is content to serve his master in pursuit of his

[102] René Girard, 'From the Novelistic Experience to the Oedipal Myth' in *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire,* edited by Mark R. Anspach (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004) p. 1.
[103] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 61.
[104] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994).
[105] Girard, *Deceit,* pp. 60-61.
[106] Ibid, p. 61.
[107] Cf. Doran, p. 172. Divorced from its religious interpretation, the positive attributes of the 'novelistic conversion' 'would appear to be some kind of fantastical utopianism'. Ibid.
[108] Miguel de Cervantes Saaveda, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, trans, J. M. Choen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950).

master's (and his own more modest) aims; the two never become rivals. The hero's desire, therefore, never leads to violence. Girard notes that Cervantes clearly lacks sympathy for Don Quixote's 'sermonizers', those who mock and attempt to undo his desire. Girard insists that this does not indicate that the author is *for* the protagonist: 'Cervantes quiet simply wants to show us that Don Quixote spreads the ontological sickness to those around him. The contagion […] affects everyone in contact with the hero and *especially those who are shocked or roused to indignation by his madness'*.[109] Even if strict social boundaries limited the range of mediators of desire in Cervantes's novel, yet, the characters who encountered the protagonist were not unaffected by Don Quixote's desires.

Given the social and cultural context of the novel, external mediation fails to provoke in the characters the deeper and more violent emotions which characterise desire in modernity. The novels which describe the shift from external mediation to internal mediation (Proust, Flaubert, Stendhal, and pre-eminently, Dostoyevsky) are invariably tending towards more intense hatreds: 'Starting with Cervantes's hero, who is steadfast in his loyalty and always identical with himself, we gradually come down to the underground man, a human rag soaked in shame and servitude, a ridiculous weather-vane placed atop the ruins of "Western humanism"'.[110]

This descent into conflict was, in Girard's view, the result of the rising tide of democratic and social revolutions which weakened institutional absolutism and eroded long-established social distinctions in the West. Between the novels of Cervantes and Dostoyevsky a world of intense and often concealed rivalry, envy, snobbery and hatred came into being. Girard states that:

> Don Quixote and Mme. Bovary as yet experience no metaphysical disappointment in the proper sense of the term. The phenomenon appears with Stendhal. The moment the hero takes hold of the desired object its 'virtue' disappears like gas from a burst balloon. The object has suddenly been desecrated by possession and reduced to its objective qualities, thus provoking the famous Stendhalian exclamation: 'Is that all it is?'[111]

[109] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 97.
[110] Ibid, p. 94.
[111] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 88-89.

Girard associates the modern period with new and typically more negative patterns of desiring; patterns of desire which accompanied and accelerated the collapse of social boundaries.[112] As traditional class boundaries and all forms of absolutism gave way to more democratic forms of social life, the modern age in literature gave birth to the misanthrope, the coquette, the snob and the underground man; figures whose desires must be more creatively concealed from their models. These figures herald the rise of internal mediation. The common tropes of wild children, angry young men, rebels, antiheroes, doomed romantics, life's adventurous risk takers, life's habitual losers, are likewise modern figures, who can be accounted for in terms of 'desire that has broken free of objects and become entirely obsessed with the being of models'.[113]

Desire and the Double Bind

Deceit, Desire and the Novel is methodologically similar to Girard's later work on William Shakespeare, *A Theatre of Envy*.[114] According to Kirwan, both works demonstrate Girard's method of 'shuffling back and forth between writer and works, more specifically between the earlier and later works of the subject, in search of ever clearer hints and indicators of what he has called "mimetic realism"'.[115] Girard's assertion that '[e]verything, in fact, is false, theatrical and artificial in desire except the immense hunger for the sacred',[116] is playfully exposed in *Don Quixote* where desire transforms windmills into giants and basins into helmets. It is the nature of mimetic desire to misrepresent reality and to deceive us about the quality and form of our desires.[117] When the subject and model inhabit the same worlds, such as in Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the mystification is still amusing, but the potential for conflict is palpable. Valentine invites his childhood friend Proteus to imitate him in admiring his beloved, Sylvia. Valentine's hyperbolic praise of Sylvia at first irritates Proteus,

[112] Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 423-24. Girard understood cultural differentiation in terms of the 'closure of societies linked to "scapegoat" type practices. To close is always to define an outside and an inside by means of exclusions and expulsions. As a result, the more these practices weaken, the more exteriority loses ground. Insofar as there are no more victims to close society, it's opening up; and we're heading more and more toward a mono-culture'. *When These Things Begin,* p. 57.
[113] Cf. Cowdell, *Nonviolent God*, p. 14.
[114] See General Introduction, n. 26.
[115] Kirwan, *Girard and Theology*, p. 14.
[116] Ibid, p. 83.
[117] Cf. Dumouchel, Viol*ence and Truth*, p. 4.

but Proteus is soon proclaiming his (mediated) desire for Sylvia. Proteus wonders at this dramatic change in his affections and asks: 'Is it mine eye, or Valentinus' praise | Her true perfection or my false transgression | That makes me reasonless, to reason thus?'

Having encouraged Proteus's desire for Sylvia, Valentine then resists and repudiates his friend's desires: the model becomes the rival. Girard notes that, 'in addition to the usual imperative of friendship – *imitate me* – another imperative has mysteriously appeared: *do not imitate me*. This is the mimetic 'double bind'. In the important decision of choosing a bride Valentine requires Proteus's enthusiastic support, 'a lukewarm response on the part of a close friend makes us doubt the wisdom of our choice'.[118] The desire is first encouraged and then repudiated. The romantic lie of spontaneous desire is exposed in Dostoyevsky's *The Eternal Husband*: 'the hero seems to offer the beloved wife freely to the mediator, as a believer would offer a sacrifice to the gods, in order that he might not enjoy it. He pushes the loved woman into the mediator's arms in order to arouse his desire and then to triumph over the rival'.[119] In internal mediation, the object of desire, recedes as the hero/disciple pursues the 'fascinating rival', whose being the hero dreams of absorbing and assimilating; to be the Other and still be himself.[120] What is still comedy in Shakespeare is terror in Dostoyevsky, where internal mediation tends to result in violence and murder, as the disciple and model are drawn closer together and desire is accelerated.

Desire and Rationality

Proteus asks if he is 'reasonless to reason thus', suggesting another theme of mimetic theory: that desire cannot be reduced to reason; it has its own largely unconscious but predictable grammar, i.e., it can be described in its mechanism, which is conflictual.[121] Andrew McKenna makes a similar distinction between the logic of reason and the logic of desire:

[118] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, p. 13. Girard reads Shakespeare's plays as a sustained exploration of mimetic desire, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* being an early example of Shakespeare's engagement with mimetic desire.
[119] Girard, *Deceit,* pp. 50-51.
[120] Ibid, p. 54.
[121] Cf. Girard, *Paroles Gelées*, p. 18.

> the logic of thinking is unitary: if we think the same thing, we will agree, and there will be harmony among us. The logic of desire works just the other way; it is essentially divisive, conflictual; if we desire the same thing, conflict will arise among us over its possession.[122]

Since the logic of reason and the logic of desire are distinct, mimetic theory has not developed into a positive political programme.[123] Girard denied the possibility of a Hegelian dialectic bringing violence to an end: 'Contemporary Hegelians, especially the Marxists, still nourish that hope […] But the novelist mistrusts logical deductions. He looks around him and within him. He finds nothing to indicate that the famous reconciliation is just around the corner.'[124]

For Girard, when Shakespeare irritates his rationalist readers by including irrational, marginal and superstitious details in his patrician tragedy, *Julius Caesar*, he is offering an account of political history, which is driven as much by the logic of desire as by the logic of reason. The inclusion of so many 'superstitious' details is an affront to reason and to politics as a rational enterprise. However, Girard reads mimetic desire throughout. As in the case of ancient myth, Girard considered the superstitious references and 'inconsequential signs' to refer to a rival, concealed logic at work. Political programmes, like reason itself, are children of the foundational murder.[125] Derrida's essay on Plato's *Phaedrus* supports Girard's suspicion that Western rationality since Plato has been an exercise in arbitrary exclusions and an anxious retreat from the fact of mimesis. Plato (in the voice of Socrates) excluded writing (considered as *pharmakon*, a poison/remedy), as opposed to the spoken word, the *logos*. What writing represents 'in the mute, mindless opacity of its arbitrary marks, its formal,

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[122] Andrew McKenna, 'Uncanny Christianity: René Girard's Mimetic Theory' in *Divine Aporia: Postmodern Conversations about the Other* John C. Hawley (ed.), (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 84-96 (p. 83).

[123] Terry Eagleton, among others, notes the lack of a political application of Girard's insights which he considers 'a sizable blind spot' for a thinker 'hailed as the most eminent theorist of sacrifice of our time'. Cf. *Radical Sacrifice*, p. 55. Girard's treatment is 'a grand moral gesture bought at the cost of historical specificity'. Ibid, p. 56.

[124] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 110.

[125] Cf. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, p. 208. Shakespeare's reason for including superstitious or 'inconsequential signs' in his political plays, is surely an open question and here Girard's assertion may be challenged on the grounds of a lack of historical evidence. What may seem superstitious or 'inconsequential signs' to a reader today, may not have been so in the early seventeenth century. Coppélia Kahn's review of *A Theatre of Envy* notes that 'even [Girard's] most astute, best-earned interpretations are hewn with the gigantic axe he is constantly grinding and wielding against those who haven't seen the light of mimetic desire', which include 'modern critics', 'traditional critics', 'the critics' and 'all critics'. Cf. T. C. Merrill, 'Critiques of Girard's Mimetic Theory' in *Palgrave*, pp. 455-61.

artificial representation' is mimesis: a form without content.[126] Girard and Derrida read in the structure of Western rationality an original violence and a sacrificial exclusion. For Derrida, the history of Western philosophical systems since Plato is the history of arbitrary expulsion, in the pursuit of an illusory origin.

Desire and the Scapegoat

Girard's pursuit of mimesis in literature led him beyond examples of mere comic mystification, beyond the troubling conflict of twins, and finally to the question of mimesis as sacrificial violence. In his early and literary work Girard attends mainly to the dynamics of conflictual mimesis and only later attempts to describe mimetic desire as a cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, what would become the core of Girard's cultural theory, the idea of the scapegoat, is already a recognizable motif in Girard's treatment of mimetic desire in literature.

The term 'scapegoat' entered the English language with the publication of William Tyndale's translation of the Bible in 1530.[127] The scapegoat refers originally to an atonement ritual recorded in Leviticus 16. 21-22, whereby a goat is chosen randomly and is expelled from the community into the wilderness, taking with it the sins of the community. While acknowledging the origins of the concept in ritual, Girard emphasized a double semantic sense of the term, i.e., scapegoating as an archaic ritual and, more broadly, as the 'human tendency to transfer anxiety and conflict onto arbitrary victims'.[128] It is significant that in Girard's work, *The Scapegoat*, the actual Hebrew ritual is referenced only once.[129] Thus, while attempting to associate the Hebrew ritual and other 'riddance' rites with the concept of scapegoating as it is understood today, Girard's interest is more in the *dynamic* than in its cultural origins. That is to say, Girard's references to scapegoating are typically to the non-

[126] McKenna, 'Ends of Violence', p. 114.
[127] Tyndale translated the Latin term *caper emissarius* (emissary goat) to '(e)scape goat'. In French the term is rendered *bouc émissaire*.
[128] Girard, *Things Hidden,* p. 132.
[129] Cf. John Dunnill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013) p. 152. Dunhill criticizes Girard's interpretation of the Hebrew scapegoat ritual in terms of ritual violence. He contests Girard's claim the ritual had an aggressive, sacrificial character and refutes Girard's attempt to associate the ritual with the frenzied tearing apart of a sacrificial victim, characteristic of the Dionysian ritual of *sparagmos*. Cf. pp. 150-51.

ritualized collective transference of guilt to an individual or marginal group, rather than an archaic ritual.

When describing the world of internal mediation, Girard anticipates the work of his second phase; a situation where 'everyone can become his neighbour's mediator' and 'every desire redoubles when it is seen to be shared'.[130] Acquisitive mimesis leads to conflictual mimesis and mimetic desire, fully grown, produces scapegoats. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, indicates the sacrificial logic by which social differentiation is achieved at the cost of the scapegoat's blood. Calpurnia's dream of Caesar's statue spouting blood, suggests to Caesar a violent crime. Decius reinterprets the dream as 'a vision fair and fortunate'. The statue spouting blood, 'in which so many smiling Romans bath'd | Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck | Reviving blood, and that great men shall press | For tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance'.[131] Girard observes that both interpretations are correct: the dream foretells a murder, but the murder will be cast as sacrifice and the scapegoat will bear away the ills of Rome.[132]

The sacrificial logic expressed in *Julius Caesar*, cited above, represents for Girard 'the most precious definition of the foundational murder'.[133] In his engagement with cultural anthropology Girard posited the emergence of social order from a shared (mimetic) act of generative violence. The sacrificial logic, which anticipates renewed social order, 'a vision fair and fortunate', emerging from a necessary 'sacred' violence. Girard's argument for a foundational murder, upon which all culture is established, is treated in detail in chapter two. Girard has espied in Shakespeare's work a universal but rarely acknowledged human trait: an instinctive faith in violence as *generative* or redemptive. Over an immense arc of history, Girard surmises, episodes of generative violence were gradually ritualized and repeated as *sacrifice*, and from sacrifice emerged every social and cultural institution in human history. Girard had to account for the conditions in which Shakespeare (and others) were beginning

[130] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 99.
[131] Cf. *Julius Caesar* II, 76-90. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, pp. 201-02.
[132] Ibid. Girard notes that Caesar bears the 'signs' of victimhood (physical defects, deafness, epilepsy, resembling a 'possessive trance', a wife afflicted with sterility, etc.) In the context of a mimetic crisis, such signs assist in identifying the victim.
[133] Ibid. p. 202.

to describe the violent logic upon which their own social realities were established, i.e., how, in modernity the sacrificial logic of scapegoating is increasingly exposed and undermined.

Behind the weakening of social boundaries and the erosion of archaic prohibitions and taboos which allowed an exploration of the logic of mimetic desire was, Girard asserts, the desacralizing presence of the Gospels. This is the core insight of the third stage of mimetic theory, i.e., that the Gospels have declared the violent expulsion of the victim unjust and exposed as deceitful the 'reconciliation' of conflictual mimesis and scapegoating. According to Girard's thesis the characteristics of modernity are (negatively) an intensification of conflictual desire and (positively) a deeper concern for victims, expressed in more democratic institutions and a sensitivity to marginalized individuals and groups.

Jean-Pierre Dupuy and others have challenged this thesis, specifically Girard's idea of *méconnaissance*, i.e., an essential misrecognition which allows all involved in exclusionary violence to deem their violence legitimate. Dupuy disputes this *méconnaissance,* insisting that if spontaneous acts of exclusionary violence operate under a cloud of *méconnaissance,* archaic sacrifices did not. Sacrificial rituals are burdened with artifice, too premediated to suggest a genuine *méconnaissance,* a misrecognition only removed with the Gospel revelation. Indeed, Dupuy cites the 'sacred' violence of the Atomic Age as proof that archaic violence can continue to function, without Girard's supposed *méconnaissance*.[134] In the atomic age the intense ideological rivalry of superpower 'twins' was contained by the accelerated stockpiling of enormous amounts of atomic weapons. In a world, supposedly come of age and governed by reason, a fascinating and terrifying liturgy of 'mutually assured destruction' was the sole mechanism controlling the rivalrous ambitions of the antagonists.[135] Dupuy's objection takes us to the heart of Girard's argument, since, according to Girard, the misrecognition of mimetic violence as *legitimate* violence cannot be undone by better or more knowledge; it demands the theological category of conversion.

[134] Cf. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, 'Nuclear Apocalypse: The Balance of Terror and Girardian Misrecognition' in *Can We Survive Our Origins? Readings in René Girard's Theory of Violence and the Sacred*, edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Paul Gifford (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015) pp. 253-64.
[135] Cf. Cowdell, *Nonviolent God*, p. 46. To emphasise the persistence of the sacred in an atomic age, Cowdell notes the fetish for naming terrible weapons after mythic gods, 'Poseidon', 'Pluto', 'Ariadne'. The submarine-launched ballistic missile 'Trident' evokes the sea-god Neptune.

Girard's theory represents modernity as both an escalation and intensification of many forms of mimetic conflict, and at the same time, a growing awareness of the victim. As a literary (and potentially theological) theory of modernity, it is more suggestive than conclusive. I will argue in chapters four and five that cultural and social changes which characterised the early thirteenth century offer evidence of a rapid collapse of social boundaries, accompanied by a remarkable insight into the dynamics of mimetic desire. The mimetic realism of the modern age was already anticipated in the early thirteenth century and achieved a significant social and political expression in the early Franciscan movement. Romanticism and specifically romantic accounts of Francis of Assisi have obscured and mystified the genuine mimetic insights of the early Franciscan movement. Girard's unsparing critique of romanticism may risk neglecting or obscuring those 'things hidden' which romanticism uniquely drew attention to.[136] Nevertheless, Girard's critique of romanticism offers a deconstructive tool which facilitates a more vital account of the dynamics of early Franciscanism.

The Role of Conversion in Mimetic Theory

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard insists that the great novels not only reveal mimetic desire but also offer redemption from conflictual mimesis in the form of conversion and an ascetical path away from conflictual mimesis.[137] In this respect Girard states that 'all novelistic conclusions are conversions'.[138] These conversions typically involve the protagonist of the novel electing to lead a more solitary life or, contrariwise, electing to re-join society. At a superficial level these scenarios seem to be opposed, however, what is significant in both is that they indicate in the novel a destruction of triangular desire. Thus, Girard asserts, 'true conversion engenders a new relationship to others and to oneself'.[139]

[136] Cf. Domenach, *Violence and Truth*, p. 159. Domenach notes that Girard's critique of romantic literature leaves wholly unexplored the positive role of romanticism (e.g., romanticism as 'multiplicity's protest against oneness'). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate Girard's critique of romanticism, save to acknowledge its merit in my own deconstruction of romantic representations of Saint Francis and his Order.
[137] Cf. Girard, *Deceit*, pp. 290-314.
[138] Ibid, p. 294.
[139] Ibid, p. 295.

For Girard, the collapse of the protagonist's faith in triangular desire is evidence of a comparable and real conversion in the author.[140] An author, released from triangular desire, abandons the project of self-justification when she renounces her pride and recognizes that her mediator is a person like herself. The renunciation of adoration/hatred breaks the triangular pattern of desire and represents 'the crowning moment of novelistic creation'.[141] Given the significance of conversion in Girard's literary theory it is worthy of note that Girard himself underwent a conversion experience while writing *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Girard was initially guarded about this experience.[142] In later works he referred to his conversion as a form of intelligence or understanding, specifically an understanding and acceptance of one's own complicity in the persecution of the surrogate victim. In his final book, Girard was explicit in linking mimesis and conversion: 'My conversion is what put me on the mimetic path and the discovery of the mimetic principle is what converted me'.[143]

Girard's conversion was, by his own admission, first an 'intellectual' conversion and then a 'religious' conversion, though in fact the conversion extended over several months 1958-59, and was a unitary experience. Girard's 'intellectual' conversion took place in late 1958 as he made weekly train journeys between Maryland and Philadelphia (he was lecturing at Johns Hopkins University and at Bryn Mawr at this time). Girard's weekly journey in 'clattering old railway cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad' took him past vacant lots and the scrap iron detritus of an industrial landscape. Girard later contrasted the unremarkable scenes of industrial decay viewed from the train with his own 'transfigured' mental state.[144] At this time, Girard recalls, 'the slightest ray from the setting sun produced veritable ecstasies in me'.[145] Girard describes these aesthetic episodes as 'quasi-mystical experiences'. The

[140] Cf. Girard, 'Conversion in Literature and Christianity' in *Mimesis and Theory*, pp. 263-73. In Proust's early work *Jean Santeuil,* mimetic realism is absent. In his later novel *In Search of Lost Time,* Proust describes the tyranny of false transcendence and the quasi-sacred status of the model, who is a source of fascination and whose desires are imitated and borrowed. Girard notes that between the early and the later novel Proust had ceased to frequent the fashionable salons, the places of borrowed desire, and false transcendence. The novelist underwent a personal conversion which is revealed in the new, mimetically realistic world of *In Search of Lost Time*. Girard insists that although Proust never embraced Christianity, nevertheless, he could not create a great novel without recourse to Christian symbolism. Cf. Girard, *Deceit*, pp. 310-11.
[141] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 299.
[142] Girard expressed the concern that his Christian faith has impeded the diffusion of mimetic theory and on this basis, he has at times avoided explicit reference to his faith. Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 110.
[143] Girard*, Battling,* p. 196.
[144] Cf. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 130.
[145] Ibid.

experiences were connected to a sense of enlightenment but involved no sense of moral obligation or 'any change of life'.[146] For a period of several months, Girard wrote, 'faith was for me as a blissful delicacy that heightened my other pleasures'.[147] At about this same time Girard underwent treatment for what was suspected to be cancer. The existential panic associated with this suspected cancer transformed the 'intellectual' conversion into an event of deeper spiritual and religious significance.

The anxieties surrounding his health lifted on the Wednesday of Holy Week, 1959. Girard, who had not practiced the Catholic faith since adolescence made sacramental confession that day, received Holy Communion on Holy Thursday, and on Easter Sunday he celebrated the Lord's Resurrection for the first time since his youth. He insisted that his 'intellectual' and 'spiritual' conversion had begun before his 'great Lenten scare'. He was intellectually committed to a new faith perspective before his health concerns began. Thus, Girard never doubted the motivation for his 'intellectual' conversion and looked upon the events leading up to his religious conversion as a 'dark night of the soul'. This period, providentially, coincided with the Church's Lenten period of penance and Girard suggests it was a necessary purgation, which mercifully concluded three days before Easter, 'no doubt so that I could calmly and quietly reconcile myself with the Church before the Easter holiday'.[148]

In chapter five of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard explores the disappearance and reappearance of vanity in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, presented in terms of a 'virulent cancer'. Girard's comparison of more terrifying and lethal forms of vanity with cancer indicates perhaps his own preoccupations with mortality at this time.[149] However,

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[146] 'The Anthropology of the Cross: A Conversation with René Girard' in James G. Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroads, 1996) p. 285.

[147] Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 130. Girard writes of acquiring at this time a heightened appreciation of music. The 'faith' he describes is clearly not yet Christian faith, rather, it seemed a preparation or prelude for Christian faith.

[148] Ibid, p. 131.

[149] Girard observed that Louis XIV lured the nobility to the palace of Versailles, so as to draw them into 'vain and sterile rivalries'; Louis XIV, the 'sun king' was the focus of the aristocracy's fascination and the person around whom their vain rivalries orbited, ceaselessly and pointlessly. However, once the revolution had destroyed the idea of the divine right of kings, the succession of King Louis XVI's heirs and later the accession of Louis Philippe was seen to be ridiculous. The role of imitation had passed to where the real power was held. The revolution didn't end vanity but, 'like a virulent cancer that spreads in a more serious form throughout the

the book itself, especially in its final chapters, indicates the actual contours of Girard's intellectual conversion. Girard's experience of conversion and his intellectual quest for the key to 'novelistic truth' had begun to occupy the same conceptual landscape: 'I realised I was undergoing my own version of the experience I was describing'.[150] Girard had begun writing the book 'very much in the pure demystification mode: cynical, destructive, very much in the spirit of the atheistic intellectuals of the time'.[151] By the conclusion of the work, Girard's perspective had altered.[152]

Cynthia Haven compares Girard's conversion experience to the 'kind of mental acceleration' associated with similar spiritual/intellectual conversions in figures such as René Descartes, Blaise Pascal and Simone Weil.[153] The conversion experience functions as a touchstone for further developments and applications of thought and practice and it adds to Girard an uncommon quality among post-critical theorists. Girard's intellectual project is fundamentally connected to the category of conversion. Haven notes that Girard may have become a visionary as much as a scholar, and in some ways a visionary at the expense of being a scholar.[154]

In the final analysis, mimetic theory cannot be reduced to a system of 'facts' or a truth which is grasped simply by examining the available anthropological data, or reading the great novels carefully. The anthropological data and the literature achieve an elegant and compelling synthesis once, according to Girard, the fundamental blindness is removed: one must recognise oneself as a persecutor, complicit in the scapegoating of others, and *for the same reasons* as others who scapegoat. The conversion which corresponds to the apprehension of the mimetic principle has immediate and unavoidable consequences for the individual, with respect to violence and victimhood. Mimesis refuses exceptions or exemptions with respect to violence and persecution. Dupuy's critique of *méconnaissance*

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body just when one thinks it has been removed', vanity took on new expressions among the *bourgeoise*. *Deceit*, p. 119.

[150] 'The Anthropology of the Cross', in Williams, *The Girard Reader*, p. 285.

[151] Ibid, p. 284.

[152] Cf. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, pp. 128-32. In this altered perspective the virtues of obedience, patience and modesty emerged as authentic while nothing seemed more 'conformist or more servile' than the 'hackneyed mythology of "revolt"'. p. 132

[153] Haven, p. 112.

[154] Ibid.

fails to take account of the category of conversion. The move from misrecognition to recognition involves not merely more knowledge, but an actual conversion, which explains why the archaic sacred can flourish in the Atomic Age. *Méconnaissance* is Girard's reworking of Sartre's *mauvaise foi*, an existential form of 'lying to oneself'.[155] Not only in literature, but as an historical marker, acts of conversion are 'acts of dissidence', because such acts release us from 'the biological-psychological impulse of rallying with the crowd against the stranger, the outsider'.[156] The category of conversion, at the core of Girard's literary theory, allows mimetic theory to function 'as a discourse for the converted, [operating] within a theological framework'.[157]

Conclusion

In the first phase of mimetic theory, Girard was drawn to questions of desire, identity and violence in literature. Girard argued that triangular desire accounts for a variety of human behaviours which were hitherto mysterious and opaque. The laws which govern mimesis allow for the deconstruction of romantic misrepresentations of reality, produced by mimetic desire. Girard's examples of mimetic realism ('Romans Romanesque') are drawn from the great literature of the 'modern' West. Indeed, Girard considers modernity, to be an historical epoch defined by rapid social, cultural, and economic change; a change which simultaneously collapses social boundaries and is accelerated by the collapse of these same boundaries. With modernity a new sense of the individual emerges, not merely the illusory, autonomous self of philosophy and romance, but also the individual who can resist the crowd and subverts the social order built on collective violence.[158]

To establish his argument Girard assembles an extensive body of literary witnesses, as historically and culturally diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Proust and Dostoevsky. As Eagleton and others have cautioned, Girard's work proceeds with little

[155] Cf. Dumouchel, 'Misrecognition of Misrecognition' in *Can We Survive Our Origins?* p. 278. For both Girard and Sartre this 'lying to oneself is a form of action, not merely a lack of knowledge'.
[156] Harald Wydra, 'Victims, Sacred Violence, and Reconciliation: A Darwinian-Girardian Reading of Human Peril and Human Possibility' in *Can We Survive Our Origins?* pp. 49-69. (p. 67).
[157] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 66.
[158] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 170-71.

attention to the historical specificity of his writers. Writers and texts are, to an extent, conscripted by Girard into his great mimetic project. The mimetic insights which Girard draws forth come at the cost of a wider historical reading. Girard provides the tools for a deconstruction of romantic misrepresentations of Francis of Assisi, and a mimetic reading of the saint and the movement. This reading, I argue, is more authentic than romantic and hagiographic interpretations, and by the same token, more relevant to our contemporary ecclesial and social concerns.

In his early work, Girard's treatment of mimetic desire was invariably negative and suggests, at first glance, that desire and violence are unavoidably paired. However, at the heart of the first phase of Girard's work on mimetic desire is the nascent theological category of conversion. The collapse of belief in spontaneous desire and in the quasi-divine autonomy of the subject, make possible a renunciation of 'metaphysical desire', of 'divinity' and of the mediator. Since mimetic desire cannot be avoided, in renouncing pride the subject is invited to take as her model one who will not, indeed, cannot become a rival. At the conclusion of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard intuits a way forward; patterns of desire that do not impose on us either 'an absolute solitude' or 'a return to the world'.[159] The dynamics of mimetic desire leave open the possibility of a non-rivalrous, pacific imitation, a true transcendence directed towards the non-violent God.

[159] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 295.

Chapter Two

A Theory of Culture

Introduction

In 1977 Girard published *La Violence et la sacré*, a work which had matured over eleven years and marked a new phase in the development of mimetic theory. In this work Girard put forward a novel theory of sacrifice, based on the generative role of mimetic violence, known as the scapegoat theory.[160] This theory was 'untimely' in the context of Western cultural anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s. It resembled the ambitious pretensions of an earlier generation of theorists such as James Frazer, Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille. However, in that same year, Walter Burkhart published *Homo Necans* and, independently of Girard's work, argued that 'in the formative period of our civilization […] solidarity was achieved through a sacred crime'.[161]

Drawing on the 'classics of ethnology', Girard argued that mimetic conflict had a stabilizing role in creating and maintaining social order through exclusionary violence or 'scapegoating'.[162] Girard's scapegoat theory may be briefly summarized as a mechanism by which mimesis initially provokes divisive, acquisitive rivalries and, as conflict escalates, produces a reunified social order at the expense of a single emissary victim. At the height of mimetic conflict, the scapegoat becomes the sole focus of the group's accumulated desires.[163] In the second phase of his work, Girard's articulation of mimetic theory was decidedly scientific, positivist and anthropological. This chapter will treat Girard's anthropological work under the following aspects:

[160] The concept of 'scapegoat', introduced in chapter one, is here interchangeable with the terms 'emissary victim' and 'surrogate victim'. If scapegoating represents Girard's best-known attempt to ground his theory of desire in ethnography, the Hebrew ritual which gave rise to the word is, in a number of ways, poorly matched to Girard's audacious claims about archaic religion and exclusionary violence. Cf. Mary Douglas, *Jacob's Tears: The Priestly Work of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp. 39-60.
[161] Cf. Nidesh Lawtoo, 'The Classical World: Sacrifice, Philosophy, and Religion' in *Palgrave*, pp. 119-26.
[162] Among the 'classics' Girard cites Durkheim, Tyler, Radcliffe-Browne, Robertson Smith, Malinowski and Frazer, cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 24 and Girard, *Scandal Comes,* p. 103.
[163] Cf. Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 33.

1. An account of Girard's engagement with cultural anthropology and his formulation of the scapegoat theory.
2. Girard's treatment of 'twins'. Already explored as a literary motif in the previous chapter, in this chapter I will indicate how Girard pursued the motif of twins from literature to myth and finally to cultural anthropology. In this way I will indicate both the novelty and the weaknesses in Girard's method.
3. An exploration of Girard's insights in the poetic register, indicating the rhetorical (persuasive) power of mimetic theory, outside the strictly scientific/social scientific domain.

Hominization and the Scapegoat Mechanism

From *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* to *Violence and the Sacred,* Girard's theoretical project moved from describing the dynamics of mimetic desire to an exploration of the phenomena of mimetic desire.[164] Eugenio Donato, encouraged Girard to explore the phenomenological evidence for mimetic desire in ethnography and cultural anthropology.[165] Girard insists that initially he had no intention of introducing a universal theory of culture, indeed, his resistance to 'theory' explains his caution in submitting *Violence and the Sacred* for publication.[166] Girard's theory of cultural origins, structured in terms of conflictual mimesis, seeks to offer not only an hypothesis on origins, but a 'privileged window onto our likely global future'.[167] The theory is dynamic and predictive (in a sense, *apocalyptic*), since humans have not 'outgrown' their violent mimetic origins. Even so, the mimetic mechanism is increasingly accessible to description and investigation. This second phase of Girard's work, is engaged with such questions as hominization, primatology, brain development, the role of ritual in the domestication of animals, the invention of agriculture, economic exchange, barter and gift.[168] It also raises ethical, philosophical and theological questions since, Girard asserts, the human species originated in the context of the *sacred* and our cultural identities were established on exclusionary violence. Girard claims that since the dawn of humanity 'millions of innocent

[164] Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 31.
[165] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 24. Eugenio Donato (1937-1983) was a university colleague of Girard.
[166] Cf. Girard, *Paroles Gelées*, pp. 8-9. Girard worked on *Violence and the Scared* for eleven years.
[167] Cf. Cowdell, *Nonviolent God*, p. 26.
[168] Cf. *Palgrave*, p. 5.

victims have been killed […] in order to enable their fellow humans to live together, or at least not destroy each other'.[169]

Girard's hypothesis of cultural origins concerns the primordial process known as *hominization*.[170] Hominization may be described as an historical/evolutionary cusp, in which early primates gradually became human. Girard theorizes that hominization was achieved by an advanced capacity for imitation, driving rapid neurological development. Girard asserts that as the capacity for imitation increased so too did 'the volume of the brain along the entire line that leads to *homo sapiens* […] it must have been the increasing power of imitation that initiated the process of hominization rather than the reverse'.[171] As the technical capacities of hominids increased their instinctual break on violence was lost. The ability to control violence arising from mimetic conflict became the decisive question for the survival of the species. Girard notes that:

> Animals are capable of engaging in rivalry and combat without fighting to the death because instinctual inhibitions assure the control of *natural* weapons, the claws and teeth. One can hardly believe that the same type of control was automatically extended to stones and other artificial weapons the day hominids began to use them.[172]

According to this hypothetical scenario, 'protohuman mimesis increased with brain size to a point where instinctual breaks on violence, which inform dominance patterns among other animals, were eroded beyond repair. At this point we have a creature, as Eric Gans quipped, who is "too mimetic to remain animal"'.[173] In Girard's view, modern theories of origin have tended to focus on subsidiary and derivative questions of human evolution.[174]

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[169] Girard, *Battling*, ix.

[170] Girard addressed hominization in *Things Hidden*, pp. 84-104. Scientific theories in support of the central role of mimesis/imitation in hominization have been advanced. The evolutionary course from the species Australopithecines, (a variety of hominid which existed in a static form circa 3.5 million years ago), to a new species with increased brain size, circa 2.5 million years ago, may have been initiated by the development of mimetic/imitative skills, leading to new and varied forms of life among the hominids. Cf. Depoortere, pp. 63-83.

[171] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 95.

[172] Ibid, p. 87.

[173] McKenna, *Divine Aporia*, p. 84.

[174] Cf. Girard*, Things Hidden* p. 86. Girard cites Sigmund Freud's theory of culture, with its emphasis on the control of sexual relations as an example in this respect.

Girard notes: 'Today we know that animals possess individual breaking mechanisms to ensure that combats between them seldom result in the actual death of the vanquished'.[175] In other animal groups a certain mimetic element must be present, for when the object which caused the conflict is removed, the violence does not immediately end. Girard notes, however, that the vanquished will eventually submit to the victor. In this way a wide variety of animal groups have managed to contain excessive intraspecies violence.[176] Girard regards this anomaly as the key to human specificity:

> Unlike animals, men engaged in rivalry may go on fighting *to the finish* […] An increased mimetic drive, corresponding to the enlarged human brain, must escalate mimetic rivalry beyond the point of no return […] it must have caused, when it first appeared, the breakdown of societies based on dominance patterns.[177]

Girard's hypothesis touches on the much-disputed question of whether humans are genetically predisposed to violence. Anthropologist Richard Wrangham, has asserted that modern humans are 'the dazed survivors of a continuous, five-million-year habit of lethal aggression'.[178] Archaeological evidence of violent conflict among pre-state hunter-gatherers is not, in itself, conclusive.[179] According to S. Mark Heim, if violent conflict is comparatively late in human evolution, then Girard's theory has 'the wrong time line', though 'it could still be quite accurate as an empirical description of a later "fall"'.[180] Having determined to link our violent (mimetic) origins with hominization, Girard was compelled to look for evidence primarily among the much later mythic traditions and rituals of archaic or 'primitive' societies. The quest for (universal) mythical representations of the antagonistic origins of culture made Girard's thesis anthropologically problematic. Unlike Girard, Walter Burkert, also engaged on an ambitious study of ritual, sacrifice, and culture, but limited his anthropological assertions

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[175] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 22.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Cf. Richard Wrangham, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996). p. 63. There is support for Girard's violent origins theory in Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Steven A. LeBlanc and Katherine E. Register, *Constant Battles*: The *Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage*, 1st Edition. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).
[179] Cf. Russell Tuttle, *Apes and Human Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014) finds no palaeontological evidence that our 'stem ancestors regularly engaged in intragroup and intergroup killing' p. 593. Frans de Waal has argued that the peaceful Pygmy Chimp or Bonobo, is more representative of human primate background than the more aggressive Chimpanzee. Cf. *Peacemaking Among Primates* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[180] S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006) p. 43, n. 7.

to a series of 'rigorously defined phenomena, for instance, ancient Greek ritual and myth'.[181] Furthermore, while Burkert provides 'a wealth of documentation in the form of thorough references and footnotes; Girard writes his essays seemingly without worrying about documentation or footnotes at all'.[182]

Girard represents the origins of human culture as the result of countless violent mimetic escalations, unchecked by any biological or instinctual breaking mechanism, annihilating entire groups in a violent contagion.[183] For Girard, at the beginning of the human species there is no Edenic, untroubled bliss, rather a powerful dynamic of mimesis, driving both rapid evolutionary development and, potentially, massive, unrecoverable species extinction. Girard states that 'humans cannot control reciprocity because they imitate one another too much and their resemblance to one another increases and accelerates. We have to imagine that *for these very reasons* the first human groups self-destructed'.[184] Although some archaeological evidence for sudden societal collapse has been found in Pre-Columbian settlements of North America, the causes of such societal disintegration are by no means clear.[185] Girard accepts that:

> […] we have no mode of access to the phenomena in question. Everything we can learn directly or indirectly about ritual belongs to a fully humanized universe. We are confronted with a gap of literally several million years. I will be criticized for exceeding the limits of the possible when I propose that the victimage mechanism is the origin of hominization.[186]

Since a pre-humanized universe is largely inaccessible to scrutiny, comparisons between 'primitive' and traditional societies, and modern societies must be chastened and tentative. Into the conceptual space between what may be observed and described and what must be mere conjecture, Girard situates the powerful idea of mimetic violence, that is to say, a compelling story. Fiona Bowie notes that, although he draws widely on ethnographic, as well

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[181] Wolfgang Palaver, 'Violence and Religion: Walter Burkert and René Girard in Comparison', trans. By Gabriel Borrud, *Contagion*, 17, 2012, 121-137 (p. 126).
[182] Ibid, p. 135. n. 24.
[183] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 27.
[184] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 25.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 97. Girard's theory is situated in the primordial, rather than the primeval origin of human history, i.e., he understands mimesis as already functioning in the earliest stages/ages of (primeval) human history subject to examination.

as classical material to support this theory, 'it would be fair to say that the examples are selected to illustrate the theory, rather than the theory arising from the ethnographic data'.[187]

Girard consistently associates the strict social hierarchies of 'primitive' societies with the effort to contain rapid escalations of mimetic conflict. He presents ancient societies as being perilously poised between social order and mimetic violence. The possibility of descent into violence demanded that important social relations were hedged about with rituals, taboos and prohibitions, imposing strict limits on autonomy and thus limiting the spread of mimetic desire. For Girard, modern societies are characterised by an intensely competitive ethic which has flourished in artistic creativity and in the scientific and economic spheres of social life. Girard accounts for this difference in terms of the gradual, progressive effacement of those symbolic barriers that discouraged rivalry in primitive society.[188] Modern societies increasingly abandon a wide variety of seemingly unrelated and 'irrational' rituals, prohibitions and taboos which were indispensable to earlier, traditional societies. If, as Girard asserts, all these cultural artefacts were protection against mimetic violence our freedom to abandon them without risk indicates a cultural shift of unique significance and power.

The Surrogate Victim

Culture, the Sacred, and the Founding Murder

In Girard's account, having breached the instinctual breaking mechanisms which had hitherto controlled intraspecies violence, hominids were exposed to unpredictable and uncontrolled escalations of mimetic conflict. Without language, no possible 'social contract' can be imagined as a way of creating social accord. Neither can any form of reflection or 'non-instinctual attention' be assumed. Girard's narrative begins in a (primordial) world without signs, symbols, language or representations. Humans instinctively give attention to food, sex, dominant group members: none of these in themselves account for what is specific to human beings. 'Non-instinctual attention' (the space or condition of symbolic thought, language,

[187] Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, ltd, 2000) p. 179.
[188] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden* p. 93.

culture, etc.), Girard maintains, was opened up as the result of a 'catastrophe'.[189] The catastrophe (the founding murder), and not any pre-existing characteristic of hominids alone, opened up the possibility of symbolic thought.[190]

According to Girard, the accelerated capacity for imitation among hominids resulted in a violent contagion, drawing more and more of the group into conflict. At its height, the accumulated conflicts of the group were transferred onto a random member of that group, upon whom the collective aggression was unleashed: 'when unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand'.[191] In this frenzied state any gesture to surge or rush upon the victim will provoke immediate imitation. Andrew McKenna describes the scene thus: 'The structure is a circle composed of a hallowed, inappropriable centre and mimetically gesticulating predators or appropriators surrounding it'.[192] The group are conditioned by the *double bind* of mimetic desire (take/do not take), as the mimetic doubles convene ecstatically around the now sacralised victim. Once the frenzy has subsided, the violence abates and, Girard postulates, silence follows. 'This maximal contrast between the release of violence and its cessation, between agitation and tranquillity creates the most favourable conditions possible for the emergence of this new attention'.[193]

Being a common victim, the scapegoat is the focus of the entire community's newly formed attention and the cadaver is the first object to be embraced by this new attention. As the group pass from mere reflex to reflection, the corpse is invested with the intense emotions provoked by the crisis, and its resolution. By means of a 'double transference' the group will henceforth associate the victim with the perilous conflict which engulfed the group, and its 'miraculous' resolution. This entire process is a blind mechanism, achieving a reconciliation which was never planned or anticipated and seems to depend entirely on the

[189] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 79. Girard notes that symbols (unlike signs) do not have a one-to-one relation to their referent, and to break down the indexing relation between actual referent and sign a 'cultural instrument' is required, a 'catastrophic moment in the evolutionary process, which isn't solely tied to encephalization'.
[190] Ibid, pp. 99-100.
[191] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 2.
[192] McKenna, *Divine Aporia*, P. 85.
[193] Girard, *Things Hidden*, P. 99.

victim/scapegoat. In some respects Girard's hypothesis resembles the work of Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes explores the idea of the 'state of nature' in human beings and determines that, 'if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies […] and endeavour to destroy or subdue one another'.[194] In Hobbes's view, human nature is characterized by a perceived 'equality of ability' which gives rise to 'equality of hope' in securing one's desires and from this he asserts our natural state is 'a condition of war of everyone against everyone'.[195] Girard agrees with Hobbes's view that that society emerged from a prior state of crisis, a 'dreadful struggle of all against all'.[196] However, he refutes Hobbes's idea of a 'social contract', a reasonable renunciation of desire for the sake of greater security, as manifestly ill-fitted to the reality of our violent, pre-symbolic origins. Girard frequently challenges the improbable scenario of an indistinct group of violent hominids/humans discussing the advantages of peace, in the very act of a violent mimetic conflict.[197] Raymund Schwager suggests that those who, believing in a social contract, 'put their complete trust in reason as the ideal organizer of human society' were 'already the victims of an abysmal irrationality'.[198]

Though the process which led to the scapegoat mechanism would have taken place in stages, 'perhaps the longest [stages] in all human history',[199] this was nevertheless the origin of the universal human experience of the *sacred*. It also signifies the beginning of properly human desire; desire as 'deferred or imaginary possession […] replete with its essential paradox, namely that it imitates other desires and therefore finds in them both a model and an obstacle to its gratification'.[200] The place of the corpse is the birthplace of language, in that language will be structured according to desire. Signs which represent for the community both the allure and the terror of the victim, emerge in the reflective space which the surrogate

[194] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) p. 76.
[195] Ibid, p. 80.
[196] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 79.
[197] Cf. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p, 13, p. 25. A. Kojéve, whose essays on Hegel had influenced Girard's early work, (describing desiring agents as 'negations' and 'nothingness') had also refuted Hobbes' social theory. Judith Butler notes that for Kojéve '[…] society does not arise as an artificial construct in order to arbitrate between naturally hostile desires, but society provides for the articulation and satisfaction of desires'. Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 78.
[198] Raymund Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats*? *Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. By Maria L. Assad (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000) p. 1.
[199] Girard, *Things Hidden*, P. 100.
[200] McKenna, *Divine Aporia*, P. 85.

victim has (unintentionally) created for the group. Girard wrote '[t]here is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol'.[201]

The symbolic, reconciling power of the tomb is attested by biblical scholar Joseph Blenkinsopp, in an essay on sacrifice and social maintenance. Blenkinsopp has noted that the covenant/sacrifice of Joseph and Laban (Genesis 31.43-54) may have been offered and shared on an actual tomb: 'While the cairn (*gal*), referenced nine times in this short narrative, is not explicitly designated a burial mound, burial *gallîm* are mentioned elsewhere (Josh 7.26, 8.29, 2 Sam 18.17) in general conformity with analogous rites from other cultures'.[202] Diverse texts suggest ancient cultural foundations were metaphorically and literally laid upon the victims of human sacrifice. In 1 Kings 16.34 Hiel the Bethelite, the founder of Jericho, laid 'the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segun'. This text is widely interpreted as a referring to human sacrifice.[203] The above ground tomb needed no invention; the surrogate victim lies buried beneath the first human monument, the burial cairn, the first pyramid.[204]

Girard was indebted to Durkheim who was the first theorist to significantly challenge Voltaire's characterization of religion as a 'widespread conspiracy of priests to take advantage of natural institutions'.[205] For Durkheim, 'society is of a piece, and the primary unifying factor is religion'.[206] For both Durkheim and Girard religion was not invented as society evolved, rather it is the foundation of society. Culture emerged from religion and religion from sacrifice: 'To carry Durkheim's insight to its conclusion […] religion is simply another term for the surrogate victim, who reconciles mimetic oppositions and assigns a sacrificial goal to the mimetic impulse'.[207]

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[201] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 83.
[202] Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Sacrifice and Social Maintenance' in *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004) p. 58.
[203] Cf. Haven, *Evolution of Desire*, p. 155.
[204] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 83.
[205] Ibid, p. 63.
[206] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 347.
[207] Ibid, p. 348.

The first use of signs emerge under a cloud of misunderstanding/misrecognition and, indeed, this *méconnaissance* is essential to the functioning of the scapegoat mechanism.[208] To observe the mimetic process at any stage is to collapse the scapegoat mechanism and, thereby, interrupt the violent process which typically transforms a mimetic crisis into renewed social order.[209] The mechanism depends upon the unanimous misunderstanding of the group as to the guilt of the scapegoat. The victim may be guilty of *some* crime, but is always innocent of the crime which the community attributes to her, i.e., the sole responsibility for a sacrificial crisis involving the entire community.

Ethnologists of the 19th and 20th centuries have described and attempted to categorise primitive rituals and frequently declared them to be impervious to rationality.[210] According to Schwager, ethnologists 'could never give a satisfying answer to the question of why men and women of the most diverse "primitive" cultures placed such great importance on ritual actions and became terrified when these were not painstakingly observed'.[211] Girard attempted to explain this phenomenon by defining 'the sacred' as the 'sum of human assumptions resulting from collective transferences focused on a reconciliatory victim at the conclusion of a mimetic crisis'[212]. Prohibitions, taboos, rituals and myth (the concrete expressions of those 'human assumptions') are perfectly meaningful as long as social stability depends on these collective transferences produced by the surrogate victim. The precise repetition of ritual is explained by the community's need to repeat the original, spontaneous act of exclusionary violence as each new sacrificial crisis loomed:

> All those aspects of the original act that had escaped man's control – the choice of time and place, the selection of the victim – are now premeditated and fixed by custom. The ritual process aims at removing all element of chance and seeks to extract from the original violence some technique of cathartic appeasement.[213]

[208] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 59-64.
[209] Cf. Ibid, p. 142.
[210] Girard cites the approach of Hubert and Mauss. Cf. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function,* trans. W. D Halls (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), and based on their work, the judgement of Claud Lévi-Strauss in *La Pensée Sauvage*: 'because sacrificial rites have no basis in reality, we have every reason to label them meaningless'. Cf. *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 6.
[211] Schwager, *Scapegoats* p. 6.
[212] See General Introduction, n. 3.
[213] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 114.

The requirement of *precise* repetition of ritual actions can be observed in biblical texts such as the rite of ordination, carried out over seven days (Leviticus 8. 14-36) and the setting up and anointing of the tabernacle, and the robing and anointing of priests (Exodus 40. 16-38). In the Exodus text at each stage of the ritual, it may be noted, Moses meticulously 'did as the Lord commanded him' (vv. 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, and 32) to complete the ritual act without deviation.[214]

In Girard's hypothesis the founding murder is not strictly a social reality, except in the sense that a group of hominids are involved.[215] It is a spontaneous irruption of violence which produces over time, fortuitously, socially beneficial results. There is then, a substantial similarity and a real dissimilarity between the founding murder and subsequent sacrificial rituals. According to Girard, the scapegoat mechanism produces a double substitution; firstly the (unconscious) substitution of one member of the community as victim and (supposed) instigator of the community's crisis. Secondly, at a later stage, the community (undergoing a 'sacrificial' or mimetic crisis) assigns to a particular victim the ritualistic role of scapegoat. This second ritualistic substitution is super-imposed on the first. The ritual victim was typically a marginal figure, a member of the group bearing some arbitrary, identifiable 'signs' of the victim. The scapegoating of a marginal figure could be relied upon to create the required unanimity without, however, provoking retaliation/revenge from within the group.[216] The two actions (one completely spontaneous, the other carefully orchestrated) are linked by the mimetic nature of sacrifice and the fascinating power of generative violence to restore peace

[214] Cf. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vols I and II, edited by Raymond E. Browne, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1970) p. 66.

[215] Freud's influence on Girard is to be observed in the idea of the founding murder. Freud put forward the idea of a founding murder in *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001). Freud returned to Frazer's observation that natural instincts do not need to be reinforced by specific laws and prohibitions, and thus the taboo of incest is not instinctive, but a cultural formulation, indeed the origin of ritual practices and culture. p. 145. Freud identifies the founding murder with the murder of a primal father by a group of excluded sons. Freud surmised that the sons had united (perhaps unifying by achieving command over some new weapon and thus achieving an increased sense of power). The sons 'killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde'. p. 164. Freud suggested that the primal father was both a feared and an envied model. In devouring him, the sons achieved identification with him and 'the sons created out of a filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism, murder and incest'. p. 166. Adopting the taboo against incest proved the essential break on violence between fathers and their sons, generated by their competition for the most accessible females, their mothers and sisters. Girard challenged Freud's application of the founding murder on the basis of its failure to account for repetition, as the murder becomes increasingly distant in time and Freud's invention of the 'unconscious' as a mysterious repository, wherein to locate all that he cannot explain.

[216] Cf. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 13.

and social differentiation.[217] Rituals cannot therefore be understood in reference to other rituals, since each ritual bears the arbitrary characteristics of a particular social crisis and a unique generative act of violence. All archaic rituals are socially constructed re-creations of an earlier, random, spontaneous, act of exclusionary violence. Against Joseph de Maistre, Girard insisted that the original victim of ritual sacrifice was not an 'innocent' individual expiating the sins of the guilty, but the random surrogate victim seized in the final paroxysm of a mimetic conflict.[218] The randomness of the scapegoat underlies the largely subconscious nature of the transference of conflict. The arbitrary distinguishing 'signs' are only later (mis)understood as tokens of the victim's guilt. The sacrificial sequence begins not in a spirit of wonder or veneration, but in undifferentiated violence, i.e., blind rage.[219]

According to Girard, sacrificial *rituals* involving human victims come late in the human experience of scapegoating violence. Nevertheless, such ritual sacrifices are an important evidential link in his theory. Towards the end of this chapter I will examine the evidence of bog bodies. Bog bodies are the centuries old human remains of victims of violent sacrificial executions. Suggestive of Girard's theory, some of the bog bodies indicate a physical deformity; what Girard refers to as a 'difference' or 'sacrificial sign'. Finally, the burial of the bog bodies indicate a determination, on the part of the community, to efface the memory of their victim (and their crimes).

Ritual, Prohibitions and Taboos

Like Burkert, Girard understood ritual to be at the heart of religion and its function was not to explain or give reasons for the human experience of the world. Rather, for Girard (and Burkert), ritual was a collective restaging of an original founding murder.[220] Ritual actions not infrequently involve the breaking of a social taboo, the controlled expression of communal

[217] Cf. Ibid.
[218] Cf. Joseph de Maistre, *Works*, trans. by Jack Lively (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965) and Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 4.
[219] Girard's treatment of Euripides' myth of Heracles draws attention to the ever-present dangers of sacrificial violence. The returning warrior unleashes violence on his own family in what seems to be 'madness'. Girard considers the violence to be sacrificial violence that 'goes wrong'. The distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' violence is effaced in blind rage. Cf. *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 44-46.
[220] Cf. Palaver and Borrud, p. 124.

hostility, and acts of violence. In this sense they resemble, in a controlled form, the same crisis which resulted in the founding murder.[221] According to Girard, the reconciling power of archaic ritual can explain 'all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious', such as monarchy, political power, legal institutions, medicine, the theatre, and animal domestication.[222] Girard refutes the assumption that the domestication of animals could have been planned, in anticipation of future economic benefits. Rather, animals were selected for sacrifice and the period between selection and sacrifice initiated domestication.[223] The reproduction of exclusionary violence brought about economic benefits and social structures (monarchy, political power) which in retrospect, have been considered the product of rational, dispassionate forethought.[224] Likewise, Girard considers agriculture the product of sacrifice. If the sacrificial crisis is the birth of culture, then the burying of seed, in imitation of the burying of the corpse, is a sacred action, in anticipation of a beneficial rebirth. Girard asks, what first motivated humans to bury seed in the ground?

> How do you account for that? What kind of reasoning lies behind those practices? A simple naturalistic observation of vegetation is anachronistic because the causal biological links are obvious to us, but not to the first people who 'discovered' agriculture. It cannot also be explained in purely economic terms. Only if you understand the powerful causal link between ritual and nature, can you grasp the origins of practices like agriculture.[225]

Girard's hypothesis subverts the 'rational' explanations for cultural advance which tends to recognise, in retrospect, the ingenuity of human cultural institutions. For Girard, these same cultural institutions are fundamentally the product of sacrifice.[226] Similarly, in hunting, 'the common denominator is the collective murder, whether attributed to animals or men, rather than the hunted species or various techniques employed'.[227] Apart from highly prescribed ritual actions, such common practices as games of chance, drawing lots, finding a ring in a

[221] Girard cites as examples of taboo, violent crimes directed at or committed by significant individuals, e.g., a king or a father, or in biblical societies the weakest individuals, especially young children. Also, sexual crimes such as rape, incest or bestiality and religious crimes such as the profanation of something considered holy. These crimes may be characterized as attacks of the foundations of the social order. In their (controlled) ritual form they represent the community's passage through a stage of social undifferentiation, into crisis, and finally back to social order, via the immolation of the victim. Cf. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 15.
[222] Cf. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 347.
[223] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 84 and *Things Hidden* pp. 68-83.
[224] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 70.
[225] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 86-87.
[226] Cf. Ibid. Girard noted that the Indo-European word for 'to plant', *pak* has etymological roots in the word for 'tomb'.
[227] Ibid, p. 73.

cake, etc., are the offspring of sacrificial logic. In each case the accidental rewards produced by chance may be associated with the random selection of the victim.

