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IDEAS

THE SCAPEGOAT:
RENE GIRARD'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF VIOLENCE AND RELIGION

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Paul Kennedy
I'm Paul Kennedy, and this is *Ideas* on the thought of René Girard.

In the Christian Bible, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that He is going to reveal "things hidden since the foundation of the world." René Girard has used this formula as the title of one of his books because he thinks he's found out what it means. What had been hidden, until Jesus revealed it, was that human culture is founded on a collective murder. Culture begins, Girard says, when people spontaneously unite against a single victim and the war of 'each against each' becomes the unity of 'all against one' - the principle of the scapegoat. And out of the corpse of the scapegoat victim grows the sacrificial cult which is the origin of every society.

René Girard
Religion is the means through which the order, and the peace, which is created by the first murder, gradually turns into a cultural system. Humanity is the child of religion. In a way, religion is like the placenta which protects the newborn and gets discarded when he's really born.

Paul Kennedy
René Girard's ideas fit no academic niche, but they've attracted many followers during his long career as a teacher and writer. A large annual conference, called The Colloquium on Violence and Religion, is devoted entirely to his ideas, as is a journal called Contagion. Many of those who take part believe that Girard's insights are an intellectual breakthrough.

Sandor Goodhart
The work of René Girard is of world historical importance. It seems to me that he offers us the Archimedean point from which all of our knowledge, not only in the humanities but I would venture to say in the sciences as well, may begin to be rethought.

Paul Kennedy
René Girard was born in the southern French city of Avignon in 1923 and emigrated to the United States in 1947. He taught throughout his career at American universities, retiring from Stanford in 1995. The first of his nine books, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, was published in 1961. The most recent, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, has just appeared. In this five-hour *Ideas* series, David Cayley will explore with René Girard the whole body of Girard's work. En route, they'll touch on literature, anthropology, the Bible and the way Biblical revelation has shaped the modern world. "The Scapegoat," Part One, by David Cayley.

David Cayley
A few years ago, while preparing an *Ideas* series on prisons, I repeatedly came across the name of René Girard and was struck by the deep interest his work held for people involved with prisoners. I remembered having been fascinated by an essay of Girard's which I had read many years before but never followed up, and so I decided to investigate, picking up first a book called The Scapegoat, which was published in English in 1986. The book compares the world view found in mythology with the outlook of the Christian gospels; and I hadn't been reading for long before I realized that I was in the presence of a master interpreter, one of those rare, penetrating minds that can unearth layer upon layer of significance in stories that most of us take only at their face. I went on, with mounting interest and enthusiasm, to the rest of Girard's work and eventually wrote to him to ask if he would be willing, with my assistance, to present his ideas on CBC Radio. Happily, he agreed and late last summer I spent several days with him at his home in Stanford, California, recording the interviews on which these programs are based.

We began with the idea that underpins all of Girard's theories—imitation. Conflict between people, he believes, is rooted in our propensity for imitation or in what he calls "mimetic desire" - an idea that began to take shape for him through his study of the great European novelists. He'd begun his academic career as an historian, enrolling in 1943 in occupied Paris at the École des Chartes, an institution for the technical training of archivists and historians. He found the subject matter rather dry and, in 1947, went to the United States where circumstances nudged him towards literary studies.

René Girard
I went to Indiana University with a student visa, and I was doing a PhD in history because, at that point, I was more of a historian. I was not at all a literary man. And I was teaching the French language at Indiana University, and very quickly they gave me some literature to teach. Novels. Balzac, Stendahl, Proust, you know. And most of the time I was just a few pages ahead of my students. I hadn't read the books. And I didn't know what to say. So I decided very deliberately that I should look for what makes these books alike, rather than for what makes them different from each other. And difference is what literary criticism, even in those days, was after. You know, a book was a masterpiece only if it was absolutely one of a kind, if you could find nothing in it that would be in another book. This is complete nonsense, of course. So I became interested in human relations in the novel, and how close the vanity in Stendahl is to the snobbery in Proust. Then I remember I heard, or I read an article by a colleague about the story in Don Quixote which is called "El Curioso Impertinente." It is a story of a young man who has a very good friend, a friend who decides everything for him. And he wants to get married, and he gets married through his friend. In other words, the friend provides the bride. The friend knows the bride and says, you should marry that girl. She's the perfect girl for you. And so he marries the girl. And, after a while, he asks his friend to court his wife in order to prove to himself that his wife is completely faithful to him. The friend is scandalized and refuses with a great energy; but he insists so much that, finally, the friend relents and starts courting the wife, and they become lovers, and the husband commits suicide. So it's a very tragic story, and this story is told in Don Quixote. And, if you look at the story, it has exactly the same plot as The Eternal Husband of Dostoyevsky. So there I had a good case against formalism because the two books are not in the same language, not set at the same time, not written in the same style. They are completely different, and yet they have absolutely the same content. That's when I realized that content matters. So everything clicked with that story. And, of course, that story reappears in many other writers. It reappears in Shakespeare, which I didn't know at the time, and it reappears in Joyce. If you read a life of Joyce, you will see that he had that type of jealousy which you find in Dostoyevsky's The Eternal Husband and which you find in that "Curioso Impertinente" of Don Quixote. So this was really the key to my whole literary enterprise, in a way.

David Cayley
This enterprise came to fruition in 1961 with the publication in French of a book called Mensonge Romantique et Verité Romanesque. Literally, romantic lie and novelistic truth. The English edition appeared four years later as Deceit, Desire and the Novel. Building on the pattern he had first noted in the Cervantes story of "Impertinent Curiosity" and drawing also on the works of Stendahl, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky and Proust, Girard argued that the greatest novelists all expose what he called the 'romantic lie', which is that our desires and purposes arise from some creative inner depth within ourselves. The truth which the great novelists reveal, according to Girard, is that our desires are generally inspired by the desires of others. We want things, not because they are inherently desirable, but because someone else's desire for them has made them attractive to us. The husband in the Cervantes story loves his wife only so far as this love is endorsed by his friend. In advertisements, products are usually presented, not on their merits, but as the possessions of attractive or prestigious people. We are invited to desire not so much the beer or the car as some quality of being that seems to belong to the blessed souls who we see drinking the beer or driving the car. Desire, Girard says, is never just a straight line between a subject and an object, but always has some other as its model.

René Girard
Desire is essentially borrowed desire. There is no such thing as natural desire, otherwise it would be instinct. If desire had a fixed object, it couldn't change, and it would be the same thing as animal instinct. Therefore, desire comes always from the other. Therefore, this other, if he is close enough socially or physically, will necessarily become our rival when we desire his object.

David Cayley
Human desire is changeable by its very nature, Girard says. Beyond those basic things to which instinct or appetite direct us, our wants and our abilities are shaped entirely by imitation of those who surround us and those we admire. This is how we develop our entire cultural repertoire, beginning with the language we speak. We learn because we want to be like those from whom we learn. This much many theorists of imitation have noticed. Aristotle, for example, says that humans are the most mimetic of all creatures. But what Aristotle doesn't say, and where Girard is original, is in pointing to the shadow side of this aptitude for imitation, which is the way in which it leads to rivalry between those who desire the same things. And this rivalry, Girard says, will be most intense between those who are most alike in their interests and affections.

René Girard
The marvelous paradox is that the closer you are, the more your goals will be the same. And this will be true at the highest level, at the intellectual level. If we are really close intellectually, we're going to look for the same things. And there will be moments when we will feel that the other is more successful than we are. As a matter of fact, it's everybody's tendency to feel that the other is more successful. It's also everybody's tendency to feel I am more successful, or I should be more successful. But anyway, the problem will be there because Man is essentially a dynamic individual, who wants to occupy the whole ground. And this individualism will lead us into competition with the people who are closest to us. People don't think enough about the formula by which Aristotle defines tragedy. Tragedy, he says, is a conflict to the death between people closest to each other. The closer you are to someone, the greater the possibility of conflict, given what Man is and his goals and his imperialism, his individual imperialism.

David Cayley
The closer we are, Girard says, the more we will want the same things. And the more we want the same things, the more we will tend to compete. This, for him, is one of the unspoken truths of social existence, a truth hidden by the romantic lie, but revealed in the greatest works of literature.

René Girard
Take a Shakespearean example. There is a character in Anthony and Cleopatra who looks at Anthony and Octavius and says, the very thing which is the cause of their amity is going to become the reason for their divorce, for their disagreement. And all over Shakespeare you see things like that. Therefore, they become obstacles to one another since they both want to govern Rome. And Brutus, in Julius Caesar, is in the same position. Brutus says, in effect, I love Caesar so much that I have to kill him. Caesar gives me all my goals, Brutus says, and I love Rome because of him; but, therefore, he's my obstacle, since he's the master of Rome. So does Brutus want to kill Caesar because he loves the republic so much, or does he want to kill him because Caesar's in the way?

David Cayley
In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Caesar is both Brutus's model and his obstacle, at the same time – in Girard's view, a characteristic effect of mimetic desire. In a book on Shakespeare called A Theatre of Envy, he writes, "Individuals who desire the same thing are united by something so powerful that as long as they can share whatever they desire they remain the best of friends. As soon as they cannot, they become the worst of enemies." This is the fertile contradiction that produces the endless transformations of desire in Shakespeare's plays. We want others to love what we love, admire what we admire. But when they do, we suddenly find that they have become obstacles and competitors. Gregory Bateson, in his theory of schizophrenia, dubbed this kind of damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't situation a double bind. And Girard has sometimes borrowed the term to describe the tangled workings of mimetic desire.

René Girard
You receive the command, imitate me, and at the same time there is another command which is, do not imitate me. So I think the perfect form of the double bind is found in mimetic desire because, with mimetic desire, if my best friend is in love with a girl,

he will say to me, "Imitate me. My girlfriend is more admirable than any other." This is Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona, where Valentine has a long speech in which he invites his friend Proteus to share in the worship of his beloved. Therefore, Proteus imitates the desire of Valentine and immediately the command that he hears is, do not imitate me. So these two commands come at the same time. And this double bind is why I think that education should warn children about their peers. Let's say that two boys are friends because they are in the same field. They love the same things. But there is only one fellowship for the two of them. Therefore, they become rivals. Any master and disciple are in a double bind situation with each other. The master wants his pupil to imitate him as diligently and effectively as possible. But, if the pupil is too effective, he will become better than the master and overshadow him. And the master will see the contradiction but will not dare to say, you imitate me too well. He will not even think that. He will try to find something wrong with his disciple. There is a tendency never to express a double bind because, if you express it, you express the essential contradiction of living together, which is competition.

David Cayley
So we keep quiet about it.

René Girard
We keep quiet about it, and it's one of the most fascinating things. We tell children, for instance, that they should imitate this, or not imitate that, but we never say that they should imitate us only some of time and not too effectively. This is the essential existential contradiction, you might say. And this essential contradiction can be expressed logically and is very visible in all our actions. It's the essence of competition. *Competere* means to join together toward the same goal; but, at a certain moment, someone, every one, want to be the first to reach that goal.

David Cayley
Competition, according to the mimetic theory, is inherent in imitation; and, once competition begins, Girard says, it will tend to be self-sustaining because the conflict itself will quickly become the main source of attraction. The competitor will become more interesting than the object of competition. Arguments provide an everyday example, wars a catastrophic one. In either case, the point of fact or pride that started the altercation is usually long forgotten by the time the struggle comes to an end. The obstacle itself is now what intrigues us, a paradox that Girard calls "scandal."

René Girard
I define scandal as the obstacle which attracts you—the paradoxical obstacle. And it can only be the mimetic rival. But you deny this attraction. You want to think of the rival only in negative terms. Therefore, you do everything not to imitate your model. If he wears a blue tie, you wear a red one, but you still imitate him madly in the sense that you desire everything he desires. If you're my model and I fall in love with your wife, or your daughter, we're going to become rivals. Period. And this rivalry will play both ways because probably you're no longer in love with your wife because you've possessed her securely for many years. And my desire is going to revive yours. Therefore, you're going to become my imitator as well as my model and everything will move both ways in perfect identity, finally, but always being interpreted in terms of difference.

David Cayley
The fact that rivals grow more alike with every new attempt to be different often causes them to intensify their conflict. But the more frantic the search for stable differences becomes, Girard says, the more aimless and undifferentiated the conflict actually grows.

René Girard
Everything is symmetrical on both sides, the two sides absolutely the same. But the rivals have to think their relationship in terms of difference. They do their best to differ from each other, but they cannot do it because as soon as one of them invents a way of being different from the other, the other does it too.

David Cayley
Once conflict is underway, Girard says, it will tend to produce sameness on all sides. A single, inexorable

logic will finally reduce everything to the same terms, while at the same time producing a phantasmagoria of apparent differences. The more alike the enemy becomes, the more different he will seem.

Girard's theory conceives of violence in a new way. Violence has usually been thought of as the expression of some aggressive instinct or as the product of a struggle over scarce resources. Girard pictures it as a form of runaway imitation and this new conception, like any new idea, can at first be difficult to grasp. There's the injury to our self-esteem involved in thinking of ourselves as imitators rather than as creative, self-inventing individuals. And then there's the common view of imitation as something admittedly pervasive but, at the same time, embarrassingly trivial and therefore unlikely to explain anything fundamental. Paul Dumouchel is professor of Philosophy at the University of Québec at Montréal. He's known Girard for many years and frequently written about him, as well as incorporating Girard's theories into his own work. He says that the mimetic theory explains all sorts of puzzling social phenomena, but only when one has first grasped the new sense with which Girard imbues the idea of imitation.

Paul Dumouchel
A lot of behaviours which at first appear as either random or unexplainable fall into place once you have this hypothesis that agents actually do imitate each other. But imitation has to be understood as not only doing exactly the same thing, but doing what the other agent intends to do, in a sense. This imitation is a bit more complex than just two people grabbing the same thing from different sides. It's more that, if you desire to distinguish yourself from me, then I will desire to distinguish myself from you. But desiring to distinguish myself from you might mean doing systematically the opposite of what you're doing. So when we first look at this, we do not see it as imitation. It is only once we consider imitation as an abstract concept which describes a certain type of symmetry between the behaviour of different people that we actually see these things appear. And that is one of the things which makes properly understanding this theory so difficult. Everybody thinks, well, of course, I understand what imitation is. That's clear. And, at the same time, they think, I can't see any example of imitation here. So we have to see that when Oedipus, at the end of the play, Oedipus Rex, tears his own eyes out, he is actually imitating what everybody else is saying about him. They're all saying that he's guilty. And he punishes himself for his own guilt. But then he becomes the imitator of all those who say he is guilty. But doing that is, of course, a form of imitation which does not appear transparently, as in every day life, as imitation. So that's why I think René Girard was quite right to choose a different term, mimesis, to describe this kind of imitation. It indicates that we're not exactly dealing with the everyday concept of imitation.

David Cayley
Another radical and potentially unfamiliar aspect of Girard's theory is its conception of the self. The huge emphasis placed on choice and decision in our world tends to make us think of the self as something free and sovereign; but, if Girard is right, the self is more like an unruly crowd than a serene sovereign. It can be a disconcerting idea, says another friend and colleague of Girard's, British theologian James Alison, but also a liberating one.

James Alison
We desire according to the desire of another. And, if that is the case, then our being is dependent on desire. It's not as though, first there is a being which desires, first there is me and I have these desires. But rather, there are these desires which form me. And this gives us, I think, the sort of malleability of self which is true to life and begins to enable us to understand how much we're driven by all sorts of reactive forces which I convince myself are me, willing, but which turn out to be me, willed. And I find that just staggering because it enables the beginning of something like metaphysical humility. There's the beginning of a realistic understanding of how one relates to others, how one is driven and how one is free, but also how one is bound up in a whole lot of mechanisms that operate relatively independently of those who think they're operating them.

David Cayley
Eleven years after René Girard first described mimetic desire in his book, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, he took the next step in the evolution of his theory with a book called Violence and the Sacred, published in English in 1977. This book explored a question to which Girard was unavoidably led by his earlier findings. If violence is a form of imitation that constantly threatens to get out of hand and produce a general crisis, how is it that humanity has even survived? Girard's answer was that our ancestors, during the course of their evolution, must have hit upon some way of keeping their violence at bay. And what the anthropological record suggests that they must have discovered, he says, is the unifying power of a common enemy.

René Girard
The whole tribe ultimately will kill one victim. Why? Because, as the mimesis works laterally, it will be cumulative, ultimately, and from its own acculmulating weight will become more and more intense. For instance, you can this in a civil war where you have several centres of trouble which tend to turn into two. Why to turn into two? Because with mimetic rivalry, you seem at first to be completely focused, you alone against your antagonist. But then another antagonism shows up and another, until you have three or four or five or six. And you become attracted to them. Political passion I think, may be something like that, as everyone has probably noticed with their own friends who are very ideological, very passionate in politics. If some morning they show up at the office and they are especially excited, you know that that has nothing to do with politics, but that they had a fight with their wife or something and that they are substituting - they are transferring their emotions to the political sphere. So I really think that this process of substitution, or transference, is very important because it's what makes the mimesis cumulative and, ultimately, must gather the whole group against a single victim. Once you accept that the process is mimetic rather than being based on the significance of ideas, it has to be that way. Therefore, if you accept the idea that it's a mimetic process, then ultimately, perhaps after many false starts and killings that do not unify the community, you'll have a moment where, like a deck of cards, all the cards will fall together and everyone will unite against a single victim.

David Cayley
And what will happen then?

René Girard
And then, peace will descend on the community because everybody will be without an enemy. There will be innocence again. And this will be experienced as such a miracle that the victim who was reviled two minutes before will come to be considered as divine. The malefactor becomes a benefactor. And there you have the real archaic sacred which is both bad and good. When these people find themselves reconciled, they are too modest, they know too much about themselves to think that they are responsible for their reconciliation. So who can be responsible? It has to be that bad guy who created the trouble in the first place. He's the master of everything. Or she, because it can be a female, of course. It's only a victim. This sudden reconcilation—and they must be reconciled, since there is no more enemy—involves the conflation of absolute war and total peace in one second. And the proof that it is so is that, if you look at sacrifice, at classical sacrifice, the victim is very bad before being killed and is very often the object of ritual insults, and then right after being killed becomes good. You can eat the victim and so forth.

David Cayley
According to Girard's hypothesis, the discovery of this peace-making single victim mechanism was neither intentional nor conscious. The people involved did not intend the result they achieved and it was precisely this that made the result so impressive, so profound, so paradoxical. What can they have supposed except that they had been touched by a force entirely transcending them.

René Girard
You have the feeling you've been saved by a mysterious power which can be both very bad—get you in trouble—and very good—save you. And save you how? Through some kind of violence which we all committed together but which obviously didn't really kill that creature. That creature is immortal. Or

that creature has been resurrected, since it saved us.

David Cayley
For Girard, the discovery of the saving power of the scapegoat is the beginning of both religion and culture. And culture, he thinks, must have had a profound adaptive value during the period of what he calls "hominization" or becoming human. During human evolution, the brain expanded very rapidly, which created vast new potentials but also produced a prolonged period of dependency and vulnerability in childhood. And this vulnerability, Girard thinks, would have quickly been the end of us without some system of order.

René Girard
In order to account for the last stages of hominization, you need culture. Why do you need culture? It's because a young animal not long after he's born can fight for himself or follow the flock; but, with human infants, because of the very large head of the human body, birth is very difficult and the human infant needs to be protected for years. He cannot run. He cannot walk. He cannot do anything. And this is inevitable if you want the brain to be as large as it is at birth, and to grow as much as it does in the first few years. So in order to set up a system in which the children can be kept for years and protected, you must have areas of non-violence in the culture, which I think only sacrifice and the sacred can establish.

