

Weeks 8:

Jesus as Sacrifice or Scapegoat?

- R. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*
- id. *The Scapegoat*
- id., *I see Satan Fall like Lightning*
- A very useful collection of texts is to be found in *The Girard Reader*
- R. Schwager, *Must there be scapegoats?* (Major theological appropriation of Girard's theories)
- Chr. Flemming, *Rene Girard: Violence and Mimesis*
- F.M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*

R. Girard

- Fundamental anthropological mechanism is 'mimetic desire' → we desire what someone else desires.
- Relation to the 'mediator' is ambiguous: example *and* rival.
- Mimetic rivalry leads to mimetic violence.
- When this threatens a community it is discharged through a 'scapegoat' who is killed.

Girard II

- The scapegoat has not been the 'cause' of problems, but killing him removes them.
- → This act produces a community of will.
- Therefore the moment is remembered and re-enacted in sacrifice.
- The memory, however, is mythically altered: the victim becomes a sacrifice, his death voluntary and necessary.

Girard III

- The biblical books relate a counter-narrative.
- They reveal the truth of the sacrificial mechanism as violence against a victim (Abel, Joseph, the Suffering Servant).
- The passion narrative in the NT shows Jesus as the victim of the mob.
- He refuses to accept his guilt.
- Cf. the words of Caiphas: 'it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish' (John 11 : 50).

Girard IV

- From then on the power of sacrifice and myth generally begins to fade.
- They don't disappear, but lose their cultural force.
- The sacrificial interpretation of the death of Jesus is a perversion of what the biblical story tells.
- Instead, Christ's death is significant for the Christian as it opens their eyes to the suffering of victims.
- Christ's life serves as an example of desire which itself isn't mimetic and can therefore offer a way out of violence.

Girard V

- Theological reinterpretation (R. Schwager and others):
- According to Girard humans cannot break lose of mimetic desire, rivalry and violence.
- Thus, the death of Jesus *as* sacrifice and its re-enactment in the Eucharist is inevitable.
- It is also grace as it spills no blood and allows humans to remain in their mimetic identity without its disastrous consequences.

Girard VI

- Sacrificial interpretation of Christ's death is best answer to Girard's question.
- Girard has meanwhile accepted this as a possible interpretation of his theory.
- This is true as Girard's theory can have an 'idealist' as well as a 'realist' upshot.