Myth and Demystification

Girard insists on the essential role of myth in disguising and justifying the scapegoat mechanism.[228] The reconciling power of scapegoating violence is reproduced in ritual and justified in myth. Girard was indebted to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, in applying structuralist methods to cultural phenomena 'was the first to identify the unity of numerous mythical beginnings in terms of a lack of differentiation'.[229] In creation myths, for example, light and dark are sometimes mixed, implying chaos. In structuralism myth is understood to resolve problems of chaos and conflict (undifferentiation) in terms of a new order or differentiation. These resolutions are limited to logical or rhetorical systems and have no causal relation to historical events.[230] Girard, though influenced by structuralism, is not bound by its methodological commitments. He offers a diachronic solution to the question of the origins of symbolic thought, concluding that an allusion to chaos in myth represents a real, historical social crisis. Girard opposes what he considers to be 'the systematic prejudice against the real' observed in the treatment of the text as autonomous, with no reference beyond itself.[231] Girard rejects the 'poetico-philosphic project' that structuralism attributes to myth, insisting that, 'its real project is recalling the crisis and the founding murder'.[232]

If monsters and grotesques inhabit the world of myth, Girard argues, there is a grotesque and monstrous reason: during a crisis of differentiation the victim is typically lacking differentiation and appears 'monstrous' and alien to the group. Girard states that 'myths make constant reference to the sacrificial crisis, but do so only in order to disguise the issue'.[233] Girard asserts that in myth, 'the victims become monstrous and display fantastic powers. After sowing disorder, they re-establish order and become founding fathers or

[228] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 105-24, *I See Satan Fall*, pp. 64-70.
[229] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 31.
[230] Cf. Richard Kearney, 'Myths and Scapegoats: The Case of René Girard, *Theory, Culture and Society,* 12, 4 (1995), 1-14 (p. 11).
[231] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 64.
[232] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 120.
[233] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 71.

gods'.[234] Girard defines myth as 'the retrospective transfiguration of sacrificial crises, the reinterpretation of these crises in the light of the cultural order that has arisen from them'.[235] Myth functions like ritual in carrying forward the reconciling effects of the murder of the surrogate victim.[236] Myth by definition is a lie, since it represents scapegoating from the community's perspective, absolving them of violence. As with ritual, a myth gradually loses its power to reinforce differentiation and mimetic desire inevitably generates a new crisis.

According to Girard, during a social crisis, '[i]nstitutional collapse obliterates or telescopes hierarchical and functional differences, so that everything has the same monotonous and monstrous aspect'.[237] Social differentiation is maintained normally through systems of exchange that differentiate and typically conceal the reciprocal element in each exchange. Traditional societies slow down exchange so that a rapid (negative) reciprocity is avoided. When social institutions can no longer restrain negative reciprocity, insults, blows, revenge and neurotic symptoms abound.[238] In archaic societies, devastating plagues, famines and floods etc., leading to a rapid cultural eclipse, were typically understood as a *social crisis* (rather than an 'environmental' or 'health' crisis). The tendency to explain the natural crisis by social, and especially moral factors (crimes) predominated. Girard notes that in order to assign moral culpability for the loss of social distinctions produced by the crisis, victims were often accused of 'monstrous' crimes that eliminate distinctions.[239]

Schwager also asserts that the mythic obsession with floods, raging seas, storms and fires, etc., are inextricably linked to ideas of a 'threatening-fascinating nature united with the agitating and confusing experience of tribal life. But the structuring element is always the social experience'.[240] Accordingly, in mimetic theory, the core of the mythic tradition is

[234] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 54.
[235] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 71.
[236] Here Girard differs from Lévi-Strauss, who argued that myth alone is 'good to think', excommunicating ritual by equating it with the undifferentiated. For Girard mythical monsters are the verbal equivalent of the actions of ritual. Both myth and ritual represent a real social crisis. Cf. Girard, 'Differentiation and Reciprocity in Lévi-Strauss and Contemporary Theory', *To Double Business Bound* (London: Athlone Press, 1988) pp. 163-64.
[237] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 13.
[238] Cf. Ibid.
[239] Cf. Ibid, pp. 20-21. For example, Girard notes that during the French Revolution the accusation that the Queen had committed incest with her son was explicitly raised at her trial. p. 20
[240] Schwager, *Scapegoats* p. 26.

located in the fascinating and terrifying experience of mimetic crisis, and its resolution in exclusionary violence. This accounts for the monstrous and undifferentiated imagery of the myth: '[…] in anger humans become blind and can lose sight even of the greatest factual differences (e.g., between human and animal)'.[241] Representations of mimetic crisis are bound to be confused, exaggerated and extraordinary. Girard insists that mythological monsters 'bear witness to the disorder that leaves its traces on these narratives, which spring from representational distortions at the time of the mimetic crisis'.[242]

Texts of Persecution

Against or opposed to the genre of myth, Girard advanced 'texts of persecution'. In the opening chapters of *The Scapegoat* Girard explores the 15th century poem, the *Judgement of the King of Navarre* by Guillaume de Machaut. A long poem in 'conventional, courtly style', the author claims to have participated in what Girard describes as 'a confusing series of catastrophic events', some of which are entirely improbable and others 'only partially so'.[243] Machaut's poem describes a persecution of the Jews in medieval France, during a plague, replete with mythic and extraordinary claims of heavenly signs and grotesque practices by the Jews. Girard points to the 'tight framework of historical knowledge' which informs our reading of the poem, specifically, historical evidence of anti-Semitic persecution during times of plague in medieval Europe.[244] In the poem, Machaut evidently believes in the guilt of the Jews and the justice of their persecution and murder. Girard draws our attention to the remarkable fact that, at a distance of several centuries, we know better than the author what actually happened; we know the Jews were scapegoated. Commenting on Girard's treatment of the poem, Finamore explains, 'an accurate representation of an historical reality can be gained from a text whose author unintentionally misrepresented the reality'.[245] The poem is in fact a 'text of persecution' or a failed myth. It misrepresents an historical reality, which modern readers can nonetheless unravel, revealing behind the misrepresentation, a true picture of historical scapegoating.

[241] Ibid, p. 28.
[242] Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 21.
[243] Cf. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 1-11.
[244] Ibid, p. 5. While Girard accepts that the poem is a mixture of the probable and improbable he makes a case for its historical accuracy with respect to the persecution of the Jews.
[245] Finamore, p. 67.

The contemporary reader suspects that the Jews did not, in fact, poison the wells and can discriminate between the fantastic and illusory claims of the author and the historical events he is reporting. The fantastic claims of heavenly omens, linked to stereotypical accusations against a traditionally marginalised group alert us to social disintegration in the context of plague and scapegoating. Girard's reading of de Machaut is, under a certain rubric, 'doing violence to the text'. Girard claimed that faced with such a text, 'one must either do violence to the text or let the text forever do violence to innocent victims'.[246] Girard argues that many myths contain the same dynamics, stereotypes and motifs, yet have been exempted from suspicion of actual, historical violence. Girard posited four criteria by which a written or an oral account of collective violence may be evaluated as myth. The mythic account will indicate (1) social crisis (general undifferentiation), (2) a crime or crimes that eliminate difference and are thus seen to provoke the crisis, (3) a person or persons judged responsible, not because of direct involvement in the crime(s) but because of certain 'paradoxical marks of the absence of difference' and (4) a violence which is frequently associated with the sacred.[247] Girard suggests that the juxtaposition of more than one of these stereotypes within a text indicates persecution.[248]

Girard's theory of myth has been criticised as reductionist and following a circular logic.[249] However, Girard's critique of myth is a compelling reversal of the dominant interpretations, which posit *first the myth* (some conception of dying and rising gods, fertilizing nature, etc.) and *then* a violent, sacrificial human performance of this mythic belief.[250] Girard insists that first came mimetic violence and murderous expulsion, and then the many and varied mythic representations of the scapegoating.[251] Even today, Girard

[246] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 8.
[247] Ibid, p. 24.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Cf. Kearney, pp. 8-14. Kearney questions Girard's grounds for distinguishing biblical myth from all other myth (Greek, Norse, Celtic, African, Indian, Asian) which are reduced on masse to 'coded strategies of persecution'. p. 10.
[250] James Frazer put forward the naturist interpretation of myth in *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, third edition (London: Macmillan, 1915) i.e., that myths about dying and rising gods represent the seasonal cycle of vegetation. For a contemporary example of this interpretation, cf. Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, first edition (New York: Doubleday, 1988) pp. 106-07.
[251] Cf. Heim, pp. 54-60.

argues, interpretations of myth successfully conceal or minimize the element of social violence and occlude the victim. Heim offers a striking example of this in Joseph Campbell's interpretation of violent myth and ritual. Descriptions of violent murder are merely recounted, as if incidental, to the 'truth' behind the ritual.[252] From Girard's perspective, the link between mythic texts and social violence remains concealed, since myth is habitually elevated by commentators such as Campbell. On the other hand, those like Frazer, who 'subvert the sacrificial principle by turning it to derision' equally become 'its unwitting accomplice'.[253]

The 'Miracle of Apollonius of Tyana' by Philostratus (Ephesus, second century AD), is a barely concealed account of a lynching and, for Girard, an example of a 'failed myth', a fanciful justification for mob violence. Girard compared this myth to the Gospel account of the woman taken in adultery which, Girard notes, is one of Jesus's rare successes with a volatile crowd.[254] Girard indicates how 'the Gospels constantly reveal what the texts of historical persecution, especially mythological persecutors, hide from us: the knowledge that their victim is a scapegoat'.[255]

The Contest of Twins: Mimetic Theory Pursuing a Single Piece of Evidence

Twins as a Literary Motif

In mimetic theory Girard's account of rivalrous twins represents his ingenuity in pursuing a single piece of evidence through different registers, texts and disciplines. It is illustrative both of the creative appeal of his work and its weakness. Rivalrous twins or 'doubles' appear in what Girard terms the great literature of modernity.[256] It is also an established motif in

[252] Cf. Ibid. Joseph Campbell's accounts (from New Guinea and the Equatorial regions) of riotous violence, violation of social taboos and the bloody sacrifice of victims (with their obvious risk to social stability) is explained dispassionately as being 'analogous' to patterns in nature. Ibid. p. 59.
[253] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 362.
[254] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 59.
[255] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 117.
[256] Girard offered several examples, such as Monsieur Valenod and Monsieur de Rênal in Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. Both men occupy the same town and share a similar social status. Their rivalry is expressed in their competition to employ Julien Sorel as tutor. It is mediated desire, not Sorel's ability, that makes him the desired object of both rivalrous 'twins'.

ancient myth and a cultural phenomenon associated with taboos and prohibitions. Girard was convinced that myth 'is not the trace of an immemorial past, it is not a vestigial presence, it is the living witness of the novelistic experience'.[257] That is to say, the rivalrous twins in mythic literature (Girard cites the well-known figures of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Eteocles and Polynices, Romulus and Remus) embody precisely the same mimetic rivalries which are explored in the modern novel.[258]

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard characterised the rivalrous desire of doubles as two identical but opposite triangles, superimposed on each other.[259] The characteristic of double mediation is that each twin insists 'that his own desire is prior and previous'.[260] In great literature, Girard asserts, the 'sterile opposition of contraries' tends always to accelerate, inevitably to violence, and the brother-enemies 'always follow the same paths…'.[261] Paul Dumouchel, commenting on the rivalry between Silas and William Dane in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, notes that the rivalrous twins struggle and strive to be rid of each other, trapped in a slavish imitation which seems (to themselves) to be anything but. '[...] William and Silas would both recoil at the idea that they are counterfeit of each other', and yet, that is increasingly what they become.[262] This is imitation without representation, conscious strategy or artifice and, mechanistically, it drives the subject and the model towards conflict: 'The more intense the hatred the nearer it brings us to the loathed rival. Everything it suggests to one, it suggests equally to the other, including the desire to distinguish oneself at all costs.'[263] The modern novel explores openly what mythic literature must disguise and conceal. The rivalrous twins of internal mediation, present (albeit in a 'monstrous' and disguised fashion) in mythic literature, indicate for Girard that ancient cultures had in fact

[257] Girard, 'Novelistic Experience in Oedipal Myth', *Oedipus Unbound*, p. 12.
[258] Cf. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 67.
[259] Cf. Girard, *Deceit* p. 99.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid, p. 100.
[262] Cf. Dumouchel, *Violence and Truth*, p. 6.
[263] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 100. In 'Novelistic Experience to Oedipal Myth', in *Oedipus Unbound,* Girard explored not the tragic stature of the hero, but the symmetry and resemblances between Oedipus and Creon and Tiresias and how these lead to conflict and violence.

suffered the intense escalations associated with desire in modernity. Twins, therefore, represent the traces of such violent desiring, providing a key to all mythic literature.[264]

Twins in Myth

By 1965 Girard was exploring the Oedipus myth in terms of symmetries.[265] The Oedipus myth is set against the background of a plague in Thebes, an amorphous presence which is as unpredictable and as terrifying as reciprocal violence. The plague may have helped to set in motion the sacrificial crisis, but it also symbolises it. In the myth, the ills which afflict the people of Thebes are attributed to the most egregious crimes and the lawbreaker, once identified, is expelled and punished, absolving the people of any violence with respect to the crisis. Girard identified Creon, the enemy brother, and Tiresias the blind prophet, as *doubles* of Oedipus. Curses and accusations hurled at the double, are typically returned, with interest, accelerating the crisis. According to Girard, the Oedipal myth begins with the illusion of subjectivity and complete innocence. The heroes' illusion of absolute innocence is frustrated by 'fatality'; a series of tragic occurrences, which undermine the heroes' purposes. As the myth progresses the heroes' tragedy is not so much a mysterious 'fate', as a growing misapprehension of mimetic desire. As Oedipus sets out, making vows to punish the unclean creature responsible for the plague at Thebes, the curses and accusations he hurls at others return to him. He places himself, unwittingly, in the centre of the sacrificial circle. Girard compares Oedipus' zeal to punish and expose the guilty one, with the fierce passion with which Proust's characters Jean Santeuil/Legrandin denounce snobs.[266] The straight road by which Oedipus sets out to rid Thebes of its evil curves imperceptibly back on to Oedipus and becomes a perfect circle. The one who began protesting his innocence is made to admit his guilt, to the satisfaction and relief of the community.[267]

[264] For Girard modern societies are not immunized against such escalations and occasionally they occur, but the influence of Christianity has raised our 'escalation threshold'; modern societies 'hardly ever experience phenomena of collective possession anymore'. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 69.
[265] Cf. Sandor Goodhart, 'Oedipus and Greek Tragedy' in *Palgrave*, p. 153.
[266] Girard, 'Novelistic Experience in Oedipal Myth', p. 13. Cf. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* (Paris: NRF/Gallimard, 1952).
[267] Cf. Ibid.

For Girard the 'twin' represents those destructive 'symmetries' associated with internal mediation and rivalrous desire both in the modern novel and in myth.[268] The sacrificial crisis takes on a variety of forms in myth: 'the appearance of monsters, the fear of twins or the phenomenon of demonic possession'.[269] The loss of differences, which accelerates mimetic conflict and tends towards violence, appears in myth as the confused and the 'monstrous'. The twin represents for archaic societies the paradox that rivalry begets imitation, and imitation rivalry, and both increasingly appear as a lack of difference, leading to violence. [270]

Anthropological Evidence

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard cited Monica Wilson's *Rituals of kinship among the Nayakusa* (1957) for examples of a society where the birth of twins and violence/social disorder are prominently linked.[271] Similarly, Malinowski's *The Father in Primitive Psychology* (1966) offers examples from Trobriand society of strict prohibitions with respect to the public recognition of physical resemblance among members of the society.[272] To these (and other) examples from cultural anthropology, Girard juxtaposed Clyde Kluckhohn's assertion 'that the most common of all mythical conflicts is the struggle between brothers, which generally ends in fratricide'.[273]

Absent from Girard's account in *Violence and the Sacred*, but worthy of mention, is E. E. Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork among the Nuer, which indicates a particular relationship to twin-births and a series of rigid prohibitions associated with the birth of twins.[274] The Nuer 'speak of infant twins having one soul'.[275] Their society was concerned with the physical duality of twins, which they nevertheless considered to be a single person (*ran*). The Nuer

[268] Here, Girard departs from the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who differentiates twins in myth, since, following de Saussure's definition of the sign as signifying difference, and nothing else, the twin was treated as another sign, opposed to a sign. Girard regarded differentiation as methodologically correct on the purely linguistic level, but incorrect on the level of culture. Cf. Girard, *Scandal Comes*, pp. 104-06.
[269] Schwager, *Scapegoats*, p. 15.
[270] Cf. Mark R. Anspach in Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, viii.
[271] Girard, *Violence and the Scared*, pp. 62-63.
[272] Ibid, pp. 65-67.
[273] Ibid, p. 67.
[274] Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).
[275] Ibid, p. 156.

considered the birth of twins a good fortune.[276] According to Evans-Pritchard the Nuer considered twins to be birds, and both birds and twins were classed as 'children of God' (*gaat kwoth*).[277] Indicative of the social significance associated with twins in Nuer society, Evans-Pritchard notes that among the Nuer, husbands and wives typically exhibited a studied courtesy towards each other in public, refraining from eating together in public and avoiding using each other's names in public. Such prohibitions eased with the birth of children and the passage of time. However, they are demanded 'with extreme vigour should the wife bear twins'.[278] In this circumstance the 'paternal and maternal kin of the twins are for a short time in the position of parties of a blood-feud. They may not, under penalty of death *(nueer*), eat or drink or share a pipe together until sacrifices, the meat of which has been divided between them, have been made'.[279] Although Evans-Pritchard indicated that the twins were considered a good fortune, their arrival set in motion a series of strict prohibitions, indicating heightened risk. Examples of the killing of one or more twins in nineteenth century Africa are well documented, as well as efforts by missionary societies to end the practice.[280] The phenomenon continues to be observed in some African countries, notably in periods of social disorder.[281]

Girard's pursuit of the concept of twins in literature, myth and ethnography highlights the creativity of his approach. His work is a heady mix of literary tropes and obscure, violent

[276] Cf. ibid, p. 195.
[277] Evans-Pritchard explains in detail that the Nuer's identification of human twins with birds is not, as Lévy-Bruhl would suggest, evidence of a 'prelogical mind', incapable of making distinctions and avoiding logical contradictions. Within the Nuer language and religious thought, there is no contradiction. The twins are treated as human beings, not as birds, but in addition to being human, the twin-born are a revelation of Spirit and 'the Nuer express this special character of twins in the 'twins are birds' formula because […] both are associated with Spirit and this makes twins, like birds, 'people of the above' and 'children of God'. Cf. *Nuer Religion*, p. 131.
[278] Ibid, p. 178.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Cf. Misty L. Bastian '"The Demon Superstition": Abominable Twins and Mission Culture in Onitsha History', *Ethnology*, 40, 1, Special Issue: Reviewing Twinship in Africa (Winter, 2001) pp. 13-27 https://www.jstor.org/stable/37773886.
[281] Cf. Orji Sunday, *Guardian*, 19/01/2018, '"They ensure each twin baby dies": The Secret Killings in Central Nigeria", <https://www.theguardian.com/working-in-development/2018/jan/19/twin-baby-dies-secret-killings-nigeria-remote-communities> The article features the practice in the Bassa Komo tribe, where the belief is held that twins are 'predestined to kill either or both parents.' '"Twin babies, according to our belief, are not humans. They are seen as danger to the existence of the entire community because our ancestors told us that they have strange powers. We see them as gods among men. So at birth, the entire village is alerted that a threat and perhaps an evil has been born into the community." A local was quoted as saying'.

practice. Mimetic theory suggests a single explanatory principle in answer to questions of different historical periods, and discreet social and geographical contexts. From an anthropological perspective, the explanation of twin sacrifice is not advanced by its selective inclusion into a prior literary theory. Recalling this second phase of his work Girard remarked that:

> 'Still today I have an extraordinarily vivid recollection of these years, one of the best times of my intellectual life. It seemed I was constantly discovering things that had never been described before, without knowing how to put them into words myself'.[282]

While personally satisfying, this stage of his work did not establish mimetic theory within mainstream anthropology, as Girard had hoped.[283] Notwithstanding the brilliance of his work, it has been asked if Girard's effort to explain the origins of culture on the basis of mimetic violence is ultimately an attempt 'to transfer nuclear panic, the fruit of our military-industrial complexes into the heart of universal man?'[284]

Mimetic Theory: Between Science and Poetry

Mimetic Theory: 'Persuasion' or Scientific Explanation?

To conclude this chapter, I will explore how Girard's insights, while not conclusive anthropologically, continue to shed light on questions of social order, scapegoating and violence. In this respect mimetic theory is helpful in bringing fundamental social dynamics to our attention.

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[282] Girard, *Scandal Comes*, p. 103.

[283] Kaplan suggests that for most anthropologists, mimetic theory 'remains radioactive' (*Unlikely Apologist*, p. 48). Girard's cultural theory is typically reduced to a fundamentally negative assumption about human nature, grounded in original violence. Cf. Douglas Davies, *Emotion, Identity and Religion, Hope, Reciprocity and Otherness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 90. Dunhill, who insists that 'sacrifice is not "about" violence or cruelty' (p. 4) is highly critical of Girard. He critiques the scapegoat theory heavily for confusing the Hebrew ritual with violent sacrifice and for confusing the Greek *pharmakoi* with victims of sacrificial murder. Cf. John Dunhill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (Perth, Australia: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

[284] Luc de Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa: A Structuralist Approach*, trans. Linda O' Brien and Alice Morton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985) p. 17.

Mimetic theory has achieved its explanatory force by a certain 'brutalization' of data; a brutalization for which Girard remained unrepentant.[285] Kirwan notes that in the twenty year period between *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and *Evolution and Conversion*, Girard had come to explicitly associate mimetic theory with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, asserting that Darwin's theory would never have advanced had Darwin been buffeted by demands for conclusive evidence at each stage of his theory's development. In pursuit of mimetic realism Girard habitually transgresses disciplinary boundaries and formalistic methodologies, which he asserts are signs of academic decadence and represent 'a huge unionization of failure' across the sciences.[286] Girard views evidence of archaic rituals and myth as cultural fossils, thus, the imperative for theorists and scientists is 'filling in the gaps, finding the overall narrative, a theory – like the mimetic theory or Darwinism – in which the single pieces of evidence, fossil or ritual, would fall into the right place, providing a compelling explanation of the phenomenon at stake'.[287]

Grant Kaplan has observed that mimetic theory is incapable of *falsification* and is thus, by Karl Popper's standards, not a scientific theory.[288] Girard insisted that Popperian falsifiability was not applicable to his theory since mimetic theory wasn't established on 'natural phenomenon […] that can be tested in laboratories'.[289] Girard argues that 'the elements favorable to my thesis are too numerous and consistent to be disputed' but he accepts that 'any of those taken by themselves cannot be regarded as a veritable proof. It is the multiplicity of consistent elements that constitutes proof'.[290] And yet, it is precisely because mimetic theory is grounded on a natural phenomenon (the human capacity to imitate) that Girard could critique Freudian and Marxist theories so confidently. Therefore, as Girard seems to accept, it is not finally measurable on empirical evidence but the 'multiplicity of consistent elements', or *persuasion* that has allowed mimetic theory to exert influence on

[285] See General Introduction, n. 5.
[286] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 40.
[287] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 120.
[288] Kaplan*, Unlikely Apologist,* pp. 52-53. Philosopher, Karl Popper (1902-1994) opposed the classical inductivist method of science. According to Popper a theory which produces any number of positive outcomes is, nonetheless, unscientific if there are no conditions in which it may be proved false. This view informed Popper's understanding of 'demarcation', i.e., the designation of any theory/hypothesis as scientific or nonscientific.
[289] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 117.
[290] Ibid, p. 114.

a variety of contemporary discourses. Perhaps reluctantly, Girard seems to have accepted – in some measure – that his theory owes more to rhetoric and persuasion than his earlier positivist assertions allowed.[291]

Mimetic theory has been compared to an 'atomic flash', producing knowledge so dazzling that 'it burns eternally what it has touched'.[292] A more modest appraisal of mimetic theory suggests not a grand, totalizing meta-narrative but an 'anti-systematic array of carefully angled spotlights illuminating particular texts and situations'.[293] Mimetic theory remains valid and contentious, if not as a meta-narrative, then as a hypothesis capable of deconstructing and demystifying cultural institutions and texts. It may be observed that Girard himself became a 'fascinating' figure for both critics and adherents of mimetic theory: 'reading Girard's detractors and admirers it is clear that he has become […] model and obstacle, mediator and rival. The simplicity and fecundity of his theses attract both avid attention and disgruntled suspicion'.[294] Girard's work continues to divide opinion.[295]

If mimetic theory has not succeeded as a meta-narrative or grand social-scientific theory, it continues to demonstrate a particular explanatory power. The explanatory power of Girard's work may be likened to what Ian Bradley describes as the 'dynamic of sacrifice'. For Bradley the *power* of sacrifice ($\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$) is dynamic, not static (*potestas*), and may be compared to the power of a poem, i.e., the power to evoke a response. 'It achieves its work by yielding and giving up rather than by forcing and imposing. Its strength is its weakness'.[296] The capacity of mimetic theory to bring together a variety of themes and phenomena owes much to its dynamic structure and literary approach. In applying this understanding to

[291] Cf. Paul Lynch, 'Rescuing Rhetoric: Kenneth Burke, René Girard, and Forms of Conversion' in *Contagion*, 24 (2017) 139-158. Lynch observes that by framing his project in a positivist manner Girard neglects the category of rhetoric, and its relation to truth. Conversion, a central category in mimetic theory is not merely the appropriation of knowledge. 'Even if desire is prior to form, form mediates desire.' p. 153.
[292] Domenach, 'Voyage to the end of the Sciences of Man', p. 157.
[293] Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, p. 9.
[294] Gerard Loughlin, 'René Girard' in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, Edited by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 96-104 (p. 101).
[295] A consistent motif in the reception of mimetic theory has been a heightened rhetoric in the opposing arguments. For example, Terry Eagleton has labeled Girard's theory of the origin of culture 'absurdly hyperbolic', cf. Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) p. 56. Eagleton among others, point to Girard's 'acolytes' who are accused of an overly enthusiastic and uncritical appropriation of mimetic theory, typically exuding 'a distinct air of hagiography', cf. Eagleton, note 42, p. 186.
[296] Cf. Bradley, p. 36.

mimetic theory, I will indicate the fecundity of Girard's work, exemplified in some of the poetic work of Seamus Heaney.

As noted above, Girard understands the tomb to be the birthplace of culture.[297] Mimetic theory may be described as a return to the tombs, to uncover the origins of culture and to reveal beneath each institution, the scapegoat. All three Synoptic Gospels give an account of the demoniac of Gerasa a story Girard has explored since *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Part of story's significance, for Girard, is that it is located 'among the tombs.'[298] The tomb, for Girard, marks the place where mimetic conflict is resolved and misremembered. Girard likens the human obsession with the mimetic rival to wandering among the tombs and committing oneself to death. Freud invented a 'death instinct' whereas, for Girard, no such 'instinct' is required because the dynamic of mimetic desire tends towards obsession, madness and death.[299] In Girard's view, the Gospel revelation exposes the nature of rivalrous desires, desires which condemn humanity to a life wandering among the tombs. At the same time, the Gospel has 'uncovered' the tombs of those sacrificed in order to contain mimetic violence. At its most audacious mimetic theory attempts to explain each ethnographic and cultural artifact exclusively in terms of victimage. More modestly, mimetic theory draws attention to the social dynamics which create victims, and our collective participation in such dynamics. To conclude this chapter, I will explore Girard's theory in relation to recent evidence of Iron Age killings and burials and how Girard's insights, while rightly checked by scientific disciplines, achieve excellence in a poetic register.

'The Tombs were opened' Evidence from European Bog Bodies

Girard's work since *La Violence et la sacré* has at times appeared stridently positivist, and this explains, in part, the reluctance of some within the social sciences to engage with mimetic theory. In this final section I will examine elements of recent archaeological and ethnographic research from the perspective of mimetic theory. I will suggest that a poetic (rhetorical) rendering of mimetic theory may be more appropriate and compelling than a scientific one.

[297] See above at n. 201.
[298] Cf. Girard, *Deceit*, p. 289 and for a deeper exploration, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 165-183.
[299] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 413-15.

What follows are examples I have drawn together for the purpose of this thesis, not examples from Girard's own research. They will indicate further, therefore, the fecundity of mimetic theory to illuminate and to generate new perspectives.

Recent archaeological discoveries in European bog-lands have contributed to the question of ritual sacrifice and enthronement rituals in ancient societies.[300] The Iron-age mummified bodies recovered from peat lands frequently indicate ritual sacrifice as the cause of death. Several significant indications (style of dress and ornament, the condition of hands and fingernails, indicating that the victim was not accustomed to manual work) suggest the royal/high status origins of the victims. In a study in Ireland significant numbers of human remains were discovered on or near important tribal boundaries. Oldcroghan Man was found during the cutting of a drain precisely on a townland and parish boundary. This was also an ancient *tuatha* boundary, located close to Croghan Hill, where the kings of Uí Failghe were inaugurated. The discovery of remains at or beyond traditional boundary lines suggest an expulsion from the community. Writing on the recent discoveries in Irish bogs, Eamonn P. Kelly, Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum of Ireland, has linked human sacrifice and kingship in Iron Age societies, both in Ireland and in Denmark. Kelly states that: 'Human sacrifice appears to be represented on the famous Iron Age cauldron discovered at Gundestrup bog in Denmark, in what I now believe may depict scenes from the inauguration of a king in a ritual that closely corresponds to the Irish tradition'.[301]

P. V. Glob's important study on the archaeology associated with 'bog bodies' in Danish peat bogs indicates a pattern of sacrificial killings associated with high-status victims. Glob's work began with the discovery in 1950 of 'Tollund Man' in Tollund Fen, in Bjaeldskov valley. Glob refers to the scenes, on the Gundestrup cauldron and suggests that they probably depict human sacrifice.[302] Glob's analysis of the remains of 'the Grauballe man' note that he lay,

[300] 'Cloncavan Man' March 2003, 'Oldcroghan Man' June 2003.
[301] Eamonn P. Kelly, 'Kingship and Sacrifice: Iron Age Bog bodies and Boundaries', Archaeology Ireland, 35, (September 2006) http://www.jstor.org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/stable/archirel.35.1
[302] P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved*, trans. by Rupert Bruce-Mitford (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) p. 151.

> with his throat cut, the sign of a ceremony in which the sacrificial blood had to well out in a stream to the gods whom it was desired to honour. We do not know how the Grauballe man came to be chosen for sacrifice […] His neat hands […] unaccustomed to toil, suggest he was not chosen from the body of the peasantry. He may have been picked by lot'.[303]

The several remains examined by Glob were remarkably well preserved in the acidic conditions of the peat bog and indicated high-status victims, a sacrificial death and the likelihood of a serious crime or social transgression. To emphasize this latter assertion, Glob cites Tacitus in his work on the legal customs of Germanic tribes:

> In the assembly it is permissible to lay accusations and bring capital charges. The nature of the death penalty differs according to the offence. Traitors and deserters are hung from trees; cowards, poor fighters and notorious evil-livers are plunged in the mud of marshes with a hurdle on their heads: the difference of punishment has regards to the principle that crime should be blazoned abroad by its retribution, but abomination hidden.[304]

The account of Tacitus indicates that the high-status victims whose sacrificial deaths were concealed in peat bogs may have been found guilty of the kind of crimes which especially offend social groups and which are, according to Girard, frequently charged to the scapegoat in times of social upheaval. At the height of a mimetic crisis the victim is charged with the most offensive crimes and the mob are united in expelling and destroying the criminal. The crimes of the guilty person are almost too terrible to mention, since they threaten the stability of the whole community. In the violent casting out there is no doubt as to the guilt of the scapegoat. The perceived cause of the community's disintegration must be effaced and concealed; the abomination must be hidden. At a later stage (the stage of myth-making), once social differentiation has been restored, the community attempt to retell the story of the criminal in a way which justified his or her murder and, at the same time exonerates the community from all guilt. In the myth of *Oedipus*, Oedipus is guilty of egregious crimes, but he did not *intentionally* commit the crimes. This is the essence of tragedy, for no one is to blame, yet the hero/victim had to die. Girard notes that 'at a critical stage of their evolution, or rather of their interpretation, myths frequently reveal innocent culprits, like Oedipus, juxtaposed with communities that are innocently guilty'.[305]

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[303] Ibid, p. 152.
[304] Ibid, p. 153.
[305] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 82.

The recovered bog bodies suggest a link between the sacrificial killing of high status individuals and the community's determination to efface and eradicate all evidence of their crime or offence. Other bog bodies are equally notable for bearing the 'signs' of victimage which, Girard notes, are frequently found in myth ('sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries and disabilities').[306] Miranda Aldhouse-Greens' recent study of bog bodies notes several victims were early adolescents.[307] Some bore other 'sacrificial signs'.[308] Their reemergence in recent years suggests, in a remarkable manner, the physical return of the innocent victim; if not a type of the resurrection, then perhaps the 'opening of the tombs' recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.[309] According to Girard the failure of crops, the occurrence of plague or some other disaster threatening the community were typically assigned to the incestuous and patricidal outrages of an Oedipus figure: 'Through its recourse to arbitrary violence', Girard writes, 'the helpless populace manages to forget its helplessness in the face of uncontrollable events'.[310]

Poet Seamus Heaney, drawing attention to the work of P. V. Glob on the bog bodies, wrote a series of poems addressed to (or about) the Iron Age victims, as a means of exploring recent tribal conflict in Northern Ireland:[311]

[306] Cf. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 18-21. In terms of those deemed suitable for sacrifice the 'weakness of women, children, and old people, as well as the strength of the most powerful, becomes weakness in the face of the crowd'. p. 19.
[307] Miranda Aldhouse-Green, *Bog Bodies Uncovered: Solving Europe's Ancient Mystery* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015) 'Windeby Girl' (aged 12-13) 'Yde Girl' (aged 16) and 'Kayhausen Boy'. pp. 14-34.
[308] Cf Ibid, 'Kayhausen Boy' and 'Yde Girl' both had suffered from a limp. The boy's impediment was probably a diseased and malformed hip joint. 'Uchter Moor Girl' was 19 years old and, significantly, left-handed. p. 25.
[309] Matthew 27: 51-52: 'At that, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split; the tombs were opened and many holy men rose from the dead'. This text evoked for Girard, the end of sacrifice and the vindication of the innumerable innocent victims assassinated 'since the foundation of the world'.
[310] Girard, "The Myth of Oedipus, the Truth of Joseph" in *Oedipus Unbound*, p. 110.
[311] Cf. Charles O'Neill 'Violence and the Sacred in Seamus Heaney's North' in *Seamus Heaney, The Shaping Spirit*, ed. Catherine Malloy and Phyllis Carey (London: Associated University Presses, 1996) pp. 91-105. O'Neill explores the political undercurrents in Heaney's myth of *North*. O'Neill draws on Girard's work to illustrate how Heaney's 'reshaping of myth allows it to speak its timeless human truths, the complicity of all in violence and its connection with what Heaney has termed "this terrible sacrificial religious thing"'. p. 19.

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.[312]

Conclusion

[312] Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment' in *North* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981 [1975]) p. 37. Several poems in this edition treat the questions of tribal conflict and scapegoating: In 'Kinship': 'Of casualty and victim | report us fairly | how we slaughter | for the common good'. p. 45. O'Neill on Heaney's use of 'My poor scapegoat' in 'Punishment': '[Heaney] recognizes in her both the sacrificial victim, whose Iron Age death was supposed to have brought fecundity to the community, and the modern collaborator whose 'punishment' helps to reinforce a sense of group identity that continued violence may have undermined'. pp. 97-8. 'For Heaney, as for Girard, the archaic processes of the past returns to dominate the present'. p. 100.

Ultimately, Girard's theory as cultural anthropology, has proved to be reductionist. Frequently, Girard's ambitious hypothesis attempts to explain a great deal, neglecting or minimizing evidence which may suggest alternative explanations.[313] Theories of mimesis, as Finamore has argued, prove to be more descriptive than explanatory. With these caveats in mind, Kirwan's analogy of mimetic theory as a series of spotlights, illuminating phenomena and texts, proves acceptable and valid. Heaney's poem, exploring contemporary tribal violence and scapegoating binds the core insights of Girard's work with the remarkable evidence of archaic ritual, lately unearthed from the peatlands of northern Europe. In Heaney, what amounts to the marriage of mimetic theory and ethnographic evidence is presented in a rhetorical, persuasive, and poetic register. Unlike Girard, Heaney makes no scientific claims. But the argument is no less compelling in Heaney's rendering, since it testifies convincingly to Girard's core assertion; that human societies – have been and still are – formed in and maintained by acts of generative violence, whether on the peatlands of the Iron Age or in contemporary European states.

Girard's theory of culture provides ample tools to explore the cultural context of the poor movements of the early thirteenth century; this, in fact, is the task of chapter five of this thesis. In chapter five Girardian spotlights will be fixed on such questions as; the meaning and role of Franciscan voluntary poverty in the late Middle Ages, as well as broader questions of social violence and exclusion. I will argue that, within its historical and cultural moment, the early Franciscans represent a heightened social awareness of the role of mimetic desire in provoking conflict. With the benefit of Girard's theoretical spotlights I will argue that, for the early Franciscan movement, voluntary poverty became a successful social/political strategy for grounding a non-violent, non-rivalrous social ethic; the early Franciscan *forma vitae*.

[313] Cf. Finamore, p. 127.

Chapter Three

René Girard and the Judeo-Christian Tradition

Introduction

During the eleven year period between publishing *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* and *La Violence et le Sacré*, a period during which he published numerous articles and books on literary subjects, 'Girard's personal commitment to, and academic interest in Christianity, remained unspoken – if not wholly concealed – in his published work.'[314] Kaplan quotes Girard's reticence in viewing his project as theology: 'Theologians should refrain from making use of the mimetic reading for parochially ecclesiastical interests […] if (the mimetic theory) is perceived as a mere servant of this or that theology, *ancilla theologiae*, its effectiveness is nullified'.[315] Even in a work as explicitly exegetical and theological as *I See Satan Fall Like Lightening*, Girard states:

> My research is only indirectly theological, moving as it does across the field of a Gospel anthropology unfortunately neglected by theologians. To increase its effectiveness, I have pursued it as long as possible without postulating the reality of the Christian God. No appeal to the supernatural should break the thread of the anthropological analyses.[316]

As late as 2004 Girard was quoted as saying: 'I am a theorist of mythology: I am not a moralist or a religious thinker'.[317] Although Girard has contributed to the confusion surrounding his relationship with theology, nevertheless his work has gained significant stature in contemporary theological circles.[318] Kaplan asserts that mimetic theory is 'not merely an explanatory tool for theology but also an apology for Christianity'.[319] Girard maintained a decade's long engagement with several important theologians.[320] Raymund Schwager was among the first to incorporate elements of mimetic theory into his theological work.[321] Apart

[314] Fletcher, p. 91.
[315] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist,* p. 4.
[316] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, pp. 191-92.
[317] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 167.
[318] Cf. Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 48.
[319] Ibid, p. 11.
[320] Ibid, p. 205 *note* 6. Kaplan cites Henri de Lubac among others.
[321] Raymund Schwager S. J. (1935-2004) Swiss theologian who began a correspondence with Girard in 1974, cf. *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence (1974-1991)*, trans. by Chris Fleming and Sheelah Treflé

from Schwager, theologians who have engaged with Girard's work, (both constructively and critically) include John Milbank, Sarah Coakley, Rowan Williams, Miroslav Volf, David Bentley Hart, Robert Doran and Neil Ormerod.[322] Kaplan seeks to defend Girard from two standard but opposing accusations: (1) that Girard's work is not theological in the strict sense and (2) that his theological bias has infected his work as a social scientist and leaves his theory without a strict scientific basis.[323] Girard's eagerness to avoid the epithet 'theologian' can be seen as a desire to protect his hypothesis from being 'intimidated out of existence by the great theoretical steamrollers of our time'.[324] In his initial engagement with academic theology, Girard was perhaps aware that a formidable theological inheritance, not necessarily free from 'mythical' or 'sacrificial' influences, might pose a serious danger to his unique religious theory. Given Girard's particular academic concerns and methodology, it is easier to distinguish his work from other theological projects, than to characterise his own theological approach. Kevin Mongrain, for example, notes that Girard writes theology not in the scholastic sense of *disputatio* or in the modern academic sense of *Wissenschaft*, but in terms which foreground God's relationship with the world as it emerges in biblical narrative.[325]

The theological content in Girard's work is extensive and in consequence I will limit myself to those aspects of his work which bear on the theological concerns of the early Franciscan movement. This chapter treats Girard's theological work as follows:

1. Girard's engagement with the Judeo-Christian scriptures, specifically his 'hermeneutic of the innocent victim'.
2. Girard's early evaluation of mimetic desire is typically conflictual. I argue that there is scope in Girard's theory for emphasising 'positive mimesis', facilitating a more constructive engagement with Christian theology.

Hidden, edited by Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge and Mathias Moosbrugger (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016). Schwager's dialogue was both critical and constructive. *Must There be Scapegoats?* (1978) has been described as 'up to this point, the most Girardian book not written by Girard himself'. Cf. Moosbrugger, in *Palgrave*, p. 145.

[322] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 2.

[323] Cf. Ibid, p. 46.

[324] Girard, *Diacritics*, p. 44.

[325] Kevin Mongrain, 'Theologians of Spiritual Transformation: A Proposal for Reading René Girard through the lenses of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Cassian', *Modern Theology*, 28, (January 2012), 81-111 (p. 84).

3. I briefly explore how Raymund Schwager has integrated mimetic theory into his theological project, as an example of the positive reception of mimetic theory in mainstream theology.
4. I explore John Milbank's critique of Girard's theory of sacrifice and Girard's deepening of his account of sacrifice through his engagement with theology.

Mimetic Theory and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures

The Hermeneutic of the Victim

Girard asserts that '[n]othing is more disturbing and more exciting than the irresistible resurgence of the Christian text, at a time and place when it is least expected'.[326] Specifically, he reads in the Christian text a consistent advocacy for the innocent victim, over against narratives which justify group violence. Girard was not the first to observe this feature in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures; it has been developed, for example, in the work of Abraham Heschel,[327] and subsequently in the work of Sandor Goodhart.[328] Girard, however, employs this characteristic in his wider project, understanding the biblical texts to be 'an active, rather than a passive object of anthropological enquiry,'[329] uniquely capable of deconstructing myth and thereby revealing 'things hidden since the foundation of the world'. He typically opposes biblical literature to myth, based on his understanding of how each approaches the innocent victim of any given social conflict.[330]

Girard's interpretation of biblical texts has garnered both praise and criticism. Girard has been credited with reviving 'for a new generation a type of multi-layered interpretation once practiced by pre-modern exegetes'.[331] It has also been asserted that until Girard, 'we possessed no coherent, rational explanation of the prevalence of deceit and violence in the

[326] René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, (London: Athlone, 1987), p. 166.
[327] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).
[328] Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrificing Commentary: Reading the end of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
[329] McKenna, *Divine Aporia*, p. 86.
[330] Cf. René Girard, 'Are the Gospels Mythical?', *First Things*, 62, (April, 1996) pp. 27-31. I will indicate below problems with Girard's absolute distinction between 'Bible' and 'myth'.
[331] Ann Astell, 'Violence, Mysticism and René Girard', *Theological Studies*, 78, 2, 389-411 (p. 401).

Bible, including the New Testament – at least no explanation which could satisfy the various demands of the exegete, the theologian, and the believer'.[332] His work has been appropriated by a number of scripture scholars.[333] Nevertheless, it is accurate to say – as Kaplan does – that the reception of his work into biblical studies has been 'lukewarm'.[334]

Finamore defends Girard's mimetic reading of the Gospels on the basis that historical-critical methods have produced such a wide (and inconclusive) variety of accounts of the 'historical Jesus'. Girard is, therefore, 'entitled to offer a literary-critical reading of the text and to take the text as it stands rather than relying on unproven and unprovable assumptions about its original life-setting'.[335] Girard's explanation of how the Judeo-Christian scriptures could be both an example of the archaic sacrificial mind, and its definitive undoing, has proved to be his most ambitious and controversial claim.

The Hebrew Scriptures

Girard considers the Psalms as possibly 'the oldest texts in human history to let the voice of the victims, rather than that of their persecutors, be heard'.[336] The application of specific psalms, such as Psalm 69.4 ('they hated me without cause') in New Testament texts (John 15.25) allowed the echo of a previous scapegoat victim to be universalised in the experience of Jesus.[337] Girard's biblical hermeneutic is fundamentally a typological interpretation of the Bible, resembling the figural/typological interpretation of the biblical texts associated with the patristic era and influential up to the early modern period.[338] For Girard, 'types' of the

[332] Robert J. Daly, Foreword in Schwager, *Scapegoats* (v).
[333] Burton Mack, *The Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), supports Girard's theory of culture, however, unlike Girard, Mack regards the authors of the Gospels as persecutors, whose portrayal of Jesus as innocent victim is directed against the Jewish community. The Gospel is a 'myth of origins' p. 312. Girard's work has been enthusiastically appropriated by Robert Hamerton-Kelly, in *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) and *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred* (Harper Collins, 1991) and Schwager, *Scapegoats* (2000) draw extensively on Girard's insights.
[334] Cf. Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 65.
[335] Finamore, p. 121. Finamore cites fifteen critical works by twelve different Biblical scholars to demonstrate the variety of accounts of the 'historical Jesus' available.
[336] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 116.
[337] Cf. Ibid, p. 151.
[338] This reading of the Bible characteristically identifies 'types' in the Hebrew scriptures and reads them in relation to corresponding 'antitypes' in the New Testament. The movement from type to antitype produces an historical consciousness, wherein the 'old' is constantly reconfigured and perfected/fulfilled in the 'new'. Thus,

innocent victim in the Hebrew scriptures are amplified and perfected in the passion narratives of the Gospels. In the Hebrew scriptures, Girard insists, a work of exegesis is in progress operating in 'precisely the opposite direction' to the dynamics of myth and culture. 'And yet it is impossible to say that this work is completed. Even in the most advanced texts […] there is still some ambiguity regarding the role of Yahweh'.[339] For Girard, the lingering ambiguity is definitively overcome in the Gospels where Jesus is first seen to offer the Kingdom of God (which is entered into by the renunciation of all violence) and, in his death, to reveal the scapegoat mechanism.[340] Girard's reworking of an earlier form of biblical interpretation has been compared to Origen's.[341]

Just as Girard's route to the Gospels was through a prior engagement with literature, his appreciation of types and figures in the scriptures owns more to Erich Auerbach than to Origen.[342] Auerbach distinguishes between the style employed in ancient allegory, and biblical typology; the latter being a type of prophesy. The 'types' in biblical narratives which Auerbach characterizes as prophetic are grounded in real, historical persons and events and, at the same time, they foretell and disclose a truth yet to be embodied and actualised, a truth known retrospectively.[343] Auerbach argues that the figural interpretation changed the Old Testament 'from a book of laws and a history of the people of Israel into a series of figures of Christ', making possible 'a magnificent and universal history' of salvation, absorbing, for example, the cultural world of the Celtic and Germanic peoples.[344]

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the mysterious type of the bronze serpent (Numbers 21. 8) is understood according to the antitype of Christ on the Cross (John. 3. 14).

[339] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 157.

[340] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 148.

[341] Cf. Daly 'Biblical Interpretation: Old and New Testaments, a New Hermeneutic(s)?' *Palgrave*, 135-141. According to Daly, both Origen and Girard have weaknesses and gaps in their writing, inasmuch as they 'theorize beyond the available evidence'. Daly argues that Girard, nevertheless, discovered the biblical foundation of his mimetic anthropology (an anthropological insight, rather than a theological one) and is not reading mimetic theory *into the scriptures*, but discovering it there.

[342] Cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) Auerbach notes the distinctive biblical narrative style, which is 'more realistic' than pre-Christian literature. Girard credits Auerbach's characterization of mimetic representation in the Gospels but insists that the content, not just the technique of the Gospels, is mimetic. Cf. *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 129.

[343] E. Auerbach, 'Figura' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973)

[344] Cf. Ibid, p. 52. In the Christian tradition figural interpretations of scripture are dominant from the patristic to the early modern period.

Figural or typological readings of the scriptures ensure that Girard's project is not a Marcionite rejection of the Hebrew scriptures. Indeed, from the perspective of mimetic theory, Girard emphasises the continuity between the Old and New Testaments.[345] However, as Gerard Loughlin notes, figural interpretations render the Bible not only coherent but also 'all-consuming' as 'otherwise independent biblical narratives and extrabiblical stories, including one's own' are accessed already 'figured into' a larger narrative. In Girard's working of the figural interpretation all biblical narratives (and extrabiblical stories) are 'figured into' a narrative about human violence and the innocent victim.[346]

In the Book of Job, the protagonist is an upright and prosperous man who suffers a series of sudden misfortunes, including the loss of material wealth, social status, family members and health. In the narrative, the afflictions of Job result from a wager between God and Satan. Girard, however, characterizes Job as a victim of scapegoating, forced by his community to follow 'the ancient trail trodden by the wicked' (Job 22. 15). Girard presents Job as a *figura Christi* in his participation in the struggle against the scapegoat phenomenon that overtakes him, in his opposition to the system of retribution and, chiefly, when he briefly eludes 'the logic of violence and the sacred' which has triumphed over everyone else.[347] In the Hebrew scriptures innocent victims such as Susanna, Daniel, and Jonah are delivered from unjust mob violence. The Suffering Servant in Deutero Isaiah (Isaiah 52. 13 to 53. 12) represents an even more sustained plea of innocence than Job's. According to Heim, in Isaiah the question posed by the Suffering Servant is no longer Job's question: How can God be justified in the face of mob violence against the scapegoat? God's solidarity with the victim is no longer in doubt. The question is moving towards how many, and by what means, can the victims be saved?[348]

For Girard, Job is the subject of 'a sort of totalitarian or inquisitorial trial'. Job's 'friends' attempt to convince Job of his guilt, and at times Job accepts the consensus. Girard asserts that Job had 'lived through a period of extraordinary popularity bordering on

[345] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 148-49.
[346] Cf. Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 43.
[347] Cf. Girard, *Job,* p. 166.
[348] Cf. Heim, p. 101.

idolatry'.[349] For Girard, Job represents a particular type of scapegoat, 'a shattered idol'.[350] Job's success provoked unanimous acclaim, desire and envy. His subsequent ignominy was equally the product of public opinion; 'unstable, capricious and void of all moderation'.[351] In Job, the archaic sacred is represented by the 'seething crowd […] the perfect vehicle for divine vengeance. It hurls itself at the victim and tears him to pieces; all the participants share the same terrible appetite for violence'.[352] Girard argues that in the Dialogues, Job, at times faltering, offers a different perspective on the same act of collective violence that motivates his 'friends' and the crowds: the sacred lie is contrasted with Job's 'true realism'.[353] In distinguishing the Dialogues (chapters 3-31) from the Prologue (1-2) and the Epilogue (42) in *Job*, Girard finds support among biblical scholars.[354] A diachronic analysis of the prose-tale indicates that it is probably later than the Dialogues.[355] While Girard's literary-critical reading is not at odds with historical-critical analysis *on this point*, his biblical work in general rides loosely in the saddle of historical-critical methods. In Job, Girard neglects the specifically legal language found in the course of the Dialogues. Citing Sylvia Scholnick, Barukh Levine argues that the Dialogues take the form of a *rib*, an established form of legal dispute, between Job, the creature, who seeks reasons for his misfortune, and God, the Creator.[356] Levine asserts that Girard 'extracts from the dialogues of Job those passages which epitomize his own concerns: How do the many treat the few, the mob the individual, the strong the weak. I insist, however, that Job is no scapegoat'.[357]

Girard accepts that his approach was 'somewhat conjectural'; the envy directed to Job is not explicit in the text, though in Psalm 73, Girard hears the embittered envy of Job's 'friends', so well concealed in the Dialogues.[358] The victim is being expelled for the sake of the community and in Job's case, the expulsion provokes what Girard considers an extraordinary

[349] Girard, *Job*, p. 11.
[350] Ibid, p. 13.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid, p. 25.
[353] Ibid, p. 32.
[354] Cf. Dermot Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence: The Book of Job* (Middlegreen, Slough: St. Paul's Publications, 1990. Cox includes a 'Theophany' (38. 1 – 42. 6) p. 15.
[355] Barukh Avraham Levine, 'René Girard on Job: The question of the scapegoat', *Semeia*, 33 (1985) 125-133 (p. 126).
[356] Ibid, p. 132.
[357] Ibid, p. 133.
[358] Cf. Girard, *Job*, pp. 55-58.

witness to the God of Non-violence: 'Even now, behold my witness is in heaven' (16. 19-21) and 'This I know: that my Avenger lives' (19. 25-27). The victim, in the process of being expelled by the false sacred, does not participate in the growing consensus as to his guilt. He affirms his faith in an entirely different God.[359] In the Epilogue, God speaks as Job's 'Avenger', upbraiding Job's 'friends' for failing to speak truthfully of God (42. 7). Of which 'god', then, were they speaking? The greatness of *Job*, according to Girard, (like that of the psalms) is the continuance, 'side by side with the still present hope for vengeance, [of] a hope for the God of victims'.[360]

Another example of a biblical story in which Girard perceives an unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism is the account of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37-47.[361] According to the story, Joseph was the favourite son of Jacob, and on that account, was both envied and despised by his brothers. United in hostility to Joseph, the brothers abandon an original plot to murder him, and instead, sell him into slavery. A slave in Egypt, Joseph eventually gained a position of importance in the household of Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard. He resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife and suffered imprisonment on account of her accusations of rape. Despite his mistreatment Joseph attained status in the court of the Pharoah of Egypt and, when famine forced his brothers to find assistance in Egypt, Joseph did not take revenge on his brothers for his own mistreatment. Instead he contrived to implicate Benjamin (the last born of Jacob's thirteen children) in a supposed crime, thereby testing Judah and the others. Rather than abandon Benjamin, Judah pleaded with Joseph, that he might take Benjamin's place. Joseph, overcome with emotion, revealed himself as their brother and they were reconciled.

Girard compares the story of Joseph with the myth of Oedipus indicating that whereas mimetic violence triumphed in Oedipus, it failed in Joseph's case. For Girard, both figures are treated as scapegoats, provoking admiration, fascination, envy and hatred in their communities. Both figures are accused of similar crimes, but the account in Genesis takes the part of Joseph, not his brothers. Joseph emerges from the text neither demonized nor deified,

[359] Cf. Ibid, p. 141.
[360] Ibid, p. 153.
[361] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 152, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 144-46.

hallmarks of successful scapegoating. The narrator 'bathes him in a warm luminosity that would be unthinkable in mythology'.[362] Girard considers the two literary forms, the mythical and the biblical, so different that 'even if the story of Joseph were not based on events and Oedipus were, the biblical story would still be true and the myth a lie'.[363]

Joseph confronting his brothers in the Genesis narrative is characterised by Goodhart as a deconstruction of sacrificial thinking: Joseph, the victim, identifies himself at the moment he has become the potential persecutor of his brothers, calling into question the binaries of innocent/guilty.[364] Whereas the community's violence is concealed in the myth of Oedipus, in the story of Joseph the ambiguous nature of violence is unavoidable. As McKenna has noted: 'To condemn the other's violence is to veil one's own participation in it […] the essential aim of scapegoating "since the foundation of the world" is to burden another with our own guilt'.[365] In the Genesis account of Joseph this burden is not relieved and the scapegoat is redeemed, not sacrificed.

The development of Jewish monotheism, according to Girard, enabled the unmasking of the scapegoat mechanism. Jewish monotheism 'no longer turns victims into divinities or divinity into a victim. Monotheism is both the cause and the consequence of this revolution'.[366] The God of Monotheism is completely 'devictimized' while polytheistic religions are the product of the sacrificial mechanism, the result of many foundational victims recast as deities.[367] Throughout the Hebrew scriptures Girard perceived a loosening of the sacrificial ties, a preparation for the Gospel revelation. Girard's account is the 'all-consuming' story of the innocent victim, set against the violence of the community. His tendency is to refer to various biblical texts (and contexts) generically, as a single biblical revelation of the innocent victim. His absolute distinction between 'Bible' and 'myth' has been critiqued. It has been observed that in his treatment of the Joseph narrative Girard emphasizes transformed relationships based on victimhood, while neglecting other possible relationships present in

[362] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 118
[363] Ibid, p. 113.
[364] Cf. Sandor Goodhart, '"I am Joseph" René Girard and the Prophetic Truth' in *Violence and Truth,* pp. 53-74.
[365] McKenna, *Divine Aporia*, p. 92.
[366] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 121.
[367] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 143.

the text.[368] Hans Jensen observes that in emphasizing strongly the manner in which biblical stories differ from the stories of other cultures, Girard minimizes the strong continuities between both and asserts, without justification, a total difference.[369] It is therefore valid to acknowledge that Girard's work gains its persuasive quality from its strength of literary creativity, rather than its exegetical rigour.

