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## Psalm 22 in the Light of René Girard's Mimetic Theory

### *Psalm 22 v luči mimetične teorije Renéja Girarda*

*Abstract:* The article examines the narrative of Psalm 22 from the perspective of René Girard's mimetic theory. First, the psalm is briefly contextualized in the Christian interpretive tradition, and its basic narrative structure is outlined. Next, based on Girard's first two books – *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1957) and *Dostoïevski, du double à l'unité* (1963) – we present Girard's triangular model (in addition to the subject and object, there is also a mediator who is located beyond the subject-object line and is actually the focus of mimetic desire). Then, we point out the basic contours of the sacrificial mechanism and corrections of Freud in Girard's third and most referenced book, *La violence et le sacré* (1972). Finally, we indicate Girard's turn towards the Bible and a kind of biblical deconstruction of the mythological sacrificial narrative in the book *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978) – which was later developed in the books *La route antique des hommes pervers*, (1985), *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (1999) and *Celui par qui le scandale arrive* (2001). Finally, the psalm itself is analyzed from the perspective of Girard's sacrificial theory.

*Keywords:* mimetic desire, Psalm 22, René Girard, sacrificial mechanism, scapegoat, unanimous victim

*Povzetek:* Prispevek obravnava pripoved Psalma 22 z vidika mimetične teorije Renéja Girarda. Najprej je psalm na kratko umeščen v krščansko interpretativno tradicijo, opisana pa je tudi njegova osnovna pripovedna struktura. Nato je na podlagi Girardovih prvih dveh knjig – *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1957) in *Dostoïevski, du double à l'unité* (1963) – predstavljen Girardov trikotni model (poleg subjekta in objekta obstaja tudi posrednik, ki se nahaja onkraj linije subjekt–objekt in je dejansko središče mimetične želje). Sledi predstavitev osnovnih kontur žrtvenega mehanizma in Freudovih popravkov v Girardovi tretji in najbolj citirani knjigi *La violence et le sacré* (1972). Nazadnje opozorimo na Girardov obrat k Svetemu pismu in nekakšno biblično dekonstrukcijo mitološkega žrtvenega pripovedovanja v knjigi *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978) – ki je bila kasneje razvita v knjigah *La*

*route antique des hommes pervers*, (1985), *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'eclair* (1999) in *Celui par qui le scandale arrive* (2001). Nazadnje je psalm sam analiziran z vidika Girardove teorije žrtvovanja.

*Ključne besede*: mimetično hrepenenje, Psalm 22, René Girard, mehanizem žrtvovanja, grešni kozel, soglasna žrtev

## 1. Introduction

It is known that Psalm 22 holds a significant place in the Christian exegetical-theological tradition. From an ideal-typical perspective, there have been numerous controversies, which seem to continue, about whether the psalmist foresaw the event of Jesus' passion directly, that is, whether it was a prophetic fulfillment (this view is found, for example, in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and in Justin Martyr – which was held to be a confirmation that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and also a very specific understanding of the inspiration of the biblical writers) or whether the scenes of the passion simply resembled the experience of the suffering person in the psalm (echoes of the psalm can also be found in other, extra-biblical texts, for example, the Qumran hymns known as the *Hodayot*) (Lange 1972, 610–611). In other words, whether it was a prophetic or analogical fulfillment.<sup>1</sup> In recent times, poetic-structural, rhetorical, and other analyses of the psalm have been developed that have served more or less convincingly as arguments for one or the other point of view and sometimes as support for both – which we consider the most authoritative.

Psalm 22, James Mays points out, has an “intensity and comprehensiveness” that are almost unparalleled in comparison to other psalms of this type (prayer complaints, lamentations) (Mays 1994, 107). It is structured in such a way that it has two essential parts: 1) a lamentation, that is, a prayer for help (verses 1–21), and 2) a song of praise for deliverance (verses 22–31). In both parts, there are two prominent sections where the basic themes (lamentation and praise) are reinforced. In verses 1–11, there are two laments (verses 1–2 and 6–8) that bring one of the strongest psalmic expressions (primarily, we are talking about verse 1:

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עָזַבְתָּנִי רְחוּק מִיִּשְׁעֹתַי דְּבַר י שְׁאַגְתִּי: or Ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεός μου, πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με, according to the *Septuagint* – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – and then in the opening verse of the second section, verse 6: “But I am a worm, and not human; / scorned by others, and despised by the people”). In both cases, the lament is followed by a profession of confidence based on God's protection in the past (verses 3–5 and 9–11). The first profession of trust is corporate (verse 4: “In you our ancestors trusted; / they trusted, and you delivered them”), while the second is personal

<sup>1</sup> R. Bultmann considered Psalm 22 to be a poetic motif that gave “form to the passion myth” (Bultmann 1964, 303; cf. Tilborg 1988, 906).