David Cayley
The sacred, as Girard understands it, is a displacement or estrangement of the community's violence, an alien shape in which this violence can be confronted and propitiated. Sacrifice is the means by which the relationship with the sacred is managed. It institutionalizes the first spontaneous discovery of the single victim mechanism. Because the mysterious peace conferred by the first murder, Girard says, must have lasted only so long.

René Girard
When that experience begins to fade away and the first ferments of new mimetic rivalry occur, what are the people of that community going to think? They are going to be terribly worried about having a new crisis. They suffered horribly from the previous one. So they are going to have the idea, let's do it again. Maybe the god did it to teach us to do it again. So we take a substitute victim—animal, man, I don't know—and then we all gang up against that victim and after that we'll be reconciled. The proof that this is what ritual is can be seen in the beginning of many rituals. Why so many rituals begin as they do was a problem that was posed and never solved by the first generations of anthropologists. The beginning of many rituals is a deliberate uprising of the whole community against itself. Total chaos. Deliberate chaos. Why? Because the original triggering mechanism of the scapegoat, or the successful scapegoat, was disorder. So you re-do the disorder to begin with. Now there will be some communities that feel scared at the idea of reenacting the disorder. They think there will always be enough disorder in the community to trigger the scapegoating, so they will avoid that. But this is a question of interpretation, a question of how a given community sets up its rituals. And you can see that communities go into ritual when they are afraid. They are essentially afraid of the mimetic rivalry, but they are also afraid that the sun won't return, and so you have winter rites. They are afraid the sun will not come up again. Or they are afraid when the sun doesn't want to go to bed any more, at the summer solstice and so they have solstice rites. And they also have rites when the young men become adults, which is very scary. And the rites are ordeals, which are a form of sacrifice – you put them through the wringer and they come out full members of the culture. They've been initiated. They've been through the crisis. And we know that in many archaic rituals if one of the kids doesn't come back or is killed through whatever ordeals may be organized for them, it's good for the other ones. What does it mean? That we are really dealing with a form of sacrifice. You find this passage from death to resurrection or re-invigorated life at all levels, in all rituals. Ritual is primarily invigoration through victimization.

So ritual is born in the first place out a foundational murder, and then gradually becomes specialized, as every big crisis of human life, of community as a

whole becomes the occasion of ritual. Every time you feel you're in trouble or might be in trouble, at any sign of change, you go into a ritual. So in my view, ritual is far from being comedy, or nonsense, as modern people might sometimes think. When archaic people were asked why they did these rituals, they said, we do it because the gods in the past told us to do it and we do it to maintain peace in the community. You always have these two things. And I say, they are true. They are true. You must take it quite seriously. This is the way they interpret their own experience. So that's what culture is, in my view. As rituals become more and more specialized, the religious element tends to fall away and what is left is a structure for dealing with problems. Education is an example. Education and the ritual ordeals found in initiation rites are fundamentally the same thing. With education, you remove the religious element. But you have exams, which are ordeals.

David Cayley
René Girard advances his theory of cultural origins as a speculative, but still scientific hypothesis. It's scientific, in the first place, because it demands no foresight or planning on the part of those who founded the first cultures but, instead, shows how sacrifice, the first religious institution, could have derived entirely from the playing out of mimetic rivalries within early human groups. It's scientific also in the range of its explanatory power. It tells us, as Girard has just said, why so many rituals involve behaviours that are normally prohibited. It tells us why the gods in all mythologies are sources of disorder as well as order. And according to Paul Dumouchel of the University of Quebec at Montreal, whom you heard earlier, it also sheds light on one of anthropology's longest-standing problems—how to account for the family resemblance between sacrificial rituals all over the world. The competing explanations, up 'til now, have been either independent invention or a common source. But neither has ever been fully satisfactory. For example, the common source theory associated with British anthropologist Maurice Hocart is contradicted by some of the physical evidence. But Girard's theory, Dumouchel says, solves these problems.

Paul Dumouchel
Hocart did a lot on the comparison of rituals and of institutions among different cultures. And Hocart thought that these things were so similar at a certain level that they must be related in some way. So what he did was that he postulated a form of diffusionism, it was called. It supposes that culture started somewhere and then it was diffused, it spread out into different areas of the world. The problem with this hypothesis is that we have no idea of how it was diffused, how it was propagated to different parts of the world, how it passed from one area to the other. We have no idea of the mechanism it would have followed and a lot of our historical evidence isn't clear or seems to indicate that it could not have taken place this way. So Hocart's diffusionist hypothesis was rejected. But his comparison between cultures remained as a very good achievement. And one of the advantages of René's theory is that it gives us an explanation of these resemblances and differences between different cultures, not because they have all spread out from one original point, not because of links between different cultures, but because they all come out from this same mechanism which generates them. So in that sense, it is a hypothesis whose interest is that it actually is very fertile. It allows us to reorganize a lot of data which we did possess but we didn't know exactly how to structure.

David Cayley
Culture, in Girard's theory, has not come from a single place but, rather, from a single discovery that he thinks people must have made many times in many places. The theory of mimetic crisis, spontaneously resolved by the transfer of all hostilities onto a single victim therefore explains both the variations and the underlying consistency in the practices of archaic cultures. It also accounts for something else that has long eluded explanation—the purpose of religion, which Girard says is, quite simply, to control violence. Religion organizes sacrifice, and sacrifice inoculates society against the very real threat of much worse violence. As such, it is, in Girard's estimation, an eminently practical undertaking without which the first cultures would have torn themselves apart. This view pits Girard against several powerful currents in contemporary

thought. It offends against the Romantic doctrine of original goodness. It looks askance at the contemporary nostalgia for the sacred, and it also challenges the rationalist view that religion is just self-interested priestcraft.

René Girard
Rationalism, the philosophy of enlightenment, holds that religion is pure superstition. Superstition means the foam on top of something. It means superfluous, ultimately. I think that Voltaire had the only real alternative to the mimetic theory. The mimetic theory tells you ritual is really useful in the first stages of culture because ritual shapes a certain way of dealing with problems and prevents violence by focusing it on a single victim. Voltaire, on the other hand, says that religion is everywhere because the priests are sneaky and take over society by scaring the people. It's a tactic of power. It's a conspiracy of power. But I will ask, where do the priests come from? Priests are also the product of religion. He makes them exist independently like demons because he hates them so much. I say, either Voltaire is right or the mimetic theory is right, since religion is everywhere. Either you make it nothing, as a pure parasite of society, or it has to be the heart of it.

David Cayley
Girard's sense that religion is the heart of society draws on a wide range of anthropological evidence - from the scapegoat kings of Africa to the dismembered god Dionysus of Greek mythology, from the prisoners, slaves and virgins sacrificed on the altars of the Sun in ancient Mexico to the children consumed in the fiery furnaces of Moloch in North Africa and the Middle East. But there is a tendency today to doubt all evidence of such things as cannibalism, head hunting or human sacrifice and to think of them only as the tainted findings of a colonialist and ethnocentric anthropology. Here, too, Girard's theory offers a bold challenge.

René Girard
You know, today it's politically correct to say that it was English imperialism which invented all these things against the natives. It's not true. For instance you have probably read that on the highest peaks of the Andes archeologists are finding the remains of children sacrificed by the Incas. So they had child sacrifice. Not two weeks ago I saw a program on PBS about this. It began with a politically correct speech against these bad Spaniards who were slandering these people and saying they had human sacrifice and so on. So I said, oh, that program is not going to be interesting, and I almost turned it off. Fortunately I kept going. At a given point, they totally forgot their politically correct speech and started to describe the present-day reality of people finding all these children sacrificed and placed on top of the mountains at such a high level that people cannot dig them up very easily. They have to rest every two minutes because the air is so rarefied up there.

David Cayley
These findings in the Andes are typical of much recent archeological evidence, for example, of widespread cannibalism in North America, which tends to confirm Girard's theory. But there remains a lot of resistance to his ideas - partly because big theories are out fashion; partly because Girard has crashed the boundaries of too many academic disciplines to get a fair hearing in any of them; and partly, he says, because many of us would rather look away from the violence against which sacrifice was humanity's first line of defense.

René Girard
The violence is real in human society. Early rituals are real acts of violence, and you see it when you read the first anthropologists who went to Australia. How marvelous their descriptions are! They describe some rituals that really scare them, and their descriptions are so lively just because the violence is so real. And that's terribly important because, in a way, that's what tends to be denied by contemporary anthropology or by a certain view of language. Now, only texts are violent. People talk about the violence of the text; and, if you ask, but was there real human sacrifice—yes or no - they will ask you what "real" means, and so on. There's so much nonsense around, and I'm talking in favour of common sense. I would say this: I have no philosophy. The question, for me, is always the results. Does the theory make sense, does it make everything fall together like the pieces of a puzzle?

Some people have actually said to me that the mimetic theory cannot be true because it works too well. But I say, the better it works, the better it is, supposedly, from a scientific point of view. The thing which is so difficult is to show people that everything fits because no one reads anything any more. I'm not really accredited within a single discipline; but, even if you are accredited inside a discipline, then you don't exist for any other discipline. People talk a good interdisciplinary game in our academic world, but they don't practice it because departments are centres of attention. There is a lot of anonymity in our world, and people are very scared of it, and for good reasons because they can fall into the cracks. So only department life is meaningful. So if you say, I believe this about human societies, you are told, you are not a sociologist and you can't talk. If you compare human societies now to earlier societies, then you're an anthropologist and ought to stay in anthropology. If I'm in sociology, I'll stay in sociology. The safe scholars, the people who think mostly about their careers, will not write a book on sacrifice or will not mix up Greek tragedy and archaic cultures because they know that the departments of classics will be furious. And the departments of anthropology will be furious, too. But I think we are at a time when certain forms of synthesis are possible that were not possible fifty years ago. So at least one should have an open ear.

David Cayley

The scope of the synthesis which René Girard has attempted will become clearer as this series goes on. In the next program, we'll look at how societies built on sacrifice began to break down, both in ancient Greece and in ancient Israel, and at how the writers of the Hebrew Bible began to expose the scapegoat mechanism on which all culture until then had rested.

Paul Kennedy
Good evening and welcome to *Ideas*. I'm Paul Kennedy. Tonight, Part Two of "The Scapegoat," a series of five programs by David Cayley about the thought of René Girard.

René Girard is a thinker who fits no category. He grew up in France but went to the United States as a young man and taught at American universities for nearly 50 years, until his retirement from Stanford in 1995. He was known, first, as a literary critic and the book that made his name in that field, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, is still being read and studied 40 years after its publication. His next major work, Violence and the Sacred, ventured into anthropology where Girard uncovered the central role played by scapegoating in the formation of cultures. Then came Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, in which Girard revealed the critical importance he attaches to the Bible in unlocking the secret of culture and disclosing the innocence of all scapegoats. Subsequent books have expanded on this theme.

In this *Ideas* series, David Cayley is exploring the whole range of Girard's thought. In our first program, Girard set out the problem of violence in human societies and showed how religion controls violence through sacrifice. Tonight, his theme is the breakdown of sacrifice in the ancient world and the emergence of a new approach to social order in the Hebrew Bible. "The Scapegoat," Part Two, by David Cayley.

David Cayley
In the Christian Bible, in the Gospel of John, the high priest Caiaphas explains to the people why Jesus should be executed. "It is expedient," he says, "that one man should die for the people." The same principle is advanced by Robespierre at the trial which condemns Louix XVI to death during the French Revolution. "Louis must die," Robespierre says, "because the country must live." The idea is found again in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar where one of the characters makes a graphic prediction of the benefits of Caesar's death. "From you," he says to Caesar, "great Rome shall suck reviving blood." The concept, in all cases, is the same. The sacrifice of one saves all; a little bloodshed forestalls the threat of general violence. And in all three cases, the sacrifice is presented in a favourable light, as something both necessary and beneficial. But contemporary people are not apt to take this view. We call this transfer of the community's baggage onto one back scapegoating, by which we mean that we think the victim is actually innocent and the whole procedure arbitrary and unjust. According to René Girard, this connotation of cruelty and irrationality now surrounding the word "scapegoat" represents a remarkable historical achievement because what the word originally referred to, he says, was a ritual undertaken in good conscience and in defense of their society by the ancient Hebrews. It's described in the Bible in the book of Leviticus.

René Girard
On the Day of Atonement, two he-goats were brought to the high priest in front of the people and the high priest put his hand on the head of one of the he-goats and thus he transferred the sins of the community to the goat. Then, as soon as that goat was loaded with the sins of the community, it was a highly contaminated animal and had to be chased out. And ultimately there were people who followed that goat and killed it. And they killed it in a very ritual way, by forcing it to jump from a cliff which was going to be fatal. Now, this leaving with the sins of people really means leaving with the violence of the people. And it really does that since, after the victim is killed, peace comes back.

David Cayley
The scapegoat ritual, in Girard's view, addresses the threat of uncontrolled violence. This threat, he believes, is endemic to human society because of the way in which people's hostilities mirror and magnify each other, producing a recurrent spasm of violence that he calls "mimetic crisis." Rituals of sacrifice and expulsion avert this crisis by reconciling everyone around the sacrificial victim; and, for that reason, they constitute the universal foundation of human culture. This point is crucial for Girard because it is only when we have understood how critical sacrifice is to the survival of society that we can begin to appreciate what is involved in overcoming this way of creating and maintaining

order. Historically, he believes, this overcoming was the vocation of Biblical religion; and it was only as modern societies digested their Biblical heritage, Girard says, that they began to give the word "scapegoat" a new meaning. The first to do so systematically was Sir James Fraser, the Victorian anthropoligist who made an encyclopaedic catalogue of myth and ritual in his book, The Golden Bough.

René Girard
What Fraser did was to realize that all communities have practices of the same type and he called them scapegoat rituals. He called them scapegoat rituals because there was already a tendency in our languages, in our modern languages, to use the word "scapegoat" for an innocent victim who is killed or chased out by everybody. And in a way my whole system is only an elaboration of that insight, which appears first in the 17th century. In France, for instance, the really good dictionary (Littré, 19th century) says that what it calls the metaphoric use of scapegoat, i.e. not for the ritual but for daily life, appears in Saint-Simon, a historian of the age of Louis XIV, who says, Mrs. So-and-So is the scapegoat of her salon - everybody dislikes her and plays bad tricks on her, and so forth. He uses the word scapegoat. He realizes that what the Jews were doing in the scapegoat ritual, and all other cultures in comparable rituals, was to systematize and ritualize a psychosocial mechanism which is part of daily life. Fraser understood that, since he expanded the use of scapegoat to all these things. He had that insight. But, at the same time, he refused that insight; he refused to say we still have scapegoats in Victorian England. No, we are too good, too rationalist; we have too much technology. How could we do the same thing as these rude savages? Well, we don't do it in our religious rituals, but we do it in our daily life continuously. That's what Fraser refused in order to scapegoat the rude savages himself. Just as other anthropoligists today will scapegoat us in order to enthrone the rude savages and say they are infinitely better than we are. Which is the opposite. The whole mimetic system would like to end these compartments and say, scapegoating is universal.

David Cayley
How it became possible to recognize that scapegoating is universal is the story that tonight's program has to tell. Our starting point is the world of myth, where scapegoating, as such, is entirely hidden. Mythology, according to Girard, sees the scapegoat, not as an innocent and arbitrary victim, but as a god. This comes about as follows: a scapegoat is killed, in the first place, because he is believed to be guilty of some crime which is polluting the community and causing disorder. But his death then restores order, an effect of such overwhelming benefit that the community comes to believe the victim must have intended it. Murder has made peace, a result so profoundly paradoxical, so welcome and yet so far from the community's intention, that it is understood as the product of a power transcending the community. This power is the sacred. It is created through sacrifice but experienced as an independent being which can both save and destroy the community. The arbitrarily chosen victim, whose death has brought order out of disorder, has become a god, who disorganizes and threatens in order save. One has an example in Euripides' play The Bacchae in which the god Dionysus makes himself an object of pious devotion in Thebes by first driving the women of the city into a murderous frenzy in which they dismember their king. The community's relationship with this terrifying power, Girard says, is managed through ritual and narrated in myth.

René Girard
There is a story behind ritual and the story is myth. But the story seems unreadable. Why? Because myths think that the victim is guilty. And this thought is so powerful that the victimizers never realize that they are dealing with a scapegoat. To have a scapegoat, by definition, is not to know that we have him. It's to think we have a culprit. That's why, at the beginning of a story, of a myth, of a foundational myth which is really archaic, all you have is some kind of crime or a trickster, who does something wrong. And then there is the violence against the criminal, the trickster, and then suddenly you discover that the former villain has become the re-organizer of the community he was disorganizing at the beginning. There is a logical break which I think

is the moment when the myth shifts from scapegoating to the divinisation of the victim. So there's the scapegoating of the one we hold responsible for what's going wrong in the community, and then the divinisation of the one we hold responsible for what suddenly turns out to be right once again. And what turns out to be right is that, after we kill that scapegoat, he becomes our saviour. Therefore he's alive. Therefore he's a god. We imitate him and that's ritual. We talk about him and it's myth.

David Cayley
Myth, as Girard uses the term here, means, not just any legendary tale, but a story that preserves some real trace of the foundational murder. The murder may be disguised—the mythological victim may only be wounded, or suffer some accident; he may fly away, fall down, or be chased rather than actually being killed—but he will be in some way isolated from the other characters, he will bear some distinguishing mark, and he will be subject to some accusation of wrong-doing. This accusation shows, Girard says, that the myth is told from the perspective of those who believe that the scapegoat is the real source of whatever problem the community is experiencing. An example may make this clearer, so here is a myth from a South African people called the Venda which Girard believes quite clearly preserves the traces of a collective murder.

René Girard
Python, the snake, is a god who looks, at the beginning of the story, like a man. He has several wives. His favourite is a new wife, which is quite intelligible, and this wife is very surprised because at night suddenly she feels the dampness of Python, the water which is his element. Python wants to stay with that new wife all the time, and his first wife, who is the older wife, is very mad and obviously tries to separate them. Here I am interpreting a little bit because the myth does not explicitly say that the older wife is jealous, but at the same time it's incredibly clear. And there is a big drought; and, though it's never told directly in the myth, but only at the end, Python is the god of water. That's why his wife wakes up drenched in the night when she is with him. Anyway, the first wife decides that the second wife is disturbing Python and that there is a drought because Python has decided to hide at the bottom of the last lake which still has water. So, the new wife, because she's been bothering Python, is held responsible for the drought. The old men of the village meditate on the situation, and they decide to have what they call a beer offering, a beer offering to the god Python. And quite naturally, since he likes his new wife very much, it's this new wife who is entrusted with taking this offering to the bottom of the lake to the god Python. The whole community attends when this offering is made. And, as the favourite wife enters the water and disappears into the water, the rain begins to fall and the drought is at an end.

David Cayley
Girard reads this myth as having originated in the collective murder of the younger wife, incited by the older, at a time of drought. One then only has to imagine such an event coinciding with the return of the rain and the rest would follow. The victim who had bestowed this gift would be understood as a god, regular sacrifices would be instituted in order to reproduce the effect of the first, and this sanctified violence would become the monopoly of the god, thus keeping all other violence at bay. This protection of the community against violence that it could not otherwise control is the crucial point, for Girard. Sacrifice, he believes, really does work in this way; but it works only so long as everyone believes in it and only so long as the sacrificial violence can be kept utterly distinct from the everyday violence which it is meant to prevent. When this precarious distinction breaks down, the result is what Girard calls a "sacrificial crisis." And it's just such a crisis, he says, that is made visible in ancient Greek tragedy.