The New Testament

In asserting that the 'Gospels only speak of sacrifices in order to reject them and deny them any validity', Girard overreaches.[370] Whereas Girard (and some of his critics) frequently treat the concept of sacrifice in a univocal sense, the New Testament admits several possible meanings.[371] In line with his theory Girard habitually assigns to biblical sacrifice the function of exclusionary violence. Even accepting Girard's sense of 'sacrifice', Lucien Scubla notes that the Gospel attitude to sacrifice is 'quite balanced'. Jesus speaks of being reconciled with your brother *before* making sacrifice (Matthew 5. 24). Jesus also instructed the healed leper to make the appropriate sacrifices, as the Law required (Matthew 8. 4).[372] Scubla notes that the Gospel counsel to pluck out the offending eye (Matthew 5. 29), rather than be cast into hell, suggests a sacrificial, 'exclusionary strategy', rather than a revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. Jesus is not obviously the opponent of cult and sacrifice; however, his teaching frequently undermines and relativizes relationships based on marriage and kinship. The priority of family and kin, are frequently subverted in favour of the Reign of God. Scubla asserts:

> It is because he was fighting the traditional forms of filial piety, and not because he was desacralizing the tomb of the surrogate victim, that Christ was able to give the impression of shaking the foundations of the social order when he opposed the cult of the dead and turned men away from their burying places.[373]

[368] Cf. Hans J. L. Jensen, 'The Bible is (Also) a Myth: Lévi-Strauss, Girard and the Story of Joseph, *Contagion*, 14 (2007) 39-57.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 180. Girard's anti-sacrificial rhetoric, especially evident in *Things Hidden*, is increasingly qualified in a number of his later writings.
[371] Cf. Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London, S.P.C.K., 1975).
[372] Lucien Scubla, 'The Christianity of René Girard and the Nature of Religion' in *Violence and Truth*, p. 162.
[373] Ibid, p. 163.

Accepting Scubla's assertion, it may be added (as James Alison has), that filial piety is itself an institution frequently associated with sacred violence. In John 8. 31-59, the pharisees insist on their descent from Abraham. For Alison, filial piety and the forms of belonging it engenders, may give sanction even to fratricide.[374] That the teaching of Jesus was subversive of the most 'natural' of institutions does not invalidate the assertion that Jesus intended to expose the mechanism of sacred violence in *all institutions*, including the family. Kinship and patriarchal/familial bonds function within a range of hierarchies, exclusions and prohibitions and are thus sacrificial, according to Girard's definition.[375]

Following Girard, Schwager insists that in the Gospels the non-violent belonging which Jesus refers to as the 'Kingdom of God' is ultimately rejected, in favour of the existing social order, governed by exclusion and violence. For Girard and Schwager, initiation into the Kingdom of God coincides with the abandoning of all rivalrous desire. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus compares mere impulses of anger and insults ('fool', 'renegade') to murder (Matt. 5. 21ff), and compares unchaste looks with 'adultery in the heart' (Matt. 5. 27ff). One explanation of this peculiar moral equivalence is that, unacknowledged and uninterrupted, the mimetic pattern of desire accelerates from mere impulse to completed acts. The rules of the Kingdom of God are explicable in terms of a 'mimetic conversion' of desire. Lacking this conversion our moral existence is continually subject to the sacrificial logic of 'an eye for an eye' and a 'tooth for a tooth' (Matt. 5. 38-42) which represents the 'wisdom' of the 'entire ancient system of the sacred and revenge' a wholly 'negative symmetry', which Jesus seeks to overcome by advocating 'a gracious human goodness which mirrors a preceding divine mercy'.[376]

In the Gospels, those who reject the Kingdom of God in favour of the sacrificial logic, inevitably seek Jesus' death. Herbert McCabe understood the killing of Jesus as a rejection of

[374] Cf. James Alison*, Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 2001) pp. 56-85. Alison argues that Jesus teaches his disciples (contrary to the customs of the pharisees) not to attribute anything sacred to our progenitors, either cultural or biological, *as progenitors*, which risks false forms of belonging and encourages rivalrous and fratricidal dynamics. Cf. Ibid, p. 75.
[375] Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Theology of the Pentateuch*. Sacrifice had a disjunctive (as well as a conjunctive role) in maintaining the (patrilineal) hierarchical structures in ancient Israel.
[376] Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. Trans. by James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1999) p. 42.

the love that casts out fear, indeed, 'the fear of love that casts out fear, the fear that without the backing of terror, at least in the last resort, human society and thus human life cannot exist'.[377] This foundational fear, that social order depends on violence, not love, was expressed by Caiaphas in the Gospel account of the passion: 'It is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed' (John 11. 49-50). Scubla denies Girard's scapegoat hypothesis on the grounds that,

> if Christ came digging up the graves and exhuming the cadavers around which men have long since made peace […] He would be abruptly destroying the work of civilization, which has little by little replaced the earliest blood rites with more and more peaceable rituals and has slowly eroded human violence, to the point of making it appear more and more odious wherever it still retains a remnant of primitive vigour.[378]

Here, Scubla demonstrates a remarkable confidence in moral progress, given that the twentieth century witnessed human violence surpassing in scale, if not in vigour, the historic accounts of archaic violence. Social institutions and 'more peaceable rituals' were relatively powerless to oppose the industrial scale exclusionary violence represented by the Holocaust and numerous other genocidal atrocities of recent history. Scubla suggests that, for Girard, the Gospel revelation 'limits itself to stripping man of his ritual protections to yield him up naked to his own violence'.[379] However, as Schwager argues above, the Kingdom of God is precisely an invitation to live without the 'ritual protections' of sacrificial economies. Without our attachment to 'ritual protections', our habitual justifications of 'legitimate violence' are radically shaken and our fantasies of innocence are undermined.

Scubla asserts that 'the Christianity of Girard is not […] that of the Gospels'.[380] Indeed, Girard's account of Christianity has been described as 'Gnostic', i.e., that Girard represents the victory of the cross as mere 'knowledge' or 'awareness' of the victimage mechanism. Girard invariably treats the Christian faith exclusively in terms of a single dominant idea: scapegoating. If the truth – hidden since the foundation of the world – is fundamentally an *idea* about our human origins, in and through collective murder, then it is fair to say that, historically, this idea has remained largely unthought by a great many professed Christians.

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[377] Herbert McCabe, *God Matters: Contemporary Christian Insights* (London: Mowbray, 2000) p. 97.
[378] Scubla, *Violence and Truth*, pp. 172-3.
[379] Ibid, p. 172.
[380] Ibid, p. 170.

The charge of Gnosticism has been routinely denied by Girardian scholars.[381] Cowdell notes that, for Girard the revelation of God's saving act takes place *in history*, both the human history of Jesus and the in the historical dissemination of the Gospels, and is therefore not a form of Gnosticism.[382] Finamore points out that, for Girard, the revelation of the innocence of the surrogate victim is not so much an 'acquisition' of knowledge but a graced conversion. It is praxiological, not intellectual. He regards von Balthasar's accusation of Gnosticism as little more than an attempt to classify Girard's theory, in order to dismiss it.[383] In an interview with Rebecca Adams, Girard appeared to accept that 'it is knowledge that eventually saves us', however he remarked that this knowledge 'is very ambivalent in the way it works with people'.[384] Taking his work as a whole, and increasingly in his mature work, it is misleading to characterize Girard's work as Gnostic. Kaplan has noted that in *Things Hidden* Girard viewed Christian Doctrine from 'as it were, above history'. However, he came to accept that there is no essential Christianity apart from historical Christianity and his Gnosticism was 'gradually purged'.[385]

The Christian tradition emphasizes the uniqueness of the death of Jesus. Christians have frequently interpreted this uniqueness in terms of a perverse and unbridled violence, tragically associated with the Jews.[386] According to Girard the death of Jesus is not unique in terms of the violence suffered or the cruelty of the persecutors. It was, in fact, a typical scapegoating. Its uniqueness lies in the collapse of unanimity, caused by the resurrection event. The scapegoat victim is seen immediately to have been innocent and the anticipated mimetic consensus evaporates in the Apostolic witness to resurrection. The strategic alliances between Jewish authorities and political power (Luke 23. 11-12) achieved a violent mimetic consensus which led to the crucifixion and from which even the Apostles were unable to escape. The Resurrection represents not only the acquittal of Jesus of all charges laid against

[381] Kirwan describes the charge of 'gnostic' as 'a profoundly unenlightening and contentious tag', *Girard and Theology*, p. 140.
[382] Cf. Cowedll, *Nonviolent God*, p. 118.
[383] Cf. Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos*, p. 112.
[384] Cf. Girard and Adams, p. 26.
[385] Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 122.
[386] Burton Mack, speaks of the Christian gospel as 'the lens through which Western culture has viewed the world'. Cf. Mack, p. 368. According to Mack, Mark's Gospel is a 'myth of innocence', scapegoating the Jewish people producing the anomaly of anti-Semitic attitudes throughout the developing world, 'wherever the gospel is read today'. p. 375.

him, but the acquittal of all those who believe in his resurrection (cf. Acts 10. 43), for to believe that Jesus is risen is to believe that the 'necessary' violence which led to his crucifixion has been exposed as a lie, therefore, faith in the resurrection is the definitive basis for our deliverance from the reign of violence.

Against the Gospel witness that Jesus is an innocent victim, Girard points to the anti-witness of the 'Accuser' or Satan. The Accuser, for Girard, is the scapegoat mechanism, not a 'being' or personality in its own right. Referred to as the 'Accuser'/ 'Adversary' throughout the Bible (3 Kings 11. 14, 23, 1 Kings 29. 4, Job 1. 6, 2 Corinthians 12. 7), the Accuser's sudden appearance in the form of accusations, insinuations and violent consensus is the basis of the archaic sacred. Jesus identifies Satan as 'a murderer from the beginning' (John 8. 44). The 'Advocate' (Paraclete, Comforter) which Jesus promises to send to the Apostles (John 14. 26), defends and pleads the cause of the innocent victim against the scapegoat mechanism, teaching and reminding the Apostles to do the same.[387]

For Girard, the New Testament is distinct from myth (and its philosophical heritage) by virtue of a unique *Logos*. The *Logos* of John is distinct from the *Logos* of Heraclitus in as much as the *Logos* of John is expelled and not recognised. Girard agreed with Heidegger that the Johannine *Logos* is not the source of, nor is it derived from, the Greek/Heraclitan *Logos*. Being two different *Logoi*, one belongs in the world (ordered through violence) and the other does not. The *Logos* of John is the 'excluded *Logos* […] the *Logos* which speaks about exclusion'.[388] Girard explored the Apocalyptic literature of the Bible, particularly the apocalyptic references in the Gospels. The violence of the Gospel apocalyptic reveals not the wrath of God, but a world increasingly deprived of the protection of the sacred, and thus a world in ever greater danger from mimetic violence.[389]

[387] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 141-42.
[388] Cf. Girard, *Paroles Gelées*, pp. 12-13, and, *Things Hidden*, pp. 263-79.
[389] Matthew 12:26, Mark 3: 22-27, indicate for Girard the end of the sacred order, by which Satan 'casts out Satan', restoring his kingdom by generative violence. This kingdom is definitively undone and its fall is alluded to in the chaos imagery of the Apocalypse. Finamore, in *God, Order and Chaos*, offers a Girardian reading of the 'chaos imagery' in Revelation 20 and demonstrates the strength of mimetic theory as a hermeneutical lens for New Testament Apocalyptic.

Mimetic Theory and the Nonviolent God

Desire as a Positive Theological Value

Girard typically treats desire as problematic and has characterised desire in literature as oriented to conflict and death.[390] This negative assessment of desire is also the basis for Girard's work in cultural anthropology. Desire is midwife to culture, generating social order at the cost of the innocent victim. The conflictual character of mimetic desire is embedded in interpersonal relations and, through the 'sacred', in wider culture. Girardian scholars can be divided between those who emphasise the conflictual nature of desire (Hamerton-Kelly and Bailie) and those, like Schwager and Alison who have emphasised the positive role of mimetic desire.[391]

Girard understands the doctrine of original sin in terms of the 'bad use of mimesis'. Our (universal) involvement in the scapegoat mechanism is how the original sin is expressed, at the collective level.[392] For Milbank, Girard's alternative to a social order based on exclusionary violence is 'a kind of self-abnegating denaturation, where all self-expressive attainments and erotic yearnings must be forgone'.[393] Milbank argues that Girard himself was still trapped within the 'pernicious "sacrificial" since he demands the renunciation of the mimetic/desiring (the subjective) for the sake of collective peace'.[394] Milbank warns that what is to be renounced, for fear of provoking rivalry, may be an authentic part of oneself. Milbank's Girard is a blend of positivist and Jansenist, advising the relinquishing of our authentic human goals and desires on the basis that they are representations and copies, derived through imitation and, therefore, not our own.

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[390] Cf. *Girard, Deceit,* p. 290.

[391] Cf. P. Steinmair-Pösel, 'Original Sin, Positive Mimesis' in *Palgrave,* p. 188. *The Colloquium on Violence & Religion* (COV&R) was established to 'explore, criticize, and develop the mimetic model of the relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture' (https://violenceandreligion.com) in line with Girard's theory. Sensitive to the charge that mimetic theory 'ontologizes violence' COV&R has also explored 'good' or 'positive' mimesis, reflecting trends in Girard's mature work.

[392] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 142-43.

[393] John Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice', p. 50.

[394] Ibid, p. 51.

Lytta Basset is likewise troubled by Girard's attenuation of human desire and has attempted to secure within mimetic theory a space for authentic desire:

> It is clear that we become human by successive identifications with one human or another whom we wish to resemble. But it is also clear that we discover our unique personality as the desire to be ourselves grows and is affirmed. No one can dictate another person's deepest desire: that hope to be realised that is held within and that has no model to follow.[395]

Basett argues that the frustration of desire in childhood and the antagonistic, rather than the pacific mediation of desire, compels us to appropriate the desires of others through rivalrous strategies. The desires of others, either communicated antagonistically or anxiously appropriated, are easily mistaken for authentic desire. If human desire is purely imitation, Basett asks, on what part of 'ourselves' can we rely in order to resist the pull into violence?

In Girard's earlier work, a thoroughgoing critique of romanticism seems to occlude, for functional reasons, any desire which is not borrowed. If our mediated desires are unavoidably part of our sense of self, it would seem humans are fated to live in conflict. However, Girard's working of mimetic desire is ambiguous. He insists, for example, that following Christ 'means giving up mimetic desire'.[396] In a later work Girard writes that mimetic desire is 'intrinsically good', and 'if we were not to desire, we would not be open to what is human or what is divine'.[397] These assertions contradict one another. Girard appears to say that following Christ means ceasing to be human. However, against the background of his work as a whole, these assertions represent for Girard a paradox: that mimetic desire is always both a positive condition of being human, and the key to understanding our perpetual patterns of fratricidal violence.

Positive mimesis, the imitation of Jesus *in his imitation of the Father* (not the Father's omnipotence, self-sufficiency and perfection) is *kenotic*, an imitation of God's gratuity and openness to the Other.[398] Girard understands the imitation of Christ to be a non-masochistic, self-effacement based on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25: 'To imitate Christ is to identify

[395] Lytta Basset, *Holy Anger, Jacob, Job, Jesus* (London: Continuum, 2007) p. 187.
[396] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 431.
[397] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, pp. 15-16.
[398] Cf. P. Steinmair-Pösel, *Palgrave*, p. 189.

with the other, to efface oneself before him: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"'.[399] However, this self-effacement is achieved through a graced conversion which is the simultaneous collapse of one's (hitherto embraced) strategies of rivalrous desiring. The Christ who is imitated is not an external model, chosen from among other models. The true imitation of Christ is on the basis of what Girard calls an 'innermost mediation', whereby the desiring subject and Christ are not in conflict or competition: 'It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me'. (Galatians 2. 19-20).

Mimetic theory is not, therefore, a 'denaturing' of authentic desire. Our 'self-expressive attainments and erotic yearnings' do not emerge from 'pure nature' and are not ends in themselves. Their mere existence does not exempt them from the Law of the Gospel, once it has been authentically proclaimed and freely received. Girard's basic insight into the potentially violent trajectories of mimetic desire does not void desire as such. Girard understands Jesus to be inviting us towards his own desire, i.e., towards the goal of his life, a pacific imitation of the Father.[400] The Gospel is directed not towards prohibitions, the sacred boundaries which contain violence; indeed, the New Testament is significant for collapsing sacred boundaries in terms of familial obligations, Sabbath ritual and dietary norms. The Christian innovation is to propose positive models of imitation, models who will inevitably scandalise some, but are ultimately indicating new non-rivalrous patterns of desiring. While these models will 'protect them from mimetic rivalries rather than involving them in these rivalries', like Jesus, the disciples too will be vulnerable to violence and will scandalise those whose desires remain trapped within the sacrificial economy.[401]

In addressing the violent trajectories of mimetic desire and their social and political consequences, Girard draws attention to the shadow of desire, without renouncing desire as corrupt. Girard's mature work is open to (but does not sufficiently develop) a positive,

[399] Girard, *Battling to the End*, p. 133.
[400] Cf. Schwager, *Scapegoats*. 'If Jesus goal had been a limited good of the senses, unconditional discipleship would necessarily lead to rivalries. But since he renounced immediate desire he motivated his disciples to similar deeds'. p. 177.
[401] Basset, *Holy Anger*, pp. 201-02. Cf. 1 Cor 10. 31 – 11. 1. Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to give offense (cause scandal) to Jew or Greek, not to seek their own advantage, and to imitate him, as he imitates Christ.

theological account of mimesis. Attending to the eschatological dimension of desire saves Girard's theory from being reduced entirely to its present 'collective and political form', or lack thereof. In Saint Anselm's *Proslogion* the transformation of desire is anticipated eschatologically. The blessed in heaven find their desires are fulfilled and satisfied beyond all their hopes. Further, in the community of the blessed there is desire without rivalry, for all desires are communicated pacifically. Having enumerated the many forms of desire fulfilled in his eschatological vision, Saint Anselm concludes:

> Where there is such joy and so great a good, how rich and great must be the joy! If man abounded in all these things, how great would be the joy of his heart, well-versed in, indeed overwhelmed by, suffering. Question within yourself, could you hold the joy of so great a bliss? But surely if another whom you loved in every way as yourself, had that same bliss, your joy would be double, for you would rejoice no less for him than for yourself. And if two or three or more had this same blessedness, you would rejoice for each of them as much as you do for yourself, if you loved each one as yourself. So in that perfection of charity of countless blessed angels and men, where no one loves another less than he loves himself, they will all rejoice for each other as they do for themselves.[402]

In this eschatological vision the rivalrous desires which tend towards conflict are transformed into pacific and shared desires, desires which increase in as much as they are shared. Anselm continues: 'In so far as each one loves another, so he will rejoice in the other's good; and as in that perfection of happiness, each one will love God incomparably more than he loves either himself or others, so he will rejoice more and without regard in the happiness of God than in that of himself and of everyone else'.[403] This eschatological vision is the obverse side of mimetic desire in its conflictual and competitive manifestations; it is the fulfilment of the 'good mimesis' which Jesus invites us to undertake. Notwithstanding Anselm's remarkably irenic eschatological vision of desire, he is an unlikely theological interlocutor for Girard. Anselm is regarded as the 'fountainhead of substitutionary atonement theology'.[404] Mark Heim critiques Anselm's atonement theory on the basis of Girard's work, giving due recognition to the frequently overlooked 'anti-sacrificial' elements of Anselm's argument.[405] Girard rejects Anselm's atonement theory in

[402] *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, (736-50) trans by Sr. Benedicta Ward, SLG (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 265.
[403] Ibid, (750-55).
[404] Cf. Heim, p. 214.
[405] Ibid, pp. 297-302.

favour of the Christus Victor theory of redemption.[406] Mimetic theory, then, attends primarily to the conflictual realities of desire as it bears upon human relationships and wider social order. However, it does not deny the completely pacific goal of desire, as an eschatological desideratum. Indeed, for Wolfgang Palaver, '[t]he vertical and eschatological dimension is essential for achieving reconciliation and can inspire historical shifts', towards an alternative, forgiving, non-rivalrous culture.[407]

Non-Violent Reciprocity and Political Strategies

If, as Girard concludes, mimetic desire cannot be abandoned it is reasonable to enquire whether Girard's theory can produce a positive political expression. Critics have noted the lack of any social and political form in mimetic theory. In the following section I will explore the limits of a political expression of mimetic theory. I will argue that any social and political form of mimetic theory remains wedded to a personal mimetic conversion (gaining the 'intelligence of the victim') and is, thereafter, sustained within discreet communities embodying this 'conversion intelligence', modelling reciprocal and non-rivalrous desire.

Girard insists that imitation is inescapable and the law of reciprocity makes conflicts practically inevitable. The Kingdom of God cannot simply be established as an alternative political reality in a world vulnerable to conflictual mimesis. The rules of the Kingdom of God are therefore fundamentally pre-emptive. In Matthew 5. 40-42, Jesus teaches, 'if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him'. For Girard, such excessive demands indicate that a dynamic of negative reciprocity is already underway. Girard advises, 'if you want to put an end to mimetic rivalry, you give way completely to your rival'.[408] Girard does not see this submission as a political strategy: 'If someone is making excessive demands on you, he's already involved in mimetic rivalry, he expects you to participate in the escalation'.[409] The only way to deescalate is to meet the excessive demand twice over ('if someone asks you for

[406] Girard, *Things Hidden*, pp. 191-215.
[407] Cf. Wolfgang Palaver, 'René Girard and Charles Taylor: Complementary Engagements with the Crisis of Modernity' in *Palgrave*, 335-42 (p. 338).
[408] Girard, *When These Things Begin*, p. 47.
[409] Ibid.

your shirt give him your outer garment (*himation*) as well'). Indeed, Wolfgang Palaver has observed that, while we can identify institutions which originate in and function by scapegoating (xenophobia and warfare), 'all forms of interpersonal violence and hostility begin in the most elementary human relationships. The way out of violence and enmity must be found on these rudimentary levels'.[410]

Walter Wink, drawing on Girard, has argued that Jesus proposed a 'Third Way', between passive acceptance of injustice and violent resistance.[411] However, Wink's assertion that Jesus offers strategies to publicly humiliate the aggressor by overcompliance with an already unjust demand is at odds with Girard. Wink represents these strategies as the only available means by which the vulnerable can be vindicated and the aggressors given the possibility (through their public humiliation) to repent. However, humiliating the aggressor (even to bring about *metanoia*) reduces the Gospel message to political strategy and inducts the victim into the victimizing role. Terry Eagleton, similarly mistakes Girard's reading of the Gospel counsel as 'a negative version of potlatch, in which one outshines one's rival not by squandering more goods than he does, but by yielding to him with fine insouciance more than he asks for'.[412] However, Girard interprets the Gospels counsel not as a strategy from *within* the sacrificial system, a rivalry between victim and aggressor. The dynamics of conflict, dominated by mimesis, can only be exited on the basis of replacing negative mimesis with positive, non-rivalrous mimesis.

John Barclay is closer to Girard's understanding of the fundamental nonviolence of the Gospels when he denies that the Gospel counsel has any agenda in terms of 'humiliating', 'shaming' or 'outdoing' the aggressor. The excessive demands and the negative reciprocity which they effect can only be undone by creating a new reciprocity based on a superabundant, positive reciprocity. The risk that such a gratuitous gesture will be denied indicates that it is truly a gift. It is offered *as gift* not on the basis of narrow self-interest, (to shame or outdo the Other) but with a view to creating a new (mutually beneficial)

[410] Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. by Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing, Michigan, Michigan State University Press, 2014) p. 295.
[411] Cf. Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
[412] Eagleton, p. 104. *Potlatch* refers to the disposal or destruction of wealth especially among the First Nations of the North American western seaboard. It may be characterized as an antagonistic form of gift-giving.

relationship, characterised by positive reciprocity.[413] The reciprocity of gift in this instance exceeds all notions of the 'worth', behaviour or attitude of the recipient. The logic of the Gospel is to conceive a new, 'shared and mutual belonging'.[414] The 'aggressor' is treated not as aggressor, but is already reimagined as ally or friend in a new reconciled relationship. Good reciprocity tends towards spontaneity and lacks the element of obligation (master/slave dynamic) which tries to annihilate reciprocity altogether.[415]

Feminist theologians frequently concur with (early) Girard that Jesus ends each and every sacrifice because in him it has become evident that 'the semantics of sacrifice misrepresent the relationship between God and humanity'.[416] However, mimetic theory has been criticized by a variety of feminist and liberationist theologians for a reading of biblical and other texts which emphasize the mimetic dynamic, rather than the justice/injustice of the opposing sides. In this respect, Girard has been criticized for excluding all but his own conceptual concerns to offer a (theoretically) disinterested perspective.[417] Liberationist and feminist theologians who have appropriated his critique of sacrificial structures have fundamentally disagreed with his contention that social and political movements identified with the 'victim' are utopian and trapped within the mimetic contest of doubles.[418] This is a pertinent criticism since, as Asle Eikrem notes, if finitude means that 'we are at all times both victims and victimizers, we lose a morally significant distinction. We are robbed of conceptual means to critique and to conceive of various forms of violence as solvable social problems.'[419] In other words, Girard's theory represents a largely fatalistic and disturbing description of our

[413] John Barclay, 'Beyond Charity: Gift Reciprocity and Community Construction in the New Testament', The Firth Lectures (2018) unpublished, pp. 11-12.
[414] Ibid, p. 12.
[415] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 180-81.
[416] Cf. Asle Eikrem, *God as Sacrificial Love: A Systematic Exploration of a Controversial Notion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) p. 56.
[417] Girard's reticence to outline a political theory, one which 'takes sides', has led to the suspicion that Girard was merely affecting an elevated and disinterested bearing with respect to political realities. Eagleton sees in Girard 'a patrician disdain for the "mob"'. Eagleton, p. 56. The issue may be, as Bartlett suggests, Girard's methodology; his 'openly sweeping, sweepingly open critique of violence' which rarely pauses to investigate questions (e.g., the ethics of war) systematically. Cf. Andrew Bartlett, 'Girard and the Question of Pacifism' in *Anthropoetics: The Journal of Generative Anthropology*, 2, spring 2016, http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2102/2102bartlett Cf. Bartlett, p. 2.
[418] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 287.
[419] Cf. Eikrem, p. 255.

inability to transcend the violent consequence of mediated desire. On this basis Girard's only strategy is to withdraw from mimetic escalation, bracketing questions of right and wrong.

It is the lack of historical and political specificity which Eagleton criticises in Girard.[420] Girard has commented that mimetic theory succeeds not merely when one realises that he or she has been a victim/scapegoat, but more crucially that he or she has also been part of a group that has turned against a victim. For such a realisation grace is necessary.[421] A social and political expression of mimetic theory seems to require even the victims in a given conflict to assume some notional share in the collective violence they suffer. If, as Girard asserts, the social order is a result of the scapegoat mechanism then our attempt to confront the social Other as Other is misguided. It sets in motion the negative reciprocity which leads inevitably to more violence. Since the *misuse* of mimetic desire is the original sin, we all participate in a social order which has come into being by murder and exclusion.[422] The 'aggressors', under this aspect, are themselves victims of the mechanism and do not know what they are doing (Cf. Luke 23. 34). Roberto Farneti has suggested that '[a] Girardian perspective on conflict resolution must therefore concern itself with making rivals reflectively aware of their mimetic plight'.[423]

If mimetic theory deprives us of the conceptual means to critique and distinguish forms of violence, as Eikrem suggests, can it have any positive political role? In the succeeding chapters I will suggest that the early Franciscan concept of *fraternitas* as a shared ethical space wherein ordinary differences and rivalries are held in tension qualifies as a (premodern) political expression of positive mimesis. The condition for occupying this shared space was penance, understood as a commitment to acknowledging one's own rivalrous desire and a willingness to learn new pattens of non-rivalrous desire within the community. In conceiving violence as a 'solvable social problem', without having first acquired the 'intelligence of the victim' (and attempted some social reality wherein this intelligence can be normative) we may unwittingly become the workers of further violence. In other words, the conditions under

[420] Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, pp. 55-56.
[421] Cf. Ann W. Astell, *COV&R*, May 2015, p. 4, https://www.pdcnet.org/covrb/content/covrb_2015_0046_0004_0005
[422] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 142-43.
[423] Cf. Bartlett, p. 2.

which the political form of mimetic theory may function are inescapably tied to a graced collapse of rivalrous patterns of desire and a non-confrontational withdrawal from existing social realities maintained by exclusionary violence.

In political terms, the primary function of mimetic theory is to identify the scapegoat and pleads his or her innocence. In so doing, mimetic theory helps to expose the endlessly adaptive mechanism by which social order is created and maintained and to insist that this order is not of God. One of Girard's main contributions to theology is 'to rid us of the illusion that there can be a legitimate, safe violence, the violence of just retribution'.[424] Theologies in which God is implicated in violence (and in which violence is justified, legitimized or 'theologized') are properly interrogated by mimetic theory. Since we habitually tell ourselves that 'our violence is only reactive, protective, educative, undertaken in self-defence or just retaliation',[425] we invariably mistake God for the alien space (the sacred) into which we cast our unacknowledged violence.

Mimetic Theory and Contemporary Theology

Raymund Schwager

Girard's commitment to a scientifically advanced anthropology gradually 'crystalized' into a theory inexplicable and insufficient outside of properly theological categories. Kevin Mongrain observes that even a cursory reading of Girard's work indicates that he was pursuing something like a theological agenda. Furthermore, Mongrain asserts that Girard's anthropology is not anthropocentric but fundamentally theocentric and Christocentric, which 'puts it squarely in the family of Christian theology'.[426] Girard's fundamental anthropology becomes, in Mongrain's opinion, the 'handmaiden' to a 'theocentric-christocentric perspective on salvation history'.[427] In this respect, his anthropological doctrine has been 'tailored to better serve the biblical narrative's panoramic vision of salvation history'.[428]

[424] Loughlin, *The Postmodern God*, p. 102.
[425] Cf. Ibid.
[426] Mongrain, *Modern Theology*, p. 82.
[427] Ibid, p. 83.
[428] Ibid.

Raymund Schwager observed the theological contours in Girard's writings in the mid 1970s and initiated a decades long correspondence which helped Girard to recast mimetic theory as a more theologically robust hypothesis. Schwager, a theologically trained and sympathetic (though not uncritical) interlocutor, encouraged Girard to rethink core insights of mimetic theory, to accommodate the biblical and doctrinal tradition of Christianity. Whereas Girard initially understood the cross to be a source of knowledge about sacrificial systems, Schwager was concerned that the Cross be understood as a source of life, not simply a source of knowledge.[429] Schwager came to appreciate Girard's perspective in presenting the Gospel and the Cross in (anthropological/epistemological) terms accessible to the nonreligious reader. Girard was sensitive to the nonbeliever's perspective, shaped by an Enlightenment bias against religion and to the assumption that faith cannot yield any form of real knowledge.

Schwager was initially concerned that in Girard mimetic desire leads – almost mechanically – to violence, undermining human freedom and ontologizing violence. To overcome this problem Schwager (and Girard) were to locate the 'Fall' 'in between the era of animal mimesis, from which humans emerged, and the hell of mimetic entrapment into which free but idolatrous choice led subsequent humanity'.[430] The effects of conflictual mimesis so quickly overtook our hominid ancestors that the 'primal zone of genuine freedom became lost in phenomenological obscurity'.[431] Schwager, who shared Girard's understanding of archaic sacrifice, convinced Girard that his earlier repudiation of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was incorrect and that the sacrificial language in the Epistle was not a lapse into sacrificial thinking. In cultures saturated with sacrificial thinking the attempt to present a human death as beneficial or meaningful without recourse to sacrificial language was probably impossible.[432]

[429] Schwager notes the symbolic meaning attributed in the Gospels to Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism. These are an essential component of the proclamation of the Reign of God, indicating a complete liberation from evil. Cf. *Scapegoats,* pp. 166-69.
[430] Cowdell, *Nonviolent God*, pp. 100-1.
[431] Ibid, p. 100. In 1983 Schwager informed Han Urs von Balthasar that his (shared) concerns about human freedom in mimetic theory were now resolved. Ibid.
[432] Cf. Finamore, p. 151. Finamore, following Schwager notes that debates on the nature and role of sacrificial language in the New Testament are based on prior decisions about the nature and purpose of sacrifice. In Girard's hypothesis Christ's death is, on one level a 'failed sacrifice'. It is also a new kind of sacrifice. Cf. Ibid, p. 160.

Schwager recognised in mimetic theory a range of insights companionable to theo-dramatic categories. Girard's insights aided Schwager's project of reconciling such contradictory assertions as Divine Love and Divine Wrath.[433] Schwager's theo-dramatic work attempts to bring the history of Jesus and the Church's doctrinal faith into a synthesis in five 'acts'. Theo-drama attempts to do justice to concrete history (like narrative theology). At the same time, theo-drama creates the possibility to pursue a genuine line of reasoning, something which Schwager judged problematic for narrative theology.[434] The theo-drama unfolds through an invitation to participate in the Reign of God, an invitation which is historically rejected. The manifestation (and consequence) of the rejection is the Cross. In Act Four, the Resurrection is the judgement of God, experienced as forgiveness and peace (no longer is the scapegoat associated with the 'poison' of the community, only its healing). The Fifth Act brings dramatic 'closure' in the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of a new community.

Schwager links Girard's work to one of the twentieth century's most prominent Catholic theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Schwager having drawn Balthasar's attention to Girard's work. Balthasar asserts the importance of mimetic theory for theology, especially soteriology, and in volume three of his *Theodramatik* (Vol 4 in English translation),[435] he states that 'Girard's is surely the most dramatic project to be undertaken today in the field of soteriology and in theology generally'.[436] Mongrain notes that Balthasar's critique of Girard is 'constructive', 'irenic' and provisional, since it evaluates Girard on *Things Hidden*, before Girard's worked crystalized into a more coherent theological form.[437] Mongrain and others

[433] The theo-dramatic category suggests the influence of Balthasar on Schwager's theology. Schwager's earliest use of theo-dramatic categories was in his 1970 dissertation on Ignatius of Loyola's 'dramatic' view of the Church. For Schwager drama involves an encounter of persons with aspects of 'development, conflicts, tension, crisis, defeat, and eventual reconciliation'. Although influenced by Balthasar, Schwager's theo-dramatic work 'has a distinctly different outlook'. Cf. Nikalous Wandinger, 'Raymund Schwager: Dramatic Theology', in *Palgrave*, pp. 217-24. The dramatic categories integrate genuine episodic experience (setbacks, advances, conflicts, trivial moments, etc.) within an overarching theme. The Dramatic includes closure, like theory, but attends to the realism of lived experience. Cf. Cowdell, *Nonviolent God*, pp. 125-29.

[434] R. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*, trans. by James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co. 1999). 'The theological line of reasoning can be developed out of drama, since drama does not advance without end in epic manner, but expresses itself in conflict and its corresponding resolution'. p. 12.

[435] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, Volume IV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1994).

[436] Ibid, p. 299.

[437] Mongrain, *Modern Theology*, p. 87.

emphasize the points of compatibility between the two thinkers. However, it may be stressed that when Girard meets violence and divine wrath in the scriptures, he assumes it is the vestige of the 'archaic sacred', projected onto God. Balthasar, on the other hand, is committed to attributing violence to God and in a lengthy passage he lists the references in both the Old Testament and the Gospels which indicate God's 'anger'.[438] Balthasar concludes, 'contrary to the unconsidered utterances of modern theologians, we must maintain that "anger" is an essential and ineradicable feature […] even in the New Testament picture of God'.[439] While Girard's contribution to Christian theology has been frequently critiqued, his work is a coherent and persuasive critique of influential theologies (such as Balthasar's) which risk sacralising human violence by projecting it onto God.

Girard and the Theory of Sacrifice

Theories of Gift and Sacrifice

Since *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard's project has been engaged with the question of sacrifice.[440] Prominent among Girard's antecedents in the theory of sacrifice are Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, who while abandoning the search for the origins of sacrifice nonetheless proposed a unified or essential structure (a single 'mechanism') within sacrifice.[441] In an important essay on the concept of gift, Mauss explored how the reciprocal nature of gift-giving was embedded in all ancient societies and functioned as a 'total system'.[442] Mauss's essay explored how the reciprocity of gift-exchange created essential social cohesion in ancient societies where effective protection from violence, the provision of health care, education, etc., were minimal. To understand the concept of the gift in ancient societies, Mauss argued for the 'scrambling of contemporary polarities between exchange that is "free" or "obliged", "pure" or "interested"'.[443]

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[438] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* Vol IV, pp. 338-58.
[439] Ibid, p. 340.
[440] Cf. Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice*. Keenan's genealogy of theories of sacrifice (pp. 10-32) indicates Girard's precursors in theories of sacrifice, as well as his influence on contemporary theories.
[441] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, Trans. W. D. Halls (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964) p. 47.
[442] Cf. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, Trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).
[443] Cf. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing 2015), pp. 11-65. Barclay, following Mauss, insists on the essential reciprocity of gift-giving in ancient societies and

Mauss's 'total system' of gift-reciprocity drew Girard's attention to antagonistic gift-giving, such as *potlatch.*[444] Mauss correctly notes that potlatch was a form of power, compelling from the recipient a reciprocal gift of equal or greater value. Girard considered potlatch a 'ritualized form of mimetic rivalry on the social scale'.[445] In Girard's view what is important is not the gift offered but the humiliation intended for the rival tribe and, typically in the case of advanced mimetic rivalry, that the gift or desired object is destroyed in the process. Mauss noted that in German the word 'gift' can mean 'poison'. Girard understood gift-giving to be derived from sacrifice and suggests that originally all gifts were those desirable objects which tended to provoke mimetic rivalries within ancient societies. What was a poison to oneself was properly a valued gift to another. The gift, poisoned to begin with, became harmless once transferred outside the immediate group.[446]

Barclay notes, that in the Greco-Roman context, the reciprocity inherent in gift-giving (a reciprocity which embraces such seemingly opposed concepts as 'voluntary' and 'obliged', 'disinterested' and 'interested', 'generous' and 'constrained'), is recognized above all in sacrifice.[447] Sacrifices may be understood as return-gifts for favours received or as inducements, and are embedded in a reciprocal cycle of gift-giving. Whereas Mauss proposed a 'total system' based on gift-giving Girard identifies mimetic violence as prior to universal systems of exchange. The gift – like the 'sacred' – is fundamentally ambiguous since reciprocity may be positive and generative or negative and destructive. Girard's theory of sacrifice incorporates the reality of negative reciprocity, and in doing so ensures an essential distinction between archaic sacrifice and a sacrifice which does not tend towards violence.[448]

Sacrifice as a Theological Category

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disassociates modern ideas of a 'pure' or 'free' gift (such as Derrida's) from the original (and the biblical) concept of gift. A gift without return is a 'historically and culturally specific western invention'. p. 64.

[444] Cf. Barclay, p. 13.

[445] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 180.

[446] Cf. Girard, *Scandal Comes*, p. 13.

[447] Cf. Barclay, *Paul*, p. 27.

[448] Keenan explores the possibility of escaping sacrifice entirely. He warns against naïve attempts to abandon the sacrificial. Keenan writes of interrupting the sacrificial tradition, rather than repeating it, in some new form.

Chronologically, Girard's interest in sacrifice began with research into archaic religion and sacrificial ritual, understood as an effort to 'revive the conciliatory effects of unanimous violence by substituting an alternative victim for the original scapegoat'.[449] It is this definition of sacrifice he found consistently subverted and undone in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Citing the biblical story of the judgement of Solomon (1 Kings 3. 16-28) Girard could say that his thinking about sacrifice had 'been nourished *from the beginning* by this inexhaustible text'.[450] For Girard, the story of the judgement of Solomon demonstrates the true pattern of a 'Christian' sacrifice, namely a sacrifice that is 'not directed toward suffering and death, not subordinated to a form of subjectivity, that is both mimetic and solipsistic […] and instead is directed towards her neighbour and toward life'.[451] Archaic sacrificial discourse inevitably tends towards death as the means of securing life and social order, whereas in the account of the judgement of Solomon, the sacrifice of the 'good harlot' can only be described as tending towards life.[452] Indeed, in yielding to her rival the true mother disrupts the mimetic cycle of reciprocal and accelerating claim which is tending always towards violence and it is she, not Solomon, who is the Christ figure in this narrative.

Initially Girard refused to consider Christ's death as sacrifice, since it represents for Girard the failure of the scapegoat mechanism to produce social order through violence. He later came to accept that Christ's death could be described as a sacrifice, in the manner in which the 'good harlot' was willing to sacrifice her interests and even her life for the life of her child. For Girard, to insist that both ritual sacrifice based on scapegoating violence and a non-violent, voluntary, self-renunciation are both species of sacrifice, 'as misleading as it may be on one level, nevertheless suggests something essential, namely, the paradoxical unity of religion in all its forms throughout history'.[453] Girard asserts that mimetic theory in fact bridged the two understandings of sacrifice in such a manner that the same word could be applied to two terms which occupy either end of the religious-cultural spectrum as it relates to human violence and conflict. Sacrifice, deconstructed by means of mimetic theory returns as the possibility of a real choice not based on scapegoating violence.

[449] Girard, *Scandal Comes,* p. 41.
[450] Ibid. (My italics).
[451] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 241.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Girard, *Scandal Comes*, p. 43.

Theological Critiques of Girard's Theory of Sacrifice

Several theologians have critiqued Girard's theory of sacrifice, specifically, his early 'anti-sacrificial' formulations, which sought to make an absolute distinction between all historical examples of ritual sacrifice and 'Christian' sacrifice. Bruce Chilton, for example, argues that having linked victimhood to sacrifice from the beginning, Girard is obliged to see sacrifice always as violence and an expression of mimetic conflict.[454] Chilton, who takes a more positive view of sacrifice, accuses Girard of scapegoating sacrifice in the ancient world as a response to the violence he discovers in the modern world.[455] Biblical scholars, such as Frances Young, have noted that sacrifice in the New Testament refers to a variety of religious actions and attitudes and cannot, therefore, be reduced to Girard's violent, 'archaic sacrifice'.[456] Young has further noted that in the Hebrew scriptures one finds 'several different levels of understanding [of sacrifice] not necessarily compatible, yet operative at the same time'.[457] The Hebrew scriptures 'universally regarded [sacrifice] as the only way of maintaining a relationship with the divine', however, this did not imply the relationship was maintained exclusively through a violent ritual.[458] The early Christian Church (and the authors of the New Testament) inherited not only the Jewish scriptures; they also inherited Jewish *ideas* about sacrifice, and this conceptual plurality is evident in the New Testament. When Girard states 'The Gospels only speak of sacrifices in order to reject them and deny them any validity', his rhetoric needs to be tempered with the evidence of Young and other biblical scholars.[459] However, it must be added, this rhetoric is more common in Girard's early work and his later work on sacrifice demonstrates more nuance and less rhetoric.[460]

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[454] Bruce Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvanian State University Press, 1992), p. 25. Chilton accuses Girard of 'ideological propaganda' by effectively dividing the modern and ancient worlds into two distinct regions, ibid.
[455] Cf. Ibid.
[456] Cf. Frances Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975)
[457] Frances Young, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins: XIV. Sacrifice' in *Expository Times*, 86, 10 (1975) 305-09. (p.308).
[458] Ibid. p. 309. 'Sacrifice was not understood as a single type of act with a single meaning'. Ibid, p. 306.
[459] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 180. Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). Chilton and Margaret Barker have argued that Jesus as High Priest was a fundamental aspect of early Christian self-understanding.
[460] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 156-57.

John Milbank's Critique of Girard's Theory of Sacrifice

In his article 'Stories of Sacrifice', John Milbank specifically targets Girard's theory of sacrifice, revisiting his previously stated philosophical and theological critique of Girard's project in *Theology and Social Theory*. Milbank has questioned whether Girard is correct to 'go behind the seeming contingency of violence, its origins in the subjective will, in favour of a thesis about its inter-subjective inevitability?'[461] Milbank argues that Girard falls into the same trap as the atheist social scientists of the nineteenth century, i.e., proposing an original act of murder 'which has both to be commuted and concealed through ascription to a divine authority. For this concealment the gods were born'.[462] Milbank surveys four theorists who, for different reasons, attempted to find the 'essence' of sacrifice, creating any number of 'diverting and plausible narratives, none of them convincing'.[463] Milbank's four theorists are the German biblical scholar, Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), Scottish professor of Divinity, William Robertson Smith (1846-1894), social anthropologist and folklorist, James Frazer (1854-1941) and French sociologists Henri Hubert (1872-1927) and Marcel Mauss (1872-1950).

Each undertook the 'quest for sacrifice' under different influences, Milbank noting Wellhausen's debt to romanticism and the influence of both Charles Darwin and Auguste Comte on Robertson Smith. In Robertson Smith's quest, the institution of sacrifice is presented as a natural, evolutionary progress towards Christianity, indeed, he offers a social-scientific apologetic for Christianity. However, Milbank notes, 'by a slight twist' James Frazer created a similar narrative amounting to 'a scarcely veiled exposure of Christian doctrine as primitive superstition'.[464] It is this 'slight twist' which indicates for Milbank the perilous nature of the modern 'quest for sacrifice'. Milbank observes that the gap between atheist metanarrative and Christian apologetics is negligible in these stories: both mistakenly confuse '*evolutionism* (any account of necessitated history) with typology, or the idea that the Cross and eucharist both end and fulfil all sacrifice.'[465] Milbank does not deny that the Cross and

[461] Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice', p. 42.
[462] Ibid, p. 28.
[463] Ibid, p. 29.
[464] Ibid, p. 35.
[465] Ibid, pp. 40-1.

Eucharist both end and fulfil all sacrifice, rather he challenges the attempt to *demonstrate* this assertion in a social-scientific theory.

Having rehearsed the misguided attempts of these theorists to 'frame' sacrifice, Milbank attempts to prove Girard's guilt by association. In this effort Milbank's critique of Girard's theory of sacrifice is chiefly ethnographical.[466] The anthropologist Luc de Heusch, a noted critic of Girard's anthropological pretensions is one of Milbank's chief authorities in this critique.[467] By Girard's own admission, his work was influenced by Robertson Smith and Frazer. Milbank detects in Girard the baleful influence of 19th century rationalism and, thus, while acquitting Girard of 'any lingering devotion to totemism', Milbank 'can still identify in [Girard's] thought thematics akin to those of nineteenth-century positivism'.[468] Milbank even suggests that, for all his efforts to escape it, Girard is 'still locked within a pernicious "sacrificial" since he demands the renunciation of the mimetic/desiring (the subjective) for the sake of collective peace'. [469]

Milbank suspects that Girard (and his disciples) represent for religion a temptation which should be resisted, i.e., to offer to science the right to explain so as to receive from science a proof or demonstration which is arranged around a Christological framework. Such a demonstration, Milbank insists, is no more than a cultural bias, 'whereas one should be content with the bias of faith'. [470] Milbank takes seriously Girard's theory of mimetic desire, but while he allows that imitative desire is at work when we desire the object desired by our model/rival, is it not also at work when the model simply appears more successful at obtaining the desired object? In other words, mimetic desire is also at work when one attempts to emulate the other, not from a supposed lack of being, but simply because she is more successful in achieving her desires.[471] Milbank also raises the question of infinite regression: where did the first desire come from?

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[466] Ibid, p. 46.
[467] Cf. de Heusch. De Heusch critiques Girard's association of sacrifice with the origins of monarchy. De Heusch suggests that Girard 'somewhat misuses anthropology' and charges him with 'ethnocentrism' and 'a type of neo-Christian, somewhat heretical theology'. pp. 16-17.
[468] Milbank, 'Stories of Sacrifice', p. 50.
[469] Ibid, p. 51.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid, pp. 42-3. In reducing mimetic desire to the more conflictual model, Milbank judges Girard 'high-handed'. Why is 'ontological' desire prior to the kind of imitation/emulation which is focused on the object,

While these critiques are valid, Milbank seems more preoccupied with the broader question of Girard's theoretical derivation. Milbank is deeply suspicious of the various social sciences which he thinks are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise and some of which are established on faith claims which are in direct contradiction with Christianity.[472] Milbank traces the problem back to medieval Nominalism and other 'deviant' theologies, which created spheres of 'secularity and autonomy' from which concepts such as rights, sovereignty, and private property became established.[473] Milbank links Girard to the philosophy of Nietzsche which develops from a violent or agonistic ontology, in contradiction to Christianity's peaceful ontology.[474]

At the heart of Milbank's argument, Kaplan notes, is Milbank's objection to Girard's methodology: 'One first needs a social *theory* – mimetic desire – in order to arrive at a theological truth or set of truths – in this case the gospel. Such approaches, even by professed Christians or theologians, accept the modern displacement of theology'.[475] Milbank's critique of theological and philosophical deviations, the antecedents to modernism, begins in late medieval Nominalism, with Duns Scotus (who for the first time separates philosophy and theology). 'It is indeed for radical orthodoxy an either/or: Philosophy (Western or Eastern) as a purely autonomous discipline, or theology: Herod or the magi, Pilate or the God-man'.[476] In such a 'zero-sum' assessment of the relationship of Christianity to modernity, Girard's theories are inevitably more to be resisted than engaged with.

Milbank's critique has itself been critiqued.[477] Fergus Kerr suggests that Millbank may have discovered, perhaps at 'some fairly late stage' in writing *Theology and Social Theory*, that Girard was offering an account about 'the non-ultimacy of violence in a properly Christian understanding of history' comparable to his own. Kerr argues that Millbank was compelled

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not the model? By asking this question Milbank is assuming that certain objects are innately desirable, which may be so, but is something Girard rules out. For Girard desire is always mediated.

[472] Cf. Kaplan, *Unlikely Apologist*, p. 47.

[473] Cf. Ibid.

[474] Ibid.

[475] Ibid, p. 48.

[476] *Radical Orthodoxy*: *A New Theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999) p. 32.

[477] Cf. Kerr, 'Rescuing Girard's Argument?'

to differentiate his deliberate reworking of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* from Girard's unintentionally similar project.[478] Kerr asserts that while Millbank gives a fair account of Girard's project, he critiques it on the basis of misleading references to Freud and Nietzsche and, seemingly to differentiate his project from Girard's, resorts to defects which seem rather 'factitious and even fictitious'.[479] Millbank's substantive theological criticism of Girard, that anarchy is prior in the human group is not – as Kerr notes – opposed to the Augustinian view, the crucial point of which is to assert no *ontological* priority in anarchy.[480]

In some respects Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy appears to be a rival twin to mimetic theory since Millbank's systematic theology is accompanied by 'an ambitious and high-minded agenda in political theology'.[481] Mimetic theory has arguably reached further into the social and political order than Radical Orthodoxy and continues to make a significant impact on contemporary social and political thought.[482] While Millbank offers a robust critique of mimetic theory and other 'secular philosophies', Milbank and his circle have themselves been accused of a 'speculative tendency that rides loosely in the exegetical saddle'.[483] MacDougall has warned that there is in Millbank a mingling of church and state and 'an imperialistic stance that many, particularly political and theological progressives, find profoundly disquieting'.[484]

Millbank's account of sacrifice exhibits a determination not to engage with Girard's later work. Other critics have likewise censured Girard for his early statements which were subsequently modified or even withdrawn.[485] In an interview with Rebecca Adams (1993)

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[478] Ibid, p. 387.
[479] Ibid, p. 394.
[480] Ibid, p. 397.
[481] Cowdell, *The Nonviolent God*, p. 119.
[482] In 1981 the Dutch Girard Society was founded in Amsterdam. The Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) was founded at Stanford in 1990. The Association pour les Récherches Mimétiques began in Paris in 2005. Theology and Peace, The Raven Foundation and *Imitatio* (funded by one of Girard's former student, Peter Thiel), began in 2007. Groups dedicated to reflection on mimetic theory have also been established Australia and South America. Cf. Haven, p. 199.
[483] Cf. Michael S. Horton, 'Participation and Covenant' in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation*, James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, editors (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) p. 128.
[484] Scott MacDougall, 'Scapegoating the Secular: The Irony of Mimetic Violence in the Social Thought of John Milbank in *Violence, Transformation and the Sacred,* pp. 85-98. (p. 95).
[485] As late as 2007 Finlan stated without qualification: 'René Girard rejects the notion that the death of Jesus should be considered a sacrifice'. Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007) p. 103.

Girard accepts, for example, that he misinterpreted *Hebrews* and was 'completely wrong' in imposing his vocabulary on the Epistle. Girard accepted that, in *Things Hidden* he had 'scapegoated' *Hebrews* and the term 'sacrifice'.[486] In 1995 Girard admitted that he 'was wrong twice': firstly in stating too absolutely the separation of archaic religions and the Christian religion and secondly in avoiding the use of the same term to express two different types of sacrifice, diminishing the paradoxical unity of all religions in human history.[487] While insisting that the overwhelming tendency of the Gospels is anti-sacrificial and that the Gospels achieve a true rupture in history, Girard did accept that there is 'no perfectly non-sacrificial space'. In *Violence and the Sacred* and in *Things Hidden*, Girard's purpose was to situate himself in 'that non-sacrificial space from which to understand and explain everything without personal involvement', a position he came to accept was impossible.[488] Girard's comprehensive retraction and his more nuanced and inclusive approach to elements of the archaic sacred in biblical literature has not always been generously acknowledged. In his 2018 book *Radical Sacrifice*, Eagleton continues to charge Girard with his rejection of *Hebrews* in *Things Hidden*.[489]

Sacrifice Inverted

Girard's treatment of sacrifice, and its theological reception, is instructive. For Milbank, Girard's theory is problematic because, although compelling in certain respects, it cannot be trusted. With a 'slight twist' the same methodology which appears to function as an apologia for Christian revelation may collapse into yet another social-scientific deconstruction of religion. However, while Milbank demonstrates Girard's debt to earlier social-scientific theories, he fails to appreciate in mimetic theory a capacity to develop and deepen, in conversation with Christian theology. Robert Daly has noted, that as mimetic theory developed it is seen to inhabit a properly Christian universe:

> One of the striking things about the history of Girardian mimetic theory was that, in its initial formulations in the mind of Girard, it was not consciously Christian. Looked at from

[486] Girard and Adams, pp. 28-30.
[487] Cf. René Girard 'Mimetische Theorie und Theologie', cited by Petra Steinmair-Pösel in *COV&R, Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion*, May 2015, p. 16.
[488] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 156.
[489] Cf. Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice,* p. 54.

> the outside, it seems to have become increasingly more Christian as time went on […] but from the inside, Girardian mimetic theory did not *become* Christian in the course of time. Rather, in the course of time, it discovered how profoundly Christian it was all along.[490]

Girard's anthropology of the Cross allows no recourse to violence in God, and denies the sacrificial nature of Christ's death, in the ordinary sense.[491] For Girard archaic sacrifice and violence are inescapably linked. Archaic sacrifice obtains for human violence the greatest possible justification and concealment. Violence is mimetic and typically no one feels responsible for provoking the initial violence. In the context of a sacrificial crisis, ritual violence always appears legitimate, sanctioned and divinely approved. Its legitimacy is confirmed by the unanimity and social differentiation it produces. Indeed, in contemporary society (political) narratives of innocence are frequently wed to the language of sacrifice, alerting us to the dangers of associating the archaic with the Gospel.[492] By drawing our attention to the endlessly adaptive mechanism of mimetic violence, and describing its working in anthropological terms, Girard helps us to avoid a naïve incorporation of archaic sacrifice into Christian theology.[493]

The Gospels offer no positive role to violence and Girard insists that even the theme of Christian apocalypse is human, not divine terror: 'As long as the violence seems to be divine in origin, it really holds no terror for anybody, since it is either an aid to salvation, or it doesn't exist at all'.[494] The arbitrary and uncontrolled quality of mimetic violence is, however a terrible responsibility and an ever-present danger, hitherto concealed by the lie of archaic sacrifice. In associating human violence with the kingdoms of this world and the social order it creates, the Gospels are nothing less than the revelation of the kingdom of God, a social order with

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[490] Daly, p. 217.
[491] Cf. *Things Hidden*, pp. 180- 279.
[492] Cf. John Pahl and James Wellman, 'Empire of Sacrifice: Violence and the Sacred in American Culture' in *Can we Survive our Origin?* pp. 71-93.
[493] Cf. Ian Bradley, *The Power of Sacrifice* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995). In an effort to explore the life-giving power of sacrifice Bradley goes some way towards suggesting a kind of equivalence between divine self-giving, kenosis, and a variety of mythic stories of violent expulsions and dismembering. For Bradley sacrifice 'is at once the power which animates and drives life throughout the physical world and the principle at the very heart of the being and purposes of God' p. 25. Bradley writes that this power is exemplified on the Cross 'where Christ's body is dismembered and broken for the world, to be re-membered at each celebration of the Eucharist', p. 35. Using the language of 'dismembering' and 're-membering' the victim, Bradley risks associating the Dionysiac myth and the violent *sparagmos* ritual. Cf. Girard*, Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 135-60. Girard argues that the 'power' of both sacrifices, the archaic and the Christian are of a different order and produce entirely different effects.
[494] *Things Hidden*, p. 195.

no claims to violence. Girard associated Jesus' 'hour' in the Gospel of John with the historical moment in which humanity must choose between two forms of reciprocity 'which are very close and radically opposed'.[495] Girard differentiates two cities or kingdoms present in the world, kingdoms which cannot ultimately coexist or communicate with each other.