(verse 9: "Yet it was you who took me from the womb; / you kept me safe on my mother's breast"). The prayer for help (verses 12-21a) focuses on the person's suffering. Verses 12-13 and 16a present images of animals that want to devour and destroy the sufferer (bulls and dogs). They are accompanied by expressions of the sufferer's physical weakness ("I am poured out like water, / and all my bones are out of joint; / my heart is like wax; / it is melting within my breasts; / my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, / and my tongue sticks to my jaws"; "I can count all my bones"). The first part ends with a chain of pleas to God to deliver the sufferer from "the sword," "the dog," and "the lion." The second part praises God and expresses confidence that He has heard the prayers of the suffering. Praise and thanksgiving agree with the petitions in the first part. Thus, verse 21 ("Save me from the mouth of the lion! / From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.") succinctly responds to the laments in verses 1-18. Then comes a dramatic turn, a kind of psalmic περιπέτεια ("I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; / in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:" verse 22). The rest of the psalm is like a catalogue of promises that God will be praised, promises that are graded from praise "in the great congregation, ...before those who fear him" to praise of "all who sleep in the earth" and all future generations.

Ellen Davis points out that Psalm 22 "exploded the limits" of poetic language and expanded the Old Testament understanding of God, human life, and death (this is an example of the creative or "resymbolizing" [P. Ricoeur] power of poetic language) (Davis 1992, 102–103).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is expected that the extensive psalmic expression and the far-reaching expression of hope have become the core of the passion narrative. Of course, the most obvious connection between Psalm 22 and the passion narrative is Jesus' cry on the cross: Ἐλωϊ Ἐλωϊ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι – "Eloi, Eloi lema sabachthani" (Mk 15:34); Ἡλεὶ Ἡλεὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθανεῖ – "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani" (Mt 27:46). Mk 15:29 and Mt 27:39 contain expressions similar to the verse 7 of the psalm ("All who see me mock at me"); Mt 27:43 frames the mockery of the religious leaders in the words of verse 8 ("Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver / let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"); in all four Gospels (Mk 15:24; Mt 27:35; Lk 23:34 and Jn 19:24) what the soldiers do at the foot of the cross is described in the words of verse 18 ("they divide my clothes among themselves, / and for my clothing they cast lots"); finally Jn 19:28 ("After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty'") corresponds to the words of verse 15 of the psalm ("my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, / and my tongue sticks to my jaws").

That Psalm 22 can be read beyond the above-mentioned analyses and interpretations is suggested by René Girard's "scandalous theory." It is "scandalous" because against the romantic idea of the "authentic self," formalism, new criticism, Sigmund Freud, structuralist and deconstructionist methods and other academic fashions, Girard believed that the best hermeneutic models are found in

<sup>2</sup> E. Davis sought to show how the method of form criticism and rhetorical criticism can be used for the theological interpretation of the Psalms (in this case, Psalm 22), that is, that the attention paid to the function of poetic language can deepen the insights of formal analysis.

the canonized literary works (texts to which tradition has assigned a prominent place, great texts that do not follow fashion, Girard 2008, 213), and – what is probably the most scandalous – in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> It was in them, the canonized literary works and the Bible, that Girard discovered *mimeticism* (of course, not in the sense of Platonic-Aristotelian interpretations),<sup>4</sup> that is, mimetic rivalry on which he based his “scandalous” theory. Ironically, Girard himself asserted in a discussion organized by the editors of the magazine *Esprit* that we are often told we should think scandalously, that scandal has value (he was referring to scandals à la Marquis De Sade and Friedrich Nietzsche, which he asserted are old romantic follies that are boringly recycled) and that, therefore, he offers a brand new, big scandal for the end of the twentieth century – which will for sure have no success (Girard 2022, 70).<sup>5</sup> He was wrong. Girard’s “scandalous theory” indeed has a significant influence not only on literary studies but also on many other humanities and social sciences – or, more appropriate to Girard, on *les sciences de l’homme*.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Girard’s New Readings of Greek Tragedians and Revisions of Freud