René Girard
The cultural system which has been established through sacrifice loses its effectiveness, and the difference between the good sacrificial violence that should push the violence away and the bad violence becomes nil. Suppose someone violates the law and you, individually, say I'm going to punish him because he has violated the law. The question then is, are you performing a sacrifice or are you

committing a second crime? The people who are on the side of the other fellow are going to say that you have committed a second crime. Therefore, they are going to want vengeance. So, ultimately, when the good violence becomes indistinguishable from the bad violence, sacrifice turns back into vengeance. And usually that's what tragedy shows you—sacrifice going back to vengeance. For instance, Medea, when she kills her children, calls it a sacrifice. Or think of Ajax in the Trojan War, who wants the weapons and the armour of Achilles when Achilles doesn't want to fight, and who becomes so mad that he kills all the flocks of the army when Agamemnon refuses. These flocks are the army's food but also, I think, its sacrificial animals. So is it a sacrifice? Or is it a wanton gesture of destruction? Tragedy happens when you cannot distinguish, when every camp will interpret things differently. And that's a modern conflict—when the situation returns to chaos, and everybody says different things and ultimately the same thing.

David Cayley
Another example of the crisis Girard is describing turns up in Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Julius Caesar. The conspirators who plan to assassinate Caesar are urged by their leader, Brutus, to think of what they intend as a sacrifice. "Let us be sacrificers, not butchers," he says, "purgers, not murderers." And then, even more explicitly, "Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods." But this attempt to invest Caesar's execution with a moral beauty that lifts it clear of any taint of mere violence will fail when Mark Anthony contests Brutus's interpretation. The result is civil war. When no privileged form of violence can be recognized, Girard says, violence spreads unchecked, and eventually reduces everyone to the same condition. Antagonists become indistinguishable and turn into what Girard calls doubles. One sees a graphic example at the beginning of Sophocles' Antigone, where the two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polyneices, kill each other simultaneously in battle.

René Girard
You have the two sons, who are twins, and who are fighting each other. Eteocles and Polyneices are the arch-doubles, the twins who destroy each other ferociously. At the beginning of Antigone they are supposed to resolve their conflict in battle where one should kill the other and emerge victorious. But they both kill each other with the same gesture, at the same time, each blade entering the same part of the other's body and so on. The speech that describes this is marvelous in showing that the doubles cannot solve the problem. The problem of the tragedy is that there are doubles, that everybody is turning into a double of everybody else.

David Cayley
The fact that the fallen brothers are doubles sets the action of the play in motion. Antigone, their sister, recognizing that they are the same, wants to bury them both; but Creon, the king, orders that Polyneices be left unburied outside the city's gates. He argues that the good order of the city depends on a distinction being drawn between them—one is the city's champion, the other its enemy—and he insists that Antigone recognize this distinction.

René Girard
That's what Creon would like Antigone to do. He says, we have these two guys who died at the same moment in the same way. There is absolutely no difference between them, and it cannot continue like that because there's no order, there is no truth and so forth. So here is our good guy, here is our bad guy. But Antigone says, no, I'm not going to believe that. They are the same and I'll treat them the same. I'll bury both of them. You want to bury one honourably and cast the other one to the dogs. I refuse to do that.

David Cayley
Antigone's refusal represents as deep a questioning of the logic of sacrifice as one can find in Greek tragedy. But the Greek tragedians, Girard says, can go only so far in exposing the precariousness and the arbitrariness of the distinction between sacrifice and mere violence. They can arrange the action they present in a revealing way but, in the end, they are playwrights dependent on the favour of their audience and therefore bound to bring the myths they narrate to their predetermined ends. Sophocles' Oedipus the King is an example. Oedipus, from Girard's point of view, is plainly a scapegoat. He

faces the stereotypical accusation, which is found throughout mythology, that he has killed his father and married his mother; he is found responsible for the plague that is ravaging Thebes; he is exiled. And Sophocles, Girard thinks, is at least partially aware of what is going on, though unable to say so openly.

René Girard
Oedipus at first says to his wife, When I came here, they all told me that Laius, the old king, had been killed by many murderers. And I, the one, cannot stand for the many. That's in the text of Sophocles. And if you look at that formula, the one standing for the many, it's a definition of scapegoating. Which shows, in my view, that Sophocles knows what he's doing and he's playing ... He cannot change the ending. He's writing for the people who will be there and will blame him if he changes anything. So he can interpret a little bit but in a kind of hidden way, like this formula, I think, which is so suggestive.

David Cayley
Tragedy, in Girard's view, is restricted to these suggestive hints about scapegoating. The play can vividly evoke the pathos of Oedipus's victimization, but, in the end, it continues, if only in a symbolic way, to sacrifice him.

René Girard
Theatre develops out of sacrifice. The Greek genius was able to turn sacrifice into tragedy. Because what is sacrifice? It's a reliving of the primordial murder, the myth. Tragedy is telling the story instead of actually sacrificing the victim. That's why, when you tell the story, you must not present the sacrifice. The big taboo in Greek tragedy is, you must not even show the violence. You can only use language

David Cayley
In Greek tragedy, violence is represented only by report. A messenger describes for the audience how Oedipus has scratched out his eyes, or how, in Euripides' The Bacchae, the women of Thebes, have dismembered their king; but this action is never actually shown. Using language in this way is obviously a huge step from actually killing someone. But the theatre remains sacrificial, in Girard's terms, because it continues to serve the same purpose as sacrifice for its audience. This purpose is made explicit, he says, in the theory of tragedy which Aristotle presented in his Poetics a century after the great tragedians had written.

René Girard
In the Poetics, Aristotle says that tragedy is catharsis. Catharsis implies a sacrificial world. It means purification; it means purgation, purging. It means that, when the victim dies, you throw the victim to the gods. And the common man who is there in the theatre says, it's common wisdom that all these people, like Oedipus and Tiresias are very ambitious. They want to reach the stars, and they do very interesting things, but ultimately fate hits them back. And we common people stay at home, and we go to the theatre. We are little quiet people, and how much better it is. You have that in every Greek tragedy. The sacrificial nature of the death of the hero is clearly indicated by someone in the chorus saying, oh how good it is to go back to one's little fireplace and put on one's slippers and not to have to die with the great heroes. So, in other words, we throw them to the gods, more or less, but we benefit from their death in the sense that it makes us more peaceful. It makes us eager to avoid trouble. That's what they say. We prefer to be common men, not to have any fame and leave that ambition to these guys who will have a bad end

David Cayley
Greek tragedy, for Girard, is two-sided. It has its sacrificial, reconciliatory side, which makes us want to stick to what the chorus in The Bacchae calls "the customary, beaten path of those who walk with revererence and awe beneath the sons of heaven." But it also has its subversive side, evident in the defiance of Antigone, the subtle doubts Sophocles sows about Oedipus's guilt, and, above all, in the very public airing of what Girard calls the sacrificial crisis, in which vengeance and vigilitanteism have become indistinguishable from sacrifice. And it's this subversive side, Girard says, that accounts for Plato's hostility to the tragic poets in his masterwork, The Republic.

René Girard
We know that Plato couldn't stand them. The idea that Plato was against all poetry, or against all art, in the sense of 19th century Romanticism, is just crazy. Plato isn't against all art. Plato is against the representation of religious violence, against revealing the secret which you must not reveal, because it's antisocial to reveal that secret, and it makes it impossible for the community to work. He says, these things are too ugly. Let's hide them. Let's not talk about them. Or if we have to talk about them, we must have a big sacrifice at the same time. That's Plato. That's The Republic, his greatest work. And Plato, of course, says this with the best intentions in the world. We must not reveal all that stuff which is underneath the community because we're just going to make the disorder worse if we do. Plato is the way of culture. The way of culture is to hide the violence in order to have less of it. His intention is the best possible. It's the highest culture.

David Cayley
Plato, in his Republic, proposes what he calls "a censorship of the writers of fiction" in order to prevent, he says, any "erroneous representation of the nature of gods and heroes." According to Girard, he is saying, in effect, better not to go poking around in the nature of the sacred. The Bible, in Girard's view, takes the opposite tack. The Biblical writers openly unravel mythology and demystify the sacred, making, as they go along, an ever fuller disclosure of what Greek tragedy can only hint at—the innocence of the scapegoat. In the Bible, from the very beginning, Girard says, something completely unprecedented happens. The stories that are told still have the structure of myths—order is created out of chaos, brother wars with brother, heroes solve riddles, an angry god floods the world—but their meaning is not the same. For example, when Romulus kills his brother Remus at the founding of Rome, Remus is understood to be justly punished for having transgressed the sacred boundary of the new city. When Cain, also a founder of cities, kills his brother Abel, the blood of the fallen brother cries out to God from the ground. Girard highlights this difference in his most recent book, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, by making a systematic comparison between two stories—the tale of Joseph and his brothers, in the book of Genesis, and the myth of Oedipus. The parallels are striking. Oedipus is abandoned in infancy, achieves power in Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, and then is undone when it is discovered that he has killed his father and married his mother. Joseph, too, is driven out in his youth when he is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He, too, achieves power by solving a riddle when he correctly interprets Pharaoh's prophetic dream of a coming famine. And he, too, faces an accusation of sexual wrong-doing. The accusation is made when Joseph is a slave in the household of Potiphar, the captain of Paraoh's guard.

René Girard
There is a great similarity between the Joseph story and the Oedipus myth, and you have many of the same episodes. The accusation that Potiphar's wife makes against Joseph is, in effect, an accusation of incest because Potiphar has treated Joseph like a son. Therefore, if Joseph has really tried to rape Lady Potiphar, it's as bad as incest. The accusation against him is of the same type as the accusation against Oedipus. But what does the Bible tell you? It tells you the accusation is nonsense. It's the Gentiles who believe these things, who have this myth, but we Jews know better. Joseph is a little immigrant, who is inevitably suspect. He has no protector. She is the one who tried to seduce him. The story very much resembles another Greek myth which is the myth of Phaedra. Phaedra wants to make love to her son-in-law. But, even though he doesn't want to make love to her, he is guilty, according to Venus, because he's too chaste. All the heroes in myth who resemble Joseph are guilty of something. Either they've really done it—they committed the incest—or they didn't do it and they should have done it because it's bad not to have any sexual life. It's like today. You have to be both promiscuous and watch out about sexual harassment. Which may be difficult, you know, because you're in a world where the taboos and the command of promiscuity are always running into each other. The world of myth is very much like our contemporary world, but the world of the Bible is much more logical and rigorous. It tells us, he didn't do it.

David Cayley
Joseph's innocence, from Girard's point of view, represents an historical watershed because, heretofore, in all mythologies, the scapegoat hero has been portrayed as guilty. And Girard finds this innovation all the more striking because the tales are otherwise so similar.

René Girard
You see how close Joseph is to Oedipus, how related the two stories are, how easy it would be to say that obviously the Bible is a myth, too. But there is one question which is answered differently. Every time the myth asks the question, is Oedipus guilty?, the answer is yes. Has he killed his father? Yes. Is he responsible for giving the plague to the Thebans? Yes. Has he slept with his mother? The answer is yes. Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty. Joseph—not guilty, not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. That's a huge difference because the not guilty is not arbitrary but is a reading of mythology. It's a reading of the fact that the unanimity of mythology is crowd contagion and not reason.

David Cayley
The difference between Joseph and Oedipus culminates, for Girard, in the Bible story's final episode when Joseph finally confronts his brothers. And in the course of that confrontation, a possibility unknown to mythology is revealed.

René Girard
Joseph has solved the problem of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh has made him his prime minister. Jacob and his sons are starving because drought and famine are not limited to Egypt - they are all over the Middle East. In Palestine, where they are, they hear a rumour that in Egypt you can get grain. So they say, let's go. All the brothers go to Egypt, or rather all of the brothers except Benjamin. Benjamin is the only full brother of Joseph; and, having lost Joseph, Jacob is very attached to Benjamin, who is now the only son he has from Rachel, the wife whom he loved so much. So the brothers say to their father, we'll leave Benjamin here with you, and we'll go there. And if we get food, we'll bring it back to you, of course. So they go there, and they get to Egypt, and they see Joseph, and they don't recognize him, probably because he's in splendid clothes, and he looks like one of these statues in the Karnak temple. So how could they recognize him? Joseph gives them grain but first he asks them, are you the only brothers there are? Isn't there one more? And they hesitate a little bit and then say, yes, we have one more, you know, but our father loves him very much because he's lost another son by that same wife, and so we left him at home. So Joseph says next time, if you want more grain, you have to bring Benjamin with you. So off they go, they eat their grain very fast, poor things, and they are hungry again. But they don't want to go back because they don't want to take Benjamin. However, Jacob forces them and says, you take Benjamin, it's not that far, after all, and the first time you had no problem. So they go back there. And they bring Benjamin. Joseph doesn't make himself known to them when he gives them the grain, and he has one of his servants hide a precious cup, his precious cup, the text says, in the bag of Benjamin. And, naturally, at the border the police have orders to search them all. And they find the precious cup in the bag of Benjamin. So they bring them all back to Joseph. He's in a good position. He says I'll keep Benjamin, who is guilty. Do you agree? And you can all go. In other words, he puts them to another test of expulsion, a test which is more tempting than the first since it seems that Benjamin is really guilty. And nine of the ten remaining brothers say ... we'll go. They don't ask for more, and they are ready to go. But Judah, who is the oldest of the twelve - and the ancestor of Christ, the Christians will add - Judah says, I can't stand it because if we come without Benjamin my old father is going to die, so we'll have lost not only Benjamin, but also my old father. Take me instead of Benjamin. And there, Joseph forgives all his brothers. One is enough. He has put them to the test of expulsion. Only one managed to pass it, but he forgives them all and invites them all to Egypt. That's the beginning of the Egyptian period of the Hebrews because they all go there But isn't that a beautiful story? The last episode shows that, for Joseph, the meaning of the story is the one I say - Will they expel me another time? - because Benjamin is obviously the same thing as Joseph. And they are all forgiven, when only one offers himself for his brother. So you have substitution

there which is the reverse of a sacrificial substitution. If one acts right, everybody is saved. So the whole story, I say, is anti-myth and anti-sacrifice. That's absolutely obvious. Now, of course, they didn't know the Oedipus myth -- or maybe they did, who knows? - but they knew similar myths and they were writing against them. And what genius to write the story like another myth, but to make it an anti-myth, the opposite of a myth, which reveals that mythology is the opposite of that love Joseph still ultimately feels for his brothers. In the Oedipus myth the story ends with the expulsion of Oedipus—period.

David Cayley
The tale of Joseph and his brothers, for Girard, is a conscious and intentional rewriting of mythology. And, as such, he says, it typifies the new thing that is happening in the Bible.

René Girard
The Joseph story is absolutely archetypal, in my view. It shows what the Bible is about, its real meaning, which is entirely the deconstruction—let's use this word—of mythology. Not through theory, not through philosophy, trying to establish the right concept, but by writing that incredibly beautiful story which is the first human story, because Joseph is not a god. When the brothers go to Egypt, they find that Joseph has become an Egyptian god—that's really what he is, you know, because being second to the Pharaoh is being so close to divinity that you're certainly divinised, too. Still they are Jews. They don't divinize their scapegoats. But you can see the whole outline of what the story would be if it were a pagan story, if it were a myth. Joseph would end up divinised, you see. But he doesn't.

David Cayley
Another Biblical story in which Girard finds the standard mythological plot turned inside out is the Book of Job. He has analysed it in an essay entitled Job: A Victim of His People which was published in English in 1987. The Book of Job consists of several sections which scholars believe were written at different times, but the part that most interests Girard is the oldest section, known as the Dialogues. There, Job is portrayed as a once great ruler who remembers days, the text says, when "my feet were plunged in cream, streams of oil poured from the rocks and like a king amid his armies, I led where I chose." But, when we meet him, he has been laid low, and sits in misery, surrounded by several friends, so called, who try to persuade him that his downfall is deserved.

René Girard
The friends are not friends at all. The friends are delegates from the mob who try to persuade Job that he is guilty, that he should be the scapegoat, that they are right to turn him into a scapegoat. He was their leader - there is a whole chapter about that, about how he was an object of reverence and veneration for the whole people, which is incredible - and it's a story of a people who suddenly shift around and want to destroy what in Greece they called their tyrant. Therefore, it's a story very much like Oedipus, again. Contrary to what we sometimes think, tyranny, the one-man rule in the ancient world, was very fragile. If people suddenly shifted around, the tyrant was finished. And Job is another story like that. But Job does not say, you must be right since you're all together - *vox populi, vox dei, t*he voice of the people is necessarily the voice of God, an old Latin motto which really agrees with scapegoating. Job says, no, I'm not the one. Maybe I wasn't worthy of all that worship you had for me before, but I'm not that bad. And this alternation of love and hate cannot be right. There is something wrong with it. He compares the people to a mountain torrent in the desert. In the winter, he says, there is so much water that you drown in it; and when you're really thirsty, in the summer when the sun is shining and it's forty-five degrees, centigrade, in the shade, there's not a drop of water. Therefore, there is no reason in what you do. At one moment you turn a man into a god. The next minute you turn him into your victim and scapegoat. So he's reacting in a human way. And he says, there must be a real God. My defender is alive. God must be on my side. But , if you look at the Dialogues clearly, you can see that Job is not always sure. It's very difficult to stand up against everybody. And there are moments when he says, you probably are right. And the book's first readers must have read the story against Job, because we know that the fourth friend, who makes the final indictiment against Job, was added later on

behalf of the readers who were incensed by the insolence of Job and who wanted to convict Job a little more. So that's really fascinating. But the Book of Job as a whole moves against this tendency. And, at the end, God says, the one who talked abut me correctly was Job, I'm not the voice of the mob, I'm against the mob. The Book of Job therefore is a fantastic battleground between the two great conceptions of the Divine: the mob conception, which is that God is an elaboration of society; and the conception that God is totally alien to all that - so far from human ways, and so hostile to all our victimizations that we don't understand Him at all.

David Cayley
Why do the friends have to convince Job ... to go along?

René Girard
Well, because it's like a Soviet trial. You want complete unanimity, so you have to get the victim himself to agree with you. It's like the Moscow trials of 1937. The best way to convince the crowd is to have the the supposedly guilty people say themselves, "I should die, I'm guilty." That's ideal. Then, there is no possible voice that can go against the new truth.

David Cayley
So Job refuses what all antique scapegoats accept—their own guilt.

René Girard
Yes. But the most interesting moments are the moments when he vacillates, and he's almost ready to say to his friends, you must be right because I'm the only one of my kind. How could I be right? He says even the lowest of the low persecute me, I'm the scapegoat of the scapegoats. His community obviously—read the text, it's fascinating—had its outcasts. And Job says, even the outcasts cast stones on me. I'm the outcast of the outcasts now. And I was at the top. Therefore, how could I fail to be guilty? But then he says no, no, no, I will not believe you.

David Cayley
Job's refusal, so unlike Oedipus's almost eager embrace of his destiny, makes Job, in Girard's words, "a failed scapegoat." He may waver but, in the end, he rejects the friends' claim that it is God who has unleashed against him "a burning wrath", "a hail of arrows", "an arsenal of terrors." God, he asserts, cannot be a persecutor or the friend of persecutors. In this sense, Girard says, what is going on in the Book of Job is what is going on through the whole length of the Hebrew Bible: the very idea which humanity has of God is changing. The change is also visible in the way sacrifice is understood. In Genesis, seemingly, child sacrifice is still being practiced. By the time of the prophets, all sacrifice is being denounced as displeasing to God. The first turning point comes, Girard says, when God demands of Abraham the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac, and then at the last moment supplies a ram in his place.