To understand Christ's death as sacrifice risks losing this unique revelation and postponing the decision. '[I]t is important to say the Christ's death was not a sacrificial one. To say that Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices, is to recognize in him the Word of God: "I wish for mercy and not sacrifices"'.[496] In a later work Girard accepts that there is both a 'break and a continuity' between archaic sacrifice and the Gospel revelation. Ultimately, Girard does not scapegoat or condemn sacrifice; 'as if we were by nature strangers to violence'.[497] In Girard's mature work sacrifice is not banished but inverted. Girard's treatment of sacrifice may be considered analogous to understanding the baptismal waters as 'a narrative transition that does not destroy the old story but reorders its trajectory to a previously unforeseen end, a different, unexpected *telos*'.[498] The old story of sacrifice is seen, in this context, to have had 'only a conditional goal, a meaning that could not satisfy, could not be the good of the person'. In his mature work Girard does not attempt to obliterate or disown archaic sacrifice; rather it is 'enfolded in a new story, which by promise of a different future changes the past. What has been is no longer what has to be'.[499]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored important aspects of Girard's engagement with theology, specifically, Girard's approach to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. From Girard's reading of the scriptures the victim emerges, against a background of half-concealed jealousies, rivalries and collective murders. Girard was not the first to observe the scriptural witness to

[495] Ibid, p. 201.
[496] Ibid, p. 210.
[497] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 157.
[498] Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, p. 215.
[499] Ibid, p. 217.

the innocent victim, however his reading of this witness through the lens of mimetic desire is his unique contribution.[500]

Girard's theory of desire was originally expressed almost exclusively in negative terms. On this basis, some commentators have misread Girard and accused him of ontologizing acquisitive mimesis, whereas, for Girard this is but one modality of human desire.[501] The passage from negative, rivalrous patterns of desire, to positive patterns of desire is not achieved by a merely intellectual process. It is not merely the *knowledge* of mediated or 'triangular' desire which is decisive. This knowledge must be accompanied by the graced awareness of oneself not only as a victim, but also as one who has scapegoated and excluded others. The possibility of creating non-conflictual patterns of desire which effect a positive political transformation, depends on forming social realities wherein the 'intelligence of the victim' is socially normative, and creatively modelled and performed.

Sacrifice, a near universal cultural institution is grounded in ideas of reciprocity, as Barclay indicates. Girard's reductive approach to sacrifice may be unwarranted. Nevertheless, by emphasizing the reciprocity at work in sacrifice (as well as gift) Girard has alerted us to a wider sacrificial economy which is itself subverted by the Gospel. The Gospels are not limited to a critique of Temple sacrifice; Jesus is frequently seen to undermine the supposed reciprocity upon which social relations and religious institutions were established. Ideas of reciprocal violence (God intervening to punish the sinner (Lk 13. 1-5)) and reciprocal benefits (God blessing/healing only those within established groups (Lk 7. 1-11)) are challenged in the Gospels. In the Gospels, God is seen to be outside of a sacrificial economy. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10. 25-37), it is the obligations of cult (not any supposed moral failure, e.g., cowardice, disgust, etc.,) that serve to separate the priest from the victim, leading Alison to note that the human pattern of desire is such that 'we either create goodness by displacing the victims, or find ourselves being made good by moving toward them. But a form of goodness which is entirely unrelated to dealing with the human reality of victimhood is not

[500] Girard's reading is, as has been noted, a literary-critical reading. To achieve its overall effect Girard has at times neglected historical-critical evidence and historicized mythic motifs.
[501] Cf. James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong,* p. 13.

something to which our species can relate'.[502] This insight accords with Girard's hermeneutic of the victim in scripture, and Girard's assertion that in Christ the sacrificial economy does not so much evolve as completely invert, in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

[502] James Alison, 'Like Being Dragged through a Bush Backwards: Hints of the Shape of Conversion's Adventure' in *Violence, Desire and the Sacred, Vol 1: Girard's Mimetic Theory Across the Disciplines,* edited by Scott Cowdell, et al. (Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 19-33. (p. 23), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/durham>

Chapter Four

Mimetic Theory as a hermeneutical key for the Early Franciscan Movement

Introduction and Methodology

In this chapter I will explore the early Franciscan movement, principally through the figure of the founder and exemplar of Franciscan life: Francis of Assisi. Treating the sources, which include the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi, biographies and early Franciscan texts, I will explore Saint Francis in his historical context, through the lens of Girard's mimetic theory.[503] I adopt Girard's method of 'shuttling back and forth' in this thesis, between the writings of Saint Francis, early *Lives* of the Saint, and contemporary scholarship on Francis of Assisi and the Early Franciscan movement.[504] In adopting Girard's method, I will explore the nexus of theological and anthropological concerns which stimulated a radically different approach to peace-making and social interaction in the early Franciscan movement. This method has as its aim the discovery of the *mimetic realism* at the origins of St. Francis's conversion and in the form of life (*forma vitae*) which characterized the early Franciscan movement.

To understand the early Franciscan movement as an *exodus from sacrificial systems* the role and function of the founder, Francis of Assisi must be clarified and set within a context of rapid social change. This chapter will be divided in three parts:

1. A critique of the 'romantic' interpretation of Francis of Assisi associated with Paul Sabatier and those authors influenced by his important work on St. Francis, *Vie de Saint François* (1894). This is a necessary prerequisite to applying mimetic theory to accounts of Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement.

[503] The writings of St. Francis of Assisi are taken from volume one of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents,* edited by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv., William J. Short, O.F.M. (New York: New City Press, 2000), henceforth *FA:ED* (1). Other Sources of the early Franciscan movement, *Lives* of Saint Francis of Assisi, and early liturgical works are contained in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vols. 2 & 3. (*FA:ED* (2) and *FA:ED* (3)).

[504] Cf. Girard, *Scandal Comes*, pp. 50-51. 'Shuttling back and forth' imposed on Girard's work 'a form of composition resembling a snail, or a volute, or a spiral'. He also compared his work to a 'thriller', where 'all the pieces are of the puzzle are given at the beginning, but it is only at the end that it becomes clear how they fit together'.

2. I will offer an alternative 'mimetic profile' of Francis of Assisi. In exploring the mimetic dimension within early *Lives* of Saint Francis, I will argue that a *mimetic* reading of the life of Francis is useful in recovering the vital dynamics of the early Franciscan movement. I will draw on contemporary scholarship to support this case.
3. I will explore the category of 'conversion' in Girard's work and in the context of the early Franciscan sources. This will follow a three step 'retrieval' of Francis of Assisi, from romantic hero, *Homo Mimeticus*, to saint.[505]

It is my aim to represent Saint Francis, liberated from his status as a romantic/heroic figure, perhaps the dominant motif since the late nineteenth century. Shorn of his romantic and hagiographic garb, and situated in his historical context, a more authentic picture of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement emerge. By exploring the mimetic dimension in the early Franciscan sources, a consistent pattern of life (*forma vitae*) directed towards non-rivalrous desiring and peace-making comes into focus. It is this form of life, characterized as an intentional, non-confrontational withdrawal from the dominant 'sacrificial' social realities, which remains culturally and theologically apposite.

The Aims and Limits of the 'Quest' for the 'Historical Francis'

Any serious engagement with the early Franciscan movement and role of Francis of Assisi demands an evaluation of the historical sources. The critical use of these sources, since the late nineteenth century, has been the associated with the 'Quest for the Historical Francis' or the *Franciscan Question*.[506] The critical problems associated with any attempt to evaluate the role of Saint Francis and the early Franciscans are raised in the *General Introduction* to the

[505] *Homo Mimeticus* is used here to indicate the person as mimetic phenomenon, i.e., exercising a degree of agency and autonomy, but always within a web of mediated and shared desires.
[506] In treating the *legendae* and other sources I will rely on Jacques Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi: Towards a Historical Use of the Franciscan Legends,* trans. By Edward Hagman, O.F.M. Cap., (New York: Saint Bonaventure University, 2002). Also, Augustine Thompson, O.P., 'The Franciscan Question' in *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2012) pp. 153-170. Thompson, citing Manselli, concludes that there is nothing more 'authentic' in the 'Spiritualist' reporting of Saint Francis's life, favoured by Paul Sabatier (1894), than in the 'Conventual' reporting favoured by Tamassia (1909). There is no 'unbiased source', including Saint Francis's own writings. Thompson continues: 'to some extent, this means that the age of the "Franciscan Question", when the dream was to find the most "primitive", "unbiased", "true" source, has passed […] If by the Franciscan Question we mean reconstruction of a pure, original, unbiased text that lies behind the extant documents, it is impossible'. pp. 168-70.

standard English edition of the writings of Saint Francis; *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. The editors caution: 'Even a careful reading of the texts contained in these volumes will prompt the reader to wonder if it is possible to write an accurate biography of Francis or determine what precisely is at the heart of his vision'.[507] The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a remarkable proliferation of translations of the authentic writings of Saint Francis and the rediscovery and translation of early sources, which had been lost or forgotten.[508] This wealth of source material and the critical work of more than a century of Franciscan scholarship has, inevitably, raised further questions regarding the social, ecclesial and psychological influences which motivated Saint Francis. The modern period has given birth to the 'Francis of Legend', 'who straddles the lines between projected history and scientific history, between the acts and the imagination of early thirteenth century Umbria, and between established religious structures and emerging spiritual beliefs'.[509]

In his study of the meeting between Saint Francis and the Sultan Malik al Kamil in Damietta in 1219, historian John Tolan warns the reader that the '[t]wentieth century, like the preceding centuries, forged a Francis in its own image, a saint whose actions in Damietta corresponds to the needs of his faithful and admirers'.[510] Tolan demonstrates the myriad and at times contradictory interpretations this historical encounter inspired across the centuries. He leaves open the question of whether it is possible to assign any particular *meaning* to the event. If the meaning of a single episode in the life of Francis is so contested, what can be said of the more ambitious attempts to ascribe a definite meaning to the entire life of Francis, refracted through multiple narratives, poems and *vitae*? In the century following Francis's death at least twenty major legends were produced.[511] Inevitably, a figure as compelling and influential as Francis of Assisi gives rise to numerous interpretations and may be considered from a variety of perspectives. Outside of a purely historical/critical approach, perspectives on Francis range from the compelling to the contradictory and all run the risk of historical

[507] *General Introduction*, *FA:ED* (Vol. 1) p. 13.
[508] Ibid, pp. 11-27.
[509] Ibid, pp. 12-13.
[510] John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), P. 323.
[511] Dalarun, p. 22.

anachronism.[512] I will be sensitive to this risk in forming my own assessment of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement.

In addressing the historical details of Francis of Assisi's life I will draw on several recent critical biographies and historical studies.[513] In doing so, my perspective is explicitly theological, offering a perspective on shared early Franciscan/Girardian theological concerns and eschewing any claim to be a work of historical criticism.[514] The multiplicity of historical sources indicates, not only the difficulty of finding the 'Historical Francis', but the impossibility of reducing Francis's experience or his message to a single voice.[515] Girard's mimetic theory is perhaps that 'single voice' which, in trying to explain the early Franciscan movement, obscures it. Counterintuitively, there is a risk of 'doing violence' to the early Franciscan movement and its founder by too rigorous an application of mimetic theory. Mimetic theory is presented here not as an exhaustive or definitive reading of the sources and context of early Franciscanism but as a new theoretical horizon. Against this horizon the message of Francis and early Franciscan movement will not be submerged – it will achieve a new and compelling articulation. As a heuristic device, Girard's theory facilitates a meaningful exploration of the early Franciscan movement and its core values. With these caveats in mind, I will apply to the early Franciscan movement the mimetic lens, offering to the contemporary reader a description which is coherent and theologically fertile.

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[512] An example of contradictory interpretations is Leonardo Boff's *Francis of Assisi: A Model for Human Liberation* (Crossroad, 1982), which, from the perspective of a Liberation theologian, argues that Saint Francis's choice of voluntary poverty subverted capitalist hierarchies. Works by Brian Hamilton, *Pauperes Christi: Voluntary Poverty as Political Practice* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2015. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing), and Kenneth Baxter Wolf's *The Poverty of Riches: Saint Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) argue that Franciscan voluntary poverty reinforced capitalist hierarchies.

[513] For the purpose of this dissertation, I will draw mainly from the following sources: André Vauchez, *François d'Assise: Entre Histoire et Mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Arthéme Fayard, 2009), *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint,* trans. by Michael F. Cusato (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), Jacques Le Goff, *Saint François d'Assise* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1999), *Francis of Assisi,* trans. by Christine Rhone (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2012) and Raoul Manselli, *Francesco D'Assisi* (Roma: Bibliotheca di Cultura, 1982), *St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. by Paul Duggan (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988). In making the case that the early Franciscan movement was ordered towards forming non-rivalrous communities and concerned with exiting the systems which create and sustain conflict, I will draw on the work of Sean Edward Kinsella, *The Lord Give You Peace: Poverty and Violence in the Writings and Early Lives of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Saint Michael's College, Canada. ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, 2003).

[514] For a brief survey of the interdisciplinary uses made of historical work on Saint Francis, cf. Thompson, pp. 144-45.

[515] Cf. Delarun, p. 23.

I propose to adopt a thematic approach, exploring across a variety of sources the traces of *mimetic realism*. The mimetic component of the early Franciscan movement has been obscured, in part due to a dominant romantic tradition which has served to isolate Francis of Assisi from his cultural context, presenting him as a heroic/tragic figure. Here, Girard's insights are particularly helpful, since the romantic interpretation of Francis has produced a variety of mis-readings of the early Franciscan movement. As I indicated in the General Introduction, these romantic mis-readings include both positive ('heroic') representations and critical ('anti-heroic') representation of Francis and the early friars. Neither the romantic nor the neo-romantic accounts of Francis are satisfactory and both are helpfully deconstructed by mimetic theory.[516]

In the next part of this chapter, I will explore two dominant interpretations of Francis and the early Franciscan movement: the hagiographical and the romantic. Both of these interpretations represent authentic expressions of the early Franciscan movement and both obscure aspects of the movement which invite attention today.

A Critique of Romantic Interpretations of Saint Francis of Assisi

Francis of Assisi: From Medieval Saint to Romantic Hero

In his treatment of the *exemplum* of Odo of Cheriton, accounts of the 'Prophesy of San Damiano', and the accounts of the 'Final Blessing of Saint Francis', Jacques Dalarun demonstrates how authentic episodes in the life of Francis have been adapted and re-presented in the *legendae*, according to hagiographical devices, political development within the Order, or the changing status of the founder (from founder to saint).[517] The hagiographic content in the *legendae* both obscures and reveals the historical content of the narratives. As Dalarun observes, in applying an allegorical sense to an historical 'fact' the medieval hagiographer is not seeking to obscure historical reality but to reveal it more clearly; 'for

[516] The critical interpretations of Hamilton (2015) and Baxter Wolf (2005) will be treated in chapter five.
[517] Dalarun, pp. 59-92.

them, a fact is true if it reveals a higher truth'.[518] The presence of specific social and cultural contexts indicates to the historian an 'historical fact' since the hagiographer's instinct is not to cloud the narrative with local and historical details, if these are not to hand. The hagiographer prefers to 'take refuge in the timeless *topos*' rather than construct narratives based entirely on the evidence of witnesses.[519]

The hagiographer Thomas of Celano's *First Life of Saint Francis* (1228) is notably different from his later work, *The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul* (1245-47). The earlier work was hagiographic in style, critical of the upbringing of Francis and emphasised the role of Elias of Assisi. His later work 'marks a step backwards in relation to the spiritual biography of Saint Francis,' more or less denying an earlier account of his dissolute youth and emphasising the miracles of Saint Francis, in line with popular conceptions of holiness.[520] The figure of Francis which Celano produced in his later *Life* is a 'saint who is predestined, a miracle worker, a prophet, a stern man'.[521] Francis had become 'archaic' and 'more monastic' and what is emphasised frequently is 'his choice for poverty which is constantly praised and supported'.[522] The incorporation (or exclusion) of other *legendae* which were compiled in the years after the death of Francis, both explain and obscure the historical picture of the founder and the movement.[523] Celano's *Second Life* (*The Remembrance*), composed almost two decades after the *First Life*, is burdened by the tensions within the Order and was 'fatally condemned to failure because its sources were irreconcilable'. In Celano's final hagiographic work on Francis, *The Treatise on the Miracles*, 'it is not so much the rough wonderworker that conceals the extraordinary saint. Rather it is the mythologised saint who conceals the man, that man whom [Celano] […] no longer recognizes'.[524]

At the General Chapter of the Franciscan Friars in Narbonne in 1260 the decision was taken to produce an authorized and official *Life* of Saint Francis. Three years later at the

[518] Ibid, p. 74-5.
[519] Ibid, p. 111.
[520] Cf. Le Goff, p. 21.
[521] Dalarun, p. 132.
[522] Ibid.
[523] *The Anonymous of Perugia* (1240-41) emphasized a logical historical progression from founder, to primitive fraternity, to Order. The account of *The Legend of Perugia* described the same historical narrative in terms of a 'deplorable failure'. The past is recalled as a rebuke to the present. Cf. Dalarun, p. 215.
[524] Ibid, p. 173.

General Chapter held in Pisa, the Minister General of the Order, Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio presented, not one but two *legendae*; The *Legenda Maior* (*Major Life of Saint Francis*) and the *Legenda Minor* (a shorter, companion *Life* of Saint Francis, whose main purpose was liturgical). Bonaventure's *Legendae* drew on earlier biographical and historical accounts by Celano (1228-29) and Julian of Speyer (1232-35). The *Legenda Maior* remained the official and dominant narrative of Saint Francis's life and the early Franciscan movement for the next five centuries. It was in many respects unsatisfactory.

Jacques Le Goff has stated that St. Bonaventure's *Life* is 'tendentious and fanciful', combining contradictory elements taken uncritically from different sources. Bonaventure remained silent on any issue which suggests a deviation from the Founder's intentions, such as the place of knowledge and learning, manual labour, the visiting of lepers, the poverty of churches and houses, etc.[525] Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci* treats the life of Francis not chronologically but thematically, attempting not so much to give an account of his life but to achieve a mystical and theological synthesis of the life of the founder and the Order he founded.[526] The *Legenda Maior* was not only the authorized and standard biography of Saint Francis; in an effort to settle acrimonious internal disputes about Saint Francis's life and legacy it abrogated all earlier legends. It was formally decreed at the General Chapter held in Paris in 1266 that earlier legends should be removed (*deleantur*).[527] As critical studies demonstrate, hagiographical narratives foreground the concerns (and anxieties) of the immediate 'heirs' of the early Franciscan movement, as much as they offer a picture of the saint himself.

Romantic Interpretations: Paul Sabatier

In the context of political tensions within the early Franciscan movement, the acknowledged limitations of hagiographic convention, a dearth of sources and an Enlightenment disdain for medievalism, interest in the figure of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement had

[525] Le Goff, p. 19.
[526] Cf. Dalarun, pp. 228-238.
[527] *General Introduction*, *FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 18. The General Chapter of Paris (1266) 'calmly voted to destroy' a range of earlier narratives whose accounts of Saint Francis could no longer be assimilated into the dominant mystical/theological portrait which Saint Bonaventure produced. Cf. Dalarun, p. 247.

dwindled, up to the early nineteenth century.[528] The *Franciscan Question*, which opened Franciscan studies to scientific and critical methods began in the mid-nineteenth century and is associated with the critical work of Ernest Renan (1823-1892) and his student Paul Sabatier (1858-1928).[529] Sabatier's *Vie de Saint François* was published in 1894.[530] Sabatier, himself a liberal protestant, portrayed Saint Francis as a deeply human person whose spiritual transformation owed little or nothing to the religious tradition from which he emerged. Instead, Francis was a uniquely free spirit, a romantic troubadour whose appearance prefigures both the humanism of the Renaissance and the radical evangelism of the Reformation. This 'de-catholicizing' interpretation was a radical departure from the mainly devotional and uncritical *Lives* which had been largely unchallenged up to the nineteenth century. Sabatier's discovery of early Franciscan sources such as the *Deeds of Saint Francis* and the *Mirror of Perfection* as well as his attention to the writings of Saint Francis, unsettled the hitherto uncontested authority of Saint Bonaventure's *Major Life*.[531]

Sabatier's work coincides with a revival of interest in Saint Francis, associated with the romantic movement. Romanticism, as both Frederick Lawrence and Charles Taylor have pointed out, was a reaction to Enlightenment rationalism.[532] The Enlightenment religion, derived from texts such as Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason,*

[528] The reputation of Saint Francis suffered in the Reformation and post-Reformation period. Bartolomeo Albizzi's work, published in English in 1542 was entitled: *The alcaron of the barefote friars, that is to say, an heape or number of the blasphemous and trifling doctrines of the wounded idole Saint Francis, taken out of the boke of his rules*. In 1826, the seventh centenary of the birth of Saint Francis of Assisi passed almost unnoticed outside of Italy, cf. Mary Heimann, (2017) 'The Secularization of St Francis of Assisi', *British Catholic History* 33, 3, 401-20 (p.406). < https://doi.org/10.1017/bch.2017.4 > The mood of the enlightenment is captured in J. W. von Goethe's 1786 tour of Umbria. Goethe paid a visit to the Temple of Minerva (rededicated to the Virgin Mary) to admire its aesthetic quality but avoided the nearby basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels and the shrine of Saint Francis, which he dismissed as a 'Babylonian pile'. Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004) p. 2.

[529] Karl Hase's, *Franz von Assisi: Ein Heiligenbild* (*Francis of Assisi: The Image of a Saint*) was published in Leipzig in 1856 and marks a new departure in Franciscan biography, being critical and non-confessional. Cf. Vauchez, p. 234. Paul Sabatier, *The Road to Assisi: The Essential Biography of St. Francis* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2004). pp. 234-39.

[530] Paul Sabatier *Vie de S. François D'Assise* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1894) in English translation, *The Road to Assisi: The Essential Biography of St. Francis. Edited with Introduction and Annotations by Jon M. Sweeney* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2004)

[531] In 1898 Sabatier published the *Mirror of Perfection*, a source he believed to date from 1227. The text was in fact a much later source, dating from c. 1318. Cf. Dalarun, p. 39.

[532] Frederick Lawrence, 'The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other, *Theological Studies*, 54, (1993). Taylor describes 'Authenticity' as 'a child of the Romantic period' and a reaction to the disengaged rationality of the Enlightenment. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp. 25-29.

reduced the human religious experience to purely ethical activity, shorn of superstition certainly, but also estranged from embodied religious acts such as fasting, ritual and prayer.[533] The Romanticism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau extolled the purity of nature and asserted that human nature is corrupted precisely by its co-mingling with a degraded and sinful society. The Romantic hero, who emerged in reaction to Enlightenment rationalism, typically 'abandons society's norms and lives freely, naturally, unencumbered and uninfluenced by culture's fallenness. Creativity, imagination and originality become the markers of salvation for the Romantic, naturally blameless hero'.[534] In many respects Francis of Assisi was an ideal candidate for the project of Romanticism.

In the Enlightenment period the life of Saint Francis was relegated to the realm of medieval piety, if not superstition, and it was in fact Romanticism which renewed interest in Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement. Sabatier's work provoked a profound shock among Roman Catholics generally, and particularly among Franciscans. The book was added to the Church's Index of Prohibited Books within a year of publication.[535] Sabatier's *Life* began a 'histography of suspicion' in Franciscan studies which implicated the Papacy and clerical forces in subverting the Gospel intuitions of Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement.[536] Sabatier was influenced by the work of Renan whose approach to historical questions in the life of Jesus of Nazareth excluded the possibility of the miraculous and the supernatural. Renan stated that 'No miracle has ever taken place under conditions that science can accept. Experience shows, without exception, that miracles occur only in times and in countries in which miracles are believed in, and in the presence of persons who are disposed to believe in them'.[537] Sabatier was less doctrinaire in his treatment of Saint Francis than Renan, allowing for the miraculous, defined in terms of key psychological and spiritual transformations in history.

[533] Kaplan, 'Saint Versus Hero' pp. 153-4.
[534] Ibid, p. 155.
[535] Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi,* vii.
[536] Cf. Vauchez, pp. 234-39.
[537] Cf. Jon M. Sweeney's *introduction* to Paul Sabatier, *The Road to Assisi,* xii. Renan had explained the stigmata of St. Francis as a deliberate hoax perpetuated by Elias of Assisi, xiii.

Sabatier's approach to the 'Historical Francis' is heavily influenced by romantic assumptions which have effectively framed St Francis for subsequent generations as a romantic genius. Departing from Renan's enlightenment reductionism Sabatier stated:

> Happily we are no longer in the time when historians thought they had done the right thing when they had reduced everything to its proper size, contenting themselves with denying or omitting everything in the life of the heroes of humanity that rises above the level of our everyday experience.[538]

Sabatier's Saint Francis was a romantic 'hero of humanity' and this view of Francis has proved to be highly influential, if not the dominant motif for most of the twentieth century. Thompson notes that Sabatier's Saint Francis is based largely on the witnesses from the Spiritual Franciscan tradition,[539] and is a 'remarkably modern individualist, a romantic seeker, anachronistic to medieval Italy'. According to the romantic interpretation, Francis was inevitably misunderstood and exploited by the 'institutional Church'.[540]

The unique achievement of Sabatier in initiating the quest for the 'Historical Francis' is obscured and limited by the romantic mantle which Sabatier and others imposed upon Francis.[541] The success of Sabatier's 'romantic' Saint Francis, outside of strictly academic discourse, can be judged in a passing reference to Francis of Assisi in James Joyce's *Stephen Hero*. The protagonist, Joyce's alter ego Stephen Dedalus, on a visit to Marsh's Library in Dublin, 'appreciated not without pitiful feelings the legend of the mild heresiarch of Assisi'. For Joyce in the early twentieth century, Saint Francis represented the gentle and misunderstood hero (the 'mild heresiarch') which Sabatier had popularised at the end of the

[538] Sabatier, *introduction*, p. xxx.
[539] The Spiritual Franciscan tradition was a contentions minority within the early Franciscan Order, typically opposed to the majority 'Community', who had adapted aspects of the early Franciscan life, as the Order grew. The Spiritual Franciscan friars 'repudiated moderation of St Francis's way of living as no better than treachery' and understood the Franciscan life to be the closest possible imitation of the Founder. Cf. Duncan Nimmo, Reform and Division in the Franciscan Order (1226-1538) (Capuchin Historical Institute: Rome, 1987) pp. 78-193. (p. 78).
[540] Thompson, p. 157.
[541] Sabatier's critical use of the early sources added credibility to his romantic narrative. Others, before and after Sabatier, popularized the romantic Saint Francis. Margaret Oliphant published *Francis of Assisi* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1898) in 1868. Oliphant's Saint Francis was both a romantic hero and a practical reformer. Cf. Mary Heimann, (2017) 'The Secularization of St Francis of Assisi' in *British Catholic History* 33(3), pp. 401-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bch.2017.4>

nineteenth century.[542] Anne Marie D'Arcy notes that Joyce's Stephen Dedalus's interest in matters Franciscan is 'tinged with a fascination with heresy' and Joyce himself, D'Arcy asserts was influenced by the nineteenth century portrayal of the 'Spiritual Franciscans' as romantic rebels, such as Renan's treatment of Friar Gerard of Borgo San Donnino. The witness of the Spiritual Franciscans, traditionally a marginal voice within the Franciscan tradition, was rediscovered in the nineteenth century as the 'authentic' tradition of Saint Francis and the early Franciscan movement.[543] The Spiritual Franciscans, whose writings have been described as 'the most asocial, the least realistic, and the most hostile to the world', were taken by Renan and Sabatier as the authentic biographers of Francis of Assisi.[544] The Francis of Assisi which emerged from the Spiritual Franciscan texts served the nineteenth century romantics and positivists as early examples of radicalism and the defiance of papal absolutism.[545]

Franciscans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also appropriated the romantic Francis, though without any hint of heterodoxy. A typical treatment of Francis by the English Capuchin, Father Cuthbert, states:

> The Franciscan story is itself a romance; it is woven through and through with the spirit of romance; it expressed itself in the language of romance. For all time the Franciscans have consecrated the romantic temperament and vision.[546]

Allowing for the complexities of the romantic movement, expressed philosophically and artistically, and allowing for some truth in the romantic interpretations of Saint Francis, it is evident that Francis and the movement he founded paid a heavy price for its characterization as a purely romantic movement. Romanticism helped to revive the memory of Saint Francis after a significant hiatus; enthusiasts readily married Francis to the romantic movement in

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[542] Cf. Anne Marie D'Arcy, "Joachim of Fiore and 'Joachitism' from Stephen Hero to Finnegan's Wake" in Anne Marie D'Arcy, John McCafferty, Marina Ansaldo, and Jason McElligot, *James Joyce: Apocalypse and Exile* (Dublin: Marsh's Library, 2014) pp. 18-26.

[543] Stanislaus da Compagnola has divided the 'Sabatier School' into *medievalizzanti* who emphasised St. Francis as a medieval person, remote from modern sensibilities and perhaps 'heretical' and the *modernizzanti* who viewed St. Francis as a source of modern (post-medieval Christian) sensibilities. Cf. Thompson, p. 157.

[544] Cf. Le Goff. P. 72. The Spiritual Franciscans 'were in great haste to begin to purify the world while ignoring its social structure, for them, among the impure incarnations of its evil nature'. Ibid. Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement were consistently and creatively engaged with the social reality of the thirteenth century, whereas the Spiritual Franciscans are characterized by a pessimistic attitude to social structures.

[545] Cf. Anne Marie D'Arcy, "Joachim of Fiore and 'Joachitism' from Stephen Hero to Finnegan's Wake" p. 21.

[546] Father Cuthbert, *The Romanticism of St. Francis: And Other Studies in the Genius of The Franciscans* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1924) p. 2.

the strongest terms: 'Nowhere else outside the Gospels has the spirit of romance so purely uttered itself in the realization of Christian faith as in the early Franciscan story'.[547] It is here that Girard's early work in literature offers a clarifying perspective on the dominant interpretations of Saint Francis and his Order.

The presence of the 'romantic lie' serves first of all to obscure the *dynamics* of early Franciscan life. Under the guise of nineteenth century demystification, it effectively mystifies the internal dynamics of the early Franciscan movement and its aims. The romantic narratives of Francis of Assisi, beginning with Sabatier, tend to remove Francis from his social context and interpret him more or less in isolation from the dynamics of the Franciscan *Vitae*.[548] The anomalies of the romantic interpretation are responsible for creating a virtually context-less Francis of Assisi. The romantic Saint Francis offers only mystification and obscures the vital role of the early Franciscan movement in late medieval theology and society. On the other hand, the romantic Francis is endlessly accommodating to diverse ideologies. The romantic Francis was hailed by Benito Mussolini as 'the most Italian of saints, the most saintly of Italians' and, at the end the twentieth century claimed by Antonio Negri as a proto-communist.[549]

Girard's insight into the 'romantic lie' provokes a healthy suspicion of such narratives. From the outset, mimetic theory deconstructs the romantic Saint Francis and directs attention to Francis of Assisi as *Homo Mimeticus*. Mimetic theory points to the accounts of borrowed desire, the modelling of desire and the historical context in which desire was mediated. Francis of Assisi's conversion is itself a collapse of a former identity (the romantic dream of becoming a knight/member of the nobility) and a renunciation of this identity in favour of a life modelled on Christ. The impulse to isolate Saint Francis as a unique exemplar continues to obscure the interdividual dynamic of the conversion process.[550] A true

[547] Ibid, p. 78.
[548] The term *Forma Vita*, frequently employed in the writings of Francis, I take to refer to the specific form of Gospel life which emerged among the early Franciscans in their highly experimental social group. Here, and elsewhere, traditional religious language is inadequate to the early Franciscan experience. '…the social vocabulary of Franciscanism […] escaped if not the religious, at least the ecclesiastical mould'. Le Goff p. 88.
[549] Cf. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi.* pp. 137-38.
[550] The term 'interdividual' is employed by Girard to indicate the radically inter-subjective nature of the self. The monadic or isolated subject is illusory. What is most 'individual' in our experience is also something already shaped and mediated by our relations to others.

conversion, literary or religious, does not produce the romantic hero. At the conclusion of his essay on the 'Franciscan Question', in which he carefully sets out his criteria for interpreting the sources of the early Franciscan movement, Thompson insists on scepticism in dealing with accounts which ignore context and maturation in Francis of Assisi's ideas. Even critical biographers such as Manselli have been willing to read Saint Francis's mature ideas back into the accounts of his conversion and the life of the primitive community. Thompson asserts that the result is

> a Francis who stands outside the events around him, and who tries to impose on his followers a vision perfectly formed at his conversion. This is a hagiographic topos: the sinner perfected by grace. There is much to suggest that Francis spent much of his time groping for solutions to situations that he did not expect to encounter. Careful reading suggests that much of the time Francis had to react to new, concrete situations; he did not carry out some abstract vision or plan.[551]

The personality of Francis of Assisi is in no way diminished by being liberated from his status as a romantic hero. Rather, when viewed as an example of *Homo Mimeticus*, conscious of his own borrowed desires, and the manner in which borrowed desires can lead to conflict and violence, he assumes a renewed and compelling importance. As I will attempt to demonstrate in the next section, when his personal conversion is situated in the context of historical conflict, rapid social change and upheaval, Francis's specific role in, and contribution to, new forms of non-rivalrous community life becomes apparent. The unshackling of Francis of Assisi from the romantic tradition, produces not merely a heroic model but a key figure in a wider theological-anthropological phenomenon of the early thirteenth century; an eruption of *modernity* in the Girardian sense, i.e., a deeper apprehension of mimetic desire and its dynamics. The unique *forma vitae* of the early Franciscan movement emerges from the shadow cast by the 'romantic Francis' and aligns with the main contours of Girard's hypothesis. The Franciscan *forma vitae* is thus retrieved as a template for the exodus from sacrificial systems in a historical context.

The Story of two Knights Errant: Francis of Assisi and *Don Quixote*

[551] Thompson, p. 170.

From the authentic writings and early *Lives* of Francis of Assisi, it is possible to construct a 'mimetic profile' of the central figure of the early Franciscan movement. This profile, while drawing on recent critical sources, is not an attempted biography, but rather a reading of the life of Francis under the aspect of mimetic theory. I will argue that early Franciscan sources which record significant episodes in the life of Saint Francis, facilitate an alternative and hitherto unexplored narrative. Fundamentally, I will argue that the conditions were present in the early thirteenth century for Francis to choose models of desire from outside his social class. The collapsing of traditional boundaries is a feature of the historical context of the late Middle Ages and in some sense, this collapse prefigures or anticipates Girard's definition of modernity, the passage from a world of external mediation to a world of internal mediation. Saint Francis is a late medieval precursor of modern patterns of desiring.

As mentioned above, Girard's work, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, opens with an exploration of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. In *Don Quixote*, Girard asserts, the author introduces the idea of mediated desire; the mediator of Don Quixote's desire being the fictional knight, Amadis de Gaul. Behind the fictional Amadis, there is the inventor of Amadis, the author of chivalric romances. Girard considers *Don Quixote* 'a long meditation on the baleful influence that the most lucid minds can exercise upon one another'.[552] For Girard, Cervantes's genius is further demonstrated in 'The Curious Impertinent', a short story with which the author 'padded' *Don Quixote*.[553] Another chivalric romance, this story compares to Dostoyevsky's *The Eternal Husband*, a work characterized by Girard as friendship turned to rivalry and hatred; the world of *internal mediation*. For Girard, Cervantes's writing succeeds in spanning the distance between triangular desire at its most charming (and least conflictual) in the chivalry of Don Quixote, and at its most destructive. Girard believed that the theory of chivalry 'is a way of glorifying mimetic desire'.[554] Significantly, for Girard, '[a]ll the ideas of the Western novel are present in germ in *Don Quixote*'.[555] Girard understood Cervantes to have explored, through chivalric romance, the hitherto hidden world of mediated desire, and in doing so, to have plotted the course of the modern novel.

[552] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 4.
[553] Ibid, p. 49.
[554] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 54.
[555] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 52.

From the perspective of mimetic theory, modernity emerged in the Renaissance, with authors like Cervantes and Shakespeare. Girard defined modernity as the 'universalization of internal mediation', an epoch defined by the absence of 'areas of life that […] keep people apart from each other […]'.[556] In Girard's view a 'type of external mediation still ruled in the Western Middle Ages'.[557] Girard asserts that the dissolution of this hierarchical, 'functional society' occurred in the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.[558] However, Girard accepted that even the Middle Ages was not a completely 'traditional' society and it experienced 'the disintegration of a certain type of order' which had dominated 'up to a point in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and then breaks down'.[559] If Cervantes is unique for having first explored mimetic desire in chivalric romance, the accounts of the life of Francis of Assisi indicate clearly that Francis's personality and his desire was moulded precisely within the late medieval tradition of chivalric romance.[560]

Several centuries before Cervantes, Francis was himself an aspiring knight errant, though he was born into the emerging urban, merchant class. Unlike Don Quixote, Francis's model was not a single fictional knight, 'the pole star, the morning star, the sun of all valiant knights and lovers'.[561] His models were not limited to the courtly literature of the late Middle Ages; rather, Francis took his models from the rapidly changing social environment of thirteenth century Assisi. Here too, models abounded; self-made men like his father, Pietro di Bernardone. Francis proved capable of exploiting the weakening social boundaries which, according to Girard, had served to contain the conflicts produced by mimetic desire; he actively aspired to live the life of a noble. However, his desires were frustrated in the harsh reality of military defeat. He experienced a religious conversion which was also, properly

[556] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 171.
[557] Ibid, p. 172.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Girard himself referenced the thematic association between Saint Francis and chivalric desiring. 'Great literature literally led me to Christianity. This is not original […] It happened to many great saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Theresa of Avila who, like Don Quixote, were fascinated by novels of chivalry […] In my case, it was not Virgil or even Dante who guided me through hell, but the five novelists I discussed in my first book: Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Proust'. René Girard, 'Conversion in Literature and Christianity' in *Mimesis and Theory: Essays in Literature and Criticism*, ed. René Girard (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, [1999] 2008) pp. 263-64.
[561] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, p. 202.

speaking, a mimetic conversion. The collapse of his ambitions did not lead to resentment, concealed envy, indifference or hatred; the characteristics of desire in the great modern novel. Neither did he merely transfer the value he had placed on the object of his desire (nobility) to another model/models. Such a transfer of value could not account for his religious and historical significance. In Francis, the convergence of a variety of social, religious and personal circumstances produced a movement that was both of its time and 'modern'.[562]

Francis of Assisi: A Mimetic Profile

The available historical sources invite a mimetic profile of Francis of Assisi.[563] Biographical details of the early life of Saint Francis portray a young man of confidence, 'flamboyant display', 'vain accomplishments: wit, curiosity, practical jokes and foolish talk, songs, and soft and flowing garments'.[564] The opening pages of the First Book of Thomas of Celano's *First Life of St Francis* are framed in the highly moralistic language of a medieval hagiographer. Celano was concerned to present not a critical biographical account of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscans, but to root Saint Francis in the Church's tradition of sanctity. Thus, Celano contrasts the saintly founder of the Friars Minor with a pre-converted Francesco di Bernardone, whose parents had 'reared him to arrogance in accordance with the vanity of the age'.[565] Arrogance in this instance does not indicate an unpleasant or overbearing

[562] Beginning in the nineteenth century, Francis of Assisi has been characterised as a 'modern' figure. Henry Thode's *Franz von Assisi und die Anfange der Kunst in Italien*, (1885) argued that the origins of the Italian Renaissance were rooted in the new spiritual sensitivity Francis popularized, which influenced art and wider culture. The Dutch scholar Johan Huizenga credited Saint Francis with shifting the nature and dating of the Renaissance from a phenomenon of the intellect to one of the affections: 'The Renaissance […] was no longer a growth of the mind […] but a growth of the heart: the opening of the eyes and the soul to all the excellence of the world and the individual personality'. (Cited in Sabatier, *Introduction*, xv). According to Le Goff, 'If Saint Francis was modern, it is because his century was so', cf. Le Goff, p. 45. Both Francis and his times appear 'modern', under certain aspects. A mimetic reading of early Franciscanism, may indicate why both Francis and his times appear to anticipate characteristics of modernity.

[563] In creating a *mimetic profile* of Saint Francis, I draw on various sources, already cited, and on scholarly editions of Saint Francis's life. I pay particular attention to Thomas of Celano's *First Life*. Jacques Dalarun has demonstrated that even in terms of a hagiographical work of its time, Celano's *First Life* is faithful to Francis's own narrative in the *Testament*, presenting us with a 'conversion in several stages' (p. 104). '[…] the whole basic structure (though not the whole substance), the outline of the first part of the *First Life* is filled with the writings of Francis. Among these, the one that stands out most of all is the only one that is autobiographical: the *Testament*'. (p. 108) Cf. Dalarun, pp. 104-108. I will also pay close attention to *The Legend of the Three Companions*, which Manselli regarded as the most 'Assisian' of the *legendae*. Ibid, p. 196.

[564] Thomas of Celano, *The Life of St. Francis* (1228-29) *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 183 [2]. (henceforth, Celano, *First Life*).

[565] Ibid, p. 182. [1]. This style is typical of the literary tradition of the medieval Church and the in particular, the influence of St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) on medieval hagiography. Celano contrasts the wretchedness and depravity of an unconverted youth with the excellence of the mature saint. Cf. note (b), ibid.

personality, since all the sources agree in presenting the young Francesco di Bernardone as courtly, affable and generous by temperament. Rather, arrogance suggests social ambitions and an interest in material wealth.[566] But Celano allows that the pre-converted Francis, whilst wealthy, was 'not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property'.

Notwithstanding this moralistic tone Celano offers glimpses of the personality of Francis di Bernardone. Celano notes that Francis was 'a rather kindly person, adaptable and quite affable, even though it made him look foolish' and, on account of this attractive personality, 'many went over to him'.[567] Celano portrays an outgoing figure and one who provoked imitation and fascination in others: 'Thus with his crowded procession of misfits he used to strut about impressively and in high spirits, making his way through the streets of Babylon'.[568] Thompson characterises this following as *societas iuventum*, a kind of fraternity, 'young men's dining club'.[569] Such 'confraternities of youth' marked certain Church holidays, such as Holy Innocents with 'farcical parades'. On the feast of Saint John the Baptist, 'danced parodies', recalling the dance of Salome were enacted; 'demonstrations marked by ritual perversions'.[570] As a wealthy young reveller his negative association with the 'confraternity of youth' was tempered by his general courtesy, charm and promise.[571] Thompson suggests that the young Francis had a touch of 'vanity and narcissism'. In a highly eccentric and provocatively mimetic manner he added patches of old cloth onto his fashionable, new garments, 'producing outlandish and even clownlike effects'.[572] The accounts of the young

[566] Cf. Brian Moloney, *Francis of Assisi and His Canticle of Brother Sun Reassessed* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 13.
[567] Celano, *First Life*, p. 184.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Thompson, p. 8.
[570] Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, p. 15. Vauchez notes that, throughout his life Francis had a taste for 'disguise and even dressing up, which, by blurring established boundaries, laid bare the reality of his thoughts and impulsive actions'. Francis's 'provocative spirit' was expressed in the 'abolition of the distinctions between social classes'. Vauchez asserts that Francis 'considered hierarchical distinctions nothing more than flexible standards which should not be treated like barriers – without, of course, ever claiming to abolish them or to deny their reality'. Ibid.
[571] Since contemporary sources give little information on the activities of Francis in such groups, Vauchez is unwilling to speculate. However, 'sexual games, muggings and rapes were part of the normal activities of these bands of well-to-do bachelors […] this seductive young man had no reason to behave other than as the customs of his time and age group dictated'. Ibid, p. 16.
[572] Thompson, p. 9.

Francis di Bernardone suggest both a model of desire, imitated by a fascinated group of admirers, and an imitator of the desires of others, notably members of the aristocratic class.

Francis was fascinated by the models of the nobility and the culture of knightly chivalry.[573] Another source of fascination for Francis Bernardone, which biographers noted, was his cultivation of the French language and French customs. The use of the French language was bound to heighten the mimetic fascination of his contemporaries; French being the language *par excellence* of poetry and chivalrous sentiment. Even after his conversion French 'continued to be the language of his intimate outpourings'.[574] He eagerly took part in military adventures, notably taking up arms against the rival city of Perugia, in the disastrous campaign that ended in defeat for Assisi at Collestrada (1202).[575] Unlike the fictional Don Quixote, Francis di Bernardone's aspiration to knighthood would have demanded not merely the acquisition of armour and weaponry, but also the mastery of horsemanship and a proficiency in the art of war. As Brian Moloney has observed:

> Learning to use heavy weapons – lance, sword, axe, or mace – means learning how to kill or maim other men as expeditiously and efficiently as possible. These were prices Francis was clearly willing to pay to achieve his ambition. He had thoroughly internalized the values of his society.[576]

Francis was taken captive by the Perugians in 1202. During his imprisonment Francis was confined, not among his own class but with the nobility of Assisi, which indicate his ingenuity and his ability to cross the social boundaries into the nobility and knightly class.[577]

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[573] Francis was influenced by the French 'courtly romances' and *chansons de geste* which had become popular at this time in Italy. The models of this genre were as diverse as Charlemagne, Roland, Olivier, Parsifal and Lancelot. Francis sought to imitate them and to distinguish himself by the practice of their virtues, 'magnanimity, generosity, and especially courtliness […] fundamentally, the courtly attitude of standing back from (or at least at some distance from) the rawness of desire and the aggressive assertion of one's own power'. Vauchez, p. 17.

[574] Le Goff, p. 23.

[575] The Holy Roman Empire and the papacy were the dominant political powers in the late Middle Ages. The supporters of the papacy, known as Guelphs were mainly from the merchant class. The supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor were known as Ghibellines and were represented by the nobility (*Maiores*). Papal intervention in the internal politics of Assisi in 1198 provoked a Guelph uprising, which the sixteen-year-old Francis took part in. Some of the nobility fled to nearby Perugia for refuge. Moloney asserts that armed conflict was 'more or less endemic' at this time. Cf. Moloney, pp. 15-17.

[576] Ibid, p. 18.

[577] '[Francis] had led in his youth a chivalrous lifestyle, whose practice, as Marc Bloch has ably shown, sometimes permitted him to slip into the knightly class itself'. Le Goff, p. 83.

Celano has drawn attention to what, in the medieval mind, was an anomaly; that the son of a merchant was not remarkable for prudence, a hallmark of the merchant class, but had a reputation for generosity, a distinguishing feature of the nobility.[578] The young Francis had 'imitated the aristocracy and longed for their society'.[579] Celano notes that 'seething with desire' Francis once followed a nobleman of Assisi to Apulia to achieve military glory in battle. It was on this journey, Celano recounts, that Francis had a dream in which his whole house was decorated with armour and weaponry, saddles, shields and spears. The dream delighted Francis but also puzzled him for, Celano notes, he was not used to seeing such things in his house but rather, 'stacks of cloth to be sold'.[580]

From these and other similar accounts of the young Francis a mimetic profile begins to emerge. Francis di Bernardone was able to subvert the strict social hierarchies by taking his models of desire from diverse and traditionally distinct social groups. Francis, the merchant's son, proved he was capable at first to move socially upward into the nobility, taking models from among the nobility (the *maiores*) and, after his conversion, to move downward, below his own merchant class (known as the *minores*). In his descending move, his model was Christ, whom Francis understood as being revealed in poverty and humility:

> Behold, each day He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the virgin's womb; each day He Himself comes to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest.[581]

This remarkable vacillation between classes indicates the fluid social boundaries which were the context of his life in the early thirteenth century. After his conversion Francis continued to interact with members of the nobility (and did not simply exclude them or form a movement that would be a 'rivalrous twin' to the aristocracy). Thus, we cannot detect in Francis traces of resentment, having been unable to successfully enter the ranks of the nobility. His post-conversion relationship with members of the nobility indicates neither a

[578] Cf. Le Goff, p. 83.
[579] Thompson, p. 46.
[580] Celano, *First Life,* [5] p. 186. In Le Goff 's view Celano's makes his class-conscious point 'somewhat maliciously', Le Goff, p. 25.
[581] *The Admonitions*, [1], *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 129. Saint Francis experiences the humility and mercy of God in the sacramental economy of the Church. He has 'a visceral need' for the sacraments. Le Goff, p. 60.

fascination with their state nor an embittered confrontation.[582] He received hospitality from the nobility and even accepted the gift of a mountain sanctuary from Count Orlando of Chiusi in 1213. In Girard's literary hypothesis the collapse of strong social boundaries places the subject and the model in ever closer proximity, provoking morbid fascination, rivalry and violence. The late Middle Ages were mimetically less charged according to his scheme, since the social boundaries were largely intact. However, as Girard intimated, social change in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries allowed for a first intuition or indication of 'universalized internal mediation', i.e., modernity.[583]

Conversion: The category of graced transformation

Francis of Assisi: Conversion and the collapse of mimetic personality

The conversion of Saint Francis is fundamental to the subsequent social and religious consciousness of the early Franciscan movement.[584] I propose to read traditional accounts of the conversion of Francis through the hermeneutic of mimetic theory, indicating the contours of what may be called a 'mimetic conversion'.[585] The events surrounding the conversion of Saint Francis indicate a crisis of identity and meaning precipitated by the collapse of ambitions for inclusion in aristocratic and knightly society. The traumatic reality of feudal warfare, and his own military misadventure and subsequent imprisonment, led Francis to both physical and mental breakdown. The period of his imprisonment in Perugia and his life afterward in Assisi, a protracted period of crisis, lasted about eighteen months. Celano refers laconically to Francis, 'worn down by a long illness'. Saint Francis was ransomed, probably in late 1203,

[582] Cf. Thomas of Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* ('Second Life' of Saint Francis) FA:ED (Vol 2) pp. 266-67. Celano gives an account of Francis riding a donkey in the presence of an aristocratic brother Leonard. Francis anticipates the offended thoughts of brother Leonard and dismounts, insisting that Leonard, being nobly born, is worthier to mount the donkey. Such an account indicates a non-confrontational attitude towards the nobility, but in giving way, Francis exposed the dangers of aristocratic privilege. Saint Francis insists: 'It is not right that I should ride while you go on foot, for in the world you were more noble and influential than I'. '*Nobilitor et potentior*'. Le Goff notes here that even when he respects natural hierarchies, Francis rejected the impermeability of the classes. Le Goff, p. 83.

[583] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 171.

[584] For an exploration of the category of 'conversion', Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, eds., *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995).

[585] Conversion in the Franciscan tradition presupposes an *interdividual*, rather than 'innate' dynamic. Francis of Assisi is converted through of a series of encounters with others. Cf. Pierre Brunette, O.F.M., *Francis of Assisi and his Conversions*. Trans by Paul Lachance, O.F.M., and Kathryn Krug (Quincy, Il, Franciscan Press, 1997).

his health severely damaged by his ordeals. Returning to Assisi, he would have found the city under papal interdict for the offence of having attacked the pro-papal city of Perugia. The interdict was lifted on 8th June 1204.[586] Francis was a troubled, traumatised and weakened young man. He was also a man who in later life exhibited a 'visceral need' for the sacraments.[587] The withholding of the spiritual means of healing and reconciliation as a penalty indicates the all-pervasive role of violence within ecclesial as well as social systems in the late Middle Ages.

Early biographers have characterised this period in the life of Francis as a time of disturbing dreams and terrifying visions, a period of his life characterised by listlessness and a loss of purpose. Francis attempted to recapture his romantic ideal with another military adventure, this time joining an Assisi militia to fight with papal forces against the army of Frederick II. Francis, having acquired the arms and livery of a knight for the expedition, seemed unable to conjure his former enthusiasm for battle and offered his armour to a poor knight. He made some effort to join the expedition but at Spoleto, thirty miles from Assisi, he turned back. At Foligno he sold his arms and horse and walked back to Assisi. Francis offered the money from the sale of his horse and arms to the priest at San Damiano Church on the outskirts of Assisi. The priest, sceptical of Francis's intentions and fearful of inviting conflict from the Bernardone family, refused the money.[588] The priest at San Damiano suspected that he was being mocked, since 'just the day before, [Francis] was living outrageously among his relatives and acquaintances and exalting his stupidity above others'.[589] Nevertheless, Francis begged refuge at San Damiano and began, in his troubled state, to convince the priest of his sincerity. The priest accepted Francis's request.

In Assisi, the former *bon viveur*, who used 'to strut about impressively and in high spirits' was now a source of puzzlement and concern for family and associates. Medieval biographers characterised this period as a time of self-loathing and of God-given humiliations,

[586] Thompson, p. 9.
[587] Le Goff, p. 60.
[588] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 189.
[589] Ibid.

required to purge his earlier vanity.[590] Even at a distance of several centuries the records suggest that the trauma of his involvement in a series of violent conflicts had taken a heavy psychological toll on Francis. Propelled by the borrowed desires of the nobility and knightly class, Francis had experienced neither glory in battle nor, we may conjecture, the ideal of chivalry to which he aspired. The collapse of his patterns of desire effectively ended his own youthful ambitions which had been tied to his family's fortunes and his father's ambition. According to the narratives, the person most disturbed by the Francis' existential crisis was his father, Pietro.

The Old Models of Desire: Pietro di Bernardone

In the early Franciscan *legendae* Francis's style of life, which imitated that of the aristocracy, is frequently contrasted with his humbler origins as a merchant's son. It was noted that in appearance, Francis resembled the son of a prince rather than the son of a merchant.[591] The borrowed desires of Francis di Bernardone came from outside his social class, but they were clearly a source of satisfaction to his father Pietro. Pietro di Bernardone is a 'very disturbing figure' in Celano's *First Life* of Saint Francis.[592] A relatively late narrative of Francis's birth cast his mother Pica in the role of Elizabeth, choosing for her son the name John.[593] Drawing on this tradition Thompson notes that Pietro is represented as the anti-Zechariah figure who refused the name John and imposed on his son the name *Francesco*.[594] In his later life Francis instructed the friars to humiliate him by referring to him as 'a worthless peasant day-labourer' (*rusticum, mercanarium, et inutilem*).[595] Responding to these characterizations Francis said, 'Yes, that is what the son of Pietro di Bernardone needs to hear'. The adult Pietro was neither rustic or worthless. Rather, he had become a successful and wealthy merchant. Thompson, suggests that Pietro may have come from a humbler ancestry. He may have been among the

[590] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 184-5: 'Thus worn down by his long illness, as human obstinacy deserves since it is rarely remedied except through punishment, he began to mull over with himself things that were not usual for him […] the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all […] From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable'.
[591] *Legend of the Three Companions*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 68.
[592] Delarun, p. 113. Cf. 1 Celano, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 190-93.
[593] Cf. Arnald of Sarrant, *The Kinship of Saint Francis* (1365), *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 673-733 (p. 683).
[594] Cf. Thompson, p. 7.
[595] Ibid, p. 6. Cf. Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 228.

many rural dwellers who fled the country areas to work in the expanding urban economies during the twelfth century.[596] If this is the case, Pietro's own social advance, from rustic labourer to wealthy merchant, must have been as audacious as his son's aspirations to the nobility.

Pietro's wealth funded his son's social life and his aspirations to join a higher social class. Francis's 'noble' virtues; magnanimity, generosity and courtliness, not only made him a source of fascination to members of his own class, but signalled his sympathy with the aristocratic class.[597] Within the aristocratic class courtliness and generosity were emblematic of an elite perspective and a rejection of the values of lower classes; the avaricious and parsimonious values of the merchant class, for example.[598] There is no indication in the *legendae* that Pietro disapproved of his son's profligate habits, until after Francis's return from imprisonment in Perugia, when he relinquished his armour to a poor knight and sold his horse and weapons in order to give alms to a priest. It is here that profligacy was no longer a strategy for inclusion in a higher social order, but rather a meaningless gesture and baleful offence to his father's family ambitions. Pietro is a recognisable motif in the hagiographies, but he is also a remarkably accurate embodiment of the complex social evolution which Francis lived through. In the hagiographies, Pietro is a wholly unsympathetic character, avaricious, violent and uncomprehending. Beyond hagiography, Pietro's reaction to his son is at least explicable, if not understandable.