In his first monograph, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1957),<sup>7</sup> Girard analyzed the works of Miguel de Cervantes, Marie-Henri Beyle Stendhal, Marcel Proust, and Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, in which he observed the phenomenon of mimetic desire (the protagonist does not want things directly but through the mediation of another), that is “triangular desire” (*le désir triangulaire*),<sup>8</sup> whi-

<sup>3</sup> R. Girard believed that canonized literary texts bring an intuitive understanding of man, reveal significant structures and forms of human behaviour, illuminate the human condition, and that literature is a kind of theory (Doran 2008, xiv). See Girard 2007, 173 and the article “Narcissism: The Freudian Myth De-mythified by Proust” (1978).

<sup>4</sup> On why R. Girard opted for the pregnant Greek term *mimesis* rather than the Latin *imitatio*; see Girard 1987, 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> An allusion to the Bible is not excluded. Namely, the apostle Paul, in the First Letter to the Corinthians (1:23), points out that the gospel is σκάνδαλον. Girard associates the Greek word σκάνδαλον (in noun and verb form) with mimetic rivalry (Girard 2001, 16).

<sup>6</sup> An illustrative example of Girard’s influence on many scientific fields and areas is the *Colloquium on Violence and Religion*, founded in 1990, and the annual journal *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*.

<sup>7</sup> Girard uses the term *romantique* (in the English edition: *romantic*) for works that reflect the presence of the mediator without revealing it and *romanesque* (in the English edition: *novelistic*) for works that reveal this presence. Y. Freccero, translator of *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* into English (*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*), notes that the categories above are not independent labels stuck once and for all on a particular literary material (cf. Girard 1965, 16–17, note 2).

<sup>8</sup> An example of triangular desire is Don Quixote. However, he is not the only character in Cervantes’ novel affected by such a desire. Some of Sancho Panza’s desires, such as being the governor of an island where his daughter would have the title of duchess, are also triangular (Sancho wants it because Don Quixote wants the same thing). Both Don Quixote’s and Sancho’s desires come from *the other*. It does not matter that in Don Quixote’s case, the mediator (Amadis de Gaula) is imaginary. Triangular desire is also found in Flaubert’s novels. Emma Bovary’s desires come from romantic heroines who capture her imagination. Stendhal also points out the role of suggestion and imitation. For example, Mathilde de la Mole finds role models in her family’s history, and Julien Sorel imitates Napoleon. With the latter

ch became a kind of model in Girard's theory. Girard notes that the usual model of imitation is rectilinear: subject-object. The triangular model indicates that, in addition to the subject and object, there is also a mediator (*médiateur*). He is located above the subject-object line and is actually the focal point. The object can change, but the triangle remains. However, this triangle is not *Gestalt*. Real structures cannot be localized because they are intersubjective.<sup>9</sup> Girard developed the triangular model in more depth in his next monograph, *Dostoïevski, du double à l'unité* (1963). Mimetic analysis shows, especially when the subject seems to have reached a dead end in the struggles with the model-rival, that the subject wants to be the model-mediator. This is when fascination, hypnosis, idolatry, and possession arise, and the "double" is born (Girard thinks that in *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky interprets the fascination with model-obstacles as demonic possession, making the psychology of *Notes from the Underground* demonology, Girard 2012, 84). The experience of the "double" occurs when the model-obstacle is so internalized that the subject does not experience a distinction between self and it. The extreme alternatives are suicide or murder of the model-obstacle. Other possibilities are schizophrenia, escaping into a new identity, and liberation through love and forgiveness. The latter refers to *conversionary mimesis* (Girard 2000, 289). However, Girard did not stop at these insights. He continued to read other, mostly older authors such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and other Greek tragedians.<sup>10</sup> It was then that he discovered the mechanism of the "unanimous victim" (*victime l'unanimité*) – which is the content of his third and one of the most referenced book, *La violence et le sacré* (1972). Unlike the first two, this book sparked numerous discussions among anthropologists, religious scholars, theologians, and others.