René Girard
My interpretation of Isaac's sacrifice is that it is the end of child sacrifice. God asks Abraham to kill his son. Which God is that? It's the old God. It's the traditional God. But the text is very powerful and very deep. What the text tells you ultimately is that, in order to transcend the old gods, you must obey them. If you do away with human sacrifice, you must have that stage of animal sacrifice. You're going to get beyond child sacrifice, not by rebelling against religion but by staying within your tradition which will come to include the transcendence of child sacrifice. I think that's what the text ultimately says: God will provide. Isaac asks, who is going to provide the victim? When he is going up the mountain with his father, he says, I see the fuel for the fire, I see the knife, but who is the victim? And Abraham has that gigantic reply, "God will provide." Which the Christians interpret, of course, as meaning God will provide His son, ultimately. In the same way, for the Christians, Judah in the Joseph story is the figure of Christ par excellence. No one wants to sacrifice himself to save his brother. Judah does it, just as Christ will. But he sacrifices himself against sacrifice, in order *not* to have Benjamin sacrificed, in order *not* to have Isaac sacrificed.

David Cayley
The overcoming of human sacrifice is a difficult achievement for contemporary people to imagine, since we can hardly believe that it ever occurred in the first place. But child sacrifice was practised throughout the Middle East, Girard says, and seems to have sometimes recurred among the Israelites even after God stayed Abraham's hand from his son.

René Girard
If you look at the Bible, the whole background there is child sacrifice. And in my view, the first books of Genesis are about how it is to be surmounted. One way is circumcision. There is a scene which is called the circumcision of the son of Moses, where the mother intervenes and saves the child from his father. And she circumcises her husband. She says, you will be for me a husband of blood. And there you can see very well, if you read the story in the context of child sacrifice, that circumcision is another one of these ways in which you avoid the killing of the child by instituting a substitute form of sacrifice. So you can say you have a history of sacrifice moving towards less and less sacrifice.

David Cayley
This history, in the Hebrew Bible, culminates in the writings of the prophets who denounce sacrifice altogether. They speak at a time of crisis and conquest, when the people have grown desperate and some, according to the prophet Jeremiah, have even returned to human sacrifices. But what the prophets tell people, Girard says, is that sacrifice will no longer work.

René Girard
The prophets operate in a world where violence is getting worse and worse. And people think they are going to be saved by sacrifices. But the prophets all say, sacrifices are no use any more. You can pile up a lot of meat on a lot of meat, and it's not going to help you. The institution of sacrifice is dead. And the only way to replace sacrifice is to be good to your neighbour.

David Cayley
"What are your endless sacrifices to me?" God says through the prophet Isaiah. "Let me have no more of the din of your chanting," He says through Amos, "but let justice flow like water and integrity like an unfailing stream." Like the Greek society portrayed by the tragic poets, the Israel of the prophets has plunged into what Girard calls a sacrificial crisis—the vicious circle that begins when sacrifice loses its effectiveness and the good violence can no longer be distinguished from the bad violence. To try to go back, the prophets say, will only intensify the crisis. The only way out now is to face the violence rather than trying to conjure it away through sacrifice. "Your hands are covered with blood," Isaiah says, "wash, make yourselves clean."

The many denunciations of sacrifice, in the writings of the prophets, are the culmination of what Girard earlier called the deconstruction of mythology in the Hebrew Bible. Violence and victimization have been disentangled from the divine and made visible as a human predicament—in Girard's view, a huge step forward in human self-understanding. The story will go on in the Christian New Testament and it is to Girard's understanding of that book and of the significance of the life and death of Jesus that I will turn in the next program of this series.

Paul Kennedy
I'm Paul Kennedy, and this is *Ideas* on the thought of René Girard. In nine books, published over a period of 40 years, French thinker René Girard has covered an intellectual territory that ranges from psychology to anthropology, from Greek tragedy to the modern novel, from Shakespeare to the Bible. His most recent book, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, is an interpretation of the New Testament and a further development of ideas that he first presented in two earlier works, The Scapegoat, and Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World. Girard writes as a Christian, but what he puts forward in these writings is neither theology nor spiritual testimony. He believes that the Gospel is an intellectual breakthrough, that it offers exactly what Jesus says it does—"the key to knowledge," the revelation of "things hidden since the foundation of the world." What is revealed, Girard thinks, is the hidden violence that is built in to all cultures, and tonight he'll explain why he thinks so and what he thinks the significance of this revelation is.

Our program is Part Three of a series of five programs about René Girard called "The Scapegoat." It's presented by David Cayley.

David Cayley
In his first two books, Deceit, Desire and the Novel and Violence and the Sacred, René Girard put forward an account of human violence that he called the "mimetic theory." The theory holds that all non-instinctual desire is mimetic or imitative. We imitate each other's desires, and so our desires frequently converge on the same objects, leading to conflict. And conflict, too, is mimetic, according to Girard's theory, which means that, once begun, it tends to intensify and spread as people copy each other's violence. A war, a feud, even an ordinary bar brawl are all examples. Human societies, therefore, face a permanent threat of runaway violence. The first cultures, Girard believes, solved this problem by channelling their violence towards sacrificial victims. He thinks that this solution must have arisen in the first place from a spontaneous discovery - that when everyone opposes a single victim an order is created - and then gradually developed into a cultural system anchored on regular sacrifices. He calls this discovery the foundational murder. But cultures that created order in this way, Girard stresses, did not understand what they were doing. For them, the awe-inspiring transmutation of violence into order was sacred, and their scapegoat victims were gods. This was a necessary illusion, Girard believes, first because these cultures had no other way of maintaining order and, second, because sacrifice only works when it is believed to be a divine and not a human requirement. So the very existence of this cultural system depended on its suppressing any recognition of its own violent origins.

And here, at last, we come to the Bible because it is in the Bible, Girard says, that this universal cultural order, founded on scapegoats, is demystified and its violence laid bare. And this demystification begins, he says, from the Bible's opening scene which pictures the root of the violence, mimetic desire.

René Girard
With Adam and Eve the thing which is fascinating is that neither one really desires the apple. Eve comes first. She's approached by the serpent, and it's the serpent who instills into her the desire for the apple. He says, you will be like God and so forth. And then she transmits that desire to Adam. She gets him to do it. And then the scene is played back in reverse, when God asks Adam what happened. Adam replies something like, she made me eat of the forbidden fruit. And Eve says, it's the serpent who did it. I mean, there cannot be any better illustration of mimetic desire. And I also like this reading because it avoids the mistake of the medieval interpretation which was that Eve is the real sinner because she's the first one to desire. There I think you have to say no, she's in exactly the same situation as Adam. She gets the desire from someone else, too. And of course, the role of Satan is to communicate mimetic desire because Satan is an imitator and Satan likes to be imitated, like all imitators; and, therefore, he communicates mimetic desire.

David Cayley
Satan, in Girard's reading, personifies mimetic desire and he takes on this role most fully in the New Testament. There, he appears first as a model who

invites imitation and then as an obstacle, or first as a tempter and then as an adversary in the traditional language. This follows what Girard understands to be the mechanics of mimetic desire. Others encourage us to imitate their desires; but, as soon as we do, we find that they have become competitors because now we want the same thing and are in each other's way. The Greek word that the New Testament uses for this feature of mimetic desire, Girard says, is 'skandalon', which means literally 'snare' or 'stumbling block'. And it associates the word, he says, with Satan.

René Girard
The skandalon is the model that becomes an obstacle, period. The skandalon is Satan when he becomes the adversary. When you first imitate him, you think he's not going to be in the way. But then, suddenly, he's there as an obstacle. Instead of being a seducer, he threatens you. He retaliates against you. Strange transformation. As the proof of this, you have a sentence of Jesus which explains it all. When Jesus announces his passion for the first time, Peter says, No, Master, this will not happen to you. You're going to be successful. Don't think you're going to die. We'll all win the battle together. And there Jesus says, move away from me, *vade retro*, Satan.

David Cayley
It says in the King James "Get Thee behind me ..."

René Girard
Get thee behind me. Yes, because it's a physical obstacle, too. A stumbling block. So, what does it mean? Peter says to Christ, Imitate my desire. I have a desire for success. I'm part of your enterprise. And I tell you our enterprise is not going to fail. What kind of a CEO are you? And Jesus says, that's what Satan is. This desire for success is sure to bring skandalon. And indeed, what would happen if Jesus imitated Peter? After one week, maybe, or three days they'd become mimetic rivals for the leadership of this messianic group, and that would be the end of it. We'd never have heard of it.

David Cayley
Mimetic desire leads, first, to conflict—Peter and Jesus as rivals—and ultimately to violence. And this violence is also personified by Satan. In the New Testament, Satan is the master of the world. In the scene of Christ's Temptation, when Satan offers Jesus dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus refuses the offer but does not dispute Satan's title or question whether worldly power is Satan's to give. Satan has this power, according to Girard, because he symbolizes the system of scapegoating and victimization that makes society work. He's called the Accuser, and the one he accuses, first of all, is the innocent victim whose murder founds society. In the Bible, this first victim is Abel, the son of Adam and Eve, murdered by his brother Cain, who then founds the first culture. The basis of this culture is sacrifice, the violence that expels violence and keeps what Girard calls the bad mimesis at bay. Jesus calls it Satan driving out Satan.

René Girard
How does Satan expel Satan? This is a definition of the foundational murder. Jesus does not deny that Satan expels Satan. He's been expelling Satan for a long time. But he says he's not going to do it for long because his kingdom is at an end. The Kingdom of Satan exists and can be a kingdom only because Satan can expel Satan, because the Kingdom of Satan is founded on negative imitation. If this bad mimesis did not expel itself, did not moderate itself, did not repress itself, there would be no kingdom of Satan. There would quickly be nothing at all.

David Cayley
Satan rules by repressing himself, by using violence to control violence. And he succeeds. But his trick will only work for so long, Jesus says, because a house divided against itself cannot stand. Satan's system works only so long as people don't recognize that the victims he accuses are innocent. Jesus reveals the secret and so disarms the whole mechanism. But if Satan can no longer drive out Satan, an alternative is necessary. Otherwise, disorder will worsen catastrophically and, as Girard says, there will quickly be nothing at all. The alternative Jesus proposes is what he calls the Kingdom of Heaven. Its principle, Girard says, is still

imitation - imitation, in his terms, is inevitable since we do not create either ourselves or the world we live in - but it is imitation of the one who will never imitate us.

René Girard
Jesus says if you don't want to be bothered by scandals, you have to imitate a model such as me who will not become your rival. That's why Paul is entitled to say the same thing, because he's a good imitator of Jesus who himself is a good imitator of the Father. And this chain of imitation is non-rivalrous, obviously. Today, our models pretend not to imitate anyone. For instance, Nietzsche, what does Nietzsche say to you? He says, in effect, imitate me because I don't imitate anyone. And this is a total self-contradiction. All modern gurus tell you that. The individualistic guru says, imitate me insofar as I'm not an imitator. They put you in a double bind. In order not to be an imitator, become one. But you don't have that in the imitation of Christ. Imitate the imitator that I am. Christian life is a chain of imitations.

David Cayley
To imitate the Father, according to Jesus, is to identify with others and with the world as a whole. God, he says, makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and makes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust. This teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, Girard says, is a response to a crisis that had already been identified by the Hebrew prophets—the failure of sacrifice. Sacrifice, all the prophets say, is displeasing to God and no longer a workable way of harmonizing society. And so a new way must be found to tame contagious violence or what Girard calls "mimetic escalation." Jesus continues this theme.

René Girard
Sacrifices don't work any more. Therefore, what can you do? You can behave according to the rules of the Kingdom of God, which is to refuse the escalation when people provoke you. Instead of being violent, answering violence with violence, we have to answer with non-violence. Therefore, if someone strikes you on the left cheek, offer your right cheek. If someone wants to walk a mile with you, walk two miles. It's not a political program, as the 19th century believed. It's not a social program. It says, if a mimetic escalation begins, this is the moment you must drop everything. If someone makes outrageous demands on you, this the moment when you must abandon everything because if you follow suit, if you do the same thing, you are in the escalation and then it's finished. You're going to kill each other, brothers. Therefore, the apocalypse is right here, because if you don't abandon your old ways, you're going to die. The apocalypse is not some invention, as if the first Christians believed there was a space ship waiting for them on the other side of the moon. No, it means, if we are without sacrifices, we're going to kill each other. Either we are going to love each other or we're going to die. We have no more protection against our own violence. Therefore, we are confronted with it. Either we're going to follow the rules of the Kingdom of God, or the situation is going to get infinitely worse.

David Cayley
Jesus' offer of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Girard sees it, constitutes an apocalyptic either/or. If the offer were accepted, the story would have a different ending. When it is not, what inevitably follows is Christ's Passion, as Christians call the sufferings and death of Jesus. There can, therefore, be no separation between the teachings of Jesus and His Crucifixion, a point on which Girard feels himself to be at odds with much contemporary New Testament scholarship.

René Girard
It is this logic that modern scholarship wants to avoid. It wants to separate out the offer of the kingdom and say, oh, that must be the real historical Jesus. And then, after that, the bad priests, ambitious and perverse, have invented everything else in order to deprive us of that happy Christ who was not announcing anything bad because we are all good and there is no problem with the world.

David Cayley
The modern scholarship that Girard says wants to divide the ethical Jesus, "the happy Christ", from the theological Jesus has a long history. Two hundred

years ago, Thomas Jefferson cut up his King James Bible and pasted up a new New Testament. He did so, he explained in a letter to John Adams, in order to purge away the theological dross and reveal, in his words, "the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to Man." The current version of this attempt to rescue the New Testament from itself, Girard says, is the Jesus Seminar whose scholar members pursue what they call the historical Jesus.

René Girard
The real historical Jesus is based on this idea which is very much against my own views, that there are two Jesuses. The one they consider the real Jesus was an itinerant preacher, a Galilean peasant, they even say, whom they compare to a Greek Cynic. Now the word "Cynic" is very fashionable when you talk about this Jesus. And this Jesus would have nothing to do with the Jesus of the Passion who was invented by the theologians. Why do they say this? Because they have a Voltairian view of the Church, really. They think that the Church is trying to fool people and dominate people, and that the Passion and the Resurrection were invented in order to create a religion. And in order to make this argument, they have to separate out the offer of the Kingdom of God. Jesus says, the Kingdom of God means we must all get together and give up all this volence. Follow the rules that I give to you and I will, too. If someone strikes me on the left cheek, I'll offer my right cheek. And if we all do it, no cheek will be struck. But, of course, the people refuse. They prefer their old ways. And they have a scapegoat who is right there, who is already found, who is the guy who is trying to disturb and upset their whole system - Jesus. So, far from being disconnected with the Passion, the offer of the Kingdom of God is an absolutely fundamental part of it. The failure of the Kingdom of God means that Jesus puts himself forward as the scapegoat for that occasion. If you prefer the old system to what Jesus proposes, you need scapegoats. And the scapegoat who is there, ready to go, is Jesus himself, since he has violated the rules. So I deny very much that there is a break between two Jesuses. The search for the historical Jesus is trying to say that the only historical Jesus is the one who has the innocuous little sayings and so on. There is no Passion at the end. The Passion was invented by the priests and the theologians. And of course, this is the revival of a thesis first presented in 19th century France. There was a famous book in the middle of the 19th century - Renan, The Life of Jesus - that had tremendous influence. All these theses are already there, but they are written in a better style.

David Cayley
Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, in Girard's view, is not just generic wisdom, nor is it something that can be detached from Jesus' eventual fate. It's a teaching that quite specifically addresses the danger of escalating violence that is created when the old sacrificial order is undone. The injunction to love your enemy and the rest, Girard says, is neither an ideological blueprint nor some sort of impossibly exacting moral standard but a way of recognizing and dealing with certain critical situations.

René Girard
The precepts of the Kingdom of God point to certain crucial moments when others want you to collaborate with them in the game of violence. Therefore, they make outrageous demands upon you, and they secretly hope that you're going to reply in the same way. You're going to get mad and give them what they want which will be an opportunity to say the violence came from him, not from me. There are circumstances in which everything is at stake, like the Passion, when Jesus is in front of the ecclesiastical establishment of the only religion which, in his view, contains the truth and the power of the Roman Empire. And there, there is no resistance. There is silence. There is nothing more to say.

David Cayley
Culture begins, according to René Girard, with a unanimous collective murder, a turning of all against one. And this situation, he says, is precisely reproduced in the Passion of Jesus, which becomes inevitable after the rejection of the offer of the Kingdom. Once he is arrested and taken to the palace of the high priest, Jesus stands entirely alone, abandoned even by his disciples who

disperse, uncomprehending, into the crowd. His betrayal is dramatized by the behaviour of Peter, the first of those whom Jesus called to be his disciples.

René Girard
Peter decides to follow, and they all go together to the mansion, or palace of the high priest. And in the courtyard there is a fire. Peter stands by the fire there with the crowd of people who are the policemen and servants of the high priest because the high priest was, to a limited extent, a worldly ruler as well. And there, in the courtyard, there is a servant who says, I can recognize you, you don't speak like we do, you have a Galilean accent – a marvelous scapegoat touch. So how can Peter join these people? At the expense of Jesus whom he sacrifices, right then and there, without even realizing it.

David Cayley
"I do not know the man," Peter says, because he wants to stay with the crowd around the fire. And this fire, Girard says in his analysis of this story in his book, The Scapegoat, is implicitly the sacred fire which immolates the victim and unites the onlookers. Peter's betrayal, which Jesus had predicted, sums up the behaviour of the disciples throughout Jesus' ministry. They misunderstand his teaching. They haggle over who will get the best places in heaven. They fall asleep during Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are Everyman and, remarkably, it is they who must have drawn this unflattering self portrait, since it is through them and their successors that the story has come down to us. The Gospel, as Girard reads it, tells the unvarnished truth about scapegoating, that we all want to warm ourselves at the fire with Peter And the unique honesty of this confession, Girard says, can be seen by contrasting it with the story that founds our philosophical tradition, the execution of Socrates.

René Girard
People ask me, what about the death of Socrates—isn't it the same thing? I say, but there is a difference. The death of Socrates shows him as a scapegoat of the community, no doubt. But there is a difference in the reporting of the two events. In the Gospel reports, we are told that the disciples were all tempted to side with the crowd and that, in a way, they all abandoned Jesus. Whereas the philosophers never abandon Socrates. The philosophers are not able to put themselves in the position of guilty people, who recognize that they are guilty of scapegoating, too. There are other differences too; but it is of particular interest, and one always mentions it in this connection, that Plato was not there when Socrates died. He stayed at home, or he had the 'flu, or something. But he didn't show up. It's kind of strange. You would have thought that he would have been by the side of his master at the time of his death, but he was not. Nevertheless Plato will never say any one of us betrayed Socrates, whereas, in the Gospel, it's the apostles themselves who will betray Jesus.

David Cayley
The disciples, who will become the first Christians, disappear into the crowd at the time of the crucifixion. Jesus is alone. And this is the key to understanding what would later become a very vexed question: Who killed Jesus? The implicit answer, according to Girard, is everyone.