Francis's 'former prodigality, allied with charm and courtesy was now replaced by, what his father regarded as a less appealing, perhaps compulsive dissipation of wealth, a guilty almsgiving, rather than a courtly benevolence'.[599] Francis's use of Pietro's wealth, originally part of a careful strategy to enter the nobility was, from Pietro's perspective, increasingly squandered on absurd and meaningless gestures. Francis's seclusion in the

[596] Thompson, p. 7.
[597] Celano, *First Life*, P. 185, [5]: 'a certain nobleman from the town of Assisi was furnishing himself on a large scale with military weaponry and, swollen by the wind of empty glory, he asserted solemnly that he was going to Apulia to enrich himself in money or distinction. When Francis heard of this, because he was whimsical and overly daring, he agreed to go with him. Although Francis did not equal him in nobility of birth, he did outrank him in graciousness; and though poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity'.
[598] Cf. Vauchez, p. 17.
[599] Thompson, p. 13.

vicinity of San Damiano aroused shock and confusion in his family. To avoid his father, Francis hid for periods of time in a pit or a cave.[600] Francis's behaviour had gone from 'moody and distracted to withdrawn and isolated and finally to bizarre and self-destructive'.[601] His pattern of life at this stage was one of mortifications and he appeared emaciated and unkempt. On his return to Assisi he was mocked and ridiculed. Celano allows Pietro no compassion or understanding for his son; rather his personal sense of humiliation had hardened his heart towards Francis and 'with no restraint, he pounced on Francis like a wolf on a lamb, and glaring at him savagely, he grabbed him and shamelessly dragged him home'. Saint Francis was imprisoned in his own home, where his father 'badgered him, beat him, and bound him'.[602]

When Pietro departed for a business trip the saint's mother, pitying her son, released him from imprisonment. [603] The tensions of several months reached a disturbing and violent climax as an enraged Pietro, on returning from his business abroad, discovered his son to be a fugitive. Francis had returned again to his poor dwelling on the outskirts of Assisi. Pietro 'raced to the place shaking and screaming, so that if he could not call his son back, he might at least drive him from the area'.[604] Thompson proposes some mitigation for Pietro's violent expulsion of his son.[605] The hagiographic symmetry of chapter VI of Celano's *First Life*, perhaps conceals the long months of frustration suffered by Pietro and the financial risk the family faced. Francis is referred to as the 'child of grace' and, the 'greatest scorner of the things of the earth and the outstanding seeker of heavenly riches'. Pietro is presented as avaricious and cruel. The rivalrous element of the relationship is alluded to in Celano's *First Life*. Pietro 'became obsessed with recovering the money' Francis had made from the sale of the horse. Celano observed that the money was in no sense a desired object for Francis, who 'was not bound by any affection for it' and 'was not disturbed in any way by its loss'. On recovering the money Pietro led his son to the Bishop of Assisi, to make him renounce into the bishop's hands

[600] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 190. *Legend of the Three Companions, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 80
[601] Thompson, p. 14.
[602] Celano, *First Life, FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 193.
[603] As a merchant in the cloth trade Pietro di Bernardone may have travelled to the Cloth markets in Champagne, along the trade route from the Mediterranean to the North Sea. Cloth trade was well established in Troyes, Provins, Bar-sur-Aube, and Lagny. After a journey of some weeks, Pietro di Bernardone must have hoped to return to Assisi to find his son chastened and docile. Cf. Celano, *First Life FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 192 (b).
[604] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 193.
[605] Cf. Thompson, pp. 14-17.

all rights of inheritance. Francis happily acceded to this demand and stripped his clothes ('He did not even keep his trousers on'). Celano's *First Life* uses the motif of nudity to convey a spiritual rebirth.[606] However, later sources link spiritual rebirth with the repudiation of Pietro: 'Until now I have called Pietro di Bernardone my father. But, because I proposed to serve God, I return to him the money on account of which he was so upset, and also the clothing which is his, wanting to say from now on: "Our Father who are in heaven" and not "My father Pietro di Bernardone"'.[607]

Pietro's role as model and obstacle in Francis's life is significant and it admits a Girardian reading. In his essays on the Oedipus myth Girard accepts the Oedipal triangle proposed by Freud, but he refutes Freud's hypothesis that desire for the mother is intrinsic. As Mark Anspach explains:

> [T]he son's 'oedipal' urges actually derive from the father himself in his role as model […] the father can be perceived as an obstacle and rival only 'when the diminution of his paternal authority has brought him into a direct confrontation with his son, obliging him to occupy the same sphere' in other words, only when the father-son relationship has succumbed to the spread of internal mediation.[608]

Anspach notes that Freud's Oedipus is forever bound to a primordial object, the mother, and a primordial rival, the father, and later relationships, for better or for worse, perpetually re-enact this original triangle. Girard 'unbinds' Oedipus, cutting him loose from any particular object and endowing him (and every person) with a primordial desire that is abstract, metaphysical and utterly open-ended, 'capable of remolding itself in protean fashion to fit the mediator of the moment'.[609] Described in terms of mimetic theory, the relationship of Francis and Pietro di Bernardone is one of shared/borrowed desires; the model becomes the rival and the objects of desire (status, social acceptance, wealth) are all but destroyed as the rivalry increases. When Francis returned the money, Celano records, 'the rage of his angry

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[606] This is explicit in Henri d'Avranches's work *The Versified Life of Saint Francis*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 449: 'Without a stitch, stark naked he stands, for all the world like Adam. But he differs from Adam in this: he suffers freely what Adam was forced to endure'.

[607] *Legend of the Three Companions, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 80. In Celano's later *Life*, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 251, Celano includes this evangelical renunciation of Pietro, absent from the *First Life*.

[608] Mark R. Anspach, *Introduction*, xxxvi-xxxvii, in Girard, *Oedipus Unbound.*

[609] Ibid, xxxvii.

father was dampened a little'. But this was not enough; public humiliation and a formal renunciation of the family fortune was demanded. Francis 'hastened joyfully and eagerly to do what was demanded', indicating that wealth and social status were no longer objects of desire, and that his father was no longer his model or his rival.

The declaration that henceforth he would not call Pietro di Bernardone his father, and henceforth he would only say 'Our Father in heaven', coming later in the sources, may be a hagiographic trope. Nevertheless, it recalls the Gospel counsel to 'call no man your father on earth, for you have one father who is in heaven' (Matthew, 23. 9). James Alison has explored this text in relation to mimetic theory and has concluded that this injunction signals the unique Gospel revelation that all human culture is established on a fratricidal murder, that of Abel by Cain and that all humans are, by virtue of that origin, radically distorted in our willing and our knowing. There are in fact two paternities, that of the Father 'which is accessible in and through the imitative creation of an inclusive fraternity following Jesus,' or the paternity which in its cultural, religious and even biological forms is implicated in and reflects 'the murderous distortion of fraternity into fratricide'.[610]

The early narratives of Francis's life have produced both the hagiographic Francis of the thirteenth century and the romantic Francis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I have argued that mimetic theory offers us another Francis; Francis as *Homo Mimeticus*. The 'mimetic' Francis was both a subject and a model of borrowed desire. Living in the early thirteenth century, he witnessed (and took advantage of) the weakening of the traditional barriers, characteristic of a social order still governed by external mediation. Francis stands between the worlds of external and internal mediation. He is not a romantic hero, but in choosing Christ as his model he is, in mimetic terms, a saint.[611] The category which allows us to break free from the romantic hero is 'conversion'.

Francis of Assisi: From Homo Mimeticus to Saint

[610] James Alison, 'Jesus' Fraternal Relocation of God' in *Faith Beyond Resentment,* pp. 64-5.
[611] Cf. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, pp. 160-61. The choice of Christ as one's model is part of the part of 'the discovery that we have always, without being aware of it, been imitating the wrong kind of models who lead us into the vicious circle of scandals and perpetual frustration'. p. 160.

The conversion experience of Saint Francis is centred around a number of historical and *interdividual loci*, which include a renunciation of family and *commune*, in Assisi.[612] From his release from Perugia, however, the church of San Damiano becomes the privileged place of conversion. Certain legends depict the events at San Damiano in dramatic, miraculous terms.[613] In Celano's *First Life*, however, the circumstances of the conversion are suggested in terms of certain actions which, in themselves, are not extraordinary. For André Vauchez Francis's conversion experience 'encompasses a whole series of very different episodes among which it is not easy to find a connecting thread'. While later legends offer precise moments of conversion, Celano's *First Life* is 'imprecise about the exact moment when his subject was truly transformed'.[614] Celano's conversion account is perhaps the most reliable; he presents us with a troubled, traumatized man who had already begun to withdraw from the familial and social systems in which he had formed and modelled his desires.

Living at San Damiano, Francis adopted the common medieval spiritual remedies for mental disturbance or spiritual weakness: he mortified his body, gave alms and made vigils of prayer. A spiritual remedy which Francis employed was a pilgrimage to Rome. In Rome he exchanged cloths with a beggar at Saint Peter's Basilica, he begged in French, having cast his coins ostentatiously at the grill before the altar in Saint Peter's. While Le Goff argues that 'little credence can be given to Celano's account of Saint Francis's trip to Rome and his interaction with the beggars there, Thompson considers the account plausible.[615] It suggests a typical medieval remedy for a deeply troubled young man, whose troubles were inevitably understood at that time as spiritual in nature. The account of the pilgrimage to Rome is therefore realistic, as is the account of his unusual interaction with the beggars.[616]

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[612] The *Commune* refers to the social, economic and political structure of the late medieval Italian city-state. Comparatively more participative than the powerful feudal families, the *Commune* was nevertheless a vehicle for the rising Merchant and middle class, and operated in their interests. It is characterized by Fortini as materially acquisitive and motivated by economic expansion. Cf. Arnoldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York, Crossroad Publishing, 1992) p. 158.

[613] *Legend of the Three Companions*, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 76.

[614] Vauchez, p. 20.

[615] Cf. Le Goff, p. 27 and Thompson, p. 13.

[616] Cf. *The Legend of the Three Companions*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 73. Jacques Dalarun has noted, however, that in an earlier source, the recently published *Vita Brevio* of Celano, Francis's original visit to Rome was a business trip (a 'merchant among merchants') and not a pilgrimage. Cf. Jacques Dalarun, *The Rediscovered Life of St Francis of Assisi* by Thomas of Celano, trans. Timothy J. Johnson. (New York: St Bonaventure University, 2016).

Celano's account of Saint Francis's life is schematized by several changes of clothing, from the 'foppish and idle adolescent who loved to dress after the mode of his class', to the knight in livery and armour, to the clothes of a beggar and later a hermit. Twice in the narrative, when he renounces his ties to his father Pietro and as he lay dying, Saint Francis strips naked. The frequent change of outward attire, observed by early biographers, suggests a man accustomed to taking a variety of different models for his desire.[617] The traumatised young man who traded places with a beggar was reaching the extremes of imitation in his search for a model. Francis's erratic behaviour, once tolerated as charming and idiosyncratic, was at this time tending towards the obsessive and even, Celano suggested, insanity.[618]

Girard notes that 'faced with a collapse the subject may decide the object was a fraud, it never had the value attributed to it and he will confer the value on another object'.[619] It could be argued on the evidence of the sources that Francis, having been frustrated in his knightly ambitions, merely transferred his desires onto religious models. In the dream of a house 'filled with soldier's arms', Celano's interpretation indicates a straightforward transfer of desire, from temporal, earthly militancy, to a heavenly militancy. This simple transfer of desire to another and higher model is explicit in Celano.[620]

Celano makes use of this hagiographic trope; the defeated soldier whose defeat leads him to embrace a higher cause: 'Francis, Christ's bravest soldier, went around the cities and villages proclaiming the kingdom of God and preaching peace'.[621] The re-presentation of Francis from an aspiring knight in armour into a spiritual warrior of Christ is, perhaps, too neat and obscures what was a long and painful realignment of patterns of desire from the rivalrous and confrontational to the pacific. Francis did not simply confer the value of one model onto another, rather, he experienced a protracted and uncertain period of existential collapse. The early *Lives* indicate that Francis endured a lengthy period of emotional and spiritual

[617] Cf. Lawrence Cunningham, 'Francis of Assisi as a Catholic Saint', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 9, 1, (2006), 56-71 (p. 60).
[618] Cf. Celano, *First Life, FA:ED,* (Vol 1) p. 191: 'when those that knew him saw him, they compared his latest circumstances with his former and they began to reproach him harshly. Shouting that he was insane and out of his mind, they threw mud from the streets and stones at him'.
[619] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 90
[620] Celano, *First Life*, p. 186.
[621] Ibid, pp. 214-5. Also, cf. *The Versified Life of Saint Francis*, *FA:ED*, (Vol 1) pp. 440-1.

breakdown, during which time he was burdened by guilt and remorse for his past sins and lost his following of admiring friends. [622]

In the first stage of his conversion Francis withdrew from the protecting systems of family and *commune*. In the winter of 1206 Francis was wandering alone in the Spoleto valley where he was robbed and beaten.[623] He served for a time as a scullery worker in the kitchen of a monastic community and from there moved on to Gubbio. It was at this time, Celano writes, that Francis encountered the lepers. He lodged in a house for lepers and undertook the lowly and demanding tasks of cleaning and caring for the lepers. In his *Testament*, Francis would recall these encounters with the lepers as the turning point or conversion of his life. Francis acknowledged in his *Testament* a natural aversion to lepers, which he described as 'bitter'. In the circumstances of his conversion this aversion was transformed into 'sweetness'. Girard, writing of the process of conversion in Dostoyevsky's novels, described conversion, not as conferring value onto *another* model but something akin to an inversion:

> In renouncing divinity the hero renounces slavery. Every level of his existence is inverted, all the effects of metaphysical desire are replaced by contrary effects. Deception gives way to truth, anguish to remembrance, agitation to repose, hatred to love, humiliation to humility, mediated desire to autonomy, deviated transcendency to vertical transcendency'.[624]

Thompson notes that at this point in his life, 'Francis's aesthetic sense, so central to his personality, has been transformed, even inverted'.[625] His emotional response to lepers may properly be called an inversion, since encounters previously experienced as 'bitter' were transformed into 'sweetness of soul and body'.[626] The sources indicate that Francis's encounter with the lepers marked a long-desired release from guilt and anxiety about his past, now characterized as 'the days of his vanity'.[627] Thompson asserts that, in his encounter with the lepers, Francis sensed himself 'remade' and his torment about past sins disappeared

[622] Celano writes of Francis in this period as in a 'pit and in darkness'. His life was taken up with 'fasting and weeping' as he became burdened by guilt. Ibid, p. 191
[623] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 194.
[624] Girard, *Deceit,* p. 294.
[625] Thompson, p. 17.
[626] *The Testament, FA:ED* Vol (1), p. 124.
[627] Cf. *First Celano*, *FA:ED* Vol (1), p. 195.

in a moment of 'rebirth and healing'.[628] Being at once released from the guilt of his past life (a past associated with rivalry, revelry, social ambition and warfare), Francis is removed to the company of the outcast, the leper. But his attitude towards the leper has changed completely. This is characteristic of the 'intelligence of the victim': an awareness that our consciousness has been formed in rivalry and that in the pursuit of borrowed desire we have excluded others.[629]

Girard's novelistic conversion releases the romantic hero from an enervating circuit of models and subjects of desire. At the moment of conversion '[…] exhausted, the hero finally lets himself fall into the abyss. He expects to smash against the rocks below but instead he is supported by the air: the law of gravity is annulled'.[630] Girard's collaborator, the psychiatrist J. M. Oughourlian makes use of this early Girardian reference to desire as gravity:

> Just as in the cosmos, the planets, stars, and galaxies are simultaneously held together and kept apart by gravity, so also mimesis keeps human beings together and apart, assuring at one and the same time the cohesion of the social fabric and the relative autonomy of the members that make it up. In physics, it is the force of attraction, gravity, that holds bodies together in space. They would be pitilessly hurled against each other into a final fusion if gravity did not preserve their autonomy, and hence, their existence, through motion. In psychology, the movement of mimesis that renders one autonomous and relatively individual is called 'desire'.[631]

Francis of Assisi's conversion, which is the locus of what will become the Franciscan movement is, in Girard's terms, a release from the gravitational pull of borrowed desires. Oughourlian, following Hegel, postulates that 'desire gives rise to the self and, by its movement, animates it'. Having broken free from the gravitational pull of borrowed desires, specifically those desires modelled by the nobility, Francis is transformed. The self which collapses in conversion is not replaced by a new, 'natural', autonomous self. It is not at this point that Francis of Assisi becomes the romantic hero he had desired to be. Rather, as Girard asserts, in the dynamic of conversion the Holy Spirit assumes an influence and a role which is experienced as the inversion of rivalrous mimetic desires. The grace of conversion is exemplified in the post-Resurrection disciples. After the Resurrection, '[…] It would be false,

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[628] Cf. Thompson, p. 17.
[629] Cf. note 14, above.
[630] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 294.
[631] J. M. Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991) pp. 11-12.

for example, to say the disciples "regained possession of themselves"; it is the Spirit of God that possesses them and does not let them go'.[632]

The presence of the Holy Spirit is a non-rivalrous presence, thus the converted do not resent lacking their 'true' autonomous self, rather they find their true self now, 'hidden in Christ'. (Colossians, 3. 3). Kaplan notes that for Girard, there is 'no holiness without the renunciation of pride, though lack of certainty and of confidence can accompany true holiness'.[633] The converted person's life is grounded in the Holy Spirit and lacks the pretensions to 'originality', 'spontaneity' and 'autonomy', characteristic of the romantic hero. Francis exhibited an extraordinary certitude in those things which were 'revealed' to him by God and were fundamental to the *forma vitae*. At the same time, he often showed himself uncertain and reached important decisions either on advice from others or by some form of prayerful discernment or consultation. From the beginning of his conversion, he adopted a consistent practice of consulting the scriptures, specifically the Gospels, for directions and indications.

In the two years after his initial conversion experiences, Francis had taken on the life of a hermit, nominally under the jurisdiction of the Church but essentially free to organise his life around the care of lepers, the rebuilding of churches, casual labour and prayers. The sources suggest that sometime in 1208, while attending Mass, Francis heard the Gospel account of Jesus sending out the disciples (Matthew 11. 7-10) and this text became programmatic for his pattern for Gospel living.[634] He relinquished his leather belt and replaced it with a cord. He adopted a tunic that was very poor, plain and rough, so that it would not be coveted.[635] He chalked a cross on the back of his tunic, to symbolize taking the up the cross, not in the sense of going on crusade, but of inhabiting the cross for protection,

[632] Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* p. 189.
[633] Kaplan, 'Saint Versus Hero', p. 158.
[634] Théophile Desbonnets notes that Saint Francis's appropriation of the Gospel takes on a deeper ecclesial/theological significance in the later sources: Celano's *First Life* (1228-29) records that Saint Francis hears the Gospel. Julian of Speyer's *Life of Saint Francis* (1232-35) notes that he hears the Gospel 'at Mass' and Saint Bonaventure's *Major Life,* III, 1*,* (1260-66) notes that he hears the Gospel at Mass, 'on the feast of the Apostles'. Saint Francis's conversion is described, in time, under the rubric of the Church's sacramental and apostolic character. Cf. Desbonnets, p. 6.
[635] Cf. Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1), p. 202.

or simply in obedience to the Gospel mandate.[636] The conversion process of Francis can be described in three movements:

Saint Francis was converted from a life of luxury and status and withdrew from the familial and social systems in which those desires were accommodated and encouraged. The care for lepers was the practical expression of this conversion. His conversion to the hermit's life gave some structural stability to this withdrawal from familial and social systems, though it had a temporary status. The occasion of hearing the Gospel read at Mass signalled a deepening of the conversion. Francis understood his vocation as a call to itinerant (lay) preaching, depending on providence, and taking as his model the poor Christ. Abandoning the garb of a hermit, Francis was indicating a new *forma vitae*.[637]

A Freudian Misreading of Saint Francis: Francis the Anti-Hero

As I have noted above, for Girard, Freudian desire misrepresents the true nature of desire by ontologizing family relationships and binding desire intrinsically to paternal/filial relationships. In another respect Freud is worthy of our attention: I will now argue that Freud's mis-reading of Francis of Assisi is an early example of Francis the 'anti-hero'. Furthermore, I will indicate in the next chapter how this neo-romantic, anti-heroic interpretation of Francis has, in recent years, found expression in some critical academic studies of Saint Francis and the early friars.

Freud undertook a study of Francis of Assisi in section four of *Civilization and its Discontents*.[638] Freud describes universal 'Christian' love as an 'unchangeable, undeviating, tender attitude' and he adds that 'Saint Francis of Assisi may have carried this method of using love to produce an inner feeling of happiness as far as anyone'.[639] Freud argues that love is a specific activity, directed towards particular persons, for particular reasons. Its specificity entails the pains, tensions and disappointments which are characteristic of a properly erotic and embodied love. Freud raised two objections against universal love: 'a love that does not

[636] Cf. Matthew 10. 38, and 16. 24, Mark, 8. 34, Luke 9. 23 and 14. 27.
[637] Francis and the early friars were frequently referred to simply as 'penitents'.
[638] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2002).
[639] Ibid, p. 20.

discriminate seems to us to lose some of its value, since it does an injustice to its object. And secondly, not all men are worthy of love'.[640] Freud's aim, according to Jennifer Leader is to demystify magical and metaphysical explanations of human nature and the world.[641] From a perspective 'as yet unexploded by the postmodern affirmation of multiple subjectivities' Freud asserted that 'there are no sources of knowledge of the universe other than the intellectual working-over of carefully scrutinized observations – in other words, what we call research – and alongside it no knowledge derived from revelation, intuition, or divination'.[642] Denying the possibility of what I have called 'conversion intelligence', Freud is compelled to consider Saint Francis the romantic anti-hero of Christianity and emblematic of religious mystification.

The Saint Francis Freud identifies (and repudiates) is a romantic construction. Freud's assertion that all men are not 'worthy' of love is related to his insistence that 'men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked'.[643] Freud's research indicated rather that they are the sort of creature for whom their neighbour is 'a temptation […] to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually, without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him'. Freud rejects any moral system in which a person sublimates love to such a degree that those persons most unworthy of love are loved indiscriminately, for the benefit of the one who loves. Without denying the agonistic anthropology Freud described, Girard maintained that through conversion the same violence one sees so clearly in others may be recognized in oneself.

The sublimation of love to its highest degree, so as to attain happiness, is a project wholly void of conversion or grace. What Freud and the romantic movement ignored is the real conversion in which Francis's patterns of desire and models of desire collapse, creating a graced understanding, the 'intelligence of the victim'. Francis, on this account does not approach the lepers to include them in his project of sublimation; this is properly speaking

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[640] Ibid.
[641] Jennifer Leader, 'Freud and St. Francis' in *Divine Aporia: Postmodern Conversations about the Other*. Edited. John C. Hawley (London: Associated University Presses, 2000) pp. 249-61.
[642] Cf. Cited in Jennifer Leader, 'Freud and St. Francis', p. 251.
[643] Sigmund Freud*, Civilization and its Discontents*. Cited in Jennifer Leader 'Freud and St. Francis', p. 257.

the romantic ideal. Rather, in showing mercy to the lepers Francis discovers himself released from the guilt of his own past sins. The leper and the outcast were not the romantic foils to Francis's heroic life; they were the graced encounter by which Francis was released from his own rivalrous desires, and simultaneously absolved from complicity in a life hitherto enmeshed in violence and exclusion.

Rather than sublimation, conversion explains the inversion of values which characterize Francis's encounter with the leper and the outcast; In renouncing divinity the hero renounces slavery. This inversion explains the costly reordering of desires which may appear, from the outside, as one more attempt to achieve mastery, divinity. The psychological and spiritual inversion associated with Francis's response to the lepers suggests the 'two trumpets' of scripture which announce Christ as both 'the fairest of the children of men' (Psalm 44) and insist that 'he had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes, no grace to make us delight in him'. (Isaiah 53, 2).[644] The inversion produced by mimetic conversion functions outside of the dynamic of rivalrous desire and produces a paradoxical intelligence. The 'fairest of the children of men' is recognised, for the first time, as the despised outcast, the suffering servant of Isaiah.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that interpretations of historical sources of Saint Francis's life have produced, first a stylized, medieval saint and, more recently a romantic hero. Drawing on mimetic theory I have critiqued the romantic interpretation on the basis that it mystifies and obscures the historical, cultural and theological significance of Francis. Dethroning romanticism is the first essential phase of a mimetic reading of the early Franciscan movement. Using the historical sources, I have proposed a 'mimetic profile' of Francis, one which takes seriously the borrowed nature of desire and the social and cultural factors which both shape and are shaped by mimetic desire. This reading of Francis hinges on the category of conversion. Conversion produces not a romantic hero but a saint. In Girardian terms, a

[644] Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty'. Message of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the Communion and Liberation (CL) Meeting at Rimini (24-30 August 2002). http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020824_ratzinger-cl-rimini_en.html.

saint has undergone a graced collapse of rivalrous desiring and emerged with what Alison has termed the 'intelligence of the victim'. The desires of the saint are, henceforth patterned on the non-rivalrous desires of Christ. By observing this dynamic in the life of Francis, the romantic fallacy is avoided. Finally, I have indicated that the romantic mis-reading of Francis is open to negative as well as positive representations, equally misleading and unhelpful. It is to these I now turn.

Chapter Five

The Cultural Context of the Early Franciscan Movement

Introduction and Methodology

In the previous chapter I applied mimetic theory to accounts of the life of Francis, critiquing the dominant romantic and hagiographic interpretations. The romantic interpretation in particular has served to mystify and obscure the core values of Saint Francis and the dynamics of the early Franciscan movement. In this I drew on the first stage of Girard's work; a mimetic reading of desire in literature. Having outlined a 'mimetic profile' of Saint Francis in the previous chapter, I will explore the social and cultural context of the early Franciscan movement. Girard's treatment of culture, in the second stage of his work, draws our attention to the role of violence in creating and maintaining social order. I will explore the early Franciscan's creative and non-violent response to the social order, through the lens of voluntary poverty. Voluntary poverty was emblematic of the early Franciscan's non-confrontational withdrawal from the dominant social and ecclesial systems. It was not merely a romantic choice, rather by choosing poverty the early Franciscans were free to establish their unique *forma vitae*, oriented to non-rivalrous community and peace-making. The chapter will be divided into two parts:

1. An evaluation of recent critical interpretations of Francis of Assisi and early Franciscan voluntary poverty (i.e., Hamilton (2015) and Baxter Wolf (2003)).[645] I will critique these interpretations by exploring the historical context of the late twelfth-early thirteenth centuries, specifically the questions of rapid social change and the role of violence, which Hamilton and Baxter Wolf neglect.
2. An exploration of the work of Sean Edward Kinsella, linking voluntary poverty with early Franciscan peace-making.[646] I will argue that Kinsella offers a more compelling

[645] Brian Hamilton, *Pauperes Christi: Voluntary Poverty as Political Practice* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Indiana, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015) and Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches: St Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[646] Sean Edward Kinsella, *The Lord Give You Peace: Poverty and Violence in the Writings and Early Lives of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Doctoral Thesis, University of St Michael's College, Canada, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003).

reading of early Franciscan voluntary poverty as a strategy of withdrawal from the social order maintained by violence.

Francis of Assisi and Voluntary Poverty: Competing Interpretations

Brian Hamilton has asserted that a variety of voluntary poverty movements emerged from within a growing social awareness of the poor as a distinct social class during the late Middle Ages. This awareness can be traced, Hamilton argues, to the transition from 'a classical Roman to an early Christian economic imagination'.[647] It develops further in the radical social changes of late feudal European society in the 12th and 13th centuries, during which time various movements known under the general title of the 'poor of Christ' began to challenge political and ecclesial power.[648] Hamilton argues that the early 'poor of Christ' movements represented a new social/political phenomenon which witnessed 'the poor' beginning to claim justice on their own behalf. In this context, Saint Francis and the Franciscan movement are both a successful and popular breakthrough and a decisive rupture. Hamilton asserts:

> If the core strength of Francis' theological vision lies in his description of Christ's solidarity with the lowest, its core weakness lies in the way he casts that solidarity in terms of humility. As a practice of humility, voluntary poverty loses its critical force. It begins to function as a means of enforcing the patterns of exclusion and stratification that the earlier movements of poverty had opposed.[649]

For Hamilton this connection between humility and voluntary poverty represents that 'essential ethical ambiguity' of the Franciscan tradition.[650] Hamilton notes that Francis of Assisi carefully avoids the anticlerical tone of earlier poverty movements and underlines obedience to ecclesiastical authority.[651] He also posits that by consistently pairing poverty and humility in his writings, Francis gradually undermined an earlier and more radical critique

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[647] Hamilton, abstract.
[648] On the 'Poor of Christ' movements, Hamilton repeatedly cites, among others: Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Stephen Rowan, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) and on the relationship between the medieval poverty movements and social and economic changes of the Middle Ages, Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978). The relationship between the Poor of Christ movements and medieval heresy has been treated in R. I. Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
[649] Hamilton, p. 106.
[650] Ibid.
[651] Cf. Ibid, p. 122.

of exclusion and stratification. The movement of voluntary poverty as a political force became increasingly identified with Saint Francis and Franciscanism in the late thirteenth century. Hamilton points to two key subversive traits of the earlier voluntary poverty movement which were effectively abandoned by the early Franciscans: traveling in mixed communities of men and women and presuming to preach the Gospel on their own authority, as opposed to preaching with the consent of local bishops and the Roman Curia. Politically subversive practice within the poor movements indicates, for Hamilton, that these groups were legitimately claiming justice on their own behalf. Francis weakened this claim, Hamilton argues, when he redefined voluntary poverty by coupling the concepts of poverty and humility. Hamilton insists that while this does not completely undermine the impetus for political action, it does 'significantly qualify and subdue it'.[652] For Hamilton, Francis's concern to 'live within the boundaries of orthodoxy' effectively enervates the voluntary poverty movement and deprives it of the radical political force it had enjoyed.[653] With Francis the decidedly anti-clerical bias in the earlier poor movements is jettisoned in favour of a voluntary poverty lived within the Church structures and always docile to Church authority. Thus, for Hamilton, Francis fails in his ambition to establish his own vision of a community based on mutual obedience. This failure is a consequence of, on the one hand, attempting to 'break down the barriers between clergy and laity, between lord and servant' and, at the same time, reifying 'the distinctiveness of clerical authority as an order'.[654]

Hamilton's argument is persuasive in that it situates Francis and the early Franciscan movement within the social context of the High Middle Ages and the 'poor of Christ' movements which had emerged in the previous century. Within this context, Hamilton asserts, the coupling of voluntary poverty and humility signals a withdrawal from political action as *confrontation* and a change in the *modus operandi* of those who would critique unjust power structures in late medieval Europe. This decisive change, Hamilton asserts, amounts to a defeat for the voluntary poverty movements which had begun to conceive of the 'the poor' as an active and contentious social category confronting the centres of social power with accusations of injustice. The poor of Christ movement produced a consciousness,

[652] Hamilton, P. 133.
[653] Ibid, P. 125.
[654] Ibid.

which Hamilton describes as an 'irruption of the poor'; the poor are recast as social agents within society with legitimate claims for restitution. The poor, Hamilton argues, gained a form of social primacy in the medieval imagination during this period which has yet to be recovered. Hamilton favours a retrieval of this historical intuition, which conceives of 'option for the poor' or voluntary poverty as more than a minority witness against the inevitably destructive practices of the dominant centres of power. He favours an 'active confrontation with the system […] not just a witness to its violence'.[655]

Hamilton reads the voluntary poverty movement and the role of Francis of Assisi within it, primarily as a social/economic history wherein the established power claims of the dominant social group came to be critiqued and then robustly challenged by a subversive reordering of social norms, on the part of 'the poor'. Francis, inspired by the just claims of the 'poor of Christ' movement and sympathetic to their critique of social inequality, both popularised the movement and recast it as a moral and ascetical enterprise, rather than a political one. In Hamilton's view, Francis's concern for 'orthodoxy' effectively limited his freedom to challenge the authority of the Church, then a major power group in society. Saint Bonaventure and other Franciscan theologians of the 13th and 14th centuries subsequently framed this intuition in a theological structure, giving institutional and religious credibility to the coupling of poverty to obedience. The debates within the Franciscan Order and the wider Church regarding the poverty of Christ and the proper role of Mendicant Orders in the universities inevitably informed these theological reflections. Hamilton observes that, in contemporary discourse, voluntary poverty is usually considered an aspect of individual piety or personal virtue; it is largely divorced from groups which consciously advocate for the poor, *as poor* (the 17th century English groups known as the Levellers or the Diggers may be considered examples of this radical strain, as can the Base Communities of 20th century Latin America).[656]

These groups, Hamilton notes, are consistently a minority in society and in the churches. Late 20th century Roman Catholic social thought frequently employs the term

[655] Ibid, P. 225.
[656] Ibid, p. 224.

'development' when addressing poverty and disadvantage, thus speaking from a position of political power.[657] The socially radical and combative energies of the nascent 'poor of Christ' movements are judged by Hamilton to have been first harnessed and then effectively absorbed into the wider social context of a dominant Church which emphasised the value of poverty always in relation to the virtue of humility. This process left the social order more aware of 'the poor' as a group, but still fundamentally unchanged.

Hamilton's desire to retrieve the socially active and politically engaged approach of the medieval poor movements in a contemporary context is certainly compelling. In contemporary Western society men and women forming itinerant preaching communities can no longer be considered subversive to the social order. Where then, Hamilton asks, can the political energy of the medieval movements be directed in a contemporary context? This vital political force, he asserts, was dissipated through the poor movement's identification with Franciscanism and the particular concerns of Francis of Assisi. He cites the Occupy movement (a popular, grassroots, protest movement in response to the 2008 world-wide financial crisis) when identifying the possible heirs to the medieval poverty movements.

Hamilton's thesis, situating Francis in the midst of a social history of medieval poor movements, inevitably understands the saint and his early followers to have failed as 'social reformers', or even as 'Christian socialists'. Stanislaus da Compagnola laments the 'tendency [...] to give a sociological interpretation to the religious movements, orthodox and heterodox, of the Middle Ages'.[658] The response of Francis and the early Franciscans was essentially a religious response to religious problems. Indeed, Hamilton acknowledges that scholars of Franciscanism (Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, p. 233 and Thompson, *St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 5, p. 33) have repeated '*ad nauseam'* that the poor movements of the Middle Ages were not instances of class conflict.[659] Nevertheless, Hamilton insists that the success of the mendicant orders of the 13th century is based, in part at least, on their

[657] Ibid.
[658] Stanislaus da Campagnola, 'Francis of Assisi and the Social Problems of His Time', *Greyfriars Review*, 2, 1, Jan (1988), 133-144 (p. 140).
[659] Hamilton, p. 67.

association with an already vibrant, popular 'poor of Christ' movement. Joining the expanding ranks of the involuntary poor, the mendicant friars eventually beg alms from door-to-door.[660]

The willingness of the early Franciscans to share the depravations of the involuntary poor may have added an 'aura of sanctity' to the humble lifestyles of the poor, as Bronislaw Geremek asserts.[661] Hamilton, however, insists that the social benefits flowed in the opposite direction: it was the successful and credible poor movements which invested the new mendicant orders with the hallmark of authenticity and relevance in the social context of the times.[662] Hamilton asserts that the Franciscan innovation, in social terms, resulted in enforcing the 'patterns of exclusion and stratification which earlier movements of poverty had opposed'.[663] Da Compagnola, agrees that being gradually aligned with a definite urban class and the ranks of the clergy, the Franciscans, helped to 'deepen the gap between the poor, the clergy and the nobility, [a gap] which would come to characterize the history of the following centuries, or at least the era of the *ancien régime*'.[664] Notwithstanding this ambiguous legacy, Hamilton's assessment of Francis and the early Franciscans is reductive. By presenting Francis as a well-intentioned but hapless late-comer to a successful grassroots political movement, Hamilton casts the saint as an anti-hero, whose personal religious commitments subvert and finally defeat the poor movement's political energies.

The Merchant Class and rise of Voluntary Poverty

The first Franciscans, like Francis himself, were drawn primarily from the more prosperous classes of society. C. H. Lawrence has claimed that 'although the early Franciscans recruited their members from all social groups except the unfree, their chief attraction was for the young of the most affluent classes and the clerical intelligentsia, young people who had never

[660] Hamilton repeatedly identifies of the early Franciscans with the *Pauperes,* the class of the indigent and involuntary poor. Addressing the early Franciscan relationship to begging da Compagnola states: 'Begging was not meant to be a simple substitute for work or a kind of social remedy. It was meant to be the exercise of a spiritual activity, the performance of a moral act, humiliating yet fruitful for both giver and receiver', p. 136. Early Franciscans were not exclusively beggars; indeed, the norm of Franciscan life was work as labourers and artisans.
[661] Cf. Hamilton, p. 86.
[662] Ibid.
[663] Ibid, p. 106.
[664] Da Compagnola, p. 141.

experienced real want'.[665] Contrary to Hamilton's thesis, David Flood suggests that significant social change in medieval Europe emerged precisely from those social groups which were materially and socially secure. Flood asserts that those who were established socially were better placed to critique the social and economic strategies employed against the poor. The sons and daughters of merchants, notaries and occasionally nobles, who opted for voluntary poverty in the late medieval period had significant advantages in evaluating unjust social systems over 'those brought up to fear and honour social reality'. Those who were socially and materially established could reject the 'co-opting maneuvers more easily than those from the lower social rungs.'[666]

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it may be argued, the most socially contentious group were not the 'poor movements' but the emerging merchant class. During the 11th and 12th centuries the merchant class advanced from the condition of *pauperes* and, 'protected and admonished by powerful people', they assumed 'the condition of being guarantors of economic order and, therefore, of the Christian public'.[667] The merchant class posed several problems to aristocratic and ecclesiastical interests in late feudal Europe; as the coin economy developed merchants were at the fore, advancing, lending and collecting the purchasing power of coin. Their success was eroding the typical coincidence between wealth and power which was at the heart of feudal society. Secondly, merchants were professionally implicated with the ambiguous practice of usury.[668] Giacomo Todeschini notes that usuary was an 'obsession' for Christian medieval Europe between 1100-1250.[669] The fortunes and social standing of merchants improved in the late 12th century. The century ended with the canonization of Homobonus of Cremona in 1199, by Pope Innocent III. Homobonus was a fabric merchant noted for his piety and care of the poor and for his witness

[665] C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (New York: Longman Group, 1994) p. 34.
[666] David Flood, *Work for Justice: A Franciscan Vademecum*. (2012), 1-53, (p. 5, Note 7). https://en.ccfmc.net/images/David_Flood-_HistoryBelow.pdf
[667] Giacomo Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth: From Voluntary Poverty to Market Society*, trans. By Donatella Melucci, edited by Michael F. Cusato O.F.M., Jean-François Godet-Calogeras and Daria Mitchell O.S.F. (New York: Saint Bonaventure University, 2009) p. 18.
[668] Cf. Todeschini, p. 20. Usury was the requirement of restitution, 'in money or in nature, of a value greater than was lent' for reasons of private interest.
[669] Ibid. 'This obsessive fear depended in part on the mere difficulty of explaining what, in reality usury was'. p. 19.

to peace as a mediator between competing factions.[670] And yet the merchant class remained contentious in late feudal Europe. As Marie-Dominique Chenu observed, the occupation of the merchant, 'free from personal ties, free from the services imposed by fief-holding, manipulating money without working, was suspect to the regime and thus suspect in the Christendom run by this regime'.[671] From their materially secure but socially ambiguous status, the members of the merchant class were capable of undertaking a serious critique of social inequality and exclusion. The merchant class was in some respects critiquing, if not subverting, the social hierarchies which excluded the poor and functioned by identifying wealth with power and the right to rule.

Kenneth Baxter Wolf has likewise insisted that the popularity of the Franciscan movement in the early thirteenth century owed much to the rising influence of the new middle classes, comprising merchants, lawyers, notaries, school masters, etc,. [672] He has characterized the attitude of this group towards the involuntary poor as a 'pervasive and deep-seated combination of guilt and mistrust'.[673] In the Franciscan movement, the ascendant middle classes recognized a group of poor men and women who were 'truly deserving of their alms'.[674] Of Saint Francis himself Baxter Wolf suggests:

> […] one could argue that it was his success in taking poverty as a virtue away from the involuntary poor and giving it, in a newly spiritualized form, to the rich that secured for Francis the respect and veneration of guilty burghers who had the resources and the influence to transform him overnight into an *altar Christus* and his followers into a powerful order […], there were, after all, plenty of 'second Christs' at work in early thirteenth-century Italy, but perhaps only one whose conception of poverty spoke so directly to the needs of the non-poor.[675]

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[670] Ibid, pp. 23-4.
[671] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, edited and translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997) p. 226.
[672] Baxter Wolf's work *The Poverty of Riches* has been heavily critiqued as an historical study of St Francis and Franciscan poverty. Baxter Wolf admits to imposing 'modern liberal notions' on the medieval texts. A significant amount of recent historical scholarship is entirely absent from the work and psychologizing references (e.g., 'guilty burghers') abound. Hamilton considers Baxter Wolf's argument that St Francis's voluntary poverty increased disdain for the poor as 'compelling' (p.8). Cf. Joseph P. Chinnici, 'The Poverty of Riches, St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered (Review)' in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 2004, Vol 4 (1) pp. 98-101. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/scs.2004.0006. Todeschini refers to Baxter Wolf's thesis as 'anachronistic' and 'completely misleading'. Cf. Todeschini, p. 170, note 34.
[673] Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 88.
[674] Ibid.
[675] Ibid, pp.89-90.

Hamilton and Baxter Wolf correctly locate Francis within a wider 'poor movement', and indicate the contemporary social and political currents which came to shape Franciscan voluntary poverty. However, Hamilton moves quickly to scapegoat the early Franciscan movement and explain the demise of voluntary poverty as *political force* in terms of Franciscan compliance with social and ecclesial power structures. Hamilton points out that the early Franciscans joined the ranks of the involuntary poor and adopted the practice of begging. However, he ignores the historical evidence that the early Franciscans mainly lived by day labour and begging was typically an alternative when labour could not be found or payment was refused.[676] In Hamilton's thesis the early Franciscan mendicants are represented as competitors with the involuntary poor, depriving them of scarce resources. The historical reality was more nuanced. The *Early Rule* (*Regula Non Bullata*, 1221) insisted on the friars taking part in manual labour and the reference to begging (admittedly removed in the *Later Rule* of 1223) suggested a twofold context for Franciscan begging: social and apostolic. As Le Goff notes, the *Early Rule* indicates that begging is motivated by solidarity: 'they must be happy to be among people of low condition and of no account, among the poor and the weak, the sick the lepers and the street beggars'. This solidarity (not competition) with the involuntary poor is the context of begging within the early Franciscan tradition.[677] Missing from Hamilton's thesis is an exploration of the early Franciscan friars as workers, labourers and economic agents.[678]

Furthermore, the relative success of medieval poor movements in effecting social change must be questioned. What Hamilton fails to explore sufficiently is the nature of *violence* in medieval society. In the context of our contemporary Western society many

[676] Thompson, p. 29.
[677] Le Goff, p. 48.
[678] Flood insists that the early friars were not *pauperes* and not identical with the involuntary poor. The term *fratres* is more fitting, even for the brothers who begged. Those who begged were nevertheless occupied with labour, in leprosaria, for example. According to Flood, their work in almshouses and among lepers was not understood to be charity: they had developed a unique concept of work as service and 'rendering back' (*reddere*). They were working in the service of the weaker members of society (the elderly, the lepers, the sick) and begging alms was considered an extension of their idea of work. In the early Franciscan movement friars employed in essential work which offered no form of payment had every right to remuneration, in the form of meeting their material needs. This form of begging was conceptually different from the begging undertaken by the *pauperes*. David Flood, O.F.M., 'Franciscans at Work' in *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 59 (2001), pp. 37-19. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41975283 accessed: 24-09-2018.

individual and collective rights have been enshrined in law and the power of the State and the Church has been limited, including its coercive powers. This was manifestly not the case in the 13th century, where poor movements were unlikely to achieve their aims without recourse to violence or without withstanding the real threat of politically organised violence. Absent from Hamilton's account, but cited in Michael Kirwan's *Political Theology: A New Introduction* are historical accounts of the violent repression of 'poor movements'. Kirwan pays particular attention to historical accounts of violent coercive action, on the part of the state, against poor movements in the sixteenth century.[679] Until relatively recently political action and social subversion on the part of the poor or 'poor movements' was likely to lead to comprehensive, violent reaction, on the part of social elites or the state. Radical groups which eschewed participation in the coercive structures of the state, such as the Anabaptists and later the Mennonites, tended to withdraw entirely from, rather than directly confront, the powerful structures of Church or State.[680] To exclude this harsh reality from a treatment of the poor movements of the 13th century is to underestimate the inevitably violent consequences of organised social and political action by the poor for most of Western history. Hamilton's assertion that the poor movements of the thirteenth century were on the cusp of effecting fundamental social change, from below, serves to romanticize those movements and remove them from the context of a social order maintained by violence.

An evaluation of Franciscan voluntary poverty must include the historical context of heightened violence in a time of rapid social change. As a response to Hamilton and Baxter Wolf's critical evaluation of Franciscan voluntary poverty I argue that the social and political change represented by the early Franciscans was attuned to the realities of violence and developed effective strategies for social solidarity and peace-making in this context.

Violence and social undifferentiation in Thirteenth Century Europe

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Europe witnessed widespread social change, ecclesiastical reform, the growth of urbanization, philosophical and theological innovation

[679] Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology: A New Introduction*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2009).
[680] Cf. Ibid, pp. 74-9.

and economic expansion.[681] The rapid social change of the early thirteenth century, whilst bringing many benefits, was nonetheless marked by violence. In *Finding Francis, Following Christ*, Michael H. Crosby has asserted that St Francis 'lived in a world defined by violence' and that 'culturally sanctioned violence reached its apogee in the conflict between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor'.[682] Le Goff affirms a tripartite scheme of social differentiation in the late Middle Ages: the *oratores*, the *bellatores* and the *laboratores* (those who pray, those who fight, and those who work). The social barriers which distinguished these three groups were in flux in the early thirteenth century.[683] The Gregorian reform led in the twelfth century to new religious orders, ecclesiastical diversity and, in the case of the Cistercians, for example, a combination of economic success and spiritual renewal. Lay society also made inroads into religious life, even though the Church reforms which forbade marriage and cohabitation in the clerical state served to radically separate the *oratores* from the *bellatores* and the *laboratores*, 'by imposing a frontier in terms of sexuality.'[684] Social differentiation was further challenged with the emergence of military orders, comprising a new fusion of the *oratores* and the *bellatores*, wedding the religious life to codes of chivalry. In this changing social context violence and conflict were characteristic. The traditional orders in society, which had been effectively buffered and distinct were less defined and as a consequence episodic violence was ubiquitous. Thomas N. Bisson notes that:

> in the eleventh and twelfth centuries most of the fighting and coercing was done by armed men on horseback, and to the extent that the freedom to fight and command elevated one above the incompetent masses, it came to seem that force (*violentia* in its special sense) was an attribute of human distinction.[685]

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[681] Cf. Chenu. In *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, Chenu situates the theological developments of the twelfth century within the structure of Latin Christian theology and dynamic social and economic progress in Western Europe. The interaction of monastic theology with Church reform, renewed understanding of concepts such as 'history' and 'nature', and a 'symbolist mentality', all contributed to development in doctrine and social dynamics. Cf. Chenu pp.202-38. Chenu maintains that, far from merely reacting to social change, it is precisely the 'discovery of the Gospel' (p.231) which allowed religiously inspired groups to interact in a dynamic way with evolving social and economic structures and facilitate significant intellectual, cultural and religious development.

[682] Michael H. Crosby, *Finding Francis, Following Christ*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2007) p. 4

[683] Cf. Chenu, pp. 263-64. Chenu notes that evangelical fraternities 'invalidated after a fashion the more or less sacred tripartite division of society into clerics, knights and peasants. That division offered no sociological or religious identity to their clientele, who included merchants and urban artisans'. Fraternities helped desacralize social differences; mendicants such as the Franciscans never consecrated the guardians of their communities, as, for example monastic communities consecrated their abbots.

[684] Le Goff, p. 4.

[685] Thomas N. Bisson., *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) p. 64.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as urban society began to develop and expand, the urban square re-emerged as a place of social and civic importance. Le Goff notes that it was here in the civic square, rather than in church buildings, that the early Franciscans attempted to preach (and perform) their unique way of life.[686] This appropriation of the public space occasionally provoked a violent reaction from the *bellatores*. Saint Francis's attempt to preach in Perugia town square was interrupted by knights on horseback who intimidated and disrupted the crowds and sought to disband the assembly.[687] The knights were, to use Bisson's terms, elevating themselves from the lower social orders and distinguishing themselves by means of violence. Within the higher social orders violence functioned to create and maintain social difference. Feuding, for example, was:

> a way of communicating to the aristocratic community one's personal traits, disclosing one's moral characteristics, one's commitment to the values and norms that helped define membership in the local or regional nobility […] feuds could signal that the feuder was a man of principle, a man of honour, a moral person who could be trusted by others to do the right thing even at a personal cost to himself.[688]

The role of violence in feudal society was further focused and targeted on specific categories as cultural and economic advances necessitated the redrawing of social boundaries. R. I. Moore asserts, 'deliberate and socially sanctioned violence […] [was] directed *through established governmental, juridical and socially sanctioned institutions*, against groups of people that were scapegoated to such a degree that membership of such groups in itself came to be regarded as justifying those attacks'.[689] Moore does not engage in the argument that medieval Europe was more or less violent than previous or subsequent periods in European history, rather, he maintains Europe became a 'persecuting society' during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Moore writes that 'religious persecution had, of course, been familiar in the Roman Empire […] But in the West, far from being "normal" in medieval society, it had

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[686] Le Goff, p. 100.

[687] 'Once blessed Francis was preaching in the Piazza at Perugia to a large crowd gathered there. All of a sudden some knights of Perugia began racing their horses around the Piazza, jousting with their weapons, and thus disturbing the preaching. Although the men and women, who were intent on listening to the sermon, reprimanded them, they did not stop'. *Assisi Compilation* [75] *FA:ED* (Vol II) pp. 178-9.

[688] Hillary Zimora, 'Values and Violence: The Morals of Feuding in Late Medieval Germany' in *Feud in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm and Bjørn Poulsen (Asrhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007) pp. 157-8.

[689] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250,* Second Edition (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p 4.

faded away with the Roman Empire, and did not reappear until the eleventh century'.[690] Moore links the re-emergence of systematic violent persecution with the eleventh century advances in the intellectual, cultural and economic spheres of European life, 'when for better and for worse, the continuous history of modern European society and achievement begins'.[691] Surveying various persecuted groups in late medieval Europe, groups which had escaped systematic persecution previously, Moore asserts: 'The activity at the core of persecution is classification, in accordance with what Leach […] called the freedom of human beings to "carve up the external world into named categories, and arrange the categories to suit our social convenience"'.[692]

Moore indicates that the social undifferentiation of the late medieval period was the source of renewed persecution and official, social violence. The great social, intellectual and economic changes which were reshaping late medieval Europe called for the rearrangement of a wide variety of social categories: 'Old boundaries had to be redrawn more precisely and many new ones, social, cultural and intellectual as well as topographical, invented'.[693] This was required to re-establish a common perception of the world which was changing for the peoples of Europe, 'in almost every conceivable dimension'.[694] Moore argues that the eleventh and twelfth centuries may be described variously as 'the reordering of Christian life', 'the renaissance of the twelfth century', 'the twelfth century revolution in government' or the 'age of chivalry'; it is largely a matter of taste. But, however that 'tremendous extension of the power and influence of the literate is described, the development of persecution in all its forms was part of it, and therefore inseparable from the great and positive achievements with which it is associated'.[695]

Conclusion: Deficiencies in Hamilton's Account

The insufficiency of Hamilton's narrative from a theological and mimetic point of view are:

[690] *Ibid*.
[691] *Ibid,* P. 171.
[692] *Ibid*, P. 184.
[693] *Ibid*.
[694] *Ibid*.
[695] *Ibid*, P. 171.

1. A reductively economic reading of the early Franciscan movement.
2. A neglect of the social context with respect to the role of *violence*.
3. A fundamentally 'romantic' view of Saint Francis which undervalues the theological categories of humility and conversion.

The historical context of rapid social change and periodic escalating violence, described above, is a significant lacuna in Hamilton's account of the early Franciscan movement. The assertion that the poor movements could have achieved significant political and social change in this context, without inviting violent confrontation is contentious, at the very least. Notwithstanding the ambiguous legacy of the Franciscan movement with respect to the poor in society, it is both unfair and unrealistic to assert that the 'poor movements' could have achieved in the thirteenth century what, for example, non-conformist poor movements of the sixteenth century failed to achieve. Kirwan warns against the 'romantic exaggeration' of the influence of non-conformist poor movements in the sixteenth century. This caveat has even more relevance for 'poor movements' engaged in political action in the context of the decline of feudalism.[696]

In Hamilton's (and Baxter Wolf's) social and economic reading of the early Franciscan movement, Sabatier's romantic saint, unworldly, idealistic and tragic, is once again on view. He is the pious fool whose personal sanctity serves to elevate and sanctify voluntary poverty, but at the same time, robs it of its original political dynamism. Much of the social context is neglected in Hamilton's account. Chenu's essays, for example, have explored the importance of theological and philosophical discourse and a changed understanding of the concept of 'nature', indeed an 'increasingly acute sensitivity to natural phenomena' in the late Middle Ages. Along with the merchant (*mercator*) the late Middle Ages the saw the appearance of the *homo artifex*, 'the maker of shapes and forms' whose ability to distinguish between the animate and the mechanical was achieved by ridding himself of 'the childish fancies of animism and the habit of seeing divinity in the marvels of nature. The sacred realm which he secularized by this process no longer possessed any properly religious value for him'.[697] And

[696] Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology*, p. 73.
[697] Chenu, pp. 44-5.

this new functionalism occurred in the century in which Francis composed the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. Chenu advises us:

> not to yield, as some have done, to the temptation to transform these movements of highest religious quality into mere secondary effects of a social crisis; this would be to misunderstand the real causes of the apostolic movement, under the pretext of emphasizing the circumstances surrounding it. It is unmistakably the discovery of the gospel which lay behind this development of Christianity.[698]

The 'discovery of the gospel' in the eleventh century, and the social, economic and political changes it helped produce, evidently changed the status of the poor within wider society. The voluntary poor movements, including the Franciscans, embodied and shaped this new consciousness of 'the poor' as a distinct social reality. At a deeper level, the 'discovery of the gospel' called into question social and ecclesial systems which created and accelerated violence. This violence was not restricted to one class within society but engaged and implicated all social classes and the social structures which defined the late Middle Ages. The early Franciscan movement, and its founder, who came to be known by the sobriquet *Il Poverello*, has inevitably been judged on its relationship to the involuntary poor. This serves to microscope the wider concerns of the movement. The involuntary poor were one group among many with which the early Franciscan movement was in contact. Early Franciscans engaged with all social classes, with lepers, heretics, labourers, artisans, clerics, and non-believers. The early Franciscan movement's 'discovery of the gospel' took the form of modelling non-rivalrous, peaceful relationships, preaching and performing peace, significantly in the 'secular' domain. Their aim was not political action in Hamilton's terms, but a peaceful and non-confrontational withdrawal from the very systems which provoked rivalry and produced social conflict and violence.

Finally, Hamilton's and Baxter Wolf's narrative avoids or obscures the theological categories which gave rise to the early Franciscan movement. Hamilton regards the connection between involuntary poverty and humility as the Franciscan movement's 'essential ethical ambiguity' and its 'core weakness'. In terms of a mimetic conversion, the pride associated with 'metaphysical sickness' can only be overcome by the virtue of

[698] Ibid, p. 231.

humility.[699] What was for Hamilton the core weakness of the early Franciscan movement's *forma vitae*, is in Girard's hypothesis, its essential strength. Hamilton and Baxter Wolf fail to recognise a real conversion, described either in terms of mimetic theory, or in classical Christian terms. Baxter Wolf claims that when Francis and his companion's interacted with social outcasts, they did so primarily for the 'spiritual benefits to which they could lay claim for having voluntarily abandoned the world. They did not do so to relieve the pain and suffering, whether here or in the next world of people who had no choice but to live the very life that Francis had voluntarily assumed'.[700] According to this assessment, the conversion of Francis had no reality in the order of grace and the Franciscan life was a continuation, or even a malignant growth of their previous patterns of rivalrous, acquisitive desire.