Girard argued that the tragic crisis should be interpreted primarily as a "sacrificial crisis" (*la crise sacrificielle*). This is the point at which mimesis has spread in a community to such a level that the essential distinctions that constitute the cultural order (sacred – profane, permitted – forbidden, pure – impure, internal – external, male – female, etc.) have diminished or completely disappeared. Order and peace are based on distinctions, so their abolition leads to mindless rivalry and extermination. The sacrificial crisis requires the re-establishment of distinc-

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writer, Girard discovers "internal mediation" (*la médiation interne*). This mediation occurs when the distance between the mediator and the one who imitates the desire is reduced enough to lead to rivalry. Thus, the mediator becomes a rival. Besides Stendhal, there are two other writers of internal mediation: Proust and Dostoevsky. The distance is not necessarily spatial. Don Quixote and Sancho are always physically close to each other, but the social and intellectual distance that separates them remains insurmountable. The harmony between the two companions is never seriously disturbed; therefore, with Cervantes, it is about "external mediation" (*la médiation externe*). Romantic works, Girard argues, are grouped into these two types of mediation – but within these categories, there can be an infinite number of secondary distinctions (Girard 1965, 9).

<sup>9</sup> In his fourth book, *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, 1978, in which he expanded on the initial insights about mimetic desire, Girard coined the term *interdividual* (cf. Girard 1987, 283–431).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, he did not stop reading other, later writers. For example, he dedicated one monograph (*A Theater of Envy*, 1991) to the "mimetic" reading of Shakespeare.

tions through sacrifice.<sup>11</sup> Greek tragedy, Girard points out, is primarily a representation of the sacrificial crisis and violence. It functions as a sort of ritual. In fact, it has taken over the role of ritual (Girard 1977, 168). Catharsis, therefore, has a sacrificial dimension, which, Girard believes, remained concealed from Aristotle. But precisely because he did not penetrate the secret of offering sacrifice, the sacrificial mechanism, the catharsis (in the *Poetics*) represents just another sacrificial displacement, analogous to all the others (291). In addition to basing general hermeneutics on the model of the sacrificial mechanism with which he explained not only literary works but also the origins of religion and culture, Girard, in *La violence et le sacré*, deepened the interpretation of mimetic desire with a sort of correction of Freud.<sup>12</sup>

Girard believes that Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth failed to reveal what was actually "suppressed" in the myth: it was by no means the desire for patricide and incest but violence. Therefore, what was concealed in the myth was violence, or the menace of total destruction, diverted and concealed by the mechanism of the "unanimous victim" (Girard 1977, 86–87). This mechanism originates from a mimetic desire – which Freud missed. To show this, Girard selected the opening passage of the seventh chapter from Freud's *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921):

"A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like and be like him, and take his place everywhere. We may say simply that he takes his father as his ideal. This behavior has nothing to do with a passive or feminine attitude towards his father (and towards males in general); it is, on the contrary, typically masculine. It fits in very well with the Oedipus complex, for which it helps to prepare the way."

"Der kleine Knabe legt ein besonderes Interesse für seinen Vater an den Tag, er möchte so werden und so sein wie er, in allen Stücken an seine Stelle treten. Sagen wir ruhig: er nimmt den Vater zu seinem Ideal. Dies Verhalten hat nichts mit einer passiven oder femininen Einstellung zum Vater (und zum Manne überhaupt) zu tun, es ist vielmehr exquisit männlich. Es verträgt sich sehr wohl mit dem Ödipuskomplex, den es vorbereiten hilft." (Freud 1940, 23)

From the passage, Girard pointed out the assertion that the identification has nothing passive or feminine about it. A passive or feminine identification would mean that the son himself wanted to become the object of his father's desire. If,

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Girard argued that sacrifice – the ritual repetition of the founding murder that initially established peace – was the only way to temporarily achieve non-violence. Girard believes that the myths that confirm the founding role of murder are so numerous that one can speak of a kind of "transmythological" phenomenon (Girard 2001: 83).