René Girard
The mimetic theory tells you that every culture in the world is based on a foundational murder. And Jesus says that this murder is being repeated constantly, because he says I'm going to die like all the prophets before me. He doesn't mean only the Jewish prophets, since the first one he mentions is Abel. He refers to that first culture and first murder. And the Gospel of John says Satan, the Devil was a murderer since *arche*, the beginning, the first culture. And in John he says, "And you are going to do it again." To say that the Jews have crucified Christ is only to say that, by crucifying Christ, this universal murder has for the first time been fully revealed for what it is. I think it's ridiculous, from a Christian viewpoint, to say that the Jews have not killed Christ. But everybody else has also killed Christ by killing innocent victims who are the exact equivalent of Christ. So the only difference with the Jews is that they participate in the revelation. They participate so well that they play their role of deniers of Christ until the end. I think one has to say that. In Christian theory, the Jews will be the first to really understand

Christianity. And I believe that deeply because they'll be the first to understand what I'm saying now, that they are only the representatives of humanity in the Gospel. They are the representative of all cultures which do the same thing. But you can reveal it only in a culture like the Jewish one which incorporates so much truth already that the lie of the foundational murder is closer to the surface, is about to be revealed and is revealed in the Gospels.

David Cayley
One of the things that indicates to Girard that the killing of Jesus is a repetition of the first murder, the founding murder, is a sentence he speaks from the cross in the Gospel of Luke—"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Until I read Girard I had taken this familiar saying as no more than a platitude, a sort of gracious superiority to the crowd. But Girard made me see that it is, in fact, a literal and precise definition of scapegoating.

René Girard
It means that the scapegoaters, literally, don't know what they are doing. They are unconscious. They believe the victim is guilty. They believe they are doing their duty. There is a sentence which corresponds to Jesus' statement from the Cross in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter, a few days after the cross, talks to the crowd of Jerusalem and tells them, you don't realize that you've killed the Son of God, the Messiah, but you're not as guilty as you might think, if you were to understand what you have done, because you were in ignorance. This has the same meaning as the sentence of Jesus. And I think it has to be interpreted in a technical way. The mimetic violence is unconscious: it doesn't know what it's doing. The mob is always innocent. Don't count on the mob to tell you what they've really done. They'll give you the myth of Oedipus. They'll say, there was this guy that had killed his father and married his mother, and we had to get rid of him. That's what they would say. We judged him, according to the rules, and we decided he had to be expelled.

David Cayley
The unconsciousness of the crowd, to which Jesus points from the Cross, has been illustrated again and again in our own time. His exact words turn up in the confession of a Rwandan man which I saw quoted in my newspaper a few years ago. This man was in prison, awaiting trial for having killed neighbour children with a homemade wooden club spiked with nails. He told the reporter, "I didn't want to. I didn't mean to kill them. I didn't know what I was doing." Not knowing what you're doing, for Girard, is the key to the entire realm of mythology and the archaic sacred, in which gods become victims and victims gods, but the victimization is never recognized as the act of the crowd, but always thought of as the design of the divinity. In the Gospel, he says, it is only those who have woken up and recognized what they have been doing who encounter the risen god.

René Girard
The resurrected Christ appears only to the people who, ultimately, have seceded from the mob. The resurrected god of the myth appears to the mob. He's the god of the mob. *Vox populi, vox dei.* He's the voice of the mob.

David Cayley
The mythological god embodies the entire community. He or she, quite literally, *is* that community in a projected form. The risen Christ is apparent only to a minority who have seceded, as Girard says, from the crowd.

René Girard
In myth, you never have any dissident minority that will tell you that Oedipus has not committed parricide and incest. In the Gospels, you have an enormous majority who say, Jesus is a blasphemer, and probably parricidal and incestuous, and then you have a minority, which is very small, who say otherwise. This minority is not there at the beginning. At the beginning all the disciples are scattered. It takes the Resurrection for them to say the truth. In other words, the anthropological truth, the judicial truth, that Jesus is obviously innocent, comes only through the Resurrection. That's what one has to see. And it affects only a few people who, when they say, hey, hey, this scapegoat is innocent, realize that scapegoats in general are innocent. Immediately they become likely victims themselves.

Because the crowd, in order to maintain its truth, will kill anybody who denies that truth.

David Cayley
According to Girard, the gospel can be distinguished from mythological narratives of resurrection by the fact that Jesus appears, not to the crowd, but only to those few who can recognize his innocence. This does not mean that for Girard the Resurrection is nothing but the recognition of Jesus' innocence. As a believing Christian, he asserts that it was a real event and a real human being who walked and talked and ate with his disciples after the Crucifixion. But this event, instead of ratifying the crowd's perspective, makes it possible for some to dissent from it. The Resurrection breaks the spell of unanimous opinion which Girard thinks is the basis for the old sense of the sacred. By the light of the Resurrection, the disciples can see, in retrospect, what they could not possibly have seen at the time, that they themselves have been immersed in the mind of the crowd.

René Girard
So when they come back, they come back in a very different way. And they come back, after the experience of betrayal, with an awareness of their self-deception. And the two essential conversions in the Gospels are the conversions of Peter and Paul. Peter's conversion occurs after his denial and is described in Luke. Jesus goes through the courtyard at that moment and looks at him, and there Peter understands that he's the persecutor of Jesus. And in the case of Paul, on the road to Damascus, Jesus asks him, why do you persecute me? To become a Christian is to become aware of oneself as a persecutor of Christ. And one is always a persecutor of Christ insofar as one lives inside the circle. But. in the case of Peter or Paul, they are made aware in a more powerful way than anybody else, because Peter is in that courtyard, in the scene that we talked about earlier, and Paul has been persecuting Christians. He has attended the stoning of Stephen, one of the first Christians. And he's going to Damascus to persecute Christians a little more. He feels it's his duty. And on the way, he encounters Jesus.

David Cayley
The passion of Jesus, in René Girard's view, corresponds to rituals found all over the world. "There's not an incident [in the story]", Girard has written, "that cannot be found in countless instances. The preliminary trial, the derisive crowd, the grotesque honours accorded to the victim, [and] the degrading punishment that takes place outside the holy city in order not to contaminate it." What makes the story unique is the fact that the victim is someone who stands completely outside of the violence of which everyone else is, without exception, a prisoner, someone capable of rising above the violence which, until then, had risen above mankind. And this luminous victim, unresisting but also completely uninvolved in the sacrificial game, makes visible what today we take for granted—the ugliness of the violence to which he submits.

René Girard
If you see the truth of that violence, suddenly that violence repels you. Before the Cross, every violence is portrayed as heroic. In literature, in the epic, even in tragedy the casting out of the victim is justified. Only the Bible doesn't do that. We owe so much to the Bible that we have a feeling that it comes from us and we cannot recognize our debt. When we criticize the Bible, we can criticize it only with the Bible, not with the Iliad, not with Greek philosophy. We have assimilated so much, but we are not aware that the substance we have assimilated comes from the Bible, which is that violence is ugly and not heroic. The Bible reveals that violence is the birth of the community, the ugly birth of the community. If you look at the Cross, you can see it. In Mark's Gospel, no one understands, and even God abandons Christ, but think of the note on which it ends. On the note of the centurion who says, yes, he was the Son of God. The only one converted is the guy who has nothing to do with it. He's there as a soldier, he's been drafted from who knows where, and suddenly it strikes him when he sees the Cross that the whole world is changed.

David Cayley
"Truly, this man was the Son of God," says the Roman soldier on duty at the foot of the Cross. And this was what the whole Christian church, after

several centuries of debate, would finally come to believe, that Jesus is God. What this recognition means, Girard says, is that only someone completely identified with God could have understood and undone the closed circle of violence in which humanity was trapped.

René Girard
Jesus is the only man to live on this earth in such a way that he can destroy single-handedly the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom of Satan rests upon the fact that ultimately we do his bidding. He says that the victim he offers us as a scapegoat is guilty, and we take him as guilty. And then we divinize that victim, and then we have order. But Jesus crushes that order forever by refusing Satan's offer. He's expelled and he's a scapegoat, but he takes it upon himself, he's a willing scapegoat. He prefers to die, in other words, rather than to share in the sacrificing of others. He prefers to die rather than to join the mob with Peter. The Kingdom of Satan is autonomous in the sense that it's a circle of violence that is shut upon itself. Jesus opens it. Jesus violates the rules with impunity, finally. They kill him, and it doesn't do any good.

David Cayley
It doesn't do any good because Jesus suffers the whole procedure but is not claimed by it. He owes it no allegiance, neither seeking nor resisting his victimization. And in this way he exposes the entire mechanism of sacrificial violence to the light of day. Satan, in the language of the early Christians, has been duped by the Cross.

René Girard
Satan duped by the Cross comes from a sentence in the First Letter to the Corinthians of Paul. And this sentence says—it's just so powerful—that if the powers, if the kings of this world, which means the same things as the powers and principalities, and the same thing as Satan, so let's say, if Satan had known the consequences, he would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. The meaning of this sentence inevitably makes it very important to me. What does it mean? It means that Satan has been fooled into triggering the sacrificial mechanism. Why? Because he thinks the mechanism is going to remain hidden, as usual, that no one will see that the victim is innocent, that his accusation will work as it always does. Therefore, Satan doesn't realize that the truth is going to come out in the Cross. From this sentence, the fathers of the church developed the thesis that Satan was duped by the Cross. And it's a very powerful thesis. Some of them even had the metaphor of God as a fisherman, and the bait being Jesus, and Satan being the fish that swallows the bait and doesn't realize he's caught. What does it mean? It means that Satan, when he kills Jesus, doesn't realize that, far from consolidating his kingdom, it leads to the modern world, to the revelation, to the more and more complete revelation all the time.

David Cayley
When René Girard first presented his interpretation of the Gospel in his book, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, he called it a non-sacrificial reading. A sacrificial reading sees the death of Jesus as required by God in order to cancel the debt we have incurred by our disobedience. A non-sacrificial reading refuses the disturbing idea that God demands the death of His son and instead focuses on the cross's power to expose and undo the lie in which humankind had been a prisoner. But as Girard's dialogue with other Christians expanded, he realized that many people were still using the word 'sacrifice' - in its other sense of self-giving - for what he was calling a non- sacrificial interpretation. The solution, he decided, was to abandon his potentially divisive term and, instead, draw a distinction within the word 'sacrifice' itself, a distinction that he finds illustrated in the Biblical story of the Judgement of King Solomon.

René Girard
For years, I carried that story in my head; and I knew that the secret of everything was there. Many people know the story, but maybe it's better to sum it up again quickly. One fine day, two prostitutes go to Solomon. These two women live together in a house all by themselves, and they both have a child of about the same age. One of the children dies during the night, and the two prostitutes show up in front of Solomon, and they both say the same thing. They are very good doubles. They both say "My rival, this

woman, rolled over her child while sleeping during the night and the child died. And she took the live child from my bed and put the dead child there to make it seem as if my child had died." Solomon repeats their story: the first woman says this, the second woman say that. What can you do? No way to find the truth. So bring me a sword. I will cut the child in two. And the first woman reacts by saying, yes, fine, let's do that, my rival will not have the child. And the second woman says, give her the child. I want the child to live. I prefer to lose the child because the life of the child is the most important thing. The Middle Ages said that the figure of Christ in this story is Solomon – the figure of Christ, *figura Christi*, is the character who replaces Christ in an allegorical interpretation. But that's not true. The figure of Christ is obviously the good prostitute who prefers to sacrifice all her interest and even herself, since Solomon may believe that she can't stand the heat and is admitting guilt. She is willing to lose her child so that the child will live. Therefore, she's really profoundly against sacrifice as an instrument of death, and of course Solomon understands immediately. He's like Joseph with his brothers, you see. So in Things Hidden..., I said you cannot use the same word for what the first woman wants to do and for what the second woman is doing. There is no difference which is greater than this one. Isn't it a scandal to use the same word, sacrifice, for both? Shouldn't they be separated? Isn't that what the story's about? But now I would say that the story is about that separation, yes, but why does the story exist in the first place? Why does it bring these two women together? Why are they together there? I think the story tells you the whole history of religion. It gives you the continuity, in a way, between the two forms of sacrifice, even while it shows how much better the second one is than the first.

David Cayley

The continuity of sacrifice, from its victimizing form to its self-giving form, leads on into a discussion of Christianity's impact on the world which I'll take up with René Girard in the final two programs of this series. Christians, too, would become victimizers, scapegoating in particular the Jews, but they would never be able entirely to forget the words their master addresses to the Pharisees in the Gospel.

René Girard

Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says, they are building magnificent monuments to the prophets their fathers have killed. When they do that, what are they really doing? They are saying, if we had lived at the time of our fathers, we would not have joined them in killing the prophets. If you transpose the saying, you can see that Christian anti-Semitism is the same thing. The Christians say, if we had lived in the days of our Jewish fathers, we would not have joined them in killing Jesus. Or today you have the incredible self-righteousness of the new generations toward the generation of the Second World War. The younger generations says, if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have joined them. We would have been so heroic, vis à vis the Gestapo, that we would all have died rather than surrendering one inch of our innocence. This is always the same thing. Today it's mostly the past which is scapegoated, and I think I've done some of it myself. That's why I said to you yesterday, I'm more conservative than you realize because today I'm very afraid of scapegoating the past, especially the recent past, which is the most tempting. Our fathers.

This sentence in the Gospel is very interesting because people try to say, oh, it was included by the Church and is not really a saying of Jesus. But we know that the Jews really built monuments, tombs to the prophets whose corpses they didn't have because they had been killed centuries before. Therefore, that sentence in the Gospel must go back too far to attribute it to the early Christian church. And, when you think of the power of that sentence and how it applies to practically everything after that, and to all the mistakes of the Christians themselves who are always scapegoating the recent Christianity which was interpreting the Gospels wrong, it's just so powerful that it takes your breath away. Paul says, thou shall not judge, oh man, because you who judge do the the same thing yourself. Why do you do the same thing? Because you're constantly judging your neighbour. You're constantly criticizing. You're constantly saying, I'm innocent, at the expense of someone else. Because if everybody were as innocent as I am, the world would be better. Therefore, they must not be innocent. Someone must be responsible for all this mess...(laughs).

Paul Kennedy
Good evening and welcome to *Ideas*. I'm Paul Kennedy, and this is Part Four of "The Scapegoat," David Cayley's continuing exploration of the ideas of French thinker René Girard.

Within the growing circle of his readers and intellectual colleagues, René Girard is regarded as one of those fundamental thinkers who changes the way people look at the world. Paul Dumouchel, at the University of Québec at Montréal, says that Girard "has completely modified the landscape in the social sciences." Sandor Goodhart, of Purdue University, thinks that "he has provided the Archimedean point from which all knowledge can be potentially rethought." And British theologian James Alison says that when he first read Girard's book, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, it clarified his own deepest concerns so completely that he felt as if the book were reading him.

These accolades refer to what René Girard calls "the mimetic theory," a theory whose full sweep takes in the nature of emotions, the roots of violence, the history of religions and the distinctiveness of the modern world. At its centre is the idea that human societies organize themselves around scapegoats as a way of containing their violence. In the last episode of our series, Girard looked at the Christian New Testament, and at how he thinks it exposes scapegoating by definitively revealing the innocence of the victim. Tonight, we continue with a program about how this revelation affected the world. "The Scapegoat," Part Four, by David Cayley.

David Cayley
To René Girard, the Judaeo-Christian revelation represents a decisive turning point in the history of the world. To understand why, you need to know how he thinks all societies before the Bible were organized. Human beings, in Girard's view, are highly imitative creatures, which means that negative emotions can quickly multiply in human groups and violence spread out of control. That's why he calls his theory "the mimetic theory." The first cultures dealt with this danger by transferring their violence to a surrogate victim, a scapegoat, whose death or expulsion united and dissolved all hatreds. This mechanism, Girard believes, is immensely powerful. The victim acts on the dispersed and disorderly group like a magnet which suddenly pulls a chaotic pile of iron filings into alignment. And, because the community owes its entire order, its peace to its victim, the victim is conceived as sacred, as a god. But at the same time, the victim is also believed to be really guilty and therefore deserving of the collective violence of which he's the target.

This ambivalence of the victim pervades mythology or what Girard calls "the archaic sacred." The gods are criminals—violent, jealous, incestuous—as any glance through mythology will reveal. But they are, at the same time, saviours, creators of order, founders and benefactors of culture. One can say, therefore, that culture originally rests on a precious error, a saving lie about violence. By supposing their victims guilty and their gods bloodthirsty and violent, people were able to push their own violence away and create within their communities an order, and an awe of the sacred in all its terrible and bloody beauty, which left them generally well disposed towards one another. The Bible, Girard believes, undoes these illusions and associates the whole surrogate victim mechanism with Satan, whom it calls a murderer, the Father of Lies, the Prince of Darkness. The Scriptures disentangle God from human violence and reveal the innocence of the victim. Jesus dies like any guilty hero, Girard says, but His Cross, instead of ratifying His guilt, proclaims His innocence.

René Girard
It is the revelation of what that violence is about, that that violence is untrue, is a lie. The violence of scapegoating in myth is reported as the guilt of the victim. If everybody believes in that guilt, if everybody can transfer their own guilt to the scapegoat, then they won't transfer against each other. Therefore, the misinterpretation of the collective murder is the peace of the world, the peace as the world gives it. But the Cross is the true representation of what should be hidden in order to work. Why is Satan the Prince of Darkness? Because his secret is hidden. The Cross reveals it. It's already revealed in the Old Testament. If you look at Isaiah 52-53, the death of the servant, it

describes an innocent victim killed by a mob, for no reason. A mad, mimetic mob. Therefore, the Cross is more than a sign. The Cross gives away the secret of Satan.

David Cayley
Scapegoating preserves social peace, Girard says, only so long as the scapegoaters don't know what they're doing. That, after all, is the definition of scapegoating—persecution of an innocent victim, believed to be guilty. The crowd that hails Jesus on His entry into Jerusalem, then turns on Him a week later, believes him guilty. They are imprisoned in what Girard calls "mimetic emotion," a feeling that swells magnetically through a group, dissolving all differences until the only difference that remains is the opposition between the unanimous crowd and their victim, the outsider, the guilty one. Jesus challenges and undermines this unanimity.

René Girard
Jesus doesn't work as a scapegoat because He divides people. At the end of the Gospel of John, every time Jesus speaks, people are divided about him. Discord breaks out every time he makes a miracle, every time he says something. He dissolves the sacrificial protections, the unanimity of the archaic society.

David Cayley
What Girard calls sacrificial protection is the spell that falls over a group that acts as a whole against a victim, the aura of sacredness that the victim's death confers on the group's way of life. Jesus breaks this spell and, in doing so, He places Himself in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, who all denounced sacrifice as discordant with the nature of God. Stop worshipping victims, the prophets all say, and understand that God has nothing to do with victimization. But Christianity, Girard says, also makes a puzzling departure from Judaism by seeming to return to the mythic pattern of the old religions the prophets were denouncing, a pattern in which a crisis is overcome by the killing of a victim who then resurrects as a god.

René Girard
Judaism is completely indispensable to Christianity; and, at the same time, Christianity contradicts, or seems to contradict, the greatest conquest of Judaism which is the de-victimization of God and the de-divinization of victims. Because once again, in Christ, you have a victim who is God, you have a God who is a victim, as if we were in myth. No wonder all the monotheisms which call themselves strict see in Christianity, not only a monotheism which is quite relaxed, but no monotheism at all, maybe a betrayal of monotheism. And the Trinity doesn't help because they think of the Trinity as three gods.