Girard has stated that 'conversion is not something of our own doing but the personal intervention of God in our lives. The greatest experience for Christians is the experience of becoming religious under the compulsion that they feel cannot come from themselves but from God alone'.[701] Conversion is the undoing of pride in its destructive forms and the ultimate critique of the illusion of the autonomous individualism which cannot but use others to achieve a greater sense of self. Girard notes that writers like Proust 'do not consider what we call their genius a natural gift with which they were born. They view it as a belated acquisition, the result of a personal transformation not of their own doing, which resembles a conversion'.[702] Kaplan notes that this quality 'pervades the lives of the saints, whose almost nihilistic denial of their own self-worth or extraordinary qualities seems insincere to readers ensconced in a Romantic frame of reference'. The narrative of the early Franciscan movement offered by Hamilton and Baxter Wolf suggests this Romantic frame of reference, which has reduced Francis's engagement with the involuntary poor and social outcasts to categories of personal aggrandizement and blithe self-interest. The saint who recognizes his or her rivalrous desires is compelled to acknowledge these desires and to adopt spiritual strategies

[699] 'Belief in the Incarnation, for Augustine, is inseparable from the translation of pride into humility, as he explains in the *Confessions*: "Nor yet was I humble enough to grasp the humble Jesus as my God, or did I know what his weakness had to teach". In light of Christ's kenotic love, Christianity could not conceive of itself without this virtue, whereas the pre-Christian world could not imagine an order in which humility *was* a virtue'. Grant Kaplan, 'Hero Versus Saint', p. 157.
[700] Baxter Wolf, p. 15.
[701] René Girard, 'Conversion in Literature and Christianity' in *Mimesis and Theory*, cited in Grant Kaplan, 'Romantic Hero Versus Saint', p. 157.
[702] Ibid, p. 158.

to overcome their conflictual outcomes. This, in classical Christian mystical and ascetical theology, is the virtue of *apatheia*. As Kaplan notes the difference between the converted saint whose relationships are now subject to periods of conscious, pacific withdrawal (*apatheia*) and the studied indifference of the neo-romantic, who 'seems to want nothing and care for nothing' is 'separated only by a hair's breadth yet by a chasm's depth'.[703] In avoiding any serious engagement with the categories of humility and conversion, Hamilton and Baxter Wolf's theses fall into this chasm.

The weak, romantic/heroic figure of Saint Francis is particularly vulnerable to this mis-reading. Without a mimetic reading, Francis of Assisi, degenerates from Sabatier's exemplary (heroic) figure, into what late-modernity/post-modernity considers a mere *vaniteux.* The inverted romantic hero is scorned for his illusory sense of autonomy. He is cast as one of those 'metaphysically sick' characters who strive to be 'original', 'spontaneous' and are ultimately both unconcerned with others and obsessively envious of the Other. Baxter Wolf asserts that Francis kisses the leper, not because he has come to see his desires were borrowed and rivalrous, that what he had hated and feared in the leper was his own spiritual disease, his 'metaphysical sickness'. Rather, he asserts that Francis kissed the leper in order to make himself a 'super leper', who would henceforth compete with the leper for the limited resources available in Assisi.[704] Giving no real importance to the role of conversion in the life of Francis, Baxter Wolf's interpretation amplifies Freud's earlier misreading of Francis. In both, Francis the romantic hero is deconstructed and recast, as romantic anti-hero.

Voluntary Poverty and a Non-Rivalrous Social Order

'The Lord Give You Peace': Sean Edward Kinsella and the Early Franciscan movement

Sean Edward Kinsella has argued that the mendicant Orders of the thirteenth century, and in particular the early Franciscan movement, were instrumental in proclaiming and performing peace in the context of significant social change and violent conflicts.[705] In his

[703] Ibid.
[704] Baxter Wolf, p. 14.
[705] Cf. note 646 above.

historical/theological study of the early Franciscan movement, Kinsella explores the systems of reciprocity and obligation which characterised feudal and late medieval societies and the manner in which belonging to such systems implicated individuals and groups in violence. Kinsella's work provides a compelling narrative of the early Franciscan movement, one which is highly compatible to mimetic theory. Kinsella observes how the early Franciscan movement departed from the established patterns of monastic life, and adopted radical strategies for peaceful relations within the wider society.

In several respects early Franciscan communities were socially significant. They represented the social undifferentiation which characterized their times, being a religious movement with significant economic and social agency: a hybrid of *oratores* and *laboratores*, an as yet undifferentiated and emerging social category. Early Franciscanism was a movement which promoted the laity within the Church as part of 'a general movement for the "secularization" of society'.[706] Early Franciscan communities sought to embody and model peaceful relations, not within the confines of a religious cloister, but in a wider social *milieu*, one which was in regular contact with economic and social institutions.[707] Significantly, the early Franciscan communities formed new patterns of communal living, largely free from the nexus of privileges and obligations which defined not only wider society but also monastic communities. Francis of Assisi consistently opposed attempts to impose a traditional monastic rule upon the Friars Minor or to adopt the existing monastic forms of asceticism. Kinsella observes that Francis's determination not to observe a monastic form of life (nor to attempt a reform of monasticism) was based on his commitment to a new form of religious life, one based on the Gospel but as free as possible from systems of power and privilege which create conflict and violence.[708]

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[706] Cf. Le Goff, p. 109.

[707] This experimental, socially fluid movement gradually underwent a process of clericalization which is treated in Raoul Manselli's 'La Clericalizzazione dei Minori e San Bonaventura in *San Bonaventura francescano*, Convegni del Centro di Studi sulla Spiritualitá medievale, 14 (Todi: Accademia Tudertina, 1974) pp. 181-208.

[708] Cf. Sean Edward Kinsella, '"The Lord Give You Peace": The Preaching of Peace in the Writings and Early Lives of St Francis of Assisi' in *Mediaevistik*, 16 (2003), pp. 51-99 (p. 56). Kinsella cites an early Franciscan account of Pentecost Chapter of 1217, during which several 'wise and learned brothers' invited Cardinal Hugolino, Cardinal Protector of the Order of Friars Minor, to persuade Francis to adopt one of the established monastic rules. Francis insisted 'I do not want you to mention to me any *Rule*, whether of Saint Augustine, or of Saint Bernard, or of Saint Benedict' since the Lord desired Francis to be 'a new fool in the world'. *The Assisi Compilation* (18) *FA:ED*, Vol (2) p. 132-33.

As Kinsella establishes, monastic religious life in the High Middle Ages was at times obsessively entangled with the familial obligations, inherited rights and the social commitments of those who would enter monastic obedience. Kinsella cites Bernard of Clairvaux's letter to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, regarding Philip, a Canon of Lincoln who had entered the monastic community at Clairvaux. In this letter the Abbot assumes that, notwithstanding Philip's monastic vows, he continues to be obliged to a large social *milieu* outside the monastery. Kinsella notes that Philip remains enmeshed in the nexus of privileges and obligations which characterise the social and political reality of this period.[709] The evangelical life espoused by Francis was entirely opposed to such compromises. From an early Franciscan source, Kinsella cites the example of a candidate for the Franciscan Order who was dismissed by Francis for having distributed his goods and property not among the poor but among his own family. Francis rebuked the candidate, 'brother Fly', since the man's intention was to enter the brotherhood while effectively reinforcing reciprocal commitments within his family.[710] This legend is instructive since it supports much recent scholarship which locates Saint Francis's motivation not in creating a lifestyle organised around material poverty, but in escaping the social systems which create conflict and reinforce rivalry, exclusion and dominance.[711]

The Gospel command to sell all one's possessions and give the money to the poor is both the 'founding text' of Francis's evangelical commitment and the form of life he insists upon in the *Rule of the Friars Minor*. Indeed, the first and second chapters of the *Earlier Rule* (*Regula Non Bullata)* are animated by this imperative and it continues to inform many of Saint Francis's writings. [712] It is Kinsella's assertion that this separation from worldly interests is not to be understood as a 'privileged distance' but 'a separation from the structures of social and

[709] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence,* P. 9.
[710] Cf. *The Assisi Compilation, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 165. A similar account of St Francis refusing a candidate for the Order, a young nobleman, due to attachments to family and rank is recorded in the same legend, ibid, p. 173.
[711] Saint Francis's 'suspicion, if not hostility' towards knowledge and intellectual work is on the basis of learning creating distinctions and inequalities in social relations, thus reintroducing pride. The learned accrue status and privileges denied the uneducated and these often prove inimical to the *forma vitae*. Cf. Le Goff, p. 115. Thompson situates Saint Francis's understanding of poverty in the context of The Word of God becoming poor for our sakes and asserts that the clericalization of the Order, 'more than any supposed deviation from Francis's view on poverty […] would transform the order into something Francis had never imagined'. p. 112.
[712] *The Earlier Rule, FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 63-5.

religious obligation which can easily become instruments of power and cause violence'.[713] It is Kinsella's contention that 'Francis rejects those structures, both conceptual and material, which maintained a social order articulated through power and dominance and based on the implicit threat or explicit exercise of violence'.[714] Kinsella suggests that Francis understood violence to be a:

> response to an extensive system of attachment and obligation, which, although established in an effort to provide social order and to curtail violence, could actually precipitate violence because it enmeshed an increasing number of participants in an increasing number of obligations, not all of which could be satisfied at the same time.[715]

Mimetic theory describes how reciprocal relations lead to conflict, even when individuals and groups within the social structure do not intend violence.[716] The complex web of feudal obligations at the heart of medieval society is characterised by Kinsella as 'spiralling – that is, continuously spreading, accelerating, and increasing' often resulting in social instability, culminating in violence.[717] Hamilton has described the 'effective social power' in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as an 'open field'.[718] In a brief acknowledgment of the endemic political violence of the 11th and 12th centuries, Hamilton cites Thomas M. Bisson's description of the feudal revolution during which time 'banal lords and knights […] swept forward in a tidal wave of self-promoting opportunism', dramatically usurping power and dominating existing feudal families, whose fortunes were in decline.[719] According to Bission the feudal revolution contributed to an atmosphere in which 'violence was as normal and enduring as the public order it afflicted'.[720]

The description of European feudal society in the 12th and 13th centuries as a society in an advanced state of social crisis, an 'open' and undifferentiated political landscape,

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[713] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, p. 10.
[714] Ibid.
[715] Ibid, p. 11.
[716] 'Once violence has reached a certain threshold, social and cultural institutions themselves are of no avail to limit its diffusion. Every attempt to diffuse the conflict is seen as a further provocation and usual mechanisms of arbitration […] are seen by all as a party in the quarrel rather than a judge'. Cf. Paul Dumouchel, *Violence and Truth*, p. 13.
[717] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, p. 11.
[718] Hamilton, p. 62.
[719] Ibid, pp. 60-61.
[720] Ibid, p. 62.

competing feudal barons and an enmeshed and highly complicated social structure, is very enlightening. The assertion of spiralling and accelerating demands and counter demands, provoking conflict and violence bears a strong resemblance to the Girardian structure of mimetic conflict leading to undifferentiation, chaos and violence. Situating the early Franciscan narrative within this social context facilitates a more expansive and historically satisfying explanation of Francis and the Franciscan movement. Set against this horizon, episodes from the early Franciscan sources are highly suggestive of a strong corporate intuition about how rivalrous desire leads to violence.

Demons and Seditious Powers: Pre-critical images of Mimetic conflict

In drawing attention to the historical context of social violence, Kinsella's narrative achieves a greater explanatory scope than does Hamilton's or Baxter Wolf's. Many significant episodes from early Franciscan history can be explored and situated within the wider narrative of peace-making and peace-preaching. Pre-critical understandings of conflict and social disorder necessarily rely on language and modes of discourse which are largely eschewed in modernity.[721] For example, the presence of demons and spirits is frequently associated with civil strife in the early Franciscan sources. In an early account of Francis's mission to preach peace in the town of Arezzo an illuminating phrase is employed. In language which is reminiscent of earlier mythic accounts of a mimetic crisis, Francis 'saw demons over the city leaping for joy and arousing the troubled citizens to mutual slaughter'. The violence which afflicted Arezzo, the account asserts, was the result of 'seditious spiritual powers.'[722] The association of violence with 'demons' and 'seditious spiritual powers', is not infrequent in early Franciscan sources. Such 'mythic' references provide no obstacle to a Girardian reading of the early Franciscan sources; indeed, Girard's work accommodates references to the demonic and seditious spiritual powers. Girard's treatment of the demonic and 'seditious spiritual powers' of pre-critical texts is an example of where his 'fundamental anthropology' overcomes a reductive reading of pre-modern texts.

[721] Cf. Finamore. The 'chaos' imagery in the apocalyptic scriptures may indicate 'the abolition of differences and distinctions' associated with social crisis. In the Bible, chaos is 'used to describe the undifferentiated state of the universe prior to creation' and 'anything which tends to move the universe back towards such a condition'. Finamore employs Girard's theory to explain the chaos imagery of *Revelation* in terms of a social order losing its distinctive characteristics. pp. 2-3.
[722] Bonaventure, *Major Life,* Chapter 6, part 9, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 574.

In this respect, Cynthia Haven notes the profound influence of André Malraux's work on Girard. Girard was familiar with the five-volume work Malraux produced, *La Psychologie de L'Art*, between 1947-9. Haven notes that Girard was 'profoundly shaken' by the passage that claims that history is 'no longer a chronology but an anxious interrogation of the past to try to discover the destiny of the world'.[723] Girard, the historian, adopted a method which privileged meaning, or the 'order of understanding' over a strict chronology. Thus, Girard's 'shuttling back and forth' to 'interrogate the past' in his search for the mimetic realism which decodes our past and plots our possible future destination. Haven notes that Malraux speaks of the range of devils from war to psychological complexes – all present in primitive art – that had reappeared. Mankind, Malraux contends, is aiming towards its own destruction: 'The demons of Babylon, of the Church, of Freud and of Bikini Atoll all have the same face.'[724] These demons are indicative of the violent conflicts which are unleashed by rivalrous, mimetic desire. Girard readily identifies the 'Principalities and Powers' of the New Testament with social, political, and institutional systems which function by means of excluding the surrogate victim, i.e., the victimage mechanism.

In the New Testament, the powers which are called 'celestial' are not distinct from those powers which are 'of this world', 'sovereignties', 'thrones' and 'dominions' (*Ephesians*, 1. 21) of all kinds. According to Girard, the 'powers and principalities' are not themselves demonic or satanic, though they are associated with the satanic principle, the scapegoat mechanism. The 'powers and principalities' indicate diverse cultural forms of social order, established through generative violence. The 'celestial' aspect of these powers is the false religious transcendence which accompanies the violent expulsion, the seemingly miraculous restoration of peace at the highest pitch of conflict.[725] Girard, therefore, does not discount the presence of the demonic or the satanic as evidence of mere superstition, but applies it to situations where competing desires have produced violent social conflict.

[723] Haven, p. 57.
[724] Ibid. Girard indicated Malraux's influence on his earlier writings, though Girard came to regard Malraux's work as 'luridly romantic'. Cf. Adams, 1993, p. 14.
[725] Cf. Girard, *I See Satan Fall,* pp. 95-98.

In Arezzo, the demons goaded the community towards its sacrificial rituals as the only possible way of saving itself from destruction. The presence of Francis and Brother Sylvester (and whatever particular form of peace-making/peace-preaching they enacted in front of the city gate), on this occasion was effective in restoring social order without a violent, sacrificial expulsion; the scapegoat mechanism failed. In the *legendae* this episode is accorded the narrative status of a miracle, a supernatural triumph over demonic powers. Within the context of mimetic theory, successful resistance to mimetic frenzy is evidence of a converted life. Gil Bailie notes that the ability to resist the lure of mimetic frenzy indicates nothing less than the moral force of an even greater power than that which the old system of sacred violence had been able to produce.[726] The ability to restore peace without recourse to violence or scapegoating is, in effect, the sign of conversion associated with the early Franciscan ministry of peace-making. The account concludes with some suggestion that the conflict ('scandal') was originally based on the reform of the city's civil laws: 'At once the city returned to peace and all the citizens reformed their civil law with great tranquillity'.[727]

Reciprocity and patterns of violence

The ability of Francis and the early Franciscan friars to work peace effectively, without recourse to threat or violence, indicates the essential conversion experience which liberates the individual from pride and affords him or her some protection against the social systems established on victimage and scapegoating. The early Franciscan community intuited a formal relationship between rivalrous desire and social systems which accelerate rivalry and lead to violence. Henri J. M. Claessen has described relations between members of the feudal hierarchy as 'asymmetrical, vertical, formal, dyadic, personal and reciprocal'.[728] These relations both protected individuals and groups from violence and exposed them to violence. Kinsella notes that social constraints established to order society and control rivalrous conflicts may become the sources of violence in a society undergoing rapid social change: 'Violence, rather than being restricted or restrained by the social order, could, in a certain sense, be understood to be constitutive of the social order or, even, an ordering system

[726] Bailie, pp. 196-97.
[727] Bonaventure, *Major Life*, Chapter 6, part 9, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 575.
[728] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, p. 11.

itself.'[729] It was their ability to stand at some distance from these systems which allowed the early Franciscans some success in limiting their violent consequences.

In demonstrating the labyrinthine patterns of honour and obligation which lead to cyclic violence in the 13th century, Kinsella alludes to a conflict which formed the background to Francis of Assisi's boyhood. At the beginning of the 13th century, the rivalrous ambitions of the rising middle classes of Assisi, represented by the *commune*, and the dominant nobility of the city, led to the attack and pillaging of the properties of a number of the city's noble families. One such defeated nobleman, Girardo di Gislerio, applied to the neighbouring and competing city of Perugia for citizenship. In a formal ceremony, Girardo di Gislerio and his family was welcomed to Perugia and bound to the city by feudal oaths and promises as well as legal contracts. The city of Perugia was thus ennobled by a new lord and enriched by the taxes from his estates, and at the same time Girardo di Gislerio was formally inducted into Perugian society as a nobleman, as were his family and kinsmen. The dispute with Assisi was now a matter of honour which embraced di Gislerio's adopted city of Perugia. The city of Perugia demanded satisfaction for the losses incurred by di Gislerio and when the *commune* of Assisi refused, war was declared. 'What had begun as a personal and familial rivalry had developed, through the deliberate use of existing social conventions and connections, into a much larger armed conflict between two cities.'[730]

Arnoldo Fortini's historical research explored the 'implacable rivalry during the Middle Ages that divided Assisi and Perugia, the two cities on the opposite sides of the Tiber.'[731] In his multivolume biography of Francis, Fortini observed that Assisi and Perugia were in conflict from the earliest days of their communal lives until the harsh restoration of papal authority in 1540, a restoration which limited Assisi's autonomy. Fortini's research has emphasised the social and psychological effects of being formed within a contest of 'doubles'. The term rival has its etymology in the word *rivus*, the Latin word for river.[732] Assisi and Perugia were 'twin' *communes*, divided by the river Tiber and locked into an exhausting competition for power.

[729] Ibid, P. 12.
[730] Ibid, p. 16.
[731] Fortini, p. 56.
[732] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 11.

Fortini collected from the municipal chronicles of Assisi and Perugia historical evidence of the enmity between the two city states and catalogued a number of accounts of reciprocal, rivalrous violence. Fortini makes an explicit connection between the violent context of Francis' youth in Assisi and his later commitment to non-violence and voluntary poverty, insisting that the 'incredible violence' to which he was exposed 'destroyed his youth.'[733] Girardo di Gislerio's defection to Perugia provoked the conflict that occasioned the battle of Collestrada in November 1202 and resulted in Francis of Assisi's capture and yearlong imprisonment.[734]

The great political rivalry of the late Middle Ages was between the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II and the papacy. In his formative years Francis' life was lived in the shadow of, and was defined by, the Assisi/Perugia rivalry. Within these larger conflicts, multiple conflicts were sustained and extended. Kinsella maintains that as a result of his personal experience of violence, Francis 'gradually began to move further and further away from those attitudes and conventions which governed the mores and behaviour of the world around him'.[735] Mimetic theory indicates that the demons which Francis encountered in Arezzo were demons he had encountered on numerous occasions before. They were the demons of the archaic sacred. What is significant about the early Franciscan movement is its power to subdue the demons of mimetic conflict. Accounts of early Franciscanism which are reductively economic or social, tend to neglect this essential characteristic of the Franciscan *charism*. Girard's fundamental anthropology explains the Arezzo episode in terms of the grace of conversion, a principal effect of which is the collapse of the mystifying power of the scapegoat mechanism.[736]

After his conversion Saint Francis could write:

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[733] Fortini, p. 56.
[734] Ibid, Cf. pp. 151-55.
[735] Kinsella, *Mediaevistik*, p. 65.
[736] Once again, I favour James Alison's understanding of conversion in terms of a graced acquisition of 'the intelligence of the victim'. The knowledge promised by the Holy Spirit is 'the active and creative overcoming of the lie which is at the root of human culture'. James Alison, *Living in the End Times*: *The Last Things Re-imagined* (London: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996) p. 68. The lie succeeds when it creates unanimity about the guilt of the victim and causes the violent expulsion of the victim. Contrariwise, by producing unanimity about the nature of the lie, each time the lie is being performed, genuine peace is established.

> There are many people who, when they sin or are injured, frequently blame the enemy or their neighbour. But it is not so, because each one has the enemy in his power, that is his body through which he sins. Blessed is that servant, then, who always holds captive the enemy delivered into his power and wisely safeguards himself from him, because as long as he does this, no other enemy visible or invisible will be able to harm him.[737]

In this admonition Francis indicates that the body is the source of injuries and sins, but this is not recognized, hence the need to blame others for one's own sins. In his essay on *Oedipus*, Girard framed this intuition in terms of the mythic figures of accuser and accused: 'Each man is Oedipus, the guilty party, *to the Other*, and Tiresias, the misjudged prophet, *to himself*. Every man is a blind prophet […] We all speak the truth while remaining blind, none of us recognizing in what we say the truth about ourselves'.[738] Francis had achieved a remarkable insight, consistent with the 'intelligence of the victim': 'For Francis, enemies do not exist outside ourselves'.[739] The 'sacrificial' element of Francis's intuition is located in assigning all culpability to 'the body'.[740]

Excursus: The Body as Scapegoat?

Given Francis's apparently sacrificial attitude towards his body, it is worth reflecting, from the perspective of mimetic theory, on the role of Francis's body in early Franciscan spirituality. His body, which he had struggled to subdue became, in death an object of desire, since Assisi's rival *commune*, Perugia, made claims upon the corpse of Saint Francis.[741] Saint Francis's body was known to be afflicted, however, Chiara Frugoni has observed that Francis did not associate his various afflictions with Christ's passion. A spirituality centred on the passion of Christ which came to dominate the Franciscan Order was not the original spirituality of

[737] Francis of Assisi, *The Admonitions*, X, *FA:ED* (Vol 1), p. 132.
[738] 'Whether we are assiduous or inattentive readers of Sophocles, we all identify Tiresias with lucidity and Oedipus with blindness. We want true and false to be solidly anchored in a world without surprises. Good and evil must be embodied once for all by infallible champions.' Such is the goal of myth. However, as Girard notes, what we find in Oedipus and Tiresias is symmetry and identity. 'The two characters correspond perfectly to the mirror image metaphor […] [w]hich is the original, which the reflection?' René Girard 'Oedipus Analyzed' in *Oedipus Unbound,* pp. 36-7.
[739] Le Goff, p. 32.
[740] It should be noted that Francis's apparently sacrificial attitude to 'the body' indicates less a contempt for his physical body than the body understood as 'the source of evil and sin within us, that is, our whole personality in so far as "we are … opposed to good but prompt and willing to embrace evil" (*Early Rule*. 22. 6) Thaddée Matura O.F.M., *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings* (New York: St Bonaventure University, 1997) p. 133.
[741] Cf. Le Goff, p. 45 and Michael Robson, O.F.M. Conv., *Saint Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London: Continuum, 1997) pp. 249-70.

Francis. Francis's writings and prayers emphasise the incarnation as the expression of God's limitless love for creation, rather than the passion. It was Francis's followers who later identified his weak and wounded body with Christ's wounded body. Francis's wounded body, and a mystical experience on Mount La Verna in 1224, were represented by Celano as the resolution of a spiritual crisis.[742] In this account the body of the saint becomes the spiritual locus for founding the Order. Francis's wounded and afflicted body came to symbolise the troubled body of the nascent Order, for which a divine sealing, in the form of the stigmata was considered the mystical resolution to internal inconsistencies and tensions. Dalarun states that in Book Two of Celano's *First Life*:

> The suffering body of Francis is the central element, the chief support of the entire institutional and spiritual edifice. Chapter IV, which described Francis's illness and his ravaged and torn body, is most expressive. His physical woundedness reflects his moral anguish. The Order, here epitomized in the founder's body (which becomes a founding body) is also in danger of being torn apart.[743]

The language is resonant of Girard's characterization of the founding of differentiation on the body of the emissary victim. Dalarun interprets Celano's treatment of the wounded and afflicted body of Francis as the resolution of Francis's inner conflict; the division of roles within the order, representing the institutional vocation and the charismatic vocation. In Celano, the separation of the roles represents the resolution of the conflict in the early Order, not the emerging conflict itself, as Sabatier would mistakenly suggest.[744]

The body of Saint Francis is also associated with the peaceful refounding of Assisi. Unlike Saint Dominic, a universal saint with no local ties, Francis is a universal saint and also a 'penitent from Assisi'. Dalarun notes that 'when the saint's body, now dead and at peace, goes from the Portiuncula back to San Damiano it becomes the "cement" of the city of Assisi'.[745] Communication between Saint Clare and the sisters at the convent, and the body of Saint Francis, took place through the same window at which the sisters received Holy Communion. Since their first encounter, the merchant son of Pietro di Bernardone and the

[742] Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 263-65.
[743] Dalarun, pp. 120-1.
[744] Ibid, p. 121.
[745] Ibid, p. 122.

daughter of the nobleman Favarone di Offerduccio,[746] effected a symbolic pact which comes to characterise the union of two competing classes in Assisi: 'The spiritual communion between these two bodies becomes material and spiritual proof of the *Concordia civitatis*. Holiness or perhaps better, hagiography, is always a means of reconciliation and refounding. Francis is also the civic refounder of Assisi, but only in company with Clare'.[747] The peaceful refounding of Assisi on the body of Francis, is attested by the long association of the city with its most notable saint.

A non-confrontational form of Gospel Life

Kinsella's account explains of why the early Franciscan movement consistently avoided incorporation into traditional forms of monastic life. In Girardian terms, monastic communities frequently functioned as 'doubles' with secular institutions and social groups. Kinsella describes the reality of monastic seclusion in the 12th and 13th centuries, a seclusion in which 'the social structures of lay society were alternately denigrated and exploited'.[748] Monastic religious communities were commonly creating a 'double bind' with respect to their way of life.[749] On the one hand they eschewed the social and material privileges which were deemed proper to the lay state – for the sake of the Gospel – and on the other hand effectively concealed these privileges within a structure which was, theoretically, radically free of material and conceptual appropriation. Francis was determined not to adopt any of the existing monastic rules or to model the way of life of the Friars Minor upon existing monastic models. His *Rule* is significant for its opposition to appropriation of material and social privileges, which would inevitably become the objects of desire and rivalry in community. In his *Testament* Francis wrote:

> Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. As *pilgrims and strangers*, let them always be guests there. I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether

[746] Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-1253). The daughter of Assisian nobility, Clare was associated with Francis from 1212, eventually forming a community of Poor Ladies at the church of San Damiano.
[747] Dalarun, p. 122.
[748] Kinsella, p. 18.
[749] The double bind is the result of a double imperative that comes from the model as model: ('imitate me'), who becomes the rival: ('do not imitate me'). Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden,* pp. 279-283.

> for a church or for another place or under any pretext of preaching or the persecution of their bodies. But, wherever they have not been received, *let them flee into another country* to do penance with the blessing of God.[750]

As Kinsella demonstrates, both monastic and secular clergy were typically enmeshed in the social structures of feudal society and attached both materially and conceptually to its centres of power. Monks and clerics were inevitably drawn into the mimetic conflicts which produced violence and were themselves unable to curtail violence, being invested in the structures which produced and accelerated the conflicts. In its attempts to restore peace and curtail violence the representatives of Church authority were frequently compelled to use the threat of violence or impose ecclesiastical penalties, which amount to a form of social violence, in order to restore peace. Kinsella cites several examples of episcopal authority implicated in violence, either in the pursuit of peace or merely in the preservation or extension of its own claims to power.[751]

In the context of late feudal society, characterised by endemic violence, Francis emerges as a figure of unique significance. He intuited the necessary link between the appropriation of material and social privilege and violent conflict. Thus, he formed a way of life which did not seek to confront power structures and thus become embroiled in the struggle of 'doubles'. Kinsella's interpretation of the Franciscan *forma vitae* asserts that:

> by virtue of the willing abandonment of social position, and its accompanying advantages, Francis and his brothers were able to stand outside that societal structure which promised, on the one hand, the power and privileges which would give them dominion over others and, on the other, which would involve them in all the attendant attachments and obligations, and therefore the conflicts and violence that such privileges entailed.[752]

The lack of material wealth and property exposed the early Friars Minor to all the antipathies and dangers which the dispossessed suffered, and as Kinsella observes, their initial campaigns of preaching were often met with mockery and violence.[753] The early companions of Francis

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[750] *The Testament (1226) FA:ED* (Vol 1), p.126.

[751] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, pp. 20-3. Kinsella cites Guy, Bishop of Le Puy's attempt to establish regional peace 'backing threats of excommunication with the troops of his nephews, the counts of nearby Gévauden and Brioude'. *Mediaevistik*, p. 68.

[752] Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, p. 24.

[753] Cf. Ibid, pp. 39-40. Thompson characterized the friars of this period as resembling 'pious tramps', p. 38. He suggests that the general population would have avoided them, as they would vagabonds, thieves or the unbalanced paupers that frequented the roadways. pp. 38-39.

stood outside the protective web of social power and domination and were vulnerable to derision.[754] When the friars sought ways to ameliorate the violence which their life invited, specifically by appeal to the protection of the powerful, Francis insisted on remaining outside the very structures which acted as both a protection from and a provocation to violence. The peace-making and peace-preaching initiatives of Saint Francis and the early friars were gradually acknowledged as an authentic witness to peace and reconciliation, uncompromised by the power interests of feudal society.[755] In Hamilton's estimation the Franciscan innovation of consistently joining the practice of voluntary poverty with the virtue of humility was detrimental to the transformative political power of the 'poor of Christ' movements. Kinsella asserts this combination assured Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan friar's remarkable success in establishing and modelling peaceful and non-competitive relationships in a society characterised by rapid and sudden escalations of violence.

Kinsella notes that the life of the Friars Minor, while embracing a non-appropriative life-style, was directed to preaching penance and conversion and was manifestly Christo-centric. The friars undertook to imitate Christ's example in the Gospel, an example which implied the 'acceptance of suffering in the service of peace'.[756] This raises the question of asceticism and the particular form asceticism took in the early Franciscan movement. In chapter six I will argue that early Franciscan asceticism is indicative of that mimetic consciousness associated with true conversions. Thus, the early Franciscans avoided the confrontational stance of contemporary 'poor movements' and adopted instead an asceticism-for-peace.

Conclusion

[754] In a study of the violence directed towards Mendicant Orders over the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Geltner identified a total of eighty-four recorded violent attacks (including four directed to Poor Clare convents). The level of violence, whilst not excessive in degree or frequency for the historical period, is significant. As Mendicant Orders became involved (confrontationally) in anti-heresy campaigns and benefited from the patronage of the powerful elites, they were more likely to be the subjects of violent attack. Cf. G. Geltner, 'Mendicants as victims: scale, scope and the idiom of violence', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36, 2, (2010) 126-141, DOI: 10.1016/j.jmedhist.2010.02.001

[755] Cf. Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, pp. 38-44.

[756] Ibid, P. 153.

Reducing the early Franciscan movement primarily to economic realities and models offers an impoverished and deficient narrative. The lingering mystification of romanticism produces such distortions and obscures the dynamics of the movement. Mimetic theory addresses fundamental cultural and social realities in relation to violence, incorporating the theological category of conversion. By avoiding the romantic characterizations of hero/anti-hero, it is possible to situate Francis and the early friars as both the subjects and the agents of change within their historical and cultural moment. Their unique social and religious project, which defies simple economic, religious and social reductions, may be described as a common life of peace-making, preaching, labouring and begging. Induction into this way of life was achieved by the graced collapse of previous, rivalrous patterns of desiring, i.e., a conversion experience which produces in the early Franciscans the 'intelligence of the victim'.

In linking Franciscan poverty to a consistent ethic of peace-making, Kinsella has indicated how the early Franciscan way of life embodied important insights into rivalrous desire, social order and violence. The social and ecclesial systems from which Francis emerged were generative of violence. The early Franciscan movement did not confront these systems, but rather attempted an exodus, by creating non-rivalrous alternatives, free from the social protection, status and obligations which characterized late medieval monastic life. The historical and cultural context of the late Middle Ages is significant for rapid social change and violence. The early Franciscan movement emerged in this context, sharing many characteristic features of the epoch, but also embodying significant counter-cultural characteristics. In attending to the cultural and historical context of violence Kinsella has offered a satisfying explanation of the early Franciscan movement's voluntary poverty. Romanticism, which first produced Francis the hero, has produced Francis the anti-hero. A mimetic reading of the early Franciscan movement, alerts us to what is concealed in such representations; the presence of demons over Arezzo, i.e., the dynamics of conflictual mimesis and the limits of any social order based on exclusion to ever effectively proclaim or create peace.

Chapter Six

Franciscan and Girardian Asceticism: The Social and Political Form of an Exodus from Sacrificial Systems

Introduction

Girard's critics have observed the absence of any structured explanation of what a non-sacrificial, non-rivalrous community would look like, 'taking a collective, political form'.[757] Even those engaged more sympathetically with Girard's work have acknowledged the lack of a positive description of the movement from sacrificial to non-sacrificial social realities.[758] Building on the insights of Kinsella in the previous chapter, I will argue that the early Franciscan movement developed and performed a unique asceticism, which I will characterise as an asceticism-for-peace.

The question of asceticism is closely united to the question of imitation and I will argue that this dual preoccupation is a defining characteristic in the early Franciscan movement: how is it possible to imitate without rivalrous and violent consequences? Early Franciscan forms of asceticism resemble – but were distinct from – existing monastic and eremitical forms of asceticism. Early Franciscan asceticism had a performative and didactic character. A mimetic reading of the early Franciscans offers an explanation for the specific forms of asceticism associated with the movement. The asceticism associated with Francis became increasingly problematic as the Franciscan Order grew and developed. A more classical Christian asceticism prevailed over time, one which suited an increasingly clericalized Order. Using Girard's categories I will explore in this chapter the relationship between imitation and asceticism. I will argue that the early Franciscan forms of asceticism indicate a determination to express a shared mimetic awareness, distinct from monastic forms of asceticism.

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[757] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory,* p. 395.

[758] '[…] while I am convinced that mimetic theory helps us better understand many dynamics governing human life, particularly the mechanics generating exclusion and violence, it is not clear in my reading of Girard (and his many interpreters) what kind of everyday practices – or *askeses* – are critical for bringing about conversion'. Brian D. Robinette, 'Deceit, Desire, and the Desert: René Girard's Mimetic Theory in Conversation with Early Christian Monastic Practice' in *Violence, Transformation and the Sacred*, eds. Margaret R. Pfeil and Tobias L. Winright (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011) pp. 130-43 (p. 131).

Building on chapters four and five, I will argue that the core values of the early Franciscan movement demonstrate a real understanding of the role of borrowed/mediated desire in creating conflict and an understanding of the systems which both accelerate and contain mimetic conflict, through exclusionary violence. I will argue, as Brian D. Robinette has argued in another context, that a pre-critical religious tradition, such as the early Franciscan movement, was capable of structuring its ascetical programme in a manner that suggests 'a profound intuitive grasp of mimetic desire'.[759]

This chapter will be divided into three parts:

1. Before exploring early Franciscan asceticism I will indicate the characteristics of asceticism as it is treated in mimetic theory. Specifically I will explore the fundamental relationship between the categories of imitation and conversion in Girard's work.
2. I will explore the question of imitation and asceticism in the early Franciscan movement. Just as the early Franciscan movement developed outside of monastic structures, early Franciscan asceticism was characterized by a practical solidarity with the socially marginalised. Over and above the ordinary asceticism involved in a mendicant lifestyle, early Franciscan asceticism was frequently performative and didactic. In its performative expressions it does not invite direct imitation so much as demonstrate/embody the conflictual dynamic of mimetic desire, specifically, appropriation. I will, therefore, argue that the early Franciscans had an intuitive understanding of the mimetic nature of desire and developed strategies to interrupt or reconfigure triangular desire in its initial stages of conflict.
3. I will introduce the bridging concept of *scandal* to further explore how early Franciscan practice can be aligned to concepts in mimetic theory, specifically Girard's use of the biblical concept of *skandalon*. I will argue that the early Franciscan movement was accustomed to provoking scandal, by refusing to interpret the Gospel life in terms of exclusion or to form identities through exclusion.

[759] Cf. Ibid, pp.130-143.

Exploring Asceticism in Mimetic Theory and the Early Franciscan Movement

Asceticism and Mimetic Theory

Ann Astell has asserted that 'the language of asceticism and mysticism abounds in Girard's early work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, as it does, Girard argues, in the novels themselves'.[760] This view is shared by the theologian Wolfgang Palaver, who has described Girard's first major work, essentially a work of literary criticism, as 'a masterpiece of Christian spirituality'.[761] Astell notes that at the heart of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is Girard's contention that

> the novelist, a 'metamorphosized hero', 'cured of metaphysical desire', shares in the freedom that his or her fictive Other finally gains through the 'renunciation of metaphysical desire', of *ersatz* divinity, of envy and pride-inhibiting vices that, in the author's case, have frequently enslaved him or her to the mimesis of other writers.[762]

Astell understands Girard to exemplify his own theory of mimesis in literature; she asserts a real connection between his insights into mimetic realism in the great writers, and his own religious conversion. In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel,* Girard notes that the various political or social systems which seek, by a Hegelian dialectic, to end violent relationships and usher in an age of the spirit, are always rejected by the novelist (and by Girard himself). The 'famous reconciliation' is preached, but the novelist continues to observe instead, 'Stendhalian vanity, Proustian snobbism and the Dostoyevskian underground, enlisted in the battle for supremacy in the universe of physical non-violence'. [763] Girard insists:

> Whatever political or social system is somehow imposed on them, men will never achieve the happiness and peace of which the revolutionaries dream, nor the bleating harmony which scares the reactionaries. They will always get on together just enough to enable them never to agree […] they will never tire of inventing new discord.[764]

The mimetic nature of desire remains hidden in the contest of 'doubles' and, as Girard illustrates in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, once entered into, the opposing doubles come to resemble each other more and more. In this regard he states: 'We constantly find the same

[760] Astell, p. 392
[761] Ibid.
[762] Ibid, p. 393.
[763] *Deceit,* p. 110.
[764] Ibid, p. 111.

oppositions between aristocrats and bourgeois, between the devout and the atheists, reactionaries and republicans, lovers and mistresses, parents and children, rich and poor.'[765] The differences, which are presented as fundamental, are exposed in the novelistic universe as 'absurd ornaments' and 'false windows' which are there 'for symmetry'.[766] For Girard the choice is between conversion; abandoning the illusion of absolute autonomy (pride), and the chimeric 'autonomy' of romanticism. The multiplication of binaries, whose 'differences' are both concealed and revealed by increasingly subtle (and more virulent) forms of hypocrisy, snobbery and hatred, betray the supposed emancipation of modernity. Mimesis has triumphed.[767] Girard asserts:

> As soon as the subject who desires recognizes the role of imitation in his own desire he has to renounce either this desire or his pride. Modern lucidity has shifted the problem of *askesis* and broadened it. It is no longer a question of renouncing the object temporarily in order the better to possess it but in renouncing the desire itself.[768]

Girard explored the role of true and false asceticism as a means of transcending mimetic desire. In *Deceit Desire and the Novel*, Girard insists that the non-desiring of neo-romanticism is not the same as the non-desiring of the great religions or the higher humanisms. Without an understanding or intuition of the mimetic nature of desire, non-desiring comes to resemble not a path to freedom but rather something like the 'numbing of the senses, of a total or partial loss of vital curiosity'.[769] The asceticism which Francis of Assisi undertakes cannot be described as a 'loss of vital curiosity' or a 'numbing of the senses'; nothing in the sources, least of all his exhilarating poem, *Canticle of Brother Sun* suggests any diminished sense of wonder or engagement. Rather, Francis's asceticism is better understood as a reordering of the patterns of desire, as a result of his 'mimetic' conversion. For Girard, unconverted asceticism is yet another mimetic ruse; an asceticism of hypocrisy. In his analysis of novelistic desire Girard concludes that to hide our desires and affect disinterest requires considerable self-discipline. It is precisely in hiding desire and

[765] Ibid, p. 151.
[766] Ibid.
[767] The *rational model* opposes the *mimetic model* and because the rational model does not grasp the mimetic principle it inevitably focuses on the single figure who has become a rival or an obstacle. Without the renunciation of the 'autonomy of desire' the mimetic principle continues to triumph. '[T]he rational model cannot thwart mimetism. Mimetism's law is implacable'. Cf. Girard, *Battling to the End*, p. 131.
[768] Girard, *Deceit*, p. 272.
[769] Ibid, p. 273

affecting a disinterested outlook that many novelistic characters arouse the strongest desires in others.

In *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* Girard insists that, alongside a true, 'vertical' *askesis*, there is a false 'asceticism of desire', which imitates true asceticism and may be superficially indistinguishable from vertical asceticism.[770] In false ascetism the gravitational pull of desire is meticulously concealed under the guise of indifference or a studied self-sufficiency. Vertical or true asceticism is the product of mimetic conversion. It is a response to the graced insight/ 'Intelligence' that we are all, or have been '[…] persecutors without knowing it. All participation in the scapegoat phenomenon is the same sin of the persecution of Christ. And all human beings commit this sin'.[771]

Without a prior mimetic conversion, even ascetical practices are strategies of acquisitive mimetic desire. In Girard's fundamental anthropology asceticism avoids a Manichean division of nature. In Dostoevsky's novel 'the universe of the possessed is the reverse image of the Christian universe. The positive mediation of the saint is replaced by the negative mediation of anguish and hate […] Deviated transcendency is a caricature of vertical transcendency'.[772] Essentially, we occupy a single universe, in which our mimetically charged desires, are channelled into 'good imitation' and alternatively, the conflict of 'doubles'. Our strategies for surviving violent escalations of rivalrous conflict are murderous. To withdraw from the systems which are founded on and maintained by the victimage mechanism Girard insists on the necessity of conversion (a gratuitous, new understanding) and asceticism (the taking of new, non-rivalrous models).

As I indicated in chapter three, the role of positive mimesis is largely underdeveloped in Girard's work. It stands in relief to his treatment of the dynamic of negative mimesis. Notwithstanding this imbalance, Girard has tentatively explored the theme of positive mimesis, giving scope for further development of this theme. For example, Girard treated the relationship between positive mimesis and true/vertical

[770] Cf. Ibid, 153-75.
[771] Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, p. 142.
[772] Girard, *Deceit*, pp. 60-61.

asceticism in his speech to the Académie Française.[773] Girard explored the spirituality of Father Robert Ambroise-Marie Carré, O.P., and noted that the spirituality of the young Carré, (in the Dominican community at Neuilly) was modelled on the persons who were close to Jesus, and to whom he attributes a 'difficult' and 'hardworking' faith. 'These two adjectives come back often to describe his own faith'. Girard observed in the mature writings of Father Carré a transformation with respect to his asceticism:

> I was recently reading notes I took during my ordination retreat. The necessity for me to be a saint occurs with a vigour that literally strikes me. So much light, such strong certainties that made me write: 'If I do not become a saint, I will really have betrayed'. I don't reject those lines written at the age of twenty-four […] But I have a long experience, that of a traveller who, on a tiring journey, is less and less confident in his own strength and knows that reaching the goal does not entirely rely upon his will. A certain restlessness of desire now gives way to the sweetness of hope. Holiness or not? The question is not phrased in those terms anymore. I only think about God's tenderness.[774]

Girard states that, in his mature spirituality, 'the Father rejects expressly what was hidden pride in his project of holiness. When he said: "If I do not become a saint I will really have betrayed" he was setting a trap for himself that would then catch him, but his humility eventually freed him'.[775] Girard asserts that Carré's mystical and ascetical life at Neuilly was 'the occasion of a fall', or at least a long and arduous exercise which he came to recognise as mistaken. Girard concludes: 'Instead of making God an Everest to climb, the late Fr. Carré sees in him a shelter. This is not sceptical humanism which is here expressed, but the surrender to the divine mercy. Without denying his mystical aspirations, the Father (Carré) recognised his incapacity to achieve them by his own means'.[776] In the religious, as well as the literary context, rivalrous desire can produce a false asceticism. In Father Carré's case Girard asserts, a conversion can be observed in the subtle but unambiguous change in language used to express his spirituality. Taking Christ (or the friends of Christ, in Carré's case) as an external model is problematic precisely because of mimesis.

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[773] Girard was elected a member of the Académie Française on 17th March 2005. Following the tradition of the Académie, Girard's speech was dedicated to the former occupant of the chair, in his case, the Dominican scholar Robert Ambroise-Marie Carré O.P. (1908-2004).

[774] The text of Girard's speech is translated from *La Monde* ('Une expérience mystique modern, par René Girard') <https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2005/12/16/une-experience-mystique-moderne-par-rene-girard_721957_3232.html>

[775] Ibid.

[776] Ibid.

Imitating the 'Conversion Intelligence' of the Founder

As Schwager observes, if a believer attempts to take Jesus as his or her external model and seeks to imitate his behaviour the result must be a 'deadly moralism'. Schwager asserts that, 'in purely external fixation on the messenger of love, the disciple would fall into a growing inner tension. Almost by necessity, the disciple would sooner or later commit acts that totally contradict the model. The imitation of love ends in violence'.[777] Both during the life-time of Francis and in the decades after his death, the question of imitation preoccupied the Franciscan Order. The role of Saint Francis as *model* within the early Franciscan movement was problematic. After his conversion experiences, Francis was drawn to periods of seclusion and solitude, and typically undertook manual labour and cared for lepers and the sick. The collapse of his early ambitions and rivalrous desires, his 'conversion intelligence' may be expressed in the phrase *subditi omnibus*, i.e., a desire to be subject to all. Francis also felt called to preach the Gospel, receiving a papal licence to do so in 1208. This dual vocation provoked a tension and anxiety within Francis. The work of preaching was, in some sense a pretension to holiness and wisdom; according to Thompson, 'distress over this interior conflict would plague Francis for the rest of his life'.[778]

Francis struggled to model his 'conversion intelligence', while avoiding the trap of becoming a model/rival to others. He frequently requested a guardian/superior, even a novice, to act as his superior. In this asceticism the Founder regularly rediscovered the liberation of being subject to all and thereby avoiding rivalrous desires which lead to conflict. Even as Francis modelled non-rivalrous relationships within the community, anomalies occurred; Francis, sensitive to his own moral weakness, frequently asked for penances, which his superiors, in deference to their founder, reluctantly imposed.[779]

[777] Schwager, *Scapegoats,* p. 176.
[778] Thompson, p. 28-9.
[779] Thompson notes that Francis's role as exemplar was frequently frustrated by bouts of illness, which required some mitigation of the *Rule*. In his frequently weakened state, Francis was persuaded to provide for his bodily needs, such as taking food cooked in lard during Lent and having fox fur sewn into his habit during a winter illness. On these occasions, anxious of the charge of hypocrisy and bad example, Francis either requested or imposed on himself corrective penances. Cf. *The Assisi Compilation, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 183.

External Fixation and Saint Bonaventure's Mystical Solution to Imitation

As the Order grew in numbers and in influence, the friars themselves struggled to imitate their Founder. This tension is seen in Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the celebrated theologian and Minister General of the Franciscan Order (1257). Bonaventure was acutely aware of the importance of imitation, weaving concepts such as 'exemplarity' into his philosophical and theological works.[780] Bonaventure's theology of creation gives maximum consideration to the concepts of 'emanation', 'exemplarity' and 'consummation', conceiving all created things as vestiges (*vestigium*) or images (*imago*) upon an ascending scale of resemblance to the Triune God. The term 'likeness' is proper to those creatures which express the Creator to the highest degree.[781] Exemplarity reaches its peak in the incarnation. Christ is exemplar in a two-fold manner: eternally in relation to creation and temporally in relation to the New Creation. The same Word of God 'is the principle of perfect creation and the mediator of perfection to lost-and-redeemed humanity'.[782]

Bonaventure anticipated Schwager's concerns about 'external fixation' on the model by several centuries. In his *Commentary of St. Luke's Gospel* and several other works, Bonaventure argues that Christ, *in his humanity*, represents for us, the possibility to imitate the transcendent goodness and love of the Father, inimitable in their source, but accessible to us in the Incarnate Word. For Bonaventure, discipleship requires not imitating Christ in those things which would be fruitless (e.g., circumcision) or impossible to imitate (deeds of power). Rather, Christ can be imitated in his humility and his poverty. For Bonaventure, Christ's material poverty and his nakedness on the cross reveal divine humility: 'The cross, encapsulating love, humility and poverty, resets humanity on a Godward course: the cross becomes the essential signpost for redeemed man'.[783] According to Gregory Shanahan in Bonaventure's commentary on Saint Luke's Gospel, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant of compassion for alienated humanity and the exultant response to this new covenant is

[780] Cf. Gregory B. W. Shanahan, *Sequi Christum est se perfecte illi configurare: St. Bonaventure's Theology of Discipleship with reference to his Commentary on Luke* (PhD Thesis, Oxford University, 1993). According to Shanahan, Bonaventure made exemplarism 'the basis of his entire mystical system and the foundation also of this teaching on external conformity to Christ', p. 300.
[781] Cf. Ibid, p. 153.
[782] Cf. Ibid, p. 300.
[783] Ibid, p. 222.

typically expressed in voluntary abnegation and following Jesus freely to the cross. This imitation finds its own perfect model in Francis'.[784]

For Bonaventure, the question of how an increasingly learned and clericalized Order could imitate a founder so averse to learning was given a mystical solution. Bonaventure emphasised the miracle of the stigmata of Saint Francis: 'The cross or sign of the cross imprinted on his body symbolized his love of Christ crucified and by the flame of that love he was totally transformed into Christ'.[785] In the sermon of 1255 and in his *Major* and *Minor Lives*, Bonaventure resolved the problem of admiration versus imitation by means of mystical categories. Bonaventure taught that transformation is a spiritual grace, received by few. In the late thirteenth century the dramatic and extreme ascetical practices of Francis recorded in the early sources were increasingly eclipsed by Francis's status as *alter Christus*, sealed and transformed by the mystical experience on Mount La Verna. In Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior* the austerities and asceticism of Francis are recorded with some embarrassment.[786]

By the end of the thirteenth century the frustrations associated with external fixation were overcome by representing Saint Francis as a unique imitator of Christ, one who was sealed by Christ.[787] The *Legenda Maior* carefully avoids a strict chronology of

[784] Cf. Ibid, p. 303.
[785] Bonaventure, *Sermo* IV in Dalarun, p. 230.
[786] Cf. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, 6, 2., *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 570.
[787] In Chiara Frugoni's work, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate: Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993) it is asserted that images have preserved and popularized aspects of Saint Francis's life that were excluded or neglected in the texts. In the late Middle Ages images of Saint Francis were an important means of telling the story of Saint Francis to the many who could not read the texts. Images tended to survive when texts were destroyed, preserving a subtle religious and political witness to the changing interpretations of Saint Francis. Frugoni notes that in the work of Giotto there are two distinct iconographic depictions of the miracle of the stigmata. In the Louvre altarpiece, Frugoni observed that the luminous rays which are emitted from the Seraph proceed in straight lines to the body of Francis (From the right hand of the Seraph to the left hand of Saint Francis, as in a mirror image). However, in the later Bardi fresco of Santo Croce in Florence, the luminous rays are crossed, linking the right hand of the Seraph to the right hand of Saint Francis. The wound on the Seraph's right side is repeated on the right side of Saint Francis. Thomas of Celano, among the earliest (and most consistent) recorders of the stigmata of Saint Francis, placed the wound on Saint Francis's right side. Saint Francis, in late thirteenth century Franciscan art becomes, not merely a mirror image of the Seraph/Christ, but the *alter Christus*; the one impossible to imitate since he is so identified with Christ. Imitation is raised to a mystical aspiration and is institutionalized within the formal asceticism of the Order.

Francis's life, as Celano's *First Life* attempted, in preference to thematic presentation.[788] As the sources created distance between the early Franciscan practice of asceticism and penance, they emphasised the mystical nature of Francis's union with Christ. Dalarun notes:

> If the Francis of the *First Life* is to be properly incorporated into the *Major Life*, his body, his sexuality and his relationship with women will have to be eliminated […] the idea that the marks of Christ's passion were imprinted on non-virginal flesh was gradually considered more and more scandalous – and not only by Bonaventure. That is why the general chapter of Narbonne in 1260 had already replaced the antiphon that recalled Francis's dissolute life.[789]

The 'historical Francis' disappeared behind the mystical image of the Founder. Étienne Gilson noted that 'imitation of St. Francis could not be literal imitation as he [Bonaventure] had to omit the extraordinary asceticism and the extreme macerations practiced by him: it had to be a translation. And this translation was possible only provided that some other discipline should come to fill the place left void, and play the part played in the earlier saint by discipline of the body'.[790] This translation was achieved by filling the void with the discipline of the mind, not only in prayer and meditation, but in learning.

The problem of asceticism and imitation in the early Order appears to require either an impossible 'external fixation', producing not love, but a 'deadly moralism' and a sacrificial violence, or Bonaventure's 'mystical-political' solution. If, however, a mimetic reading is applied a new possibility emerges: The early Franciscan asceticism was aligned to a unique awareness of the victim, a 'conversion intelligence' and it functioned within the community as a series of strategies for remaining outside the dominant social, ecclesial and political systems which required victimage. As the Order developed this 'intelligence' was weakened or lost. The ascetical practices became incomprehensible and embarrassing to the later generations of friars, such as Bonaventure. Attempting to practice these ascetical practices from within the systems of social, ecclesial and political power was anomalous. In the next chapter I will explore one reason why the friars could no longer understand their own

[788] Bonaventure's *Major Life* is divided according to a threefold mystical pattern:
Chapter V-VII: Austerity, obedience and poverty (Purgative), Chapter VIII-X: Devotion, charity and prayer (Illuminative) and Chapter XI-XIII: Understanding of the Scripture, preaching and the Stigmata (Imitative). Cf. Dalarun, p. 238.
[789] Dalarun, p. 255.
[790] E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (New York: 1938) pp. 81-2., in Dalarun, p. 255.

founding asceticism: the abandoning of daily labour, in favour of more traditional forms of ecclesial life.