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that Girard does not mention Freud at all in his first two books (*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* and *Dostoïevski, du double à l'unité*). R. Doran believes that this is Girard's strategy to avoid his studies being associated with psychoanalytically oriented literary criticism. However, he soon realized, Doran notes, that a dialogue with psychoanalysis was not only fruitful but also necessary (Doran 2008: xviii).

therefore, the boy's desire is neither passive nor feminine, Girard asked, how then will the active and masculine identification realize itself? And he immediately offered an answer: "Either it is wholly imaginary, or it finds concrete form in the desire for some particular object." (Girard 1977, 170) He then pointed out that identification is "a desire *to be*," which seeks fulfillment by means of "having," that is, by appropriating his father's things. The son seeks to replace the father in everything, meaning he desires what the father desires. Girard believes that the proof that this is indeed what Freud had in mind lies in the last sentence, which says that identification "fits in very well with the Oedipus complex, for which it helps to prepare the way." This sentence either means nothing or suggests that identification directs the boy's desire toward objects desired by the father. If we consider the latter, Girard pointed out, then we see Freud's undeniable intention to explain every desire of the boy through the influence of *mimesis* (171). Consequently, this means that there is a conflict in Freud's thought between *mimesis* in the process of identification and the establishment of desire in the object, that is, the autonomous libidinous affection toward the mother. The conflict is all the more apparent if the identification with the father is presented as primary. After the identification with the father comes the libidinous affection toward the mother, which initially appears and develops independently. Thus, initially, the desire for the mother has two origins: the identification with the father (*mimesis*) and the *libido* that fixates directly on the mother. These two forces act together and reinforce one another. Girard concluded that the path of mimetic desire had opened before Freud, but he did not take it.

That Freud had indeed given up the path of mimetic desire, Girard explained by analyzing Freud's definition of the Oedipus complex:

"The little boy notices that his father stands in his way with his mother. His identification with his father takes on a hostile coloring and becomes identical with the wish to replace his father in regard to his mother as well. Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal."

"Der Kleine merkt, daß ihm der Vater bei der Mutter im Wege steht; seine Identifizierung mit dem Vater nimmt jetzt eine feindselige Tönung an und wird mit dem Wunsch identisch, den Vater auch bei der Mutter zu ersetzen. Die Identifizierung ist eben von Anfang an ambivalent, sie kann sich ebenso zum Ausdruck der Zärtlichkeit wie zum Wunsch der Beseitigung wenden." (Freud 1940, 23)

Girard noticed a strange thought in the quoted text: when the son is confronted with the father as an obstacle, his identification fuses with his desire "to replace his father in regard to his mother as well." Girard pointed out that this "to replace his father in regard to his mother as well" is quite unusual. Namely, after pointing out the mimetic scheme in his definition of identification, where the father is the model of desire for the boy, directing his desires to what the father

himself desires, Freud then rejected it with the phrase “to replace his father in regard to his mother as well.” These words make a mimetic interpretation of identification impossible, at least in regard to the object of primary importance: the mother. Efforts to eliminate mimetic elements are confirmed in Freud’s later texts as well, for example, in *Das Ich und das Es* (1923). Why does Freud reject what he has come across – the mimetic desire (to desire the same thing as the model)? Girard believes it is because a reinterpretation of the “Oedipal” rivalry in the light of a radically mimetic conception would lead to consequences that are at the same time similar to and quite different from those that Freud attributed to the Oedipus complex. Namely, in the Oedipus complex, desire is rooted in the mother as the subject, while the mimetic interpretation rejects any awareness of the desire to kill the father and commit incest (Girard 1990, 170–177).

Girard believes that Freud tried to resolve the Oedipus complex based on a semi-objective, semi-mimetic desire. Hence, there is that strange duality of the identification with the father and the libidinous affection for the mother. The failure of that attempt compelled Freud to base the Oedipus complex purely on object desire and to reserve the consequences of mimetic desire to the *superego*: because the relationship between the *superego* and the *ego* implies the so-called *double bind* (act like your father and do not act like your father). Girard, therefore, considers Freudian analysis as a series of texts on more or less the same subject and not as a fully articulated system. For Girard, the best thing about Freud is not the Freudian systematization but precisely what is intuited (185). Therefore, he believes that the term Oedipus complex should be dropped because it is an inexhaustible source of misunderstanding, and the phenomena that are grouped around that complex should be regrouped around mimetic rivalry. This would allow coherence and the possibility of fitting into the diachronic scheme. Most phenomena grouped around the Oedipus complex have unity and intelligibility that are fully revealed by mimetic reading.