David Cayley
This discrepancy between Christianity and Judaism appears to be a contradiction, Girard says, but reveals itself, on further analysis, to be a continuation of the logic of Judaism. The Hebrew Bible separates God from all scapegoats, and shows that the divine does not depend on the scapegoat mechanism, but it also goes further and shows God to be on the side of victims, from the blood of murdered Abel which cries out to God from the ground to the vindication of persecuted Job. Christianity, Girard says in a recent essay, "takes [this] rapprochement between God and the scapegoat as far as possible, which means all the way to a complete identification. God willingly becomes the scapegoat of his own people," in order to show them once and for all their error in persecuting scapegoats. And this identification of God with victims, Girard says, represents something that he has only recently recognized—a redemptive return to the pattern of myth, as well as its overcoming.

René Girard
Before, I made only a great separation between the archaic and the Christian. And that's necessary because the Christian God is still the monotheistic God, not a pagan god. And it's love that divinized, not violence. But there is complete symmetry between the two. And, when there was no Judaeo-Christian revelation, archaic religions were the only thing Man had, the only contact with transcendence. And I think that this contact was legitimate, was real.

So this complete symmetry of the symbolism between Christianity and archaic religions, the fact that it's the same story, is extremely important and should be read, not only as separation between the two, but as union. In other words, men have always worshipped their victims; and, when they were worshipping ancient gods, without any knowledge of the Judaeo-Christian revelation, they were right. There was a contact with real transcendence there.

David Cayley
Christianity, as Girard understands it, brings religion full circle. It incorporates the achievement of Judaism but returns to the older pattern of myth in order to make contact with people where they are and thus to liberate them from the illusions of myth. So long as social order depends on the dark alchemy of sacrifice, Girard says, humanity lies within the power of what the New Testament calls Satan, the accuser of mankind. So Jesus takes his stand within this kingdom, submitting to it in order to lead people out of it.

René Girard
Jesus acts like God in the territory of Satan. In the territory of Satan, Jesus has to be expelled. God has to be expelled. He proves that He's God there. He demonstrates it. Therefore, God has, in a way, created a bridgehead in the Kingdom of Satan, reunited God and the Kingdom of Satan through His death. And this bridgehead is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opposes Satan, of course; but what's fascinating is that the New Testament Greek word for Holy Spirit is *parakletos*, the Paraclete, and *parakletos* in a Greek tribunal of the time is simply the lawyer for the defence. Satan is the accuser of the mythical victim, and the Holy Spirit is the one who tells you this victim is innocent. That is what the Gospels do. The Gospels do it for Jesus – and it it's especially true for Jesus - but it also true of all mythical victims.

David Cayley
The death of Jesus is the birth of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the lawyer for the defence. And as the defender of victims, the Holy Spirit, in effect, accuses the accuser. It introduces into history a new spirit of self-criticism. "Why do you notice the mote in your brother's eye," Jesus asks in the Sermon on the Mount, "when there is a beam in your own eye?" And Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, says, "you have no excuse, oh man, when you judge another, for in passing judgement on him you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, are doing the very same things." This self-critical spirit, Girard says, will transform the world. Christians, too, will become accusers and persecutors; but they will never be free of the constantly repeated call to examine themselves and reform.

René Girard
We are the one society in the world which has that vocation for self-criticism. We never leave well enough alone. And the circle is never-ending. Christianity first becomes an establishment under Constantine. You denounce it. Then there's the Inquisition, followed by the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Reformation says, we are going to be that perfect church that the Catholics were not able to be. But after a few centuries, they become the same. And it doesn't stop there. They will be criticized, too. And then they all survive together. They become a horrible big mess. But the spirit of critique is always more powerful than the institution. And what we must try to purify is that critique. Critique always embodies an element of the same violence it is criticizing. It's always in the same circle of violence. Today, for instance, we constantly criticize ourselves—and rightly so. But people ought to ask themselves, from what point of view do we criticize, from what point of view are we entitled to say, this is bad. When Voltaire wrote Candide, he wanted a perfect society as a backdrop. He couldn't fine one. He had to invent one. He wrote a letter at the same time in which he said, our society is like a Siren. It's a beautiful woman on top but there's an ugly fish-tail down below. We are double. We are both the best and the worst. So ultimately, the critique has to be criticized. And the critique of the critique has to be criticized, too. In other words, we have to see the truth of what Paul says: whatever you condemn, oh man who judges, you are doing the same thing. When we judge, we are always in a psychic space which is circular. We always want to turn the other into something solidly posed, something which is there in front of you and separate

from you, so you can feel that you are good and they are bad. And, in a judicial affair, you have that physical separation between the two. But Christianity is constantly abolishing this separation. That's what constitutes the permanence of Christianity. But I think it has to receive a Christian name.

David Cayley

What René Girard calls "the permanence of Christianity," is the continuing influence of the self-critical spirit he's been talking about. Girard recognizes, of course, that Christianity quickly became a worldly power, that Christians began to scapegoat Jews, that the Cross became a sign of military conquest, that heretics were burned and that the Passion of Jesus was interpreted, not as a liberation from sacrifice, but as a ransom demanded by God as the blood price for human guilt. This, he thinks, was to be expected. But he says, nevertheless, that the Gospel also worked steadily, over time, to decode mythology, de-sanctify violence and de-legitimate scapegoating. This effect, in his view, is not well-recognized in the modern academy where religion and science are strictly segregated. And consequently, he says, modern scholarship sets aside what should be its primary resource in analysing and understand mythology.

René Girard

It takes the Bible out of the circuit and says, we won't touch it because otherwise we'd be against the separation of Church and State. So they exclude the most important text when they are talking about the interpretation of mythology. This is quite paradoxical because university people have tried for centuries to decode, as they would say, mythology. Today they have given up. They say, there is nothing to decode. Myths are only stories, imaginary stories. I say not at all. The Gospels have decoded mythology. The Cross decodes mythology. The Cross is science, as Paul said. The Cross is not only the truth about God, who dies on the Cross, but the truth about man, who kills God. Therefore, I say that what I'm doing is scientific - it's the anthropology of the Gospels. And, if I'm right, then the truth of what I say will become obvious sooner or later. Why are we able today to decode witch-hunting texts which are exactly like myths except that we don't believe in them any more. Look at a witch-hunting text of the Middle Ages. It says, everyone has the plague and it's the fault of this guy or this woman, who may be a hunchback, who may have physical defects, who is alone in life because she's a widow or she's ugly. She's a witch, and we must kill her because she's the one who brings the plague into the community, and she probably also kills little children and commits incest and parricide. Now, if this text is mediaeval, we don't believe it. We say it's just witch-hunting because we read it, as we read every historical world, in the light of the Gospel. We even manage to turn such texts against Christianity. We say, how could such things continue in Christian times? Whereas we should say that we can read these texts because Christianity makes it possible for us to read them. But, fools that we are, we cannot see that myths are exactly the same thing. We are unable to decode because them because we respect them too much. Witchcraft texts weren't even respectable at the time they were created. They were already weakened mythology. The interesting thing about the epidemic of witch-hunting in the Middle Ages is not that it happened. All societies believe in witch-hunting. The interesting thing is that it was the last time it happened, and it ended with the decoding of witch-hunting. In other words, we understand what witch-hunting is. It's ganging up against an innocent victim. We say the witch is a scapegoat. The witch was not a witch. Witch is only an accusation. It doesn't exist as an institution. Some of the feminists today believe that witchcraft existed as an institution, so they say we are witches today, but no one ever said that in history before. Witchcraft was always an accusation, not something one claimed for oneself. We decode witchcraft the way we should decode mythology. The radicalness of the mimetic theory is that I say the Oedipus myth is nothing but undeciphered witchcraft. There is a plague. We need a scapegoat. That's what the oracle says.

David Cayley

The ability to recognize scapegoating is an effect of the Gospel, Girard says, which makes itself felt over time, and in people's concrete historical circumstances. Gil Baillie is a friend and colleague of Girard's who has applied Girard's insights to what he

calls "the contemporary cultural crisis" in a book called Violence Unveiled. He agrees with Girard that the effect of the Gospels is not felt all at once, but through a continuing historical revelation. And he gives the spirit that fosters this revelation the name Girard used earlier, the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit, the advocate—through whom , Jesus says, the truth will in time be more fully revealed.

Gil Baillie

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, I'm not going to spring the truth on you all at once, essentially because it would be too much for you, you're not ready for it. This is part of the realism and the generosity of the Biblical tradition. In other words, the sacrificial system wards off more horrendous forms of violence, and there is a kind of understanding of that economy at the same time that it's being deconstructed. So the Paraclete begins to awaken the empathy for victims as history goes on. You get a progressive development of this acuity which is both a moral acuity, recognition of victims, and an epistemological or intellectual or cognitive acuity in the marvelous sense in which René has unpacked it. There's that great phrase he uses when he says, we didn't stop burning witches because we invented science, we invented science because we stopped burning witches. This is completely unintelligible to most people; but what he's saying is that, if a community in the Middle Ages has a drought and some children start to die and they suddenly think that God's punishing them and they think there must be some pollution in their society, and they look around and find some poor old Jewish woman living on the outskirts of town and they bring her in, they interrogate her and they find, oh, lo and behold, she is, in fact, a witch and they burn her at the stake and the next year the crops grow and the babies stop dying, then they're going to think, well, it worked. And life goes on. But, if the babies start dying and the crops fail and they bring an old woman into town and they lynch her, and moral misgivings about that, even very attentuated ones, begin to stir, and they begin to have doubts and they begin to think that it doesn't quite work for them, then they're going to have to account for what's happening to them in another way. Once their ability to be satisfied with the lynching, or the sacrifice, falls below a certain threshold, they can't just account for things in the old mythological way. They have to become rational, they have to look around for other explanations for why the crops are dying and why the babies are dying. So... we didn't stop burning witches because we invented science, we invented sciences because we stopped burning witches. So that's part of the development of the power of the Gospel which fosters not only a moral awakening but also an intellectual awakening.

David Cayley

Recognition of the innocence of scapegoats, Gil Baillie says, is a mental as much as a moral achievement. It dispels the air of this-is-how-it's-always-been, this-is-how-it-must-always-be that attaches to social orders sanctified by victim blood. It initiates free inquiry. It undoes hierarchies. But this new freedom, René Girard has stressed, operates for ill as well as for good. Sacrifice, for Girard, is the anchor of all social order. Without sacrifice social order becomes more fluid, more open to question; and this eventually sets free not just good things but *everything* that has been contained and controlled by the old sacrificial order. Science and democracy appear, but so do vast new powers of destruction and new forms of envy. The logic of the modern world is apocalyptic - not in the sense of signs in the sky, but in the sense of uncovering and revealing, which is what this Greek word originally meant.

Girard's most detailed account of how this apocalypse actually unfolds occurs in his first book, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, and I want to devote the rest of tonight's program to the analysis he presents there. In that book, Girard examines a number of the masterpieces of modern fiction as a revelation of what he calls mimetic desire. Mimetic desire is that acquisitive emotion that traditional societies repress and modern societies try to harness, the desire that copies other desires and seeks to possess what others possess, thus creating what Girard calls mimetic rivalry. Girard divides mimetic desire into two phases, which he calls external and internal mediation. Desire, he says, is mediated—it copies a model—and this mediation is external or internal depending on how the model or mediator is related to the one who emulates it. An

example of external mediation is Cervantes Don Quixote, where the Don imitates a legendary knight called Amadis of Gaul, and his companion, Sancho, imitates him.

René Girard
External mediation is a mediation that does not breed mimetic rivalry because the model is too far from you. This distance may be physical - it may be a distance in time or space - but it is also a social distance. I say, for instance, that Don Quixote is the external mediator of Sancho. In other words, there cannot be any mimetic rivalry between Sancho and Don Quixote because Sancho sees Don Quixote at an incredible distance from him. Sancho may want to marry his daughter to a duchess, but he operates within his own sphere. He will never question the authority of Don Quixote for anything.

David Cayley
And Don Quixote, for his part, also has an external mediator.

René Girard
That's right, because he's never going to encounter Amadis of Gaul. Amadis will never be a rival in destroying windmills or saving beautiful ladies. Don Quixote is happy as a lark; he's incredibly happy.

David Cayley
Internal mediation on the other hand, is not a happy situation. It occurs when the mediator of desire is physically or socially close by, and it leads to rivalry. Girard finds numerous examples in the plays of Shakespeare.

René Girard
Internal mediation is when you will have a rivalry, when the model is close enough to you to produce rivalry. In Shakespeare, for instance, it's very obvious. All his first comedies are stories of two male friends or two girlfriends or four, as in A Midsummer Night's Dream. They've always lived together. They love each other. They share the same entertainment, the same embroidery in Midsummer Night's Dream. And suddenly, they don't know why, they are enemies. They've fallen in love with the same lover. And they don't understand at all. They say to each other, you're responsible for this because you're mocking me and so on. And the other one always answers, Oh, I thought you were doing that, not me. And this symmetry is marvelous.

David Cayley
Internal mediation leads to rivalry. External mediation does not. The difference is reflected in two kinds of society—the modern, in which all are supposed equal, and traditional, hierarchical forms of society in which people occupy separate spheres and so cannot, in principle, compete or compare themselves with those in other spheres. But it's also a difference that expresses itself in every form of society, Girard says, as the difference between comedy and tragedy.

René Girard
Internal mediation is essentially tragic; it's violence and death. Whereas external mediation is play-acting and games for children. Children imitate their parents – Freud is right – but, if a child has a lawyer for a father, and he has his little law court, where he acts as if he were his father with other children, it will be a game. It will not be serious. He himself will know that there is no rivalry with his father. The imitation that takes place in children's play is very interesting as a fundamental form of external mediation, and as a fundamental form of learning. You learn a type of desire which makes you a part of your culture without creating rivalries. And that is something Freud doesn't recognize. Many aspects of education become clearer when this is understood. When education collapses, people say, oh, students must not imitate their teachers. What else can they do? Argue with them, discuss with them, have free and easy exhanges... your ideas, my ideas, and so forth? No more education there. That's what's going on now. Inevitably, education is imitation. And if this imitation is desired, of course, it will work better.

David Cayley
External mediation is desiring imitation, but not rivalry. Internal mediation is always rivalrous. These two phases of desire are both present in all societies, but there is an overall direction to modern history, in Girard's view, and it's definitely towards more and more internal meditation. He finds one of

the epochs of this history well-described in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville on democracy.

René Girard
Tocqueville has a passage, which I quote in my first book, where he says that when human beings have destroyed the principle of hierarchy, which was represented in their world by the king, they think that an easy way has been opened to success and all the things they couldn't reach before. What they don't realize is that the obstacle has changed places and also has multiplied. Each obstacle is smaller, but there are so many, because everybody has become an obstacle. So I think in a way he's speaking about the difference between external and internal mediation.

David Cayley
When revolution destroys the privileges of the few, de Tocqueville says, people "encounter the competition of everyone." So desire is checked, even as it is encouraged to spread; and this contradiction, he goes on, "torments and tires souls." De Tocqueville points to what Girard thinks is a crucial property of mimetic desire. It cannot, for long, be satisfied. What we desire, finally, is the desire of others; but, as soon as we have it, it loses its desirability. So desire, in the last analysis, is metaphysical. What it seeks, Girard says, is not the things others have but the other's very being.

René Girard
Being, in the traditional sense, absolute being, is something I don't have in me. I don't feel it. I feel my emptiness. But the other always seems to have more of it than I have - unless, of course, the other surrenders to my desire, in which case being flees him very fast and I contaminate him with my nothingness.

David Cayley
Why is it that the other appears to have what I don't have?

René Girard
Well, because what I don't have, and I dream of, must be somewhere. In a way, it's the last optimism of Man. I see it in my neighbour, and that's why I want his donkey, his wife and so forth – in order to become him. You can see this in a marvelous way in the Tenth Commandment. It enumerates all the objects of the neighbour that you shouldn't desire, and then, ultimately, it gives up. It realizes that there are too many objects. It's like sudddenly shifting to the New Testament. It says, and everything that belongs to the neighbour. Therefore, it puts the stress, ultimately, on the neighbour himself. What you really desire is not the objects of the neighbour. It's some quintessence of the neighbour that cannot even be given a name.

David Cayley
What modern persons finally seek from each other, Girard says, is the sense of really existing. "Everything which was not myself," Proust writes, "seemed to me more precious, endowed with a more real existence." Cut off from any vital contact with God, Girard says in Deceit, Desire and the Novel, "men become gods" for one another, although always only fleetingly. Mimetic desire pursues an illusion, and this makes it at once urgent and insatiable. The race is intense, but there's no finish line.

René Girard
It gets worse and worse when you have no objective element. Intellectuals are often contemptuous of business, and business people; but in business you can at least distinguish the successful people from the unsuccessful people. If your business is losing money, you will immediately ask what your competitor is doing which is better. And you'll start imitating your competitor. But, if you are an intellectual, you will manage to rationalize things in such a way that you always want to do the opposite of your competitor. Therefore, you'll hide the fact of imitation better. A businessman, who is responsible for a business will immediately imitate his competitor. That's why the world of business today is probably more creative in relative terms than the intellectual world. It is the last creative world because, in intellectual life, you don't dare to imitate others. The old classical theory of imitation was that you have to imitate the great guys. Today that's no good for us because we are too proud, and we reject imitation. Everybody must be original. Therefore,

everybody is contradicting everybody else all the time. Competition between people loses all positive, concrete content and becomes completely abstract. Creation is destroyed. What is modern art? Modern art is the type of art in which you must not repeat anything. It seems to me, for instance, that someone like Mahler in music opens up new areas of dissonance and harmony which, in other times, would have been exploited by all sorts of disciples for a century or so. Or Richard Strauss as well. Not in our time. So today music is interrupted because one is too proud to be the disciple of anybody. Therefore, one is nothing. And everything. Music is very interesting in this regard. The specialists say, for instance, that, from a technical viewpoint, Mozart is not creative. He brings nothing. But Mozart was infinitely creative inside a framework which he never felt like changing, which was good enough for him. So it's a totally different way of looking at things. The same thing is true in many fields. I did an article once on the word 'innovation'. The word innovation, until the 18th century, always means something bad. Even with the people we regard as very progressive and modern, like Montaigne, if he says "innovation," it means something bad. It refers to people who try to look new and invent things when the old stuff is better, and they should stay within the right framework. Beginning with the 18th century, suddenly innovation becomes good. And then you have to innovate in everything.

David Cayley
The more the duty of innovation is pressed on us, the more, in Girard's terms, we have to conceal the fact that what is really going on is an ever more frenzied imitation of one another. One current example, which Girard has taken up in a recent essay is preoccupation with food.

René Girard
Even appetites can become contaminated with mimetic desire. There are certain dishes which are fashionable and others which are not. Here in the San Francisco area, they are very particular about food. They pride themselves on being totally individualist compared to the rest of the continent. And very superior. Whereas in fact, they imitate constantly because, of course, they read the books, and they live in this anorexic world where everybody talks about food and becomes obsessed with food because no one can really eat as much as they want. I think that eating disorders, in our world, are one of the great symptoms of mimetic desire going haywire. Food today has become totally contaminated with mimetic desire, and the cultural forms this takes can be very, very strange. You have the scientific reports, or you have the doctors at Stanford who say that the gymnastic facilities here are being put to a pathological use by the students who are there all day long, trying to lose weight and things like that. So they are going to invent a syndrome, a gymnastic excess syndrome or something like that, but they don't want to talk about the culture. They want to interpret eating disorders in terms of psychoanalysis or something, but they don't want to see the social aspect, the crowd as model, the ... culture.

David Cayley
Contemporary mimetic frenzy is the culmination, in Girard's view, of a growing sickness, one that is already evident in the 19th century in the novels he analyses in Deceit, Desire and the Novel. He says, for example, that by the time one reaches the later Dostoyevsky, with few exceptions, "there is no longer any love without jealousy, any friendship without envy, any attraction without repulsion." And this development, for him, moves in only one direction. "Historic and psychic evolution," he writes, "is irreversible."