Girard's theory of mimetic desire sheds light upon the tempestuous decades following the death of Francis. Francis represented for the Church of the early thirteenth century an extraordinary model of Christian discipleship. He came to be described in Joachimist terms as the harbinger of a new age, even the 'angel of the Sixth Seal'.[791] Yet, in the early Franciscan narratives he referred to himself as the 'little back hen', a more vulnerable and homely moniker. And a great deal that was homely, concrete and descriptive was omitted from Bonaventure's *Major Life*; the feathers of the Seraph being irreconcilable with the feathers of the black hen.[792] Girard insists that we are obliged to take models: 'Every human being is in every respect too deeply dependent on models that an attempt to follows one's own intuition and to act with complete autonomy makes no sense at all'.[793] According to Girard, the collapse of our rivalrous patterns of desiring presents us with either a return to models/rivals or to Christ. Of Christ, Girard wrote: 'There is no acquisitive desire in him. As a consequence any will that is turned to Jesus will not meet with the slightest of obstacles […] with him there is no risk of getting caught up in the evil opposition of doubles.'[794]

Jesus's desires are always addressed to the Father and are identical with the Father's. Since Jesus's desires are not directed towards limited goods, Jesus never enters into rivalry with the disciples, but rather, he initiates them into the non-rivalrous kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, the non-rivalrous love of the Father is rich enough for all and excludes none. Early Franciscan asceticism and especially voluntary poverty should be understood as a means and not a sacrificial end: In the concrete performance of voluntary poverty Francis created 'a space in the world for an ethic of sharing that would manifest God's providential liberality toward all human creatures'.[795] The problem of imitation is

[791] Bonaventure, *Major Life, Prologue*, nn. 1,2
[792] Cf. Dalarun, p. 257.
[793] Schwager, *Scapegoats,* p. 176.
[794] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 430.
[795] Joseph Chinnici, *When Values Collide: Sexual Abuse and the Challenge of Leadership* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010) p. 76.

overcome in Christian discipleship when Christ is taken as the model. Christ's life is a consistent witness to the non-violent God, a God who is not jealous of human beings.[796] Indeed Christ's not grasping at equality with God (Philippians 2:6) may be understood as refusing to hold on to equality with God for himself *exclusively*, 'as opposed to willingly undergoing everything necessary to make of that equality with God something to be shared with us'.[797] In judging Francis as the perfect follower of the Gospel (*totius evangelicae perfectionis exemplar*) Bonaventure recognised a true form of Christian imitation and discipleship. [798] However, there was much in the life of Francis he found difficult to assimilate or appreciate. From within the same social and ecclesial systems which Francis and the early friars had exited, the non-rivalrous strategies (asceticism) had become incomprehensible. In the next part of this chapter, I will explore some of those early ascetical practices which embarrassed later generations of Franciscans and I will argue that they may be understood as early strategies for non-rivalrous relations.

Franciscan Asceticism-for-Peace

Franciscan Asceticism: introduction

In his second edition of *The Admonitions of St. Francis: Sources and Meanings*, Robert Karris O.F.M.,[799] applies to Franciscan scholarship an insight common to scripture studies, i.e., one does not look for 'sources' but parallels. Parallels indicate what was 'in the air' when authors were composing their texts. The medieval *legendae* associated with Francis indicate what was 'in the air' with respect to the founding dynamics of early Franciscanism. If the *legendae* typically express a sectional or party bias it must also be acknowledged that even the authentic writings of Francis of Assisi have been influenced both by contemporary sources

[796] Cf. Matt 5:23-24, which puts human reconciliation before external cult
[797] James Alison, 'My sheep her my voice and I know them: Reflections on language, tone, and teaching in the space between Magister and Magisterium' paper presented at the Celebratory Conference for the 10th anniversary of the CCS, Durham University, April 19th 2018.
[798] Bonaventure *Major Life,* c. 15 n. 1
[799] Robert Karris, O.F.M., *The Admonitions of St Francis: Sources and Meanings* (New York: St Bonaventure Publications, 2015) xiii-xiv.

and earlier religious and secular texts.[800] While certain early Franciscan narratives betray the barely concealed polemical concerns of a later generation of Franciscans, projected back onto Francis and his companions, other narratives suggest a pungent and reliable provenance in life of Francis himself, and in the lived experience of the early community of friars. With these caveats in mind, I will suggest that the early sources provide us with a rich account of early Franciscan asceticism, one distinct from contemporary monastic practice. While Franciscan asceticism has an important performative, didactic quality, I will argue, with David Flood, that Franciscan asceticism was, to a large extent the asceticism, not of the cloister, but of the market and the field, i.e., an ordinary asceticism, undertaken not sacrificially, but in consequence of the friar's economic and social agency living and working, among the poor.[801]

Peace Performed and Proclaimed: Stories of Franciscan Asceticism from the Early Sources

An Asceticism towards material and conceptual 'purses'

In the *Legend of the Three Companions*, Francis directs his brothers:

> As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness and harmony, through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: To heal the wounded, bind up the broken and recall the erring. In fact, many who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet be disciples of Christ.[802]

This irenic vision is programmatic of the early Franciscan *forma vitae*. The early Franciscans undertook a unique experiment in peace-making, remaining socially and economically engaged, but within an alternative, non-rivalrous social reality. Since the friars were not

[800] Cf. Robert Karris O.F.M. 'St Francis of Assisi's Admonitions in New Ecclesiastical and Secular Contexts'. *Franciscan Studies* 74, 207-230. Franciscan Institute Publications. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from Project MUSE database.

[801] Chapter seven will explore Flood's work on the *Early Rule*. Briefly, Flood describes early Franciscan life as promoting daily labour as service (not as servile) and it included what Flood calls a 'natural asceticism'. Work as service meant the friars did not seek remuneration or to appropriate material wealth. A non-rivalrous Franciscan asceticism was the by-product of a larger world view which was positive and liberating. The legacy of Francis was not a 'difficult inheritance'. Cf. David Flood, *The Daily Labor of Early Franciscans* (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2010) p. 20.

[802] *The Legend of the Three Companions*, (58c) *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 102.

attempting this way of life within the confines of a monastic cloister, the specific insights and values of their *forma vitae* required repeated performance. The emphasis on personal conversion in peace-making was unqualified. In the *Later Rule*, Francis writes:

> I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about in the world they do not quarrel or fight with words or judge others; rather, let them be meek, peaceful and unassuming, gentle and humble, speaking courteously to everybody, as is becoming.[803]

The importance of courtesy and moderation in conversation is identified as an essential component of peace-making. Some of the early Franciscan writings emphasize this in dramatic and memorable terms. Thomas of Celano offers a vivid illustration of Franciscan *ascesis* in his account of a brother who had spoken sharply of another brother in the presence of a nobleman. When the friar realized that he had offended his brother and introduced violence into the fraternal relationship '[…] he took some donkey manure […] and put it into his mouth to chew, saying: "Let the tongue which spat the poison of anger upon my brother now chew manure!"'.[804]

The appropriation of material possessions (acquisitive mimesis) as a root of violence is equated with the appropriation of opinions and arguments which cause division and dissent and draw the friars into unnecessary and escalating conflicts. *The Assisi Compilation* speaks of the friar who has concealed the 'purse' of his opinions. The reference, found also in Francis' *Admonitions*, is to Judas, who holds onto the purse and by avarice betrays the Lord. It is implied that friars who hold on to their conceptual or intellectual 'purses' also betray the Lord and introduce conflict and dissension into the community.[805] Early Franciscan asceticism is notably opposed to the accumulation of material goods and the coin economy. As Giacomo Todeschini has observed: 'Money, coins, *pecunia* – all these little copper, bronze and silver objects – have in themselves a mysterious power to represent the value of ordinary useful things such as bread, wind, land, water and domestic animals.'[806] The 'mysterious power' was

[803] *The Later Rule*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1).
[804] Thomas of Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 347.
[805] Cf. *The Admonitions of St. Francis of Assisi,* (IV), *FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 130.
[806] Todeschini, p. 13.

part of the fascination which accelerated mimetic conflict and perhaps explains Francis's opposition to entering into the coin economy.

Todeschini notes that for centuries European Christianity had been using coin as symbolic language to speak of faith and religion. Around 1120 a French monk, Honorius of Autun, 'compared the consecrated host to a very good coin. Without scandalizing anybody, Honorius observed that the roundness of the host resembled that of a coin just as the capacity of the host to be equivalent to salvation resembled the capacity of the coin to represent value'.[807] It is significant in Celano's *First Life of Saint Francis* that, having sold his horse and some of his father's valuable cloth, Francis the successful merchant (*felix mercantor*) has no longer any use for the money. When the priest of San Damiano refused to take the money, Francis, threw it on the window ledge, 'indicating according to his biographer's words that a physical separation from money was more important than using it in acceptable ways'.[808]

The rejection of coin is part of Saint Francis's 'conversion intelligence', since it is an extension of the bonds which bind society into violent, excluding systems. Todeschini notes that in the *Rules* of 1221, 1223 and the *Testament*, certain fundamental ideas emerge strongly: 'the refusal to touch money, the refusal to consider property as the fundamental condition for belonging to the human family, the importance attributed to alms and work as ways to earn a living, the search for contact with those usually considered outside the sphere of human society, i.e., animals, lepers, wanderers, criminals, mendicants, the poor and farmers.'[809] It is illustrative to compare with the previous account of asceticism another account which links coin to acquisitive mimesis. In the sixth chapter of the *Anonymous of Perugia*, brothers in the community at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula discovered money left on the altar. It was removed from the altar to the window ledge and finally a brother approached Francis to enquire what was to be done. Francis reminded the brother that the friars should not merely avoid using money but should abstain from touching it. Francis's determination that money was a route back into systems of social exclusion required a performative ascetical expression. The brother asked Francis for a penance and Francis

[807] Ibid, p. 14.
[808] Ibid, pp. 58-9.
[809] Ibid, p. 61.

instructed the brother to carry the money from the church in his mouth, and when he came across some ass's dung to place the money on it.[810] Such performative ascetical practices (both involving dung) underlined for the friars the core values of the community, by insisting on the worthlessness and danger of monetary tokens. For Francis, coins represented units of value directed towards hoarding, 'as opposed to the common welfare, which was understood as the perpetual redistribution of resources or, rather, as continuous and reciprocal exchange of favours, donations, and alms.'[811]

This demanding *ascesis*, which requires complete detachment from the material and conceptual objects of rivalrous desire, was itself scrutinized, lest it provoke pride or competition. Francis writes that the friars are not to judge or condemn others: 'I admonish and exhort them not to look down on those people they see wearing soft and colorful clothing and enjoying the choicest food and drink'.[812] This demanding asceticism is the *ascesis* by which the 'intelligence of the victim' is habitually acknowledged.

Imposing Peace and Performing Peace

Bonaventure's *Major Life of Saint Francis* records that Francis began all of his sermons with the greeting 'may the Lord give you peace!' This greeting was so noteworthy of Saint Francis's preaching that every one of the sources of his life mention it.[813] In the *Testament*, Francis records the origin of this greeting in a divine revelation: 'The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say, "May the Lord give you peace!"'[814] In the contentious circumstances of the early 13th century the brothers, who had been instructed by Francis to use this greeting everywhere, found that it provoked confusion, indignation, and even hostility among people. The friars were frequently questioned as to the meaning of this greeting. In the *Assisi Compilation* it is recorded that a friar, through embarrassment, asked Francis for permission to use another greeting; Francis declined, insisting on the divine

[810] *The Anonymous of Perugia* [30] *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 47-8.
[811] Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth*, p. 79. Francis also referred to coins as 'flies'. Cf. Celano, *Remembrance*, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 298.
[812] *The Later Rule, FA:ED* (Vol, 1).
[813] Kinsella, p. 115, footnote 104.
[814] *Testament*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 126.

origin of this salutation.[815] Saint Francis's peace greeting is distinct from what was the common priestly greeting, '*pax huic domo',* recited on entering the homes of the sick. This greeting takes the form of an imperative and implies the authority of a minister of the Church to bless, whereas Francis's greeting is a prayer and implies no ecclesial authority.[816]

In wishing and inviting, rather than imposing or declaring peace, Francis was articulating the 'intelligence' of his conversion. In the early thirteenth century the proclamation of peace is seen to provoke resentment and indignation. The proclamation of peace outside the systems of power and exclusion sounds different from the proclamation/declaration of peace from within such systems. Part of the friar's training for peace was a willingness to endure misunderstanding and contempt, since the proclamation of peace may have been misunderstood as yet another example of domination. The peace greeting represents a subversion of the systems which traditionally concealed violence and declared peace. In separating the Gospel proclamation of peace from the coercive power to declare/impose peace, Francis was indicating distance from an ambiguous social order which imposed peace through violence. This proclamation unsettled and provoked misunderstanding and hostility, but Francis insisted that it was of divine origin, and in some way part of the 'intelligence' which Francis associated with his conversion.

Francis did not permit the peace-greeting to be recast or abandoned, even though it provoked hostility. Neither did the asceticism-for-peace allow an appeal to authority or power when the motives of the peace-makers were contested. In *The Legend of the Three Companions,* it is related that when a sympathetic bishop suggested to Francis that it is was difficult to possess nothing in this world, the saint replied: 'Lord, if we had possessions, we would need arms for our protection. For disputes and lawsuits usually arise out of them, and, because of this, love of God and neighbor are greatly impeded. Therefore, we do not want to possess anything in this world'.[817]

[815] *The Assisi Compilation, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 205.
[816] Cf. Thompson, p. 36.
[817] *The Legend of the Three Companions*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 89.

Borrowed Desire: Envy and Conflict

Franciscan asceticism was carefully non-confrontational. It avoided a Manichean disdain for material goods and often suggested immediate, sometimes visceral, remedies to the slightest provocations to rivalry. As Kinsella concludes, for Francis, the cause of violence lies in avarice and envy. Envy, *invidere*, 'means to look with malice'. It is characterized by Francis as a blasphemy in *The Admonitions*: 'Therefore, whoever envies his brother the good which the Lord says or does in him commits a sin of blasphemy, because he envies the Most High, who says and does every good'.[818] This conclusion is reached by Girard who begins his book *I See Satan fall like lightning* with a reflection on the Decalogue. The 6th – 9th commandments are against violence, in order of seriousness. The 10th commandment is against coveting, which implies a perversion of desire. But Girard insists the Hebrew word is *desire*, rather than a perversion of desire.

A prohibition on desire, as such, seems to make a nonsense of the ascetical life. However, mimetic desire potentially places rivalry at the heart of all human relationships. Girard states: 'The phenomenon is so common, so well-known to us, and so contrary to our concept of ourselves, thus so humiliating, that we prefer to remove it from consciousness and act as if it did not exist'. Girard maintains that if we kept the 10th commandment the four previous commandments, not to murder, steal, commit adultery or bear false witness would be superfluous, since these are all fruits of mimetic desire, the desire for my neighbour/neighbour's possessions.[819]

For Girard, the scriptural prohibition is not directed primarily to the desirable objects but rather to the object *which belongs to my neighbour*. It is my neighbour, my model/rival, who invests in the particular object a mysterious, metaphysical value, igniting my desires and leading me into the field of mimetic conflict. Girard characterized the beginning of violence as 'a double idolatry of self and other'.[820] Since, according to Saint Francis, all good comes from God, to hate or resent the good we find in our neighbour is to hate God. To

[818] Kinsella, p. 197.
[819] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 12.
[820] Ibid.

discover a good in my neighbour is to discover a good of God and it invites praise of God, not appropriation or envy. Humility is indispensable if we are not to enter into competition, not only with our neighbour but with God.

An early Franciscan source, describing an exchange between Francis and a novice, captures the intractable ties by which desire, appropriation and domination are bound in human experience. In response to a novice's persistent demands for a psalter Francis replies: 'After you have a psalter, you will and want to have a breviary; after you have a breviary, you will sit in a fancy chair, like a great prelate telling your brother: "bring me my breviary!"'. Francis's insight into human desiring and its end in domination and power, if not conflict, is comparable to mimetic theory. In typical fashion the story ends with an element of performance: to the novice's amazement and embarrassment, Francis 'speaking in this way with great intensity of spirit […] took some ashes in his hand, put them on his head, rubbing them around his head as though he were washing it, saying "I, a breviary! I, a breviary!"'.[821]

The immediate and performative element in the parable indicates that in matters of desire, mere intellectual argument and reasoning falls short, and an embodied response to the threat of mimetic desire in community is required.[822] A number of early Franciscan sources include accounts of similarly provocative or unpleasant 'reactions' to simple requests or expressions of acquisitive desire. The value of this sometimes shocking or crude asceticism is precisely in its destabilising of what is, as Girard notes above, 'so contrary to our concept of ourselves, thus so humiliating, that we prefer to remove it from consciousness and act as if it did not exist'.[823] That is to say, we fail to appreciate, in our own case, how our desires tend towards rivalry, domination and conflict.

[821] *The Assisi Compilation, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 209. Cf. Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, *FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 372.
[822] For an assessment of the 'performative' element within Francis's preaching, Cf. Richard Boileau, 'The Great Communicator of Assisi: How Francis transmitted his Spiritual and Religious Insights', *The Cord*, 59 (2009) 131-53. Cf. Raoul Manselli, 'Gesture as Sermon in St Francis of Assisi', trans. By Patrick Colbourne, O.F.M. Cap and Edward Hagman, O.F.M. Cap., *Greyfriars Review*, 6, (1992), 37-48. Cf. David, L. Jeffrey, 'St Francis and Medieval Theatre,' *Franciscan Studies*, 43 (1983), 321-347.
[823] Girard, *I See Satan Fall*, p. 9.

Franciscan asceticism is directed towards peaceful relationships, such that friars live in peace among themselves and become credible witnesses of peace to their contemporaries. In a social order aligned to violence and scapegoating, this takes the form of 'provocative' peace greetings and an exaggerated, almost theatrical, asceticism. The locus of Franciscan peace-making was originally among the workers and artisans of Assisi, not within a monastic enclosure. This was manifestly a novelty in the early 13th century. While many examples of Franciscan Asceticism referred to above are drawn from the post-canonization *Lives* of Francis, I concur with David Flood that originally, Franciscan Asceticism was primarily the asceticism of ordinary work and the burdens associated with remaining outside the prevailing social system. Flood maintains:

> The brothers and Francis first of all, understood themselves as the servants of the Spirit of the Lord. They celebrated the good which the Spirit worked through them, returning all good to God. (*Early Rule* XVII, 17-19) […] When they held back anything from flowing into the current of action raised by the Spirit of the Lord, they needed a social context where they could locate such deeds and reap esteem. That was the world.[824]

'The world' is thus synonymous with the social and economic systems which the friars had abandoned on entering into obedience. To withdraw from the 'world' was the first essential step which allowed a genuine participation in the action of the Holy Spirit. Attachment to possessions, property and status were indications of a return to the 'worldly' economy which Francis and the friars had voluntarily abandoned. The daily asceticism of the early Franciscans was primarily their commitment to a way of life outside the system of social and economic rewards. Francis achieved in his context a remarkable – if limited – liberation from mimetic violence at a time of great social change. Girard has helped to articulate thematically what has historically been a Gospel intuition; that human desiring is inherently complex and tends towards conflict. This process is invariably concealed, especially to those most immediately involved, and cannot usually be resolved without escalation and crisis, i.e., without violence. Alternatively, the process is halted, for the individual, by a conversion experience. In the dynamic of conversion the mimetic nature of one's desires (and one's own part in the conflict those desires create) is disclosed.

[824] Flood, *Franciscans at Work*, p. 47

Asceticism as Withdrawal

Early Franciscan ascetism was also expressed in the practice of withdrawing to solitudes and retreats. While Francis refused the life of a hermit as an exclusive choice, he undertook regular retreats and instituted an eremitical Rule for the friars. Benedikt Mertens insists that eremitism represents an authentic expression of the *forma vitae*, 'no less than the preaching apostolate', and it was successfully integrated into the way of life of the early friars.[825] The role of eremitism is significant since from the beginning, Franciscans were noted for their refusal of the cloister and monastic way of life. In chapter thirty-two of his work *Historia Occidentialis* (c. 1221-25) Jacques di Vitry extols the 'Lesser Brothers' as an order of perfection, noted for evangelical zeal. They represent for di Vitry a fourth form of religious life (along with hermits, canons and monks) which is, in fact, a renewal of the primitive Church.[826] The Lesser Brothers are significant for their 'spacious cloister', i.e., the world.[827] In *The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty* (1237-39) Lady Poverty asks the friars to show her their cloister: 'Taking her to a certain hill, they showed her all the world they could see and said: "This, Lady, is our enclosure"'.[828] A rhythm of labour and evangelizing activity in urban centres, and regular withdrawal into the solitude of hermitages, was fundamental to the early Franciscan movement.[829]

In several ways early Franciscan eremitism is significant: It represents the first attempt to combine occasional eremitical experiences with itinerant preaching, as a 'mixed life'. It developed according to its own core values, being a fraternal experience (three or four friars were required for each hermitage, never a friar alone), it uniquely included lay friars as well as clerics, and it adopted a familial format with friars taking on the roles of

[825] Benedikt Mertens, OFM, 'Eremitism: An Authentic Element of Franciscanism' in *Franciscan Solitude*, Edited by André Cirino OFM and Josef Raischl (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1995) pp. 139-40
[826] Jacques di Vitry, *Historia Occidentialis*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 582-85.
[827] Ibid, p. 585.
[828] *The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 552.
[829] Cf. Vauchez. Among the hermitages in use were the Carceri, on the slopes of Mount Subasio, Poggio Bustone, la Foresta and Fonte Colombo (Rieti Valley), the Sacro Speco of Saint Urban, above Narni, the Isola Maggiore in Lake Trasimeno, Le Celle, near Cortona and Montecasale. p. 128. With the exception of the *Assisi Compilation* the early sources rarely mention this regular withdrawal into solitude, suggesting that it's fundamental significance for the *forma vitae* was lost on later generations of Franciscans.

Martha and Mary (the *Rule* also refers to 'mothers' and 'sons'). Those roles were not fixed but were exchanged by the friars living in the hermitage.[830]

In formulating his *Rule for Hermits*, Francis makes no reference to earlier and established forms of eremitism, such as the Eastern desert writers or monastic or pre-monastic eremitical ideals. Traditional practices such as *Lectio Divina*, radical asceticism and the recitation of the psalms are not referenced in early Franciscan eremitism.[831] We may therefore consider early Franciscan eremitism to function, like other aspects of the *forma vitae*, according to a specific 'conversion intelligence'. Precisely without the traditional enclosure of monasticism and in the context of life and work in largely urban settings, the friars adopted a pattern of regular and prolonged withdrawal, creating an essential distance from which to continue their determined way of life. Girard emphasized withdrawal as an element of mimetic conversion. Both in the life of Proust and the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1827) Girard associated mimetic conversion with an extended withdrawal from society. Mimetic relationships depend on reciprocity whereas Christ uniquely places us 'at the right distance', he is simultaneously 'near and difficult to grasp'.[832]

Kirwan notes that periods of withdrawal indicate a true asceticism: 'the overcoming of the "social Other" by means of the presence in withdrawal of the "Other Other" entails both a personal *ascesis* and an explicit rejection of the strategies of spiritual and aesthetic self-improvement, the religion of "endless striving"'.[833] The asceticism of withdrawal indicates an intuition among the early Franciscans that their way of life, no longer subject to traditional social and ecclesial boundaries (e.g., a life of monastic stability) was vulnerable to the dynamics of rivalrous desire. Living their *forma vitae*, the friars were a source of scandal and fascination for many. Extended periods of withdrawal served to create the

[830] Cf. *Franciscan Solitude*, pp. 206-08
[831] Cf. ibid, p. 208.
[832] Girard, *Battling to the End*: 'The presence of the divine grows as the divine withdraws: it is the withdrawal that saves, not the promiscuity'. Girard asserts that a god that can be appropriated is a god that destroys. 'To imitate Christ is to refuse to impose oneself as a model and to always efface oneself before others. To imitate Christ is to do everything to avoid being imitated'. p. 122.
[833] Michael Kirwan, '"A Candle in Sunshine": Desire and Apocalypse in Blake and Hölderlin', *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture,* 19, (2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41925339> 179-204 (p. 200).

'right distance' between those they encountered in their daily work and evangelical missions, and themselves.

The Affective Dynamic of Scandal: Early Franciscan and Girardian Approaches

The Early Franciscan Understanding of Scandal and Girard's use of Skandalon

To conclude this chapter on Franciscan asceticism, I will argue that the Franciscan *forma vitae*, frequently provoked scandal among those whose investment in the established social orders was threatened by aspects of an alternative, non-rivalrous social reality.[834] It was characteristic of the early Franciscan movement to endure both misunderstanding and a poor reputation, rather than accommodate the dominant social systems which functioned by exclusion and victimage.[835] The extent to which early Franciscans were a source of scandal to others indicates another aspect of their unique asceticism: the formation of a fraternal/sororal social order which functioned to mediate between traditionally opposed social groups; clergy and laity, rich and poor, male and female, learned and uneducated. Within these shared spaces non-rivalrous patterns of desire were practiced and a mutual dependence was encouraged on the basis of reciprocal exchange. Drawing on Joseph Chinnici's work I will argue that early Franciscan fraternities defied the exclusionary strategies of the dominant ecclesial and social institutions and thus provoked 'scandal'. I propose to read the early Franciscan understanding of scandal in parallel with Girard's exploration of the New Testament concept of *skandalon*.

Early Franciscans and Scandal

The first eyewitness account of the early Franciscan movement comes to us from Jacques de Vitry in his letter of 1215.[836] The letter does not mention Saint Francis himself but notes

[834] For an exploration of the use of 'scandal' in contemporary theology and Canon Law, Cf. Aidan McGrath, 'The Problem of Scandal and Canon Law', *Priests and People* 17, (2003), 111-115. Also, Patrick Connolly, 'The Concept of Scandal in a Changed Ecclesial Context', *Studia Canonica* 51, (2017) 135-148.

[835] CF. Celano*, First Life, FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 217. In a descriptive and somewhat nostalgic passage Celano notes that the early brothers were 'truly lesser who, by being subject to all ("*subditi omnibus*") always sought the position of contempt, performing duties *which they foresaw would be the occasion of some affront.'* (my Italics).

[836] Jacques di Vitry (1160/70- 1240), French Canon Regular and theologian. Elected Bishop of Acre in 1214.

that by night the friars were to be found in vigils and prayer and by day they went from village to village, seeking out souls for Christ.[837] There is nothing to suggest that they had at this stage any influence beyond the Spoleto Valley. De Vitry notes that the brothers were 'grieved, indeed troubled, to be honoured by the clergy and laity more than they wished'.[838] That the brothers were, counterintuitively, grieved and troubled by their good reputation indicates an ambiguous relationship between the early Franciscan community and the systems of social inclusion and exclusion.

Within moral theology 'scandal' carries a variety of meanings which may include 'a stumbling block to faith; anything that brings discredit upon religion; injury to reputation; a false imputation; malicious gossip; slander; a disgraceful fact, thing or person; a shocked feeling'.[839] Joseph Chinnici has noted that the early Franciscan movement was accustomed to public shame and ecclesial rejection.[840] Chinnici draws attention to the manner in which the early Franciscan movement gave scandal to some within wider society by including the excluded and marginalised sections of society, and by consciously forming con-fraternities, wherein socially distinct groups; male and female, learned and uneducated, rich and poor, cleric and lay practiced humility and *mutual obedience*.[841]

Chinnici notes that the social conditions of the early thirteenth century, were characterised by 'a structural conflict between the hierarchical arrangements of the landed feudal society and the communal arrangements of an emergent urban economic and social world'.[842] This rivalrous struggle of 'doubles' had in some sense ordered the patterns of Francis's youthful desires. After his conversion Francis and the early friars responded to this struggle by establishing non-rivalrous *fraternitas*/fraternities, organised around their core

[837] Later accounts tended to exaggerate and exemplify the role of Francis within the movement, for the purposes of identifying the Founder with particular groups or perspectives within the Order. As Thompson observed, Francis was a Franciscan; a brother among the brothers. The movement shaped Francis even as Francis shaped the movement. Cf. Thompson, p. 154.
[838] Jacques di Vitry, *Letter I, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 580.
[839] Cf. McGrath, p. 111.
[840] Cf. Chinnici, p. 172. For examples of ecclesial rejection cf. *The Chronicle of Roger of Wendover, FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 598-9.
[841] Cf. Chinnici, pp. 101-6.
[842] Ibid, p. 101.

values of Gospel living.[843] Chinnici insists that Francis accepted an essential hierarchy and this was expressed in Franciscan thought and spirituality. However, Francis and his followers were formed in the world of the Assisi *commune*; a distinctively participative reality which, in the context of urban growth and the rise of a merchant class was asserting its role in society. Franciscan *fraternitas*/fraternity effectively created a shared ethical space between the horizontal and vertical structures of early thirteenth century society.

Belonging to the fraternity was, *de facto*, a commitment to penance which was the expression of 'conversion intelligence'. Penance, as Chinnici observes, is the recognition of competing desires; desire for fraternity and mutual flourishing (good mimesis) and the desire for power, rivalry and self-aggrandizement (bad mimesis).[844] *Fraternitas*/fraternity is the shared ethical space wherein identities may be formed pacifically, not over against others.

Giving Scandal: Early Franciscan Association with Lepers

In exploring the Franciscan tradition of living with scandal, Chinnici points helpfully to the early Franciscan association with lepers. Citing Nathanial Brody, Chinnici observes that lepers of the thirteenth century endured not only social exclusion but also moral judgement.[845] Their presence represented a threat to social order and they fall within those categories of groups and individuals which Girard noted are particularly vulnerable to scapegoating in times of social crisis.[846] Girard also noted the link between the contagious nature of mimetic violence and societal fears of all infectious disease. If, as Paul Ricoeur has noted, the Good is commonly understood to be attractive, the transmission of evil is commonly described in biological terms such as 'contamination', 'infection' and 'epidemic'.[847]

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[843] To emphasis the innovation of fraternity and its affective and relational importance within the writings of Francis, Chinnici notes that Francis used the relational term *ordo*, seven times; the term *religio*, eleven times, and the term frater/brother two hundred and thirty-two times. Ibid, p. 105.
[844] Cf. ibid, pp. 108-09
[845] Nathanial Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in medieval Literature* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974).
[846] Cf. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, pp. 126-140.
[847] Cf. Ann W. Astell 'Saintly Mimesis, Contagion, and Empathy in the Thought of René Girard, Edith Stein, and Simone Weil' in *Shofar*, Winter 2004, Vol 22, No. 2. p. 116.

According to Girard, in primitive social groups any change in the status of individuals was, potentially, the cause of a mimetic conflict. The passage from childhood to adulthood, from virginity to sexual union, from pregnancy to childbirth, from health to sickness and from life to death, were potentially destabilising to the social order and were thus hedged round with various prohibitions, rituals and taboos, protecting the community from sudden outbreaks of conflict. Violent conflict was viewed as something contagious and imminently communicable, indeed a type of infection.[848] Those who, for whatever reason, were considered unclean or infected were also considered potentially dangerous. For the sake of the community, they were by unanimous agreement, excluded and cast out, or at least isolated. Thus, the leper of the thirteenth century is a scandalous figure and those who crossed the social boundaries which isolate the leper were themselves the cause of scandal.[849]

In exploring Francis of Assisi's relationship to the leper, Chinnici returns to the *Testament* and specifically to Francis's use of the words 'bitterness' and 'sweetness'.[850] As already noted, Francis's relationship with lepers was 'inverted' in his conversion experience; what had once been bitter was transformed into sweetness. Here, Chinnici observes, is the language of *Exodus*. In the Exodus account the waters of Marah are bitter, indicating the bitterness of the journey of liberation out of Egypt. The bitterness of the water is changed only by Moses striking the waters with a piece of wood. Chinnici reads the conversion of Francis in terms of a similar journey or Exodus. At first Francis considers the leper a source of bitterness, but later discovers in the leper, Christ, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (53: 4), disfigured and *quasi leprosus*, almost a leper. The transformation in the case of Francis is achieved by the wood of the cross which makes what was bitter into sweetness.

[848] Ibid, p. 119.
[849] According to André Vauchez, in the medieval mind lepers 'incarnated not only a horrible malady but also the suspicion of a hereditary defect or some abnormal sexual behavior which would have caused it […]'. Their exclusion was justified both by a fear of contagion and the suspicion of a serious transgression against an important social taboo. Cf. Vauchez, p. 23.
[850] *Testament, FA:ED,* (Vol I), p. 124.

The 'intelligence of the victim' compels the early Franciscans to endure public shame and ecclesial rejection. The 'outward limits' of belonging to the fraternity were tempered by a shared commitment to a path of continuous conversion and reform.[851] The symbolic and material affiliation with the leper demonstrates the early Franciscan agenda as the widest possible incorporation of what is repugnant, unwelcome and marginalised in medieval society. 'Being scandalised' or taking offence can negate the transformative encounter with Christ in the Other who is weak or whose presence is socially problematic. This transformative encounter with the Other, which potentially changes what was bitter into sweetness, is at risk in social, economic, and religious systems based on 'othering'.

In 1219 tensions among the friars required Francis to return from his meeting with the Sultan. The crisis was in part, provoked by the imposition of new laws limiting the eating of meat within Franciscan communities.[852] These new laws would have brought the friars into line with monastic and even pious lay habits of fasting and, according to Thompson, the impetus to impose these new laws on the friars was a reaction to criticism and invidious comparisons with other orders and pious associations. Francis resisted these innovations and revoked the fasting laws on his return to Assisi.

According to Thompson, in the absence of Saint Francis, the brothers were 'unwilling to endure the humiliation of pious misunderstanding'.[853] That is to say, the friars were abandoning an important characteristic of the 'intelligence of the victim', to gain social recognition. It is without doubt that the early Franciscan movement caused scandal by egregious moral lapses and bad example. Francis admonished the friars against causing scandal by sin.[854] However, there is also a willingness to give scandal rather than abandon

[851] Ibid, p. 175.
[852] Early Franciscan itinerancy, which was an important and distinguishing feature of Francis and his companions required a realistic attitude to food. Thus, Jacques di Vitry noted, 'If anyone invites them to dinner, they eat what is set before them'. *Historia Occidentialis, FA:ED* (Vol 1), p. 583. 'In accordance with Gospel, it may be lawful for them to eat of all food that is placed before them'. *Earlier Rule* (1209/10-1221), *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 66.
[853] Thompson. p. 73.
[854] Cf. Celano, *First Life, FA:ED* (Vol 1), pp. 218-19. *The Assisi Compilation, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 146, p. 160, and Thomas of Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, FA:ED (Vol 2) p. 359.

practices and attitudes associated with their 'conversion intelligence'.[855] From the historical sources it is evident that the early Franciscans both edified and scandalized their contemporaries. Serious moral lapses were certainly an occasion of justified scandal, but significantly, the willingness to cross arbitrary social boundaries, also caused scandal. Francis and the early friars were prepared to endure this scandal, rather than forfeit their unique, and still developing, way of life.

Skandalon: René Girard's Reframing of a New Testament Concept

According to Girard, in the Gospels the word *skandalon* never indicates a material object. 'It is always someone else, or it is myself to the extent that I am alienated from other people'.[856] Girard notes that the term has its etymological roots in the verb *skadzo*, meaning 'I limp'; thus, for Girard *skandalon* is already rooted in mythological expulsion.[857] According to Robert Hamerton-Kelly, the analysis of the meaning of 'scandal' in the Gospels belongs among Girard's most brilliant achievements.[858] Girard associates the word *skandalon* with the early stages of mimetic rivalry. *Skandalon* cannot refer to random obstacles which happen to block our progress or cause us frustration. What makes the *skandalon* significant, indeed decisive, is its obsessional power, a power derived from the model, not from the object.

The model is always someone I desire to emulate *and to surpass*. If I surpass the model, he/she ceases to be a model for my desires. Therefore, the desire depends precisely on this tension of its being offered and withheld, and so the model is both loved and hated, desired and despised. The model is the *Skandalon* or stumbling block of my desire. 'We attack and cherish, hate and love, diminish and exalt him. This is scandal, and it is the

[855] This form of scandal is traditionally understood as *passive scandal*: "Scandal may be only passive, if one takes occasion for scandal from conduct which is good under every respect. This was the case of the Pharisees, who were scandalized over the doctrine and beneficent activity of Jesus." Cf. McGrath, citing, L. Bender, "Scandal", in *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, ed. P. Palazzini, London 1962, 1095-1096; cf. also L. Babbini, "Scandalo", *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Teologia Morale*, Roma 1973, 873-874; B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. II, Westminster Maryland 1967, 473-474).
[856] Girard, *Things Hidden*, p. 416.
[857] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 'physical and moral monstrosity are always heaped together in myths that justify the persecution of the infirm'. p. 35.
[858] Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred,* p. 46.

essence of anxiety (and addiction) because it is the love of what one hates and the hatred of what one loves.'[859] This understanding of scandal incorporates the traditional theological definition of scandal as *admiratio*, i.e., wonderment and fascination. According to Girard desire cannot remain in a state of scandal indefinitely. If desire cannot escape the fascinating stumbling block which both attracts and defeats us, it loses its equilibrium and descends into envy and finally hatred.

In this sense those who are scandalized have not recognised the mimetic or borrowed nature of their desires and have allowed the model of their desire to become the rival of their desire. It is noteworthy that in the references to scandal that appear in the indices to *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* a significant number of references to scandal are precisely scandals of this sort.[860] The previously mentioned account of Francis's visit to Arezzo described the violence between the two rival factions in the city as the breaking out of a 'scandal'. This account captures well Girard's understanding of contagious violence, wherein the objects of desire disappear as the scandal develops and the rivals are content not only with securing the desired object but with obliterating the model who has become the rival. The text notes:

> When they arrived at Arezzo, there was a great **scandal** and war night and day throughout almost the entire city, because of two factions who had hated each other for a long time […] it seemed to [Francis] that the demons were overjoyed by this and were inciting the people to destroy their city with fire and with other dangerous means.[861]

A bitter conflict between the mayor of Assisi and the Bishop Guido III is also referred to as a 'scandal' in the early sources.[862] Though seriously ill, Francis was called upon to remove the stumbling block (their rivalrous conflict) which was the source of such grief among the people. His intervention was considered miraculous: 'All the others who were present and heard it took it for a great miracle, crediting it to the merits of Blessed Francis, that the Lord had so quickly visited them, and that without recalling anything that had been said, they returned to such harmony from such scandal'. There are numerous references in the

[859] Ibid, p. 95.
[860] *FA:ED* Index, p. 117
[861] *The Assisi Compilation* (108), *FA:ED*, (Vol 2) p. 215.
[862] Ibid. (84), p. 188.

Franciscan sources to rivalrous conflict in terms of 'scandal'.[863] The creative manner in which early Franciscans engaged with these rivalrous 'scandals' suggests a conceptual bridge between the early Franciscan understanding of rivalrous desire and Girard's theory.

Avoiding Scandal

In Chapter XI of the *Later Rule* it is stated that the brothers 'may not be godfathers to men or women, so that *scandal* may not arise among the brothers or concerning them on account of this'.[864] The man who would enter the brotherhood was directed to offer himself inwardly to God and the to give up all possessions, keeping nothing because those who entered obedience 'should not cause *scandal* by keeping a *money bag*.[865] The early Franciscan community was, therefore, sensitive to the role privileged social positions (godparents), material wealth, and even opinions played in provoking *admiratio* or fascination, and thus in provoking envy and scandal. This was the route back to a social order maintained by violence. In significant ways the early Franciscans and Girard appear to have a shared understanding of scandal, i.e., scandal, as a stumbling block, a misreading of desire which occasions rivalrous conflict and hatred. Early Franciscan fraternities were, among other things, mediating spaces where the initial stages of desire, the scandal, could be creatively managed.

The early Franciscans were committed to a variety of practices which provoked 'pious misunderstanding' or scandal. These practices included visiting and living among lepers, forming communities outside the privileged monastic structure, and forming 'confraternities' which were both male and female and in which different social classes partook of a common religious life. These 'provocations' qualify as passive scandals since they involve the taking of offence 'from conduct which is good under every respect'.[866]

Mimetic conversion, 'taking a collective, political form', represents a potential escape from scandal: 'He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for

[863] Some forty-one references to scandal (actual, avoid, generate) are included in the *FA:ED* Index, p. 117.
[864] *Later Rule, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 106.
[865] Celano, *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, FA:ED* (Vol 2) p. 300.
[866] McGrath. P. 111.

stumbling [*skandalon*]. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes'.[867] The 'collective, political form' represented by the *fraternitas* was both a cause of 'scandal', and a radical effort to neutralize the scandal of fascination/*admiratio* which devolves into envy, conflict and violence.

James Alison has argued that Jesus is a scandalous figure to some, not on account of the so-called 'hard sayings' which occur in the Gospels.[868] Rather, the Gospel gives scandal when the presence of God in a particular human group is experienced not as 'laborious or burdensome, but contrariwise, God is experienced as being loosed from the moorings to the sacred. The heavy demands of the Gospel turn out to be the existential risks of exclusion, persecution and death at the hands of "people of unbound conscience and bold speech"'.[869] Thus, the Gospel typically scandalises those who have invested much in whatever justifies them as 'good' in their society and 'it is noticeably less scandalous to those who have found themselves living in the shadow side of that goodness'.[870] Francis and the early friars formed their identities precisely among those groups that existed on the 'shadow side' of social respectability and in doing so, gave scandal.

Conclusion

Questions of imitation, desire, asceticism and 'scandal' characterise both the early Franciscan and the Girardian projects. Mimetic theory may be helpfully applied to a variety of early Franciscan practices to suggest a social and political expression of a converted mimetic social order taking shape. Dalarun, commenting on the ascetical accounts of Francis's life contained in the *Legend of Perugia* asserts that Francis 'had a very free attitude regarding any rule of life. He did not hesitate to uphold great freedom, great imagination even, especially in the area of bodily discipline. In fact, the saint is first presented as opposed

[867] Cf. Girard, *Things Hidden* pp. 416-7. (1 John 2: 10-11).
[868] Cf. Luke, 9:60, 12:4-5, 14: 25-33, 16:18, 18:22, 22:36, Matt 5:27-32, 5:48, 8:22, 10:28, 10:37, 19:21, Mk 10:11-12, 10:17-22.
[869] Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment,* p. 179.
[870] Ibid.

to systematic penance and excessive fasting, opposed to mortification and asceticism'.[871] The imitation of the Founder, which became problematic for later generations of Franciscans indicates not a lack of good will, but the imperceptible drift back into the very social and ecclesial realities from which Francis and the early brothers had emerged.

Ascetical practices aligned to the core values of the early community became a source of puzzlement to later friars, or they simply migrated from the centre to the margins of the Order (such as regular experiences of the eremitism). In the decades after the death of Saint Francis, the practice of poverty became divisive within the Order, often aligned to the questions of imitation and exemplarity. Michael Cusato has observed a qualitative change in the practice of voluntary poverty from the Founder and the first friars to the 'Second Generation' of Franciscans. Cusato has observed the recasting of voluntary poverty from 'a positive ethic of creation', a manner of life (*forma vitae*) which Saint Francis *receives from* the poor, the lepers and the marginalized, to an attitude of renunciation, in the pursuit of evangelical perfection.[872] Mimetic theory enables a rereading of early Franciscan asceticism and poverty (as well as fraternity) as 'a positive ethic of creation', a web of reciprocal, non-rivalrous relationships, spun experimentally, outside of the dominant sacrificial social realities.

[871] Dalarun, p. 207. The ambiguities and anomalies, Dalarun suggests, may be accounted for by the author's need, on the one hand, to account for Saint Francis's unique ascetical life and on the other hand to include accounts of asceticism more typical of the time and more in conformity with the history of Christian asceticism. It may be that both accounts are true and simply express the difficulties of forming a non-sacrificial ascetical life. Cf. Dalarun, p. 209.

[872] Michael Cusato, OFM, 'The Fortunes of Poverty: Minor(ite) Musings on a Medieval Matter', *The Cord*, 64, 2014. P. 118.

Chapter Seven

A Social and Political expression of Non-Rivalrous Relationship: Franciscan Labour as a key to non-rivalrous relationships

Introduction

The structure of this thesis is that of a 'double triptych'. The first three chapters offer an account of mimetic theory in terms of the three stages of Girard's work, in literature, cultural anthropology, and theology. Chapters four to six interpret the early Franciscan movement in light of those three categories. The structure allows for mimetic theory to shed light on the early Franciscan movement, and the early Franciscan movement to suggest an historical, political and social form for Girard's insights. This final chapter, standing outside the double triptych, nevertheless builds on the insights of the previous six chapters. Specifically, whereas the previous three chapters offer a mimetic reading of the early Franciscan narratives, this present chapter will explore the movement's social and political form. The Franciscan *forma vitae*, I will argue, has its own idiom and political expression – an expression grounded in the conversion experiences which I have characterized as the 'intelligence of the victim'.

The chapter will be divided into four parts:

1. An exploration of the *forma vitae* as a unique social and religious programme with its own distinctive idiom and character.
2. An introduction to the work of David Flood O.F.M., Franciscan historian; the aims and methodology of Flood's critical analysis of Franciscan history, with respect to the role of daily labour among the friars.
3. Flood's interpretation of the early Franciscan writings and the argument for a social history of withdrawal from the dominant social systems based on exclusion (consonant with Girard's mimetic theory).
4. Conclusions.

The Franciscan *Forma Vitae*: Positive Mimesis taking 'collective and political form'

Revisiting John Milbank's Critique of Mimetic Theory

As we noted in the General Introduction and in chapter three, John Milbank has criticized Girard's project for failing to offer a plausible account of what a non-violent, non-sacrificial community would look like, 'taking a collective, political form'.[873] According to Milbank, in Girard's scheme '[…] all that Jesus seems to offer is a denial of culture, and not the imagination of something beyond culture, which would be humanly problematic'.[874] The crux of the problem for Milbank is Girard's apparent neglect of 'idiom'. Milbank has emphasised the Church's role in communicating to humanity the 'idiom' or *logos* of an adequate return of God's glory to God:

> Mutual forgiveness and the bearing of each other's burdens becomes the modus vivendi of the Church: an 'atoning' way of life. It is highly significant that from Paul, through Origen to Augustine, the early Christians seem to have thought in terms of 'continuing' atonement […] Hence to the Anselmian speculation one needs to add: only God incarnate could first make an adequate return of God's glory to God, but the point of the incarnation was more to communicate to human beings the idiom, the *logos* of an adequate return, so that it could be made universally. For until there is a universal return, then surely God must continue to suffer the 'contradiction' of a loss of glory, an alienation of his participated being.[875]

Milbank suggests that Girard is theorizing from a space outside of the Christian 'idiom'. Outside the Christian 'idiom', violence is recognised whenever we are 'forced' to do something, even when we may appear to do it willingly, for we are often 'manipulated'. Milbank argues that 'if indeed there are no objective standards of truth and goodness, as nihilism claims, then every act of persuasion is in fact an act of violence'. Even so, Christianity does not claim that the good and the true are self-evident either to objective reason or to dialectical argument. From the Christian perspective faith, '*pistis*' which is precisely a form of persuasion, is required to save us from violence. Milbank argues that 'we need the stories of Jesus for salvation, rather than the speculative notion of the good, because only the attraction

[873] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 395.
[874] Ibid.
[875] Ibid, p. 398.

exercised by a particular set of words and images causes us to acknowledge the good and to have an idea of the ultimate telos'.[876]

For Milbank, then, Girard argues from outside this 'idiom' in the barren spaces of post Enlightenment secular reason. Thus, Milbank concludes:

> An abstract attachment to non-violence is therefore not enough – we need to practice this as a skill to learn its idiom […] For further elaboration of the idiom we must turn back from Girard to Augustine, who by placing the Church, and not Christ alone, at the centre of his metanarrative, pays far more attention to the concrete shape of a non-antagonistic social practice.[877]

Fergus Kerr observes that, having criticised Girard for an absence of non-violent practice 'taking collective, political form', Milbank himself fails to offer a positive description of non-violent practice.[878] According to Kerr, '[R]emarks about how the Church might offer "a social space where a different, forgiving and restitutionary practice is pursued" (*Theology and Social Theory*, 422) certainly go a little beyond anything Girard has said'.[879] However, Kerr is slow to fault either theorist on this point since, given the pervasiveness of institutionalised violence, we must ask if 'any vision of an alternative can be delineated in much more than negatives and promises?'[880]

Girard asserts that the Gospel revelation is working to interrupt and nullify the scapegoat mechanism progressively throughout history. According to Girard, this process has already collapsed innumerable social boundaries and weakened the social order established on victimage and exclusion. A world with fewer and weaker sacred boundaries is a world more at risk of mimetic conflict; hence the apocalyptic tone of much of Girard's later work. Kerr asks: 'Until we learn to think and feel non-violently, how would it be possible to flesh out "the absolute Christian vision of ontological peace" *(Theology and Social Theory*, 434)?' It may indeed be impossible to describe the absolute Christian vision of ontological peace in this world. However, if the Gospel revelation is progressively undoing

[876] Ibid.
[877] Ibid.
[878] Kerr, 'Rescuing Girard's Argument?' p. 396.
[879] Ibid.
[880] Ibid.

the sacred social order should we not expect to find historical instances of a nascent, non-violent social reality accompanying the demise of the old, sacrificial order? In this chapter I will argue that the early Franciscan movement may be considered an attempt to 'flesh out' just such a vision, equipped with its own social strategies, vocabulary and political programme, i.e., its own idiom.

Taking seriously Milbank's assertion that Girard's theory lacks an ecclesial dimension, Milbank's own assumptions about ecclesial non-violence must also be probed. The extent to which violence operates within and through ecclesial structures and sacralised versions of the Gospel is neglected in Milbank's analysis.[881] Examples of ecclesial violence, e.g., medieval bishops imposing peace agreements under pain of excommunication or interdict, and even threat of military violence, are provided by Kinsella.[882] As I sought to demonstrate in chapter five, Francis's experience of social *and* ecclesial violence (and the problem of effective peace-making from within the dominant social structures) required a fundamentally different approach to social conflict. The early Franciscans, unlike other reform movements, responded to social and ecclesial violence non-confrontationally, suggesting an intuitive understanding of how mimetic desire operates in accelerating conflict. While deliberately distancing itself from forms of ecclesial life which create and contain violence, the early Franciscan movement did not attempt to scapegoat or to 'other' the Church, as institution.

Early Franciscan fraternities represent a new, shared ethical space in late medieval Europe; an ethical space attuned to the risks of acquisitive desire and competing interests. The various characteristics of the Franciscan *forma vitae*, taken together, represent a new social consciousness with definite strategies for avoiding rivalry, conflict and violence. The collapse of social boundaries in the late Middle Ages, which increased the risks of violence, also made possible a unique social reality; part religious order, part worker's cooperative, sharing a common life and obedience, oriented towards minority and peace-making.[883]

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[881] Cf. Scott MacDougall 'Scapegoating the Secular' in *Violence, Transformation and the Secular*, pp. 85-95.
[882] Cf. Kinsella, *Poverty and Violence*, pp. 20-23.
[883] 'Minority', lived in fraternity, may be considered the hermeneutic of a Gospel life, according to the *Early Rule*. Cf. Regis J. Armstrong, 'If My Words Remain in You: Foundations of the Evangelical Life' in *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents*. Jay M. Hammond (Ed) (New York: New

Evidence for this new social consciousness may be found in a unique Franciscan vocabulary. This vocabulary represents a determination to articulate not merely a new social and religious structure from within the existing social order but a heightened awareness of how established social order creates and contains violence. The early Franciscans did not attempt to break with the Church or repudiate it. However, their form of life indicates a grappling with the reality of ecclesial violence. Milbank's ecclesiological assertions benefit from some historical nuance:

> […] in the high Middle Ages, the cultural passivity of the mass of society (rooted in the social and political subjection that left it little more than heresy as an expression of revolt) made it possible for the Church to act upon society by means of a 'terrorist' language of the sacred (use of Latin, idealist symbolism, lack of realism in Romanesque art, etc.). The emancipation of an increasing number of categories in secular society (the nobility, urban strata, *rustici*, less rigidly defined and supported by heretical organizations) made this language increasingly inoperative. The Franciscan's concern to be effective in the new society demanded a new language, vocabulary, with a certain relationship with reality, and primarily with social reality, in its group institutions.[884]

The Early Franciscan Idiom

As I have argued in previous chapters, the early Franciscan movement, was characterized by distinctive practices directed towards positive reciprocity and the avoidance of mimetic conflict. An exploration of the early Franciscan lexicon suggests significant discontinuities of idiom, with respect to the general social and religious vocabulary. I have already suggested that the significance of Saint Francis's 'peace-greeting' is precisely its ambiguity in *wishing* rather than *imposing* God's peace. Other examples of a distinct Franciscan idiom indicate a definite, conscious, determination to stand outside of the dominant social and ecclesial realities. In describing their project, the early Franciscans frequently avoided contemporary ecclesiastical terms in favour of more 'secular', political and economic ones. The early Franciscan 'idiom' expressed the Gospel revelation according to a shared 'conversion intelligence', and to do so, employed ways of speaking and acting which were, in some sense, sustained by the 'secular'.

City Press, 2004) pp. 64-89 (p. 68). The friars are constituted as 'minor' or 'lesser' brothers. Minority/becoming 'lesser' is fundamental to the friar's identity.

[884] Le Goff, p. 65.

Jacques Le Goff characterised Francis as 'a figure half religious, half secular'.[885] This assertion is developed in an analysis of the specific vocabulary of early Franciscan writings. Le Goff notes that Francis rarely used a political vocabulary (*imperator, rex, regina, principes, magnate*, etc) and the vocabulary of the *commune* is used minimally (*potestas, civis, homo, popularis*, etc). Le Goff observed that, 'with his political pessimism […] Saint Francis avoided language of a political type'.[886] Francis used non-religious terms alongside religious terminology, crafting a distinct social and religious frame of reference. Le Goff asserted that '[…] the social vocabulary of Franciscanism also escaped if not the religious, at least the ecclesiastical, mould'.[887] Francis favoured the term *subditi*, a term found in Paul (Titus 3. 1) which had made its way into the writings of medieval jurists, as well as the contemporary vocabulary. *Subditi omnibus;* being 'subject to all' was a common characterization of Franciscan life in Francis's writings. As such it signals the novelty of the early Franciscan movement and its occurrence is indicative of the particular concerns and values of the movement.

David Flood's assertion that the early Franciscan movement was defined not by voluntary poverty, much less by begging, but by work, also finds support in the early Franciscan vocabulary. When Francis addressed his letter '*ad populorum rectores*' and referred to superiors of Franciscan communities as '*custodes*' (never as prior) he was using the emerging vocabulary of the corporations of workers, which were then in the process of establishing their statutes. Those who were responsible for the welfare of the corporations (examples exist for the corporation of Toulouse, 1227) were referred to as *rectores* and *custodes*. Eschewing the extant religious titles of responsibility, Francis and the brothers referred to 'ministers', which was then commonly used to refer to a trade's apprentices, also called 'discipuli' or 'laboratores' (or 'laborantes'). The organised trades were known at this time as '"ministeria" rather than *artes*, a word which later gained precedence in Italy and whose semantic field is completely different.'[888]

[885] Ibid, ix.
[886] Ibid, p. 88.
[887] Ibid.
[888] Ibid, p. 89.

Francis's use of a distinct vocabulary which was both religious and 'secular' demonstrated a determination to form a way of life which was outside the dominant social self-descriptions of Church and society. Le Goff notes that Francis strove to avoid using pairs of opposites in his writing. Nevertheless, his social and religious project recognised the inequality which defined social institutions. According to Le Goff, Francis aimed to

> replace these antagonisms with a society founded on family relationships, in which the only inequalities would be based on age and gender – natural inequalities and therefore divine. Hence his mistrust or hostility towards all those who raise themselves above others through social artifices.[889]

His vision for a more equal and less violent social reality was capable of inspiring cooperation (and avoiding confrontation) within the emerging class of urban and rural workers. In the context of labour, new forms of non-rivalrous participation could be proposed and it is significant that Francis and the early brothers draw freely on the vocabulary of these emerging social groups, rather than adopting traditional religious terminology indiscriminately.

Absent from Saint Francis's vision were designations which included the prefixes marking superiority: *magis-* (*magnus, magister, magnatus*), *prae-* (*praelatus, prior*), *super* (*superior*).[890] Those to whom Francis most often referred and associated with were the people excluded from society: *minores* and *subditi*.[891] The early Franciscan writings are significant for the use of terms which emphasise equality and fraternity, values which were shared in the workers corporations and guilds. As previously noted, Francis rarely described social relations among the friars in the typical language of ecclesial or social hierarchy.[892]

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[889] Ibid, p. 90.

[890] Francis uses the term *praelatus* in the *Admonitions*. This anomaly may be accounted for by Francis's extensive use of monastic and ecclesiastical sources in the composition of this text. Cf. Karris, *Admonitions of St Francis*, p. 9.

[891] Le Goff, p. 90. Flood suggests that Francis and the brothers use the terms *maior* and *minore*, as did Jesus, to indicate the priority of the lesser over the greater in the Kingdom of God, cf. Matt 23. 11. Flood acknowledges, however, that in a civil context *maior* referred to the social standing of the feudal aristocracy and *minore* referred to the emerging social class of merchants, bankers, notaries, who were free from feudal bonds. Each particular *commune* at this time gave the terms a particular interpretation, as social conditions changed. Cf. Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life* (Phoenix, Arizona: Tau Publishing, 2015) p. 55, note 66.

[892] Cf. Chinnici, p. 105. Francis uses 'ordo' only seven times in his writings, 'religio' eleven times, and 'frater' two-hundred and thirty-two times.