In *La Violence et le sacré*, in addition to new interpretations of Greek tragedians and corrections of Freud, Girard also brought specific interpretations of biblical texts: the story of Cain and Abel, Abraham’s sacrifice, Isaac’s blessing of Jacob, the messages of the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Micah (who speak about the ineffectiveness of sacrifices and rituals in general), and at the very end, the story of the prophet Jonah. However, he still did not point out the essential difference between myth or Greek tragedy and the Bible, which is not the case in his later books, primarily in *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. However, he hinted at the existence of a difference with two remarks. First, he pointed out that unlike the biblical prophets, who presented the sacrificial crisis from a historical perspective, the Greek tragedians presented the sacrificial crisis through mythical figures whose contours were fixed by tradition (44); and second, when he noted that the biblical prophets, like the Greek tragedians, describe the mechanism of violence, but the prophets do so in greater detail (66).

### 3. Turn Towards the Bible

Although a certain turn towards the Bible is indicated in *La Violence et le sacré*, it occurred in a more significant way in the discussion organized in 1973 by the editorial board of the magazine *Esprit* precisely on the occasion of the publication of *La Violence et le sacré* and later in the book *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978) (the book is conceived as a dialogue – Girard spoke with two Parisian doctors: neuropsychiatrist and psychologist Jean-Michel Oughourlian and psychiatrist and psychotherapist Guy Lefort). In the discussion mentioned above, Girard's interlocutors were Michel Panoff, Eugénie Luccioni, Jean-Marie Domenach, Michel Deguy, Paul Thibaud, Maurice Mourier, and François Aubral. As for the discussion in *Esprit* – Andreas Wilmes points out – one thing is certain: it is not so much the discussion itself as Girard's text *La Formidable Efficacité du Christianisme* (Girard initially planned it as a conclusion to *La Violence et le sacré*, but after giving up on that, he published it as an integral part of the discussion mentioned above) that marked a more decisive turn towards the Bible.<sup>13</sup> Namely, with this text, Girard put the biblical exposing of the sacrificial mechanism in the foreground, which, in his opinion, begins with the Old Testament texts and reaches its climax in the Gospel. It is the first text, Wilmes concludes, in which Girard set out his vision of the Bible, a vision he would continue to develop until the end of his career; hence, it represents the most significant breakthrough in mimetic theory (Wilmes 2022, ix–x).<sup>14</sup> The following passage indicates the basic direction of later excerpts:

“In Greek culture, at a time that corresponds to *Second Isaiah* (Is 40–55, 6<sup>th</sup> century BC – ed.), there are, with the pre-Socratics, with the tragedians, foreshadowing murmurs, but the revelation ultimately fails. *Truth comes from the Jews*. That same revelation fails, of course, even among the Jews at the social level. It succeeds only on the level of the text; it is still there, and we can always refer back to it. The only prescientific reading of the relations between the *Old* and *New Testaments* is to be found neither among our philosophers, Hegelian or other, nor among the erudite positivists of the last two centuries, but in New Testament allegory, patristic, and even medieval, /.../. But this tradition alone has been able /.../ to hi-

<sup>13</sup> A. Wilmes also provides a text that was omitted in the American edition of *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (*Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 1987) and explains why Girard nevertheless omitted the conclusion mentioned above when publishing *La Violence et le sacré*: “If I did not speak about the Christian (biblical – ed.) text in *Violence and the Sacred*, it is because it would have been sufficient to evoke it to persuade most readers that I was indulging in a particularly hypocritical work of apologetics. No matter what happens, this is what people will not fail to say. It is nowadays agreed that all thought is subordinated to more or less unavowable ideological or religious goals. And the most unavowable of all, of course, is to take an interest in the text of the Gospels, and to notice the formidable hold it exerts on our universe” (Girard 1983, 246, cited in Wilems 2022, xvi–xvii).

<sup>14