René Girard
There is a sentence of Stendhal which is: "On ne remonte pas dans l'ordre des passions." One doesn't go back up in the order of passion, of sentiments, which is a very beautiful and profound saying. One doesn't go back to the past. One doesn't become more archaic than one is now. There is one direction to history. I think Stendahl says that. And he's thinking about mimetic desire, obviously, in my terms. And he's defining it as a kind of a relentless movement towards that internal mediation we were talking about, therefore toward chaos.

David Cayley
René Girard recognizes that his history of what Stendhal first called "the modern emotions" is not complete, and that there are many intermediate stages, and partial recoveries, on the road to what he just called chaos. Nevertheless, he does finally believe that the Christian revelation has set an irreversible process in motion, a process which tends to the more and more complete uncovering of human nature at both its best and its worst. The worst is clearly evident in the envy, jealousy and hatred that are progressively manifested in the great novels of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and, above all, in the works of Dostoyevsky and Proust. But the best is also evident in the capacity of these novelists to tell the truth about mimetic desire, and this is the other side of what Girard has to say in Deceit, Desire and the Novel. This ability to tell the truth, Girard says, is always the result of the writer's recognition that he himself is involved in the tangled web of desire he is creating, that he is posing before his readers, as surely as his characters are posing before one another. "Madame Bovary, c'est moi," "I am Madame Bovary," as Gustave Flaubert is reported to have said about one of his characters. Girard sees a particularly strong example in the case of Marcel Proust, who underwent a dramatic personal change around the time he became capable of writing his great novel sequence, variously translated as The Remembrance of Things Past, In Search of Lost Time, or Time Recaptured.

René Girard
Even the handwriting of Proust changed. The people who know the manuscripts can tell immediately, just by looking at one, whether it comes from before or after this time. And Proust talks about it better outside his novel than inside his novel. For instance, he talks about the death of Don Quixote. He says the death of Don Quixote is obviously the moment of illumination when Cervantes becomes capable of writing the novel. Don Quixote renounces the fool he has been, and then then he dies to be reborn as the real writer of the real novel. Dying at the end of the novel means realizing that everything you've done so far is pure junk. But, instead of giving up, the end becomes the beginning. The writer dies to a certain type of life and starts writing the novel, which is like entering a monastery or getting into Proust's "cork-lined room." The great creative act is always a second time around. There is a first time around which is just the vanity of the writer. In The Remembrance of Things Past, there are scenes like the great scene at the theatre where the little Proust is there, looking up at the private boxes in which his snob heroes sit like gods. But, if you look at the earlier writings, instead of being down in the orchestra looking up in great envy and appetite and inability to reach, you have Marcel up in the box, flattered and very well treated by the best people. So you feel that the earlier writing is wishful thinking written out as truth. And that is what all beginning writers do. The secret of writing is giving that up, just like the secret of great comedy is putting yourself in the bad position. And then you become able to write truthful things about life, when you put yourself in the worst possible position.

David Cayley
In an article published in *Le Figaro* around the time of writing The Past Recaptured, Proust refers to "that belated lucidity which may occur even in lives completely obsessed by illusions." Elsewhere, he speaks of his new, hard-won capacity to tell the truth as "giving up one's dearest illusions." From the death of Don Quixote to Proust's redemption of lost time, all great conclusions in the novel are conversions, Girard says.

René Girard
I would never say that Proust became a Christian, He certainly didn't, although at the time of Time Recaptured, he did go to see André Gide – the worse possible advisor in these matters – and he said to Andre Gide, something is happening to me, something very important, and I feel it's connected with religion. Should I go and look towards Christianity? And Andre Gide said, don't do that. So he didn't do it. But Time Recaptured is full of Christian metaphors, and you can see that the whole substructure is one hundred percent Christian because it's about death and resurrection, and the destruction of the self - the destruction of the self which results in some creative power which wasn't there before and which is undefinable.

David Cayley
René Girard doesn't ask his readers to see Proust as a Christian but rather to remove, as he writes, "the watertight barrier which our prejudices erect between aesthetic experience and religious experience." Proust's great work is not ideologically Christian but Christian rather in its structure and imagery—objectively Christian one might say. "Only Christian symbolism," Girard concludes, "is able to give form to the experience of the novel." And this conclusion, he says, is warranted by his reading, not by his own Christian faith. All he has done is to make explicit and systematic what he finds in the novels. And what Girard, as a discerning reader, finally sees in the unfolding of the modern novel is an apocalypse. "Apocalypse," Girard writes "means development," the working out or unfolding of implications. And, in the great novelists, the logic of mimetic desire is carried to its end, which is self-destruction, but also rebirth. You'll be hearing more from Girard in the final programme of this series about why the modern situation is apocalyptic. He concludes tonight by showing how the idea of apocalypse, as it's presented in the teaching of Jesus, illuminates the history he's been discussing.

René Girard
If you look at the Gospel text in the light of what we are talking about, you have texts like, I bring a sword, not peace, I will separate the father from his son, the daughter from her mother, the mother-in-law from her daughter-in-law. It's there in the Gospels, but people forget about it because it's so scary. And it's the announcement of a world which will be no longer protected by sacrificial protections, I would say today. The Christian world is a world where the sacrificial protections collapse more and more. Therefore, you have only Christian love or the hatred that comes from the internal mediation we have been discussing. So I would say we have to bring these texts back and disagree with the theologians who tell us the apocalypse was a big mistake, that it was borrowed from the Jews and so forth. Not at all. It came from the profound insight that Christianity uproots culture in terms of sacrifice, and therefore delivers the world to the powers of destruction, if it doesn't choose Christian love.

Paul Kennedy
Good evening. I'm Paul Kennedy and this is *Ideas* on the thought of René Girard.

René Girard
We owe so much to the Bible that we have a feeling it comes from us, and we cannot recognize our debt. When we criticize the Bible, we can criticize it only with the Bible, not with the Iliad, not with Greek philosophy. We have assimilated so much, and we are not aware that the substance we have assimilated comes from the Bible.

Paul Kennedy
It's often said that we live today in a secular society, a society of a novel type that is neither defined nor dominated by religion. But this condition in which we think we live is largely imaginary, according to René Girard. "There is no society without religion," he writes in his book, Violence and the Sacred, "because without religion society cannot exist." What we're actually living in today, he thinks, is a form of Christianity which we've become unable to recognize.

René Girard grew up in France and made his career in the United States, retiring from Stanford University in 1995. His writings have ranged over literary criticism, anthropology, the history of religions and the interpretation of the Bible. In tonight's program, he talks about how Christianity has shaped our world, and why this shaping influence has become invisible to so many. The broadcast is the fifth and final episode in a series about René Girard called "The Scapegoat." It's presented by David Cayley.

David Cayley
In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother... A person's enemies will be the members of his own household." The passage is puzzling. Why would Jesus' gospel of love and mutual forbearance create division and discord? René Girard's interpretation unlocks the puzzle. Human society, Girard says, creates order by channeling violence towards scapegoats. Envy and resentment are directed away from one another and towards a common enemy. Ritual sacrifices institutionalize this way of expelling violence. Jesus denounces the lie on which this system rests and allows himself to be crucified in order to reveal for all time the innocence of all sacrificial victims. But this revelation, by depriving people of the means to disown their violence and project it onto others, inevitably brings that violence home to roost, so to speak, setting father against son and so forth. Jesus flushes the hidden violence of culture into the open, imposing a choice on people, and it is this choice, Girard says, that constitutes the unveiling or uncovering that Christians call the Apocalypse.

René Girard
The Apocalypse is not some invention. If we are without sacrifices, either we're going to love each other or we're going to die. We have no more protection against our own violence. Therefore, we are confronted with a choice: either we're going to follow the rules of the Kingdom of God or the situation is going to get infinitely worse.

David Cayley
This either-or, in Girard's view, is the dynamic that the Christian gospel introduces into history. The effect is gradual, exerting itself over many centuries. But this doesn't by any means imply that the world then grows magically less violent. Sacrifice is a means of limiting violence—a single victim thrown to the gods so that everyone can live in peace. So when people no longer sacrifice but also fail to repent, violence can easily grow worse and this worsening violence, Girard says, is an effect that many contemporary people seem to hold against Christianity.

René Girard
You know, I'm pretty accustomed now to these meetings about violence. Everybody's talking about violence today. They've all read Voltaire's Candide, and violence is a scandal to them. And so they ask, what kind of a God is that who is supposed to bring us peace and just look at the state the world is in? People show up indignantly, as if God were an American president who had not fulfilled his

promises. But I say to them, where do you see it said in the Gospel that Christ came to bring peace? He tells you Himself that He's bringing a sword and not peace, that He's separating father from son, and so on ... Where do you find that the Christ promises immediate peace? Christ tells you you have to fight for the Kingdom of God. Otherwise you won't have either the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Satan. Because the Kingdom of Satan, he says, is going to collapse as a result of its internal contradictions. It is going toward destruction. So people read the Gospel ... well often they don't read the Gospels at all, but they take it for granted that the Gospels are a recipe for peace. If the stock market keeps going up and at the same time we have peace, the world is fine. No more problems. What could be better? But why don't we have that peace insured as much as it should be? And then they get angry at the Gospel because they are absolutely sure, without having read the Gospels, even if they go to church they hardly read the Gospels—they're absolutely sure that Jesus is promising peace on earth immediately. If you are all good boys and if you are politically correct, you will have peace. And indeed, the churches are practically saying that now.

David Cayley
Perhaps that's why Christmas is so popular...all those angels with their trumpets saying everything's going to be fine.

René Girard
Yes. Peace on earth and so forth. Everything is going to be fine. But the next minute, you know, Herod is killing all the babies in Bethlehem.

David Cayley
King Herod kills the babies of Bethlehem because he has been told by the wise men who have come from the east that a new king has been born there – a parable of what Girard is saying. The birth of Jesus occasions violence from his infancy. When He preaches in Nazareth, His home town, the people are so enraged, the Gospel says, that they try unsuccessfully to throw Him off a cliff. And in the apocalyptic passages in His teaching, He predicts worse to come, saying that there will be signs in the sky, nations in agony, men fainting with terror and even the powers of heaven shaken. This teaching is often read, Girard says, as a prophesy that history will end in a rain of fire from heaven; but he believes that what it actually foresees is the raging of human violence, when it is no longer held in check by sacrificial institutions.

René Girard
The violence doesn't come from God. I try to impress this on the fundamentalists, whom I sometimes talk to or see as students. I say, but why do you want that violence to come from God? Isn't it a wonderful discovery that it comes from Man and therefore you can justify God and not blame God for the violence which is about to descend upon the world? God has nothing to do with it, obviously. It's Man's human sin which is bringing it about, and there is nothing in the Gospel that says it's the violence of God. It says, "It will be as in the days of Sodom..." and so forth, but it doesn't say anything more. At no point does Jesus say God will punish you.

David Cayley
Jesus' apocalyptic sayings predict a human conflagration, Girard says, but modern enlightened Christians have generally failed to see this and so have treated these texts as embarrassments. He gives as an example the early 20th century medical missionary and biblical scholar Albert Schweitzer.

René Girard
Poor Albert Schweitzer...he's the one who decided all biblical scholarship was false because earlier scholars hadn't discounted this enormous amount of apocalyptic stuff in the Gospel. They thought it applied to our world; but, according to Schweitzer, it has nothing to do with it. The Apocalypse comes from that old Jewish milieu, where they thought the end of the world was about to come. So he said, we can reject all this. But we live in a world, suddenly, where the end of the world is present again. It comes back not as a religious text, but as scientific knowledge, the only type of knowledge we believe in.

Let's suppose that extraterrestrial beings show up who are more advanced than we are. (I love this way

of speaking because it supposes that the only kind of advance is technological, so people more advanced than we are means people with space ships that go faster than light, and who can therefore do what we will never do, which is to get in touch with other beings, if they are there.) Anyway, suppose these more advanced people show up, wouldn't they say: Look at these guys. They suddenly find themselves in a world which they can literally destroy in the wink of the eye, if they unleash the destructive power they have so patiently amassed against each other - in total madness, really. Or they can possibly do the same thing more slowly with their technological development which might make life impossible in the world. At the same time, they have texts which say that the religious revelation of the present time is linked with the end of the world. And for a long time, when they were not able to destroy the earth, the part of these texts which talks about the destruction of the world was very important to them. Today, even the people who still believe in this revelation, the theologians, totally exclude the idea of the end of the world as if it were something indecent. Now, wouldn't these visitors think we are mad?

David Cayley
Apocalypse, in René Girard's interpretation, does not refer to any divine or other-worldly intervention in history but to an historical process which Christianity initiates. And what drives this process, he says, is revelation, the bringing to light of everything formerly hidden or held down, both for good and for ill.

René Girard
Apocalypse means revelation.

David Cayley
Uncovering.

René Girard
Uncovering. Because if you reveal what sacrifice is, if you understand what human violence is, you are faced by the ultimate issue, which is either the total refusal of violence, or surrendering to it and destroying everything. In other words, one could say there is more and more good and more and more bad in the world as this choice is posed. There is more and more good because we have to say that technological progress is good and our capacity to recognize violence is good. Our feeling for victims is good. We kill more victims in our world than we ever did - people say that - but we can also say we save more victims than we ever did. And we feel that victims have rights as victims. You could list hundreds of such propositions, showing that our world is the best and the worst at the same time. It makes no sense to see it as just dreadful, as reactionary people will, or just wonderful, as some free enterprise, global optimists will. You have to be able to see it as more and more mixed up – as both the best and the worst - which is very difficult. Ours is a world of total instability, where our powers are increasing all the time in every domain, and our responsibility is increasing along with our freedom.

David Cayley
Our world, in René Girard's view, is now in the midst of the apocalypse that Jesus predicted. But curiously, he says, we are less and less able to recognize what is really going on because Christianity has been increasingly set aside as a possible form of explanation. This rejection begins, he says, in the 18th century with the rationalist, anti-religions prejudices of the Enlightenment.

René Girard
The Enlightenment thinks it knows everything because it has gotten rid of religion, and it thinks that religion is totally responsible for violence. This idea appears in the 18th century. You see it in Voltaire's Candide about which I want to write an article. Candide is a prodigious masterpiece, which develops the characteristic modern notion that violence is a scandal created only by institutions. Violence has nothing to do with the individual man, who is good. Only institutions are responsible for violence.

David Cayley
Candide, the satire by Voltaire about which Girard wants to write, follows the adventures of a naïve young man who travels through the many upheavals of his time, endlessly appalled at the violence he witnesses but never doubting his own innocence. The spirit of Candide is reproduced today, Girard thinks, in journalistic media who report from all the

current capitals of violence, but always exempt themselves and their audience from their scandalized indictment.

René Girard
The media today are scandalized very seriously, and they feel they have absolutely nothing to with all that violence. They are obviously innocent, so they denounce it. All they do is to denounce it. They announce that everybody else is responsible because, ultimately, who doesn't belong to one of these terrible institutions—the state, religion, and so forth? All the sacrificial institutions today are scapegoated. And the main one, of course, is the church. The church has been scapegoated for so much that today it's practically forgotten. But it's the same now with the state. Today we think the state is bad. Therefore, if we had a globalized world where everybody were more uniform, there wouldn't be any violence. This is still the idea that violence comes from differences. People don't realize that by doing away with borders they are creating more and more the conditions of violence. What was the purpose of borders? To keep violence inside or to have violence between two nations or three but to prevent it from moving to the entire world. When the world is globalized, you are going to be able to set fire to the whole thing with a single match. People don't understand that because they feel that if there is no barrier between individuals, they are going to get along.

David Cayley
The good individual and the bad institution is the primary myth of our time, according to René Girard, and it leads, in his view, to a chronic and dangerous illusion about our own innocence. We take what we owe to Christianity for granted, he says, and so never notice that it's only because of Christianity that the Enlightenment can criticize Christianity in the first place.

René Girard
Today we see the violence of Christianity. We don't see the violence Christianity has prevented all through history. All through the Middle Ages, for example, this dreadful Church was spending its time trying to limit war between these Germanic tribes to three days a week, or to forbid war on Friday first, and then on Sunday and so forth. If you really look at the story of Christianity, it's infinitely more complicated than is normally admitted. Today we read it all one way, just as we once read it all the other way. I recently saw a reprinting of a book by Cardinal Guardini, one of those people who was madly for the Middle Ages and claimed that they were the summit of Western civilization from which we've been going down-hill ever since. This is false. But, at the same time, mediaeval society did have Christian aspects which have been lost since. The situation is so complex that the main thing to understand is that you cannot pass any judgment on the recent past any more than you can condemn Babylonian society or Sumerian culture. You can only try to understand. Take the Inquisition. The Inquisition, no doubt, is a first attempt at totalitarian government. The leaders of the Church, in good conscience, felt responsible for all these people whom they had on their hands. They were the supreme power. Then, suddenly, they felt that things were escaping their control. What was their duty? Would not giving up mean surrendering the work they were doing? They didn't see violence the way we do. We have to understand that when the legate of the Pope in Albi, in the days of the Albigensian crusade, said, "Kill them all, God will recognize his own," he was incredibly serious. What was wrong with sending these people, the good ones, to paradise? God, in their view, worked with death. There is a tendency in our world to see violent death as the worst possible evil. But throughout history there were many people who had values which were more important to them than their own life. Today, when life on this earth in a world without God has become the one exclusive value, one feels, to a certain extent, that this view has to be rehabilitated. People in the past didn't feel as we do. They thought that it was better to kill people with a sword and be finished with it in two minutes than to deliver them into hell by allowing the Albigensian heresy to take over their soul. Killing the body, which would resurrect anyway, since they really believed in the Resurrection, was the lesser evil, the good sacrifice. Today we don't accept that type of sacrifice any more. And we are right. But we have to try to understand them. We are the first to feel the way we

do. They still had one foot in the previous world, the world Christianity was trying to replace.

Take another instance. Today you have a discussion between Moslems and Christians which I find very weird. The Christians see themselves as totally guilty toward the Moslems because they've been violent to the Moslems. And this is true. They are guilty from a Christian point of view. But they are certainly not guilty from a Moslem point of view since Moslems are supposed to spread the Moslem faith through the sword. There is no doubt of that. Today it's not said any more because everything is becoming Christian, in a certain way, but through the sword is an absolute obligation. There was no St. Paul in the spread of Islam. It wasn't done by convincing little people to join the faith, as with Christianity. It was done through the sword - by the fastest and the greatest military conquest the world has ever known. But in discussions between Moslems and Christians, it goes without saying that you will never talk about that because in these discussions we take Christian ethics to be the absolute value. It's a modern value, and we don't see that it comes from Christianity because, for us, it's the natural way to be. So when people complain about the violence that came from Christianity, they are right, but they are throwing back at Christians Christian values, not their own. They can complain because they have Christianity to complain with. From what point of view, otherwise, could they blame Christianity? We don't radicalize things enough. We take for granted certain aspects of Christian ethics as if they had been the norm. If you had gone to a Roman functionary and if you had said, I am a victim of your system, you owe me some kind of compensation, he would have been so amazed. He would have said, you deserve to die for saying that. What right do you have? Are you a Roman citizen? No. To the scaffold or to the wild beasts. We don't see the world as it is, or as it was, and, in a way, still is. We always turn against Christianity the foothold into non-violence that it gave us. Where would it have come from before?

David Cayley
Condemning Christianity's failures, while taking its achievement for granted, leads, in Girard's view, to an upside-down view of history. We read the record of Western civilization as a violent sequence of Crusades, Inquisitions and colonial conquests, but we often overlook the violence of the cultures that were overcome by the West. Girard gives, as an example, the institution of potlatch, a feast involving competitive gift-giving and the destruction of wealth that was practiced among the tribes of the Pacific coast of North America.

René Girard
At some point, the Canadian government banned potlatch. And if you look at the documents, you realize that they banned potlatch for extremely good reasons. There was a tremendous destruction of wealth, in particular blankets, and things like that, which was a dreadful thing. Potlatch is as bad as anorexia and bulimia, you know. It's a destruction which ultimately is for the prestige of the two or three chiefs who are fighting about who will destroy the greatest quantity of goods. Now, think about Canadian people in the 19th century, rationalists and so forth. They felt it was their duty to forbid such an institution. Can you blame them for that?

David Cayley
Girard argues that we should try to understand why people acted as they did in the past, rather than blaming them. He says this, I think, not to excuse evil acts but to point up a prevalent form of scapegoating. Blaming our ancestors always implies the claim that we would have done better in their shoes. It's a way of protesting our eternal innocence and brightening our self-esteem. And this is what he objects to. Otherwise, he says, he has no wish to try to justify the terrible and undeniable suffering of which Western civilization has been the cause.

René Girard
I have absolutely no right, you know, to say this is worth that or that it's justified to pile up suffering so high. I don't want to do that. I just say I'm a Christian. I believe that it's all for the good. But it's only faith. I don't want to justify it. I can justify things with all sorts of arguments, but they are no good because when it's real suffering you have to remain silent.

David Cayley
A rush to judgment, René Girard says, is characteristic of our time and by this excessively critical spirit, he says, we too easily put ourselves above the world.

René Girard
I think what is lacking in an attitude which is too negative is gratitude. You know, one of the things in Judeo-Christian tradition which is tremendously important is the praise of God. And that's what we seem to be unable to do in the modern world. We are all rebellion, and we are self-righteous rebellion because we say we are better than this history. We would do better if we were in the place of God. That's all it means.

David Cayley
Christianity, Girard has said, is the invisible foundation of the modern world. It is the source of our capacity for self-criticism, the cause of our sensitivity to victims. But it is not perceived as such because we take these capabilities to be a natural endowment and see Christianity only as a corrupting institution that imposes on our native benevolence and rationality and tries to control us by instilling guilt and fear. This, roughly, is what Girard calls the Enlightenment critique of religion. But the Enlightenment at least wants to preserve Christian ethics, even if it thinks it can dispense with the rest of Christianity's institutional and theological apparatus. Our own time has seen an attack on Christianity that questions even Christian ethics. And this attack, for Girard, begins with Friedrich Nietzsche, the mid- to late 19th century German philosopher. Nietzsche, in his late writings, argues that Christian sympathy for victims enervates society and saps its strength. Against Christ, Nietzsche pits the Greek god Dionysus, whose death and rebirth, he says, symbolizes a tragic acceptance of life. Nietzsche understands what Christianity has accomplished, Girard says, but he rejects it.

René Girard
My main discovery, I say, is that in Christianity God is for victims and not against them. But this is not my discovery at all. It is Nietzsche's discovery. Look at aphorism 1052 in The Will to Power. Dionysus and Christ, Nietzsche says, suffer the same martyrdom, the same death at the hands of the collective. The difference is in the interpretation. With Dionysus, there is the acceptance of suffering, and of the fact that there must be victims and so forth. Christ is portrayed as an innocent victim with the implication that no one should be sacrificed. And the whole idea that Christianity represents the morality of slaves starts from that discovery. Nietzsche lived in what might be called the first age of political correctness, though much less than today, and he saw that the concern for victims in his society came from Christianity with its recognition of Jesus innocence. That's what he calls the morality of the slave, which he says we have to do away with. And Naziism didn't say anything else.

David Cayley
In the section of The Will to Power that Girard quotes, Nietzsche says that Jesus cross is "a curse on life, a pointer to seek redemption from it." Christ's innocence is "an objection to this life and... the formula of its condemnation." Dismembered Dionysus, on the other hand, torn to pieces by his worshippers, is "a promise of life," his death a recognition that life in "its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence involves agony, destruction and the will to annihilation." Christianity, Nietzsche says in another late essay, sides with everything "sickly" and "base." It fosters pity rather than "the tonic emotions that heighten our vitality." This invective has been extremely influential with later generations but it is all based, according to Girard, on a misunderstanding. It is the death of Christ that represents heroic opposition to the crowd, he says, while the death of Dionysus is submission to the crowd.

René Girard
The Dionysiac sacrifice is the voice of the mob and the Christian solution, that the victim is innocent, is the truth of a very small minority. The aristocrats are there. Socially they may happen to be a fisherman here, a good-for-nothing there. What does it matter? They turn into aristocrats at the moment when they oppose the mob around them, as Nietzsche, by his own standards, should recognize. But Dionysus is obviously the mob. There is not one episode of his myth which is not decided by the mob. Christianity is

the exception—saying no to the mob. And Dionysus is the acceptance of the mob.

David Cayley
Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity are founded, in Girard's view, on a misunderstanding and Nietzsche has, in turn, been misunderstood. He is thought of as the philosopher of the death of God, but in one of the writings that gives rise to this reputation, Aphorism 145 in The Gay Science, what Nietzsche actually writes about is the killing of God. "God is dead," Nietzsche writes, "and it is we who have killed him...What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives...Who will wipe this blood from our hands? "

René Girard
Usually people call it the death of God text of Nietzsche and, if you look at the text closely, you see that the expression "death of God" is there once but what he emphasizes is the we killed God, we are the killers of God. What are we going to do, he says, to atone for that death? What kind of rituals, what kind of purifications are we going to find? Therefore, it's a birth of religion through the death of the victim. It's an incredibly powerful text. He was under a kind of inspiration, that was very profound. It's read as the death of God, but the formula which is repeated throughout that passage is we killed God, we killed God. What are we going to do? It's like drinking the sea and now there is no up and no down, no right and no left. All positions are lost. What are we going to do to atone for the death of God? One could just as well call it the birth of God.

David Cayley
This passage is important to Girard because it plainly describes, not a passive fading away of religious belief, but a sacrificial murder and therefore the birth of a new order. And this new order will once again include heroism and the cleansing of society by sacrifice. Within Christianity, Nietzsche says, the individual was taken so seriously, made such an absolute principle, that he could no longer be sacrificed. But the species only survives, he says, thanks to human sacrifices.

Nietzsche's revolt against Christianity, with its longing for the imagined vitality of the world before the Cross, would have many sequels in the 20th century. One that has particularly interested Girard is the work of the great German philosopher Martin Heidigger.

René Girard
It's very difficult to define what Heidigger is after, you know. I would define it as a neo-pagan view of the world. In order to see this, a very important text is that famous interview which he gave to the German magazine Der Spiegel years before his death, which they promised to publish only the week after his death, which contains the famous statement, "We have reached a point where only a god can save us." And this has to be interpreted as another god, a god entirely outside of Christianity. He seeks a new beginning from the chaos out of which everything comes. Heidigger is trying to do away with Christianity, no doubt, and in a way which is more extreme than Nietzsche. He's fundamentally Nietzschian in some ways, but he refuses, for instance, the Nietzsche formula the death of god. It's too Christian a formula. If God dies, there is a good chance that He will be reborn. So he talks about the withdrawal of the gods.

David Cayley
Heidigger and Nietzsche both want to replace Christianity, to re-found society and to begin again. This ambition also has its contemporary political form, Girard says. He points to two main tendencies in which he thinks the attack on Christianity is expressed.

René Girard
Today I think we have two totalitarian groups, one of which may have exhausted its possibilities. That's the group which is openly anti-Christian, which is Naziism. I really think the violence of Naziism is all about getting rid of Christianity. Nietzsche talked about doing it through philosophy, genealogy, showing that the Christians are really for victims only for - what should I say? - extremely vulgar and sinister reasons, you know, because they are part of the lower class. But the Nazis say, we are more powerful than a poor philosopher who was half mad

and we're going to drown the Christian desire to vindicate victims in such injustice, such destruction, that we will prove that the destiny of the Christian world, of the world which has been Christianized, is not the Christian one. I really think you have to regard the open, explicit nature of Nazi violence in this way. They didn't talk about the concentration camps, the death camps during the war because it would have been very bad from a purely tactical, strategic viewpoint; but I'm sure that, if they had won the war, they would have publicized it and said, you see, our world has nothing to do with Christianity. We have won. We have proved that Christianity cannot do anything in this world. So this was the explicit anti-Christian view. I think there is another totalitarianism which is the opposite, which says, don't believe that Christianity is defending victims. It just pretends to. It's nothing but inquisition, terrorism and so forth. We will show you how to defend victims. And this is precisely what we see today. I really think that we have to read much of contemporary history in the light of the idea of anti-Christ, of an imitation of Christ which would at the same time be a total betrayal of Christianity. This is difficult to do, of course, because the idea is so controversial and potentially explosive. But I think, nevertheless, that the signs are converging in that direction. I would say that what we call political correctness today is a super-Christianity.

David Cayley
This super-Christianity which Girard associates with political correctness reduces the world to nothing but victimization, oppression and the machinations of power. It takes up the Christian concern with victims but abandons Christianity and in particular, Girard says, Christian morality.

René Girard
Today ideology consists in presenting the Ten Commandments as the worst form of tyranny and oppression. The Enlightenment would never have done that. Voltaire was making fun of the Church and certain aspects of the corruption of the Church; but today the Ten Commandments, for instance, Thou shalt not commit adultery, is regarded as the worst oppression. Everything is oppression, according to this view, everything is victimization. And this, I think, is the totalitarianism of the future. Marxism was only its most primitive form probably.

David Cayley
This new totalitarianism, as Girard sees it, promises to deliver all that was good in Christianity while dispensing with everything repressive. It is currently engaged, Girard has written, in a gigantic intellectual expulsion of the whole Judeo-Christian tradition. The fact that the defense of victims can now be carried on against Christianity is characteristic of our time, Girard says. Our preoccupation with victimization comes from Christianity but it has by now worked its way so deeply into the grain of our society that it has become a valuable form of political currency.

René Girard
Think that today some American states, the American government, and some serious politicians are thinking about indemnities for slavery – a hundred and fifty years ago - indemnities that would be paid by the whole American people. And most peoples' ancestors in this country were not here when there was slavery. They are the descendants of immigrants that came to America after the Civil War, which is the largest number. Therefore, you have something which is amazing and absolutely unique. Can you imagine one single society which would behave the way we do? Not one in all of history. And the sensitivity we have to victims, I would say, is a concrete form of Christianity. Even if Christianity isn't preached, people will defend victims, and everybody will do it against everybody else. If I'm French, I'll talk about American slavery. If I'm American, I'll talk about the Terror. Americans are obsessed by the French Revolution and the Terror. We are always more preocupied with other people's victims than with our own.

David Cayley
In the world of today, an accusation of victimization can be attempt to get one up on a rival, just as a claim of victimization can be a source of advantage. This produces a general competition for victim status in which it is sometimes hard to tell the scapegoats from the scapegoaters. Our world, as Girard said earlier, moves towards both the best and the worst at once. We are more concerned with victims and, at

the same time, more concerned with ourselves than ever before. And according to Girard, it is precisely this combination that advances the revelation in which we are living.

René Girard
The mixture of selflessness and ultra-individualism in us contributes more and more to the fact that everything is revealed. The idea that in the last days everything will be revealed is just haunting today. Because that's what the Gospels say. Don't worry, whatever is hidden will be revealed. The course of history is a revelation. The idea that we are at the end of history, that this revelation is over, makes no sense. More is revealed all the time.

David Cayley
During a long career as a writer and teacher, René Girard has ranged over many fields. He has made original contributions in literary criticism, in psychology, in anthropology, in the understanding of violence, in the interpretation of Shakespeare and in biblical studies. What has animated him throughout is what he calls "intellectual passion." He says, for example, that he was led to his hypothesis that society originates in violence not through any special vocation to oppose violence but because of the idea's great explanatory power.

René Girard
What drove me to study violence, I'm sorry to say, is not an urge to combat violence. It was really an intellectual drive. I thought it solved problems, and I'm interested in the solution of problems. I'm interested in showing how things work and so forth. But very few people see that this intellectual passion is first and foremost for me. I like solving puzzles. So when you say that I have found something, a workable solution, that's what I like. So I'm a scientist, in a certain sense. At the same time, I'm existentially involved - inevitably. Nevertheless, that feeling of it works, it clicks is very important to me. So I'm really a researcher. I'm really an academic man.

David Cayley
René Girard's intellectual achievement has attracted over the years a growing community of scholars dedicated to further explorations in the territory that Girard has mapped. In 1990, some of these scholars founded The Colloquium on Violence and Religion as a focus for this work and it has met annually in either Europe or the United States ever since. Since 1994, a journal called Contagion has also been published. One of the founders of the Colloquium, and a colleague of Girard's at Stanford before they both retired is Robert Hamerton-Kelly. He's written two books on the New Testament from a Girardian perspective and is currently the minister of Woodside Village Church in Woodside, California.

Robert Hamerton-Kelly
Well, you know, I must say that he's a living example of his own theories. One is frequently disappointed by the personal presence of great thinkers. They turn out to be quite unpleasant or quite unremarkable in their personal presentation. But Girard is the kindest, gentlest man in the world, and I have had the experience every now and then with him where you're talking along and it's almost as if somebody changes the lighting or something because you 're aware of a very powerful spiritual presence in this man. You know that this is an extraordinary person, an extraordinary spirit. So my involvement is about as total as you can get. I remember a specific occasion, when we were discussing his Shakespeare book - this was before it was published - and I was trying to tell him that I thought the argumentation was a bit relentless. He does tend to be merciless in his argumentation. And he took this very badly. He thought it was a criticism. Well, it was a counsel of perfection, really. It was not a criticism. I just said, you know, René, you should let up every now and then, give the opponent a chance to breathe or something. But in the middle of that conversation, I had this extraordinary experience of him being transmogrified in this way I described, and I realized that I was probably out of line. I probably shouldn't have been saying these things because, at the deepest level, I didn't know what I was talking about. At the deepest level, my comments were probably frivolous.

David Cayley
Robert Hamerton-Kelly's sense of René Girard as a master teacher is shared by another friend and

colleague of Girard's, Gil Baillie. Baillie is an independent writer and lecturer from Sonoma, California, and the author of Violence Unveiled, a book that applies Girard's insights to what Baillie calls "our contemporary cultural crisis." He undertook this book, he says, in the hope of getting Girard's ideas out of the ghetto in which he felt academic prejudice against Christianity was keeping them confined.

Gil Baillie
There's a kind of embargo against Girard in the academy because of his faith. He is a believing Christian and in certain areas of the academic world, they take your card away for that. You don't have a license to practice. And I realized that that was keeping his work from being really discussed the way it should be. So...fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I thought, I'll just write a book that outflanks the embargo and get this stuff out to the average person. Well, I was having lunch with him about the time I was preparing to send the manuscript off, and I said, you know, René, I'm afraid that I'm just going to end up contributing to the stereotype because my book has turned out so incredibly Christian. And he leaned over the table, smiled at me and said, let's burn our boats on the beach.

David Cayley
René Girard has burned his boats on the beach, adopting during his long career any number of unfashionable postures. He has stood up for meaning when the more à la mode literary critics were saying that words only point at other words. He has insisted that the Bible remains our primary instrument for understanding the world at a time when most were ignoring it or treating it only as a magnificent relic. And he has thought and written across the full range of human experience instead of just remaining in some secure academic enclave. For all this, he has occasionally been abused and misunderstood. But in recent years, according to many of Girard's colleagues, there has been a growing interest in many quarters. And Girard himself says, finally, that he, too, has sensed this new spirit.

René Girard
I feel that there is an opening today which wasn't there a generation ago. You can now say things which formerly would have taken people aback and scandalized them to such an extent that they would have reacted negatively, they would have seen you as a freak – or seen me, more specifically, because people really did see me as a freak at one time. So I feel that in the young generation there is a new spirit, that people are more ready for anything—bad, good, but they are ready for anything. There is more of a sense of experimentation again. I feel nothing comparable to the type of rejection I've always had with people of my generation and even the generation younger than me. And I found that again this year, when I visited Paris. Part of the reason I had such a good press is that I encountered lots of students who told me, we had some of Violence and the Sacred in school, and I was very surprised because I didn't even know that in the French lycée, which is a public school, they were mentioning La Violence et le Sacré , and I saw maybe five or six journalists who said that from different papers. So I think it's a mixed picture. I feel that young people are being left in a state of emptiness as certain historical aspects of Christianity are lost. But they experience that emptiness. If you talk to them about emptiness, they know what you're talking about. I have contact with this generation.

David Cayley
Thank you.

Paul Kennedy
On *Ideas* tonight, you've listened to the fifth and final program of "The Scapegoat," a series about the thought of René Girard.

René Girard's latest book, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, is published in Canada by Novalis and is available in bookstores.

Tonight's program was produced and presented by David Cayley with the assistance of Richard Handler. David Cayley would also like to thank Robert Hamerton-Kelly, Gil Baillie, James Alison, Andrew McKenna, Paul Dumouchel, Sandor Goodhart and Martha and René Girard for help,

hospitality and good counsel during the preparation of these programs.

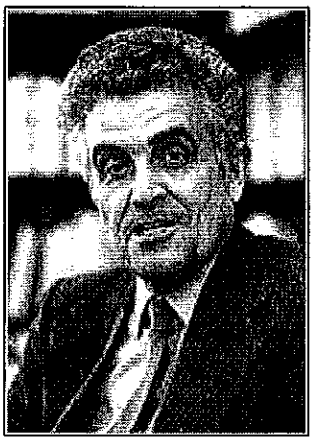
Sound production by Dave Field, Associate Producer Liz Nagy.

The Executive Producer of *Ideas* is Richard Handler and I'm Paul Kennedy.

Transcript by Susan Young and David Cayley

IDEAS

The Scapegoat
René Girard's Anthropology of Violence and Reli



René Girard was born in the southern French city of Avignon on Christmas day in 1923. Between 1943 and
1947, he studied in Paris at the École des Chartres, an institution for the training of archivists and historians, where he specialized in medieval history. In 1947 he went to Indiana University on a year's fellowship and eventually made almost his entire career in the United States. He completed a PhD in history at Indiana
University in 1950 but also began to teach literature, the field in which he would first make his reputation. He taught at Duke University and at Bryn Mawr before becoming a professor at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. In 1971 he went to the State University of New York at Buffalo for five years, returned to Johns Hopkins, and then finished his academic career at Stanford where he taught between 1981 and his retirement in 1995.

Girard continues to lecture and write and still offers a seminar at Stanford, where he and his wife Martha make their home. In 1990, friends and colleagues of Girard's established the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion*
to further research and discussion about the themes of Girard's work. The Colloquium meets annually either in Europe or the United States. This year's meeting will take place in Antwerp, Belgium, between May 31 and
June 2. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor will give one of the conference's featured lectures.
You can get more information about the conference here .

There is also a journal devoted to the discussion of Girard's ideas called **Contagion**. It has been published annually since 1994, and its current editor is Andrew McKenna of Loyola University in Chicago. Contagion's address is c/o Department of Modern Languages and Literature, Loyola University of Chicago, 6525 North Sheridan Ave., Chicago, IL 60626, USA.

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The Scapegoat: René Girard's Anthropology of Violence and Religion
Produced and presented by David Cayley
Technical producton Dave Field
Associate Producer Liz Nagy

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