Steven Epstein notes that 'brother' was a relational term in common use among medieval workers, especially those involved in guilds.[893] It is, therefore, possible that in making *frater* his preferred relational title Francis was borrowing, not so much from traditional monastic practice, but from the emerging labour cooperatives and guilds.

Fraternity (*fraternitas*) came to represent a third reality, situated between the inherited, hierarchical institutions and the new authority of the *commune*. Chinnici defined fraternity as the social space which mediated the horizontal and vertical structures of wider society, but belonged to neither. Chinnici notes that the 'guiding ethical principles for becoming a brother and a sister were reciprocal charity, humility and mutual obedience'.[894] The principle of fraternity was dynamic and expressed itself in multiple con-fraternities which created new mediated spaces in which the wealthy and the poor, the learned and the uneducated, clergy and laity, men and women 'could learn self-mastery and constructively intersect their lives and concerns'.[895] Le Goff concurs that the early Franciscan movement was 'in the first instance, in the literal sense, more of a *fraternity* or a *confraternity* of a secular type than an Order of a religious, ecclesiastical type, to which he finally had to resign himself'.[896] As instructive as the use of 'fraternity' is in the early writings, its later absence in the narratives is perhaps even more telling: 'Théophile Desbonnets reminds us, this term [fraternity] is not found in the *Anonymous of Perugia*, the *Legend of the Three Companions*, the *Legend of Perugia*, the *Second Life*, the *Major Legend*, and the *Minor Legend* or the *Mirror of Perfection*. It appears only in the *First Life*: "He said, I want this fraternity to be called the Order of Lesser Brothers"' (1 Celano, 38). Delarun observes that the word 'fraternity' appears ten times in the writings of Saint Francis; 'It almost seems as if the brothers themselves, after 1230, wanted to forget this word and all it involved'.[897] There is evidence, therefore, of the beginnings of a non-confrontational social reality (*fraternitas*),

[893] Cf. Steven Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) pp. 86, 90, 114 and 157. Cited in David Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 43, note 50.
[894] Chinnici, pp. 104-6. *Early Rule* IV-VI and *Admonitions* III-IV lay down the principles.
[895] Ibid, p. 108. Also, cf. Celano, *Second Life, FA:ED* (Vol 2) [191] p. 370. '[Saint Francis] wanted to unite the greater to the lesser, to join the wise to the simple in brotherly affection, and to hold together those far from each other with the glue of love'.
[896] Le Goff, p. 75.
[897] Cf. Delarun, p. 178 and Desbonnets, pp. 65-82.

with its own specific vocabulary, making a determined effort to create a non-violent social, political and ecclesial form of life.

The Form of Life

Giorgio Agamben has indicated a novelty among the early Franciscans, in that they are committed not to a Rule, but to 'form of life'. Agamben has argued that what is most significant about the early Franciscan movement is that the 'Friar Minor does not obey the rule, but live it – with an even more extreme reversal, it is the life that is to be applied to the norm and not the norm to life'.[898] Agamben understands this to mean a radical dislocation of ethics and politics from the sphere of action to that of 'form of life'. The *forma vitae* comes first and only with difficulty is it translated into coherent, juridical terms. These terms or rules were (originally) always themselves subject to the form, which is prior. Agamben asserts that the earliest commentary on the Franciscan *Rule*, the *Expositio quatuor magistrorum*, notes that among early Franciscans, the normal state of living is governed by the *vita* and exceptions are governed by the Rule: thus, the friars are committed to a form of life (in their case one still developing around their core values), not to the traditional practice of observing Rule. Agamben observes that the relationship between rule and life is at the heart of the 'novelty and inadequacy of the Franciscan movement – its extraordinary success and its foreseeable failure […]'[899]

Agamben emphasizes the discontinuous aspect of the early Franciscan social and religious project: 'the attempt to realize a human life and practice absolutely outside the determination of the law'.[900] Agamben goes beyond the reductive understanding of voluntary poverty found in Hamilton and Baxter Wolf. Poverty is part of the idiom of withdrawal from 'the law', since the law regulates the systems of appropriation (but not the natural right of use) of material goods. The friars renounced property and 'every faculty of appropriating', but not the natural right of use, which is, in so far as it is a natural right,

[898] Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Forms-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013) p. 61.
[899] Ibid, p. 109.
[900] Ibid, p. 111.

unrenounceable'.[901] It is Agamben's contention that with Francis and the early friars the *forma vitae* (life according to the form of the Holy Gospel) 'is situated on a level that is so distinct from that of the life according to the form of the holy Roman Church that it cannot enter into conflict with it'.[902] Being a particular Gospel form of life, it escapes a rivalrous or antagonistic relationship with the form of the Roman Church, which is related to material and temporal goods by law.[903] Agamben, therefore, asserts a positive social and political novelty in early Franciscanism; an attempt to live *sine proprio*. Living 'without anything of one's own' was (counterintuitively) a positive form of life, in that it was directed to evangelical perfection, beyond the limits of positive law.

Among the social and ecclesial realities of the late medieval period the Franciscan *forma vitae* has continuous and discontinuous elements, and along with Le Goff and Agamben, I have emphasized the discontinuity. It is possible to describe the early Franciscans as an instance of the radical reworking of social relations, around a specific form of life. This *forma vitae* reframes voluntary poverty as a positive ethic of gift, lived within an ongoing commitment to penance, i.e., the renunciation of conflictual mimetic desire. This defines the social reality of *fraternitas*. While Agamben and Le Goff have addressed the idiomatic novelty in terms of vocabulary and conceptuality, David Flood O.F.M., gives an account of how this form of life was radically dependant on the exigencies of daily labour. I will argue that Flood's account of the early Franciscan movement supports my assertion that it represents a remarkable instance of non-violent practice 'taking political, collective form'.

Early Franciscans and Daily Labour

David Flood: Preliminary remarks

[901] Ibid, p. 115.
[902] Ibid, p. 122.
[903] By law, i.e., under the conditions which regulate and limit appropriation, thus from within the 'sacrificial' system. Agamben notes that the early Franciscans were committed to a sustained reflection on their relation to temporal things, whether 'ownership', position, usufruct or simple use. p. 124.

A significant effort to ground this conceptual and idiomatic novelty in its historical context has been undertaken by the Franciscan historian David Flood, O.F.M.[904] Flood's particular contribution has been his efforts to retrieve and clarify the social and political values which found expression in the *Early Rule* and in the writings of Saint Francis. Flood has attempted to situate Francis exclusively in the context of the early Franciscan movement retrieving him, as far as possible, from later representations which tend to minimize the social history in favour of the romantic/heroic and exemplary Francis.[905] Franciscan history begins, as Francis himself asserted in his *Testament*, 'after the Lord gave me some brothers'.[906] Flood notes that to 'focus on Francis as the unique and sole source of Franciscan inspiration and history is to miss the point of these words of Francis, as well as the evidence of the text of the Early Rule'.[907] Flood's work on the *Early Rule* reveals a common commitment and purpose, emerging from a shared Gospel form of life; not merely the dictation of moral instruction from a founder to his disciples, but a genuinely shared enterprise. The brothers together, and not merely Francis, are the subjects of Franciscan history.

Flood has also insisted on characterizing the early Franciscan movement as a religiously inspired ecclesial movement which is also, and essentially, a *social* reality. In situating Francis within the movement – not outside or above it – as in romantic interpretations, Flood affirms early Franciscanism's unique social and political significance. Flood asserts that the early Franciscans 'lived an alternative economic reality by working to supply the needs of the day for themselves and lepers and the sick'.[908] According to Flood, an early Franciscan economy emerged in contrast to (but not in competition with) the emerging economy of the Assisi *commune*. Significantly, Flood interprets Franciscan poverty not as an

[904] David Flood's bibliography numbers 'more than fifty entries and includes a significant number of critical text editions, each of which is recognized as a quality example of medieval text editing'. Cf. Michael W. Blastic O.F.M. Conv., 'David E. Flood, OFM., 17th Recipient of the Franciscan Institute Medal' in *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 63 (2005) pp. 28-34. St. Bonaventure University Press, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41975342.
[905] Medieval Franciscan narratives were less interested in the *facts* of Saint Francis's life than in representing Francis as the model or interpretative key of their particular social and religious aims. Later romantic interpretations were no less anachronistic. They produced histories which frequently obscured the fact that Francis was himself a Franciscan. Cf. Thompson, p. 154.
[906] Francis of Assisi, *The Testament, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 124.
[907] Blastic, *Franciscan Studies*, p. 31.
[908] Ibid, p. 32.

ascetical practice but, in line with Kinsella, as a concrete social stance towards wealth and power and the social order which creates and contains violence. [909]

In asserting the centrality of the social dynamic in early Franciscanism, Flood adopts a questioning attitude to what is generically called 'Franciscan spirituality'. In Flood's view Franciscan spirituality has tended to obscure and dissolve the social dimension which was fundamental to the early Franciscan *forma vitae*. As the early Franciscan movement lost touch with its origins in local labour and drifted into high status roles within Church and society, the spiritual and mystical significance of poverty and minority were accentuated, if not fetishized. While Flood insists on the religious nature of the early Franciscan movement and the role of graced conversion, he asserts that the early Franciscan writings employ 'new categories of spiritual practice – the realm of politics and economics, social structures and institutional reform'.[910] Flood's reading of the early Franciscan writings has helped to relocate these founding texts in a social and economic consciousness aligned with the needs of the poor and marginalised. If what I have described as (mimetic) 'conversion intelligence' is, in fact, prior to the dominant hagiographical and romantic interpretations of early Franciscanism, Flood's work on the largely forgotten category of Franciscan labour is an essential piece of evidence.

Flood argues that the writings of Saint Francis reveal not so much the 'behavioural patterns of a religious institution', or a spiritual master instructing his disciples.[911] Rather, the *Early Rule* is Francis's invitation to the brothers to reflect on their own shared experience as brothers and labourers, living outside the established systems of social and economic power. In this respect Flood is in agreement with Agamben who notes that the lines in the *Early Rule*: 'the things which are written in this life' (*quae in ista vita scripta sunt*) represent not a set of norms imposed on the friars, but a *forma vitae*. Agamben affirms that 'precisely what was written here was a life and not a rule, a form of life and not a code of norms and precepts, the text itself can be defined as "life"'.[912] In the writings of Saint Francis, the Founder speaks in his own voice, chiefly to articulate and recommend *a way of life*, not his own spiritual

[909] Cf. My discussion of Kinsella, chapter five.
[910] Blastic p. 33.
[911] Ibid.
[912] Cf. Agamben, p. 99.

teaching. At the conclusion of the *Early Rule*, Francis asks the brothers 'to learn and frequently call to mind the tenor and sense of what has been written in this life'.[913] In speaking of the *tenor and sense* of the life, Francis is inviting commitment to a dynamic social and political reality, not the observance of religious precepts.[914]

It is the 'tenor and sense' of the life which is most important and, in this regard, Francis asks God to bless those who 'teach, retain, remember, and put into practice' their common memory, not merely observe religious rules or ascetical practices.[915] In other words, the *forma vitae* cannot be deduced from a series of rules and ascetical practices; it is not a religious rule imposed on life, but a form of life which the brothers together have practiced and benefited from. For Flood, the 'tenor and sense' of this form of life is something experienced in the context of daily labour. It is in the context of daily work that the friars enact the 'intelligence of the victim', redefining work in a manner calculated to avoid rivalry, exclusion and conflict.

David Flood's Historical Criticism: Aims and Methodology

The Importance of Daily Labour

Flood studied with Franciscan historian Kajetan Esser, O.F.M. (1913-1978) at Mönchengladbach, Germany between 1961-1965. Esser's distinguished career in early Franciscan history spanned several decades and culminated in the critical edition of the writings of Saint Francis which was published in 1976 (*Die Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi, Neue textkritische Edition*). Esser's work on the writings of Francis demonstrated what Dalarun considers 'an excessive distrust of the legends of Francis'.[916] Flood demonstrates a similar distrust of the legends.[917] Esser's critical work on the writings of Saint Francis has

[913] *Early Rule, FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 86.
[914] Cf. Blastic, p. 33.
[915] Cf. *Early Rule, FA:ED,* (Vol 1) p. 86.
[916] Dalarun, p. 43.
[917] Flood's stance towards the legends is not dissimilar to Girard's view of 'archaic myth'. Flood assumes in the *legendae* strata of mis-remembering. In contrast, the early Franciscan writings, such as the *Early Rule* are trustworthy expressions of an emerging *forma vitae*. 'In our study of the Early Rule, we have acquired knowledge that does not depend on testimony'. The *Early Rule* is characterized by Flood as 'empirical' knowledge, an authentic self-description of the values and dynamics of early Franciscan life as it took shape between 1209-1221. The legends, even the earliest, date from an historical context in which the legacy of

achieved what Sabatier and earlier Franciscan historians had hoped were possible; a Franciscan histography which treated the writings of Saint Francis as the primary and authoritative source of Francis's life, and consigned the narratives (*legendae*) to the Franciscan debates which followed the canonization of Saint Francis in 1228.[918] Flood takes issue with Esser's critical assessments occasionally, specifically on the *Rule*.[919] Nevertheless, he is committed to Esser's project of developing a critical history based on the writings of Saint Francis and is highly suspicious of the narrative tradition.[920]

Flood identifies with what E. P. Thompson termed 'history from below'.[921] Flood has applied the 'history from below' approach to the early Franciscan movement, reclaiming the neglected tradition of early Franciscan labour by means of a careful reading of texts and reference to social histories of the late Middle Ages.[922] Flood advocates reading the early Franciscan writings, which allude to the practice of work, in the context of a 'thick description' or 'detailed contextualization' of social history. Flood argues that the social context of daily work offers a compelling hermeneutic key to the written history of Francis and the early movement. The *Early Rule* functions as a 'manifesto' of the emerging Franciscan movement

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Francis is in dispute. The information contained in the narratives is already distilled through 'an emerging clerical institution': Cf. Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 14 and p. 83. Whatever their value, Flood insists 'We do not know what events lay behind a narrative, nor do we know the phases of its tradition, especially if it belongs to a compilation'. Cf. Flood, 'Franciscans at Work', *Franciscans Studies*, Vol. 59, (2001) p. 31, note 26.

[918] Flood, *Work for Justice*, p. 16, note 43.

[919] Flood notes that Esser was committed to defending the *Later Rule* as expressing the spirit of the *Early Rule*. This was, in Flood's view, motivated by Esser's visceral opposition to Sabatier's characterization of the *Later Rule* as an ecclesial/papal imposition on Francis and the Order; an imposition which effectively halted their project of Gospel renewal. Central to Flood's argument is the contention that on the matter of work at least, the *Later Rule* expunged the spirit, if not the letter of the *Early Rule*.

[920] Flood distinguishes two types of Franciscan history: That which originated in the late nineteenth century with the 'Franciscan Question' and is compelled to rely on the narratives, which Flood characterizes as more 'literary'; and that which dates from after the Second World War and is associated with the critical study of the writings of Saint Francis (notable historians of this 'school' were Sophronius Clasen, Théophile Desbonnets, Stanislao da Compagnola, Kajetan Esser and Flood himself). Esser and his school is more properly 'historical' in Flood's estimation. Cf. David Flood, 'Francis of Assisi, History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents', (Review) in *Catholic Historical Review*, 90, 4, (October 2004) 764-65 (p. 765). www.jstor.org/stable/25026725.

[921] Cf. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Publishing, 2013) [originally, 1963]. The term, popularized by Thompson, indicates social history written from the perspective of groups usually ignored or neglected by historians and chroniclers.

[922] Augustine Thompson regards Flood as one of the two great leaders of Francis studies in the 1960s, 1970s (along with Théophile Desbonnets). Nevertheless, Thompson suggests that Flood's critical work has ideological concerns and that Flood's *Frere François et le Mouvement Franciscain* (1983) 'read Francis through the lens of Liberation Theology'. Thompson, p. 159.

not simply another 'Religious rule'. Flood reads in the *Early Rule* a commitment to daily labour and, indeed, to a unique conception of work. This commitment remains outside of the acquisitive and competitive dynamics of the Assisi *commune*.[923] The manifest absence of a detailed account of Franciscan labour in the *legendae* indicates, for Flood, a determined retreat back into socially secure systems within Church and society. According to Flood, the early Franciscan social reality was oriented to creating and maintaining peaceful relations and, as an essential component of peace-making, was committed to the just redistribution of material goods.[924] Flood's historical project involves articulating the voice of the working brothers (including Francis, the worker) in the writings of Francis of Assisi.

An example of Flood's approach is his critique of Saint Bonaventure's treatment of work in the life of Francis. In the *Legenda Maior*, Bonaventure characterised Francis's work in repairing churches as a purely moral exercise, 'to prevent his body from becoming sluggish with laziness'.[925] Flood notes that in Bonaventure's writings Francis 'did not work save occasionally but gave his life to preaching'.[926] In Flood's estimation, Bonaventure's characterization of Francis as a preacher, whose relationship to manual work was determined by merely moral and ascetical considerations, is evidence of a wider debate on the character of work in the mid-late thirteenth century Order. By the late thirteenth century, we can detect only the dominant, clerical position of this argument, as the working brothers and their shared memory had become increasingly marginalized.

That Bonaventure addressed the question of whether Francis worked indicates to Flood that in the mid to late thirteenth century there were still friars who recalled the fundamental role of labour in the early Franciscan Order and contested its increasing marginalization in official narratives of Saint Francis. Flood's historical criticism of the early Franciscan movement is informed by his assertion that work is always a social act and, as such, communicates meaning and social values. On the evidence of the *Early Rule* and other

[923] Cf. Flood, 'Franciscans at Work', p. 33, n. 30.
[924] Cf. Ibid, pp. 55-58.
[925] *Legenda Maior, FA:ED* (Vol 2), p. 540.
[926] David Flood, 'Franciscans At Work', *Franciscan Studies*, Vol 59 (2001) p. 43. Flood cites C. Wenin, 'Saint Bonaventure et le travail manuel' in J. Hamesse, ed. *Le travail au moyen âge* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), pp. 141-155., on Saint Francis's absence from the world of manual labour.

early Franciscan writings, primitive Franciscan communities had formed their communal identities within the social laboratory of everyday labour.[927] Later attempts to deduce 'freestanding' spiritual and moral principles from these texts, diminishing or avoiding the social character of work, produced a flawed Franciscan history.

Apart from the historically contested and polemical nature of many of the early Franciscan narratives Flood observes an absence of what we might expect to find: accounts of friars involved in daily labour. The *legenda* known as *The Anonymous of Perugia* notes that the brothers worked every day with their hands.[928] This is a rare admission of Franciscan daily labour in an early narrative source; a source which situates Francis as a brother among the brothers and not yet the great exemplar of most *legendae*. Nevertheless, *The Anonymous of Perugia* is effectively an apologia for the increasingly clericalized Order of the mid to late thirteenth century. While the author emphasises the social exclusion of the early community, and their pattern of daily work, neither social exclusion nor daily work are idealized or presented as constitutive of Franciscan living. Indeed, the message of *The Anonymous of Perugia* is that the origins of the Order, characterised by hardship, exclusion, and folly were not betrayed, but perfected, as the movement gradually became a formal and clericalized religious Order.[929] The narratives are thus removed from the social and religious context of the early writings, such as the *Early Rule* and, while containing fascinating details of early Franciscan life, they generally describe work in terms of moral virtue and not social action. They represent a rupture with the form of life expressed in the *Early Rule*. For Flood the early Franciscan writings uniquely locate Francis, speaking to the brothers *as a brother*, from within the Franciscan *forma vitae*.

The Early Franciscan Idiom: Living and Working in the World

Flood draws attention to Francis's *Later Admonition and Exhortation* (c. 1220). Traditionally read as a general, pastoral letter to 'all the faithful', the text is now commonly understood

[927] Flood is referring to what are commonly called the authentic writings of Saint Francis. These writings are neither autobiographical or purely 'directional' works of Saint Francis; rather they represent the core values and aims of the early brotherhood as it emerged. Francis speaks in his own voice, but he is still speaking as a 'brother among brothers'.
[928] *Anonymous of Perugia, FA:ED*, (Vol 2) p. 46.
[929] Cf. Dalarun, p. 189.

to be a *commonitorium*; a work reminding and encouraging a specific group of earlier undertakings and commitments.[930] Those addressed by Francis in the *commonitorium* include men and women, (*illi et illae*), and since it is a message of *recall and exhortation*, the recipients are likely to have encountered the brothers in the context of their daily labour. The *commonitorium* invites the brother's fellow workers to recall the distinctive spirituality which found expression in their daily labour.[931] Flood insists that 'the early writings simply encompass too much experience and too developed a linguistic culture' to be the invention of one man.[932] The vocabulary developed as the brother's *forma vitae* matured within the local economy of day labouring, and in the context of emerging guilds and worker's corporations.

Flood identifies the *Early Rule*, the *Admonition and Exhortation*, the *Admonitions* and *A Salutation of the Virtues* as early Franciscan texts which bear witness to the *forma vitae* by use of a distinctive vocabulary.[933] According to Flood, these and others texts invited those who undertook to live the *forma vitae* to recall and remember why and how they 'left the world'.[934] Flood argues that, taken together, the texts form a definite social and economic alternative to both the feudal social order and merchant class interests, expressed in the contemporary social contracts, the charters of 1203 and 1210.[935] To 'leave the world' is to withdraw from the social and economic model of the charters of 1203 and 1210; something the Church was not prepared to do, since it was so much a part of those very systems. Flood maintains that the early Franciscan vocabulary was not simply borrowed from the world of labour, but was crafted and developed by brothers who were,

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[930] Cf. *Later Admonition and Exhortation, FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 45, note a.

[931] Flood understands the *Later Admonition and Exhortation* (which he refers to as the *Message of Recall and Admonition*) as a critique of work *as appropriation*. The *commune* of Assisi issued charters in 1203 and 1210 which invited the citizens to work for the interests of the city, principally the property-holders. Flood interprets the *Admonition and Exhortation* as the response of early Franciscans and their co-workers to the charter of 1210. The early Franciscan movement insisted on work as *service*, renounced the property and wage economy in favour of distributive justice and developed a spirituality indistinguishable from their patterns of working. Cf. David Flood, 'Poverty and the Gospel', pp. 1-15. For the Assisi Charter 1210, cf. A. Bartoli Langeli 'La realtà sociale assisana e il patto del 1210' in *Assisi al tempo di san Francesco*, Assisi 1978, pp. 271-336. For an evaluation of the economic and social agenda of the Italian *commune*, cf. J. K. Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy: The Evolution of the Civil Life 1000-1350* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

[932] David Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 73.

[933] Cf. *FA:ED* (Vol 1) pp. 63, 45, 128, 164.

[934] Francis wrote of having 'left the world' in his *Testament*, cf. *FA:ED* (Vol 1), p. 124. The theme is present in chapter XXII of the *Early Rule*, cf. ibid, p. 81 and in *A Salutation of the Virtues*, ibid, p. 165.

[935] Flood discusses the Assisi charters of 1203 and 1210 in 'Franciscans at Work', pp. 34-36.

in every respect, workers, *laborantes*. It was in the field of work that the early Franciscans modelled a non-rivalrous and non-acquisitive ethic.

It is axiomatic for Flood that words and phrases which appear frequently in late medieval spiritual works (e.g., *carnaliter* and *spiritualiter*), have a specific meaning in early Franciscan idiom and represent a distinct Franciscan social and religious consciousness.[936] The characteristic bond between work and the early Franciscan spiritual programme was gradually abandoned, as the later Franciscan documents testify. Steven Epistein's work on labour in medieval Europe has also indicated a conspicuous absence of historical accounts of work in the late Middle Ages.

In his examination of Frederic Tubach's index of medieval sermon exempla, Epstein notes an absence of stories about guilds, artisans or journeymen. This absence is striking since a considerable number of the clerics preaching the exempla were the sons of merchants and artisans. Epstein concludes: 'This gap of information, or comprehension, and whatever caused it of course constitute an implicit attitude about work and the people who lived by it'.[937] In the context of the late Middle Ages daily labour and reflection on the purpose and aims of labour is discreet or absent. The friars involved in labour have left little indication of how their working lives formed their social and religious lives. It is evident that when official Franciscan history begins to take narrative form the role of daily labour was being marginalised in favour of preaching and pastoral work in the Church, and this signals an accommodation with the systems of power and status which Francis and the brothers had attempted to leave.

The Sources of Early Franciscan Life

[936] It is reasonable to assert that what constitutes 'of the flesh' and 'of the spirit' in an enclosed monastic context is understood differently in the context of brothers engaged in daily labour, actively avoiding reintegration into the social and economic systems of exclusion. Flood writes: 'Francis and his brothers wrested their linguistic creation from the age's culture and broke society's control over them. Then they used it to deepen their sense of the Spirit in their lives'. 'The early brothers talked one another into the common language they needed to engage in post-conventional action, to use Habermas's terms, or to fashion a new Christian language in the early thirteenth century'. David Flood, O.F.M., 'What is a Franciscan? Constituting the Franciscan Subject' in *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 63 (2005) p. 47. https://www.jstor.ord/stable41975343

[937] Epstein, p. 183. Cited in Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 157, note 211.

Beginning with his doctoral work on the *Early Rule*, Flood has argued that the *Regula non Bullata* of 1221 is structured around three foundational chapters: Chapters I, VII and XIV. According to Flood, these three chapters are indicative of the origins and core values of the early Franciscan movement. Of the twenty-four chapters in the *Rule*, Chapters XVIII-XXI were added after the fourth Lateran council of November 1215. Chapters IV-VI were inserted into the text and revised in 1217-18. The first chapter is programmatic and describes the origins of the brotherhood. Chapter VII explores the practical questions of how the brothers would provide for themselves (The manner of serving and working). Chapter XIV describes how the brothers 'should go through the world'.[938] The *Early Rule* is witness to how the *forma vitae* developed between 1209 and 1221 and the core of the text records the decision of the brothers to 'leave the world', a traditional religious motif, radically redefined in light of the social and political aims of the early Franciscans.

The brothers engaged in daily labour in the local economy as *subditi*, i.e., subject to others. Having decided to withdraw from familial and social systems and their web of obligations, the brothers were careful not to be drawn back into those structures through work: 'none of the brothers may be treasurers or overseers in any of those places where they are staying to serve or work among others.'[939] The core value of withdrawing from the dominant social, economic and ecclesial systems was given a definite purpose in Chapter XIV: the brothers were to avoid appropriating material goods, they were to observe the Gospel counsel to make peace and they were admonished not to resist anyone evil; 'Let them give to all who ask of them and whoever takes what is theirs, let them not seek to take it back'.[940] Flood takes these three chapters to be the core of the 1209 *Rule* and in its 1221 form he considers it equivalent with the *forma vitae*.[941] Even in its 1221 form, the *Rule* is

[938] Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 7.
[939] *Early Rule VII, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 68
[940] *Early Rule XIV, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 73.
[941] Flood insists on the term *vita*, or *forma vitae.* The traditional religious motif of 'following the Gospel' is unhelpful in reconstructing early Franciscan history and, as Flood notes, 'perfectly vacuous'. To reiterate that Francis and the early brothers 'followed the Gospel' further obscures their social and religious innovation. They followed the *forma vitae* or *vita* which is frequently alluded to in the early writings. This way of Gospel living was both a determined withdrawal from the dominant social systems and a specific ethical engagement with labour, such that they refused payment in coin and promotion into social and economic hierarchies. They worked to provide for their needs and the needs of those who were unable to provide for themselves. They understood work as a means of social justice or distributive justice. Cf. David Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 20 and p. 4.

neither 'expository' or 'narrational', but 'directional', expressing a common way of life which has unfolded over time, in the course of a unique experiment in social, religious, and economic practice.[942]

The *Early Rule* is a significant text since it can be read as an 'ongoing event, an emergent manifesto'.[943] By comparison with the juridically refined *Later Rule* of 1223, it bears witness to the accumulated wisdom of the brothers as they formed their way of life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[944]

The Early Franciscan Life: Indications from the Early Rule and Early Franciscan Writings

The *Early Rule*, Chapter VII has specific indications on the manner of Franciscan working:

> None of the brothers may be treasurers or overseers in any of those places where they are staying to serve or work among others. They may not be in charge in the houses in which they serve nor accept any office which would generate scandal or be harmful to their souls. Let them instead, be the lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house.[945]

Chapter VII effectively prohibits the seeking or acceptance of promotion to higher status work within the local economy.[946] Roles of responsibility within the local economy, served to subvert the Franciscan view of work as *service*, in favour of work as a means of entry to social and economic hierarchies. According to Flood, the labouring friars 'worked to produce

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[942] Cf. Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 8, note 9.

[943] Ibid, p. 12.

[944] The *Early Rule* with its emphasis on daily work took on a more juridical character in its 1223 form. Flood argues that the voice of Francis on work appears forcefully in chapter VI of the *Later Rule*, and this chapter can be best understood as a continuation of the *Early Rule* work ethic, cf. Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Rule and Life*, p. 17. In the *Testament* (1226), Francis takes the opportunity to address the inconsistencies of the 1223 *Rule,* arising out of its ambiguous message on work. In forceful terms work is presented as constitutive of the Franciscan way of life: 'And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn […]' Units 20-21 of the *Testament* became increasingly problematic for the clerical friars who by 1226 were redefining the role of the movement and were no longer engaged in manual labour. It fell to Pope Gregory IX (who had helped draft the *Rule* of 1223) to ease their consciences. He declared that Saint Francis had no authority in the *Testament* to impose on the friars anything in addition to the Rule: '*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*' ('What touches all must be dealt with and approved by all'). (Gregory IX, *Quo elongati*, 1230). Cf. Desbonnets, pp. 110-11.

[945] *Early Rule, VII, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 68.

[946] Flood notes the roles of *camerarius, cancellarius, praefectus*, are rejected in the Early Rule, since they are 'roles of responsibility and social consequence' incompatible with the *forma vitae*. Flood, 'Franciscans at Work', p. 31.

the common product, without claiming any share thereof'.[947] Flood understands the term *subditi omnibus*, as signifying the friar's entire economic outlook. Work was directed towards a just distribution of the material goods produced by labour, and the friars renounced all claim on the goods themselves, since to do so would be to re-enter the systems of ownership and appropriation. This renunciation reframes labour as an essential social activity, but not essentially linked to acquisition or appropriation. In Chapter VII of the *Early Rule* the paradox of the early Franciscan economy comes into focus; 'For their work they can receive whatever is necessary, excepting money […] And it is lawful for them to have the tools and instruments suitable for their trades'.[948]

The Prohibition of Coin and 'Referring all good to God Most High'

The friar's economic agency is affirmed in the local labour market (tools and instruments are explicitly permitted) but they refuse incorporation into the systems of appropriation (coin is prohibited) which have hitherto determined how the economy develops and excludes. Todeschini's view, noted in chapter five, is that the prohibition of coin is more than a form of spiritual asceticism for Francis. Narrative accounts of an extreme rejection of coin indicate for Todeschini Francis's visceral recognition of the role of coin in the systems of exclusion.[949] Physical separation from money was more important than using it in acceptable ways.[950] It is worth repeating here Todeschini's view that Francis's rejection of the coin economy was part of a much wider project of inclusion and reintegration of those parts of society which were socially, religiously and economically marginalised:

> Some fundamental ideas strongly emerged: the refusal to touch money, the refusal to consider property as the fundamental condition for belonging to the human family, the importance attributed to alms and work as ways to earn a living, the search for contact with those usually considered outside of the sphere of human society, i.e., animals, lepers, wanderers, criminals, mendicants, the poor and farmers.[951]

[947] Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Life and Rule*, p. 37.
[948] *Early Rule* VII, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 69
[949] Cf. Celano, *First Life*, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 190.
[950] Cf. note 808, above.
[951] Note 809, above.

From the time of the *First Rule* (1209-1221) a Franciscan friar was recognizable by an itinerant life, 'ragged appearance and clothes, manual work as scullery-man and mason, and begging without shame'.[952] Flood adds to this description, insisting that the brothers 'worked according to their notion of work as service. They did not simply add to the sum of the social product and take their wages; they had the welfare of others foremost in mind'.[953] The early brothers modelled a fraternal, non-acquisitive, non-competitive work ethic, which kept them outside the social systems of competition and exclusion. Todeschini credits Francis and the early brothers with the creation of an 'elsewhere' where money didn't provide the means of communication and did not 'explain or schematize reality'.[954] The renunciation of coin created an immediate relationship with the goods of the earth: Todeschini notes that 19th-20th century romantic characterizations of nature, projected onto Saint Francis and the friars are 'improbable' and 'anachronistic'. Creation was always associated with the elements necessary for living, especially in the context of labour outside a coin economy.[955]

In Chapter XVII of the *Early Rule* the brothers are encouraged to 'refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High' (*bona Deo reddere*).[956] Flood reads this chapter as programmatic of the Franciscan movement, since it deals with 'good works and deeds' being 'returned' or 'referred' to God, the source of all good things. This 'return' is made primarily by undertaking work as service. '*Servi*' and '*servire*' are key words in the early Franciscan vocabulary which Flood reads in opposition to *officium*, the service which operated in the feudal system and was characterised by explicit and implicit obligations. [957]

[952] Todeschini, pp. 61-62.
[953] Flood, *Francis of Assisi's Life and Rule*, p. 39.
[954] Todeschini, p. 64.
[955] Ibid, p. 66.
[956] The verb *reddere* occurs eighteen times in the writings of Saint Francis. It is used by Saint Francis in the context of giving back objects or goods received and to give back or return/render praise to God. The use of *reddere* (*tibi reddamus, reddant*, etc.) in connection with restoring praise and honour to God is not found in the New Testament and is considered an innovation of Saint Francis. God is not understood to be the recipient in relation to human agency, nor does God lose God's honour or glory. God has first bestowed respect and honour on human beings, 'giving them many good things and allowing them to say many good words and do many good deeds.' Cf. Edith van den Goorbergh, O.S.C. and Theodore Zweerman, O.F.M., *Respectfully Yours: Signed and Sealed, Francis of Assisi: Aspects of His Authorship and Focuses of His Spirituality*, edited by Elise Saggau, O.S.F., and Paul Sansone (New York: St. Bonaventure University, 2001). P. 117. For an evaluation of Saint Francis's use of *reddere,* cf van den Goorbergh and Zweerman pp. 114-126.
[957] Cf. Flood, 'The Early Franciscan Penitents', *The Cord*, (2016), 64, 4. 313-330.

By becoming *servi inutile* ('useless' in terms of the systems of appropriation and status) the early Franciscans were committed to labour as a means of reordering social relations and redistributing the goods of creation. Work, defined as *servus/servire* became a constitutive form of Franciscan social and political action. Wealth, represented in coin, was directed towards hoarding and appropriation and thus 'opposed to the common welfare, which was understood as the perpetual redistribution of resources or, rather, as a continuous and reciprocal exchange of favours, donations and alms'.[958] The renunciation of coin and the social advantages of promotion (contra, '*subditi omnibus'*) necessitated a continuous reflection, by the friars, upon the valid use of goods and required the establishing of networks of social support among workers, friars, and those in need of alms. Taken together, this was the Franciscan economic programme.

Sharing in common the 'intelligence of the victim', the voluntarily poor friars 'approached the wealthy world they had previously abandoned and saw it again with the eyes of poor people, as a world of objects, materials and activities whose overall social functionality was important to understand'.[959] Todeschini describes the early Franciscan economy as a critique on the fixed and involuntary nature of wealth in society. Wealth, like poverty had to be voluntary in order to be good. Riches required a 'flexible intentionality' which saw goods distributed according to need and changing circumstances. From this perspective every 'automatic patrimonial holding on to goods, starting with monetary hoarding, appeared illegal, sinful and, at the same time, senseless'.[960] While the prohibition on coin exchange was a determined strategy of the early Franciscan 'exodus', it was already intuited in other religious movements. [961] Ironically, by imposing a strict prohibition of the handling of coin, Francis had invested coin with the fascinating status of the sacred. Evidently, in frequently comparing coin to dung, dust, flies and stones Francis and the

[958] Todeschini, p. 73.
[959] Ibid, p. 90.
[960] Ibid.
[961] Cf. Peter Damian in his *Epistola a Cadalo*, *Letter 89* in Todeschini, pp. 62-63. 'You have fortified towns behind you, armed with gold rather than with steel, and thus money pours forth from your purses like swords drawn from their scabbards. […] For with a golden fist, the farmers say, you can break through a wall of iron. […] but your money serves to destroy the foundation of the Christian faith and of the Holy Church entirely'. Todeschini observes that the danger of coin, in the religious perspective of the late Middle Ages, 'consisted of the total absorption of a system of social and religious values […] into the metallic nature of money, understood as a destructive war arsenal'. Cf. Todeschini, pp. 62-63.

brothers sought to empty coin of any such fascination.[962] Nevertheless, being something prohibited, coin itself became not merely a token of the useless and excluding social systems abandoned by the friars. It was treated as something fascinating, 'sacred' even, only be accessed through intermediaries.[963]

The *Early Rule*, according to Flood's analysis, is only superficially a traditional religious rule. It represents the early Franciscan covenant or manifesto, grounded in their daily experience of work. Since it represents the complex coordinates of an exodus from systems defined by rivalry and exclusion, the terms used in the *Early Rule* invite, at a minimum, a realignment proximate to the movement's core values and aims. It is prudent, given Flood's analysis, to extend to such terms as 'fleshly' or 'spiritual' (*carnaliter* and *spiritualiter*) a meaning which reflects not ascetic concerns of monastic piety, but the social and religious concerns of Christian workers in a rapidly changing economy. Those who live in and by the systems of competition, appropriation, and rivalry are living *carnaliter*; and those who have fled the dominant economic systems to live and work fraternally, are living *spiritualiter*. Those who have been led by the Spirit out of the systems of rivalry and exclusion 'refer all good to God'. Living *spiritualiter* indicates a social order emerging from the 'intelligence of the victim'. To live carnally is to continue forming identities over and against others competitively and antagonistically.

Flood maintains that a distinct vocabulary is the product of a social group articulating the insights of their shared conversion experiences, in the context of daily work, not simply restating traditional terms from within the seclusion of enclosed religious life. In the *Admonitions*, specifically *Admonition* V, Francis describes the excellence in which human beings were formed, with respect to other creatures.[964] However, 'possessing all knowledge', interpreting 'every kind of language', securitizing 'heavenly matters with skill', wealth and handsome appearance, when employed for one's own advancement and not referred to God, are the basis of a life of the flesh. These goods become the source of boasts, envy and conflict. Goods which are not 'referred back to God', through a continuous

[962] Cf. *Early Rule*, *FA:ED*, (Vol 1) p. 70.
[963] Cf. Todeschini, pp. 117-120.
[964] *Admonition V, FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 131.

economy of service and gift, are appropriated, hoarded, and becomes the source of rivalry and conflict.

Pauperes or Fratres? Franciscan Social Self-understanding

Chapters IX and XVII of the *Early Rule* indicate the role of distributive justice within the brotherhood. When the brothers cannot secure by labour their needs (either because their fellow workers/employers refuse to offer them just payment, or because their work is among lepers and the poor who cannot reimburse them) they are instructed to beg alms. Flood insists that the early friars were not *pauperes* (indigent, beggars) and referred to themselves not as *pauperes* but as *fratres*. In Chapter VII of the *Early Rule*, Francis instructs the brothers in cases of necessity to beg alms as do other brothers. Flood takes issue with Esser for translating the text "*alii pauperes*", rather than "*alii fratres*". Flood argues for a manuscript tradition which designates *fratres*. Flood insists that, from the beginning, the movement's self-understanding was not as *pauperes* but as worker-brothers, economic agents.[965]

The early Franciscans did not merely join the ranks of the involuntary poor, a group who were, in Flood's estimation socially invisible. Instead of disappearing into the ranks of the *pauperes*, they took on economic agency in a manner which questioned the acquisitive and exclusive economies of the late Middle Ages. They provided a positive social and political alternative to systems of exclusion. The brothers who begged were those whose work of service was in poorhouses '*eleemosynae'* (*Early Rule* VIII) and among lepers. By seeking alms these brothers were not claiming charity but including the marginalised and the leper in their wider economic activity and insisting that the economic systems which had excluded them were duty bound to contribute to their needs. The brothers worked on behalf of the community among those who were effectively excluded by the community's systems, economic and political.[966]

[965] Cf. Flood, 'Poverty and Gospel' in *Franciscan Studies*, 64, Vita Evangelica: Essays in Honor of Margaret Carney, O.S.F., (2006) https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40092595 1-15 (p. 2).
[966] Cf. Flood, 'Franciscans at Work', p. 38.

Flood makes the counterintuitive claim that Francis and the early brothers were not poor. Francis and the brothers regularly fasted (*Early Rule* III), which indicates the community were not in a constant state of want. As workers they benefited from the local economy, within the boundaries of their *forma vitae*. By refusing to receive payment in coin and refusing to take promotion, they avoided two routes back into the systems of rivalry and exclusion. Their work was rewarded by a share in the material goods produced, which they willingly distributed among themselves and among the poor whom they served. Flood asserts that the brothers enjoyed both material sufficiency and meaningful association, assets which the poor do not enjoy.[967] If the materially poor (*pauperes*) were socially invisible and marginalised, the early Franciscan communities were creatively present in the social and economic reality of Assisi and their solidarity with the labouring people produced much goodwill.[968]

Living *subditi omnibus*, *spiritualiter*, *sine proprio*, and as *fratres,* the early friars marked out an alternative, non-rivalrous, social and political reality. This way of life was consciously non-confrontational: The brothers were reminded not to say or do evil to another, not to exert power or to control one another; (*Early Rule* V), to revile no one, nor grumble or detract from another, nor judge or condemn another; (*Early Rule* XI). Their *forma vitae* was not a competing value within the social systems of power and exclusion, but a graced exodus from these systems.

Conclusion

Superficially, a negative programme of withdrawal and abnegation, the early Franciscan *forma vitae* represents a coherent, non-violent ethic, 'taking collective and political form'. The abnegation was motivated by Christ's example and was directed towards peaceful

[967] Ibid, p. 9.

[968] Jordan of Giano's *Chronicle* describes the remarkable support the friars received from the people of Assisi when they held the 'Chapter of Mats' in 1221: 'I have never seen a chapter in the order like that one, both as to the numbers of brothers present and the distinction of those who ministered to them. And, though there was such a great number of brothers there, the people supplied all things so cheerfully that after seven days of chapter the brothers had to close the door and receive nothing further'. The brothers were compelled to remain a further two days to consume 'what had been offered and accepted'. *XIII Century Chronicles*, trans. Placid Hermann O.F.M., (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961) p. 32.

coexistence and mutual, positive reciprocity. Since their way of life was directed towards positive reciprocity, not antagonism, the friars were cautioned 'not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy hypocrites but show themselves joyful, cheerful and consistently gracious in the Lord'.[969] The Franciscan withdrawal from the dominant social and ecclesial structures was not a withdrawal from wider society**:** early Franciscan writings are frequently addressed to the whole society, to 'all the peoples, all created beings' ('*omnes homines, omnes creaturae*'). Thus, the early Franciscan writings employ a wide variety of social categories, though often in a new or inverted combination.[970] As Agamben, Le Goff and Flood demonstrate, the movement is characterized by its own experimental and specific idiom; a hybrid of religious, economic and political languages. The dynamic social and political form of the movement becomes distinct as the hagiographic and romantic Francis recedes, and as the role of labour is recovered.

The Francis that emerges is not the romantic hero, but the foremost representative of a unique, collective, non-violent practice of the early thirteenth century. Francis of Assisi traditionally speaks to us from the hagiographer's 'timeless topos', or from the romantic's equally anachronistic perspective of heroic authenticity. Rarely has Francis spoken as a brother among brothers, or as a worker, attempting to live and work peacefully and collaboratively a shared Gospel ethic.

Dalarun has stated that the 'key to the Franciscan legends, when we reach their essence, is not so much the dialectic between oral tradition and written version, as Raoul Manselli once believed. It is another dialectic, one that is irreconcilable, between facts and the remembrance of facts.'[971] Thomas of Celano could describe the Edenic moment of the early Franciscan community in Chapter XV of the *First Life*, but, Dalarun asserts, Celano didn't experience this 'sacred exchange', the 'solidarity and transparency between ideal and practice'. He came, not too late, but rather with a different 'intelligence'.[972] While the

[969] *Early Rule* VII, *FA:ED* (Vol 1) p. 69.
[970] Treating the realm of work in the *Admonition and Exhortation*, '*laboratores* – which could mean either "ploughman", the rural elite or urban workers – *agricolae, servi* are mentioned before lords'. Le Goff, p. 77.
[971] Dalarun, pp. 116-7.
[972] Celano's *First Life,* 56-7 records the admission of some literate and noble men into the Order. It occurs after the meeting of Saint Francis and the Sultan (1 Celano 55 and 57). 'The mention of the new brothers who are literate and noble betrays a certain self-satisfaction on the part of the learned hagiographer. It betrays the fact

critical study of the writings of Saint Francis cannot hope to uncover the 'true' Francis, Flood's critical interpretation provides a contextualising of Francis in a manner which is both historically responsible and socially significant. Both Dalarun and Flood point to an 'intelligence' which is barely visible, through layers of romantic and hagiographic interpretation.

In light of Flood's thesis, it may be asked for how long did the founding 'intelligence' define the early Franciscan movement? At what point did the form of life based around a particular, historical 'intelligence of the victim' collapse back into the dominant social and ecclesial systems? Flood has asserted that early 'Franciscan history […] began in 1209 and ended in 1239'.[973] 1239 was the year in which the chapter of friars ruled that no further workers be admitted into the order. The neglect of daily labour changed the direction and character of the early Franciscan movement, and dissolved the subversive potential of the emerging Franciscan vocabulary. However, a Franciscan economic outlook, albeit one divorced from daily labour, endured after the first generation of Franciscan brothers. The core of the early Franciscan economic vision, as it developed, was 'the usefulness and ethical nature of wealth in movement'.[974]

Flood's analysis of the early Franciscan movement does much to uncover a social history obscured by romance and hagiography. What emerges is the outline of an audacious social and political enterprise, oriented towards a peaceful and inclusive economy. Flood avoids basing his analysis on the early narratives. While Flood's reasons for doing so are justified, the use of early *lives*, along with a critical reading of the *writings* of Saint Francis, can support Flood's retrieval of a rich social history. Both Flood's history of early Franciscan labour and a mimetic reading of the early Franciscan movement indicate a number of core values, which may be epitomized in Alison's phrase, the 'intelligence of the victim'. This 'intelligence' was the engine of an original, non-violent social and political reality, the *forma vitae*.

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that when Thomas arrived, the time of the first fraternity had ended and that the Order had begun'. Dalarun, p. 115.

[973] Flood, *Work for Justice*, p. 52.

[974] Todeschini, p. 188.

Conclusion

Medieval hagiography and romantic interpretations over several centuries have typically framed the discourse around Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement. I have argued that these interpretations have obscured, rather than revealed the dynamics of the Saint and the movement to which he gave his name. Apart from hagiography and romanticism, the spiritual and ascetical insights of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan movement achieved a particular philosophical and theological expression in scholasticism.[975] According to Lydia Schumacher, the early Franciscan practitioners of scholastic theology did not make explicit connections between their theological work and the Franciscan *forma vitae*.[976] Nevertheless, Schumacher argues that Franciscan theologians of the 1230s and 1240s were not merely systematizing Augustine, as has been generally said, but purposefully laying down 'a Franciscan intellectual tradition for the very first time'.[977] Schumacher agrees with Scott Matthews that the early Franciscan theologians were 'thinking like a community, not merely as a group of scholars who happened to be working at the same institution'.[978] Schumacher's argument tends to emphasize the innovation, creativity and fittingness of such an intellectual project, and its essential congruence with the values of Francis.[979] However, the scholastic appropriation of early Franciscan experience, while enduring, is not definitive. Elements of the early Franciscan culture which were not immediately congruent with scholastic categories were eclipsed. While the spiritual genius of Francis of Assisi and the values of the early Franciscan movement clearly resonated with some of the major cultural and intellectual trends of the day, the importance of the early Franciscan experience exceeds the late-medieval moment. I have attempted to demonstrate that reading the early Franciscan sources through a post-critical lens produces a compelling narrative which avoids historical anachronism and is relevant to contemporary concerns.

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[975] Cf. Lydia Schumacher, *Early Franciscan Theology: Between Authority and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). The Franciscan, Alexander of Hales and his collaborators produced the first great *Summa* of the scholastic period. p. 18.

[976] It may be noted, however, that Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, a work of mystical theology, is explicitly modelled on Francis's life.

[977] Ibid, p. 29.

[978] Ibid.

[979] Cf. Ibid, pp. 30-54.

In the course of this thesis, I have attempted to structure a dialogue between the early Franciscan movement and René Girard. I have attempted to structure Girard's insights so that they dovetail and illuminate key aspects of the early Franciscan movement. This has involved 'shuttling back and forth' between texts, contexts, ideas, intuitions, and shared concerns. I concur with Cynthia Haven that the problem with all attempts to explain or describe mimetic theory (including my own) is that they are 'less rhetorically commanding and confident, less elegantly pugnacious and provocative, less witty and wise than Girard's own writing'.[980] It is equally true, however, that Girard was not 'naturally a system-builder; there are gaps, missing correlations, flaws of cross-referencing and consolidation in his immensely suggestive body of work'.[981] I have attempted to demonstrate that, through this dialogue, mimetic theory finds an expression, not equal to Girard's rendering, yet still provocative, compelling and worthwhile.

Adopting (and adapting) a well-established tripartite structure, this thesis has first explored core insights of mimetic theory, and then applied these insights to the early Franciscan movement. The pairing of mimetic theory and the early Franciscan movement has both strengths and weaknesses:

With respect to the early Franciscan movement, mimetic theory foregrounds the core values of peace-making and a non-rivalrous ethic of living, labouring, and evangelizing. Drawing attention to the social dynamics which both create and contain mimetic conflict, Girard's work provides us with tools to describe and understand the early Franciscans and their aims. Through the lens of mimetic theory, it is possible to describe Francis and the early friars in terms of a shared 'conversion intelligence', an intelligence which required new social, ascetical, religious and economic forms. Mimetic theory explains how periods of rapid social change can produce not only social undifferentiation, persecution and violence, but also a deeper insight into the dynamics of mediated desire and an aspiration to found new, non-rivalrous social realities, in response to conflict.

[980] Haven, p. 90.
[981] Paul Gifford, 'Responses to Jean-Pierre Dupuy' in *Can We Survive Our Origins?* pp. 279-68. (p. 279).

Girard's theoretical work is compelling, as description, if not always convincing as explanation. Having a certain distance from the pre-critical world of the early Franciscans, mimetic theory acts as a companion to, or a reader of, the early Franciscan texts. It draws our attention to what those texts say about the perennial questions of imitation, desire, envy, acquisition, violence, social order, creation, and God. Like Girard, the early Franciscan theologians were 'readers of texts' and in this respect they offer an example. According to Mary Carruthers, the scholastic theologians located authority in texts rather than authors, and therefore texts awaited further interpretation and elaboration: 'it is precisely the fact that the text generates further texts that renders it authoritative'.[982] The scholastics were not mere compliers, neither did they limit themselves to a recapitulation of earlier authorities, rather from the patristic texts they attempted a new synthesis, necessarily encompassing their own concerns and perspectives. It is, therefore, appropriate to revisit the early Franciscan movement and the texts associated with it and to read the texts through a different lens, testing the sources for shared concerns and points of convergence.

Evidence of the dynamics of mediated desire and of mimetic conversion justifies a reframing of the early Franciscan narrative along Girardian lines. A determined form of life, indeed, a specific Franciscan idiom points to the formation of a new social reality with its own self-awareness and distinct principles. In Girardian terms we may describe the early Franciscan movement as an effort to withdraw peacefully from the sacrificial systems that comprise the social order. This exodus was ultimately short lived and its legacy contentious and ambiguous. The gradual disappearance of daily labour, as understood in the *Early Rule*, was an important element in the failure of the exodus. The social and ecclesial utility of the Order, the privileges the friars accrued, and the admission of learned doctors such as Alexander of Hales, imposed on the *forma vitae* contradictions and tensions too much to bear. The learned friars, referred to variously as *fratres sapientes*, *scientati* and *clerici*, increasingly came to prominence within the Order.[983] Typically, these friars valued the practices of monastic life and were formed outside the context of daily labour, itinerant preaching and

[982] Cf. Ibid, p. 24.
[983] Cf. Lazaro Iriarte, *Franciscan History*, *The Three Orders of St. Francis of Assisi,* trans. Patricia Ross. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) pp. 15-25.

that peculiar asceticism which was aligned to the 'intelligence of the victim'. No longer sharing the 'intelligence of the victim' and no longer understanding the *forma vitae* from that perspective, the early Franciscans continued to regard voluntary poverty as emblematic and entered on decades of debate as to its role and observance in the Order.[984] The near obsession of later generations of Franciscans with voluntary poverty is startling, since the choice to live among the dispossessed and to develop social realities which included and incorporated the dispossessed was, in fact, the chief characteristic of Francis' converted life.[985]

This thesis has attempted to read early Franciscanism as a shared project of mimetic conversion; an experiment in positive, non-rivalrous reciprocity. It is evident that the social and political form which embodied this shared 'intelligence' had begun to collapse during the lifetime of Saint Francis. In the decades following this collapse, the Founder was removed from his brothers and sisters, becoming the exemplary (and inimitable) saint of hagiography, and the romantic hero of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The limits of this work do not permit further exploration of the failed exodus. It may be noted, in passing, that the early Franciscan movement produced its own scapegoat, upon whose shoulders the burden of charismatic betrayal was almost uniquely placed. The 'scapegoat friar' was Elias of Assisi (1180-1253).[986] A remarkable consensus, a virtual unanimity, from both the clericalist and 'Spiritual' wings of the Order single out Elias for unforgiving rebuke in the decades after the death of Francis.

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[984] Cf. Thompson pp. 245-46. During the lifetime of Francis, the crisis in the Order's identity was not due to poverty. The datable writings of Saint Francis, specifically his nine letters offer no evidence of a struggle over poverty during the crisis period in the Order. Later narratives, such as the *Assisi Compilation* give an account of this period which is not recognizable in the writings of Francis, at this time. Thompson notes that the word 'poverty' as well as 'anything like the later concept is virtually absent from Francis's writing of this period'. Ibid, p. 246.

[985] Desbonnets (citing Giovannai Micoli) asserts that Saint Francis linked his conversion with the decision to live with lepers. This was a specific symbol of 'doing penance'. Voluntary poverty was indicated by this choice, however, more significantly, in 'medieval society, the leper represented the element that was alien, irretrievable and repugnant, the physical projection, so to speak, of all the ills that society wanted to push away from itself' and Saint Francis's choice to live among the lepers is 'above all the rejection of the society's current values and of its criteria of judgement'. Desbonnets, p. 11.

[986] Fourteenth-century Franciscan authors styled Elias of Assisi (also known as Elias of Cortona) as 'alter Iudas' in contrast to St. Francis, the 'alter Christus'. Cf. Austin Powell, 'Writing Polemic as History: The Apocalyptic Implications of Elias of Cortona, and Gerardo Segeralli in Salimbene's *Cronica*, *Franciscan Studies*, 75, (2017) pp. 343-84. (p. 343) <http://doi.org/10.1353/frc.2017.0013>

The continuing appeal of Saint Francis notwithstanding, his importance exceeds simple characterizations of romantic hero or medieval saint. His association with a dynamic movement, as a practitioner and advocate of a shared way of life, indicate his relevance for contemporary concerns. These concerns include the question of exclusion within and outside of Church structures, questions of imitation, reciprocity and desire, the possibility of an authentic witness to peace, the possibilities of holding in a creative tension the valid assertions of hierarchical and horizontal structures in Church and society. Loosed from its moorings to the single question of voluntary poverty, the early Franciscan movement emerges as a more complex and creative social and religious phenomenon. Both in its initial exodus, and in the lesson of its ultimate collapse back into excluding and sacrificial systems, the early Franciscan movement represents a paradigm of mimetic conversion. Through a Girardian lens, Saint Francis and the brothers and sisters of the movement return, no longer quaint, or tragic, or inimitable. Rather they resemble us, in our contemporary struggles to co-exist within a variety of social, ecclesial and economic contexts, which continue to create stability through violence and exclusion. The mimetic reading provides the early Franciscan movement with a contemporary voice and a new idiom from which to speak about its mission: To embody the 'intelligence of the victim'; a common witnessing to the graced encounters with those who are habitually excluded. 'To heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring'.[987]

[987] *The Legend of the Three Companions*, *FA:ED*, (Vol 2) p. 102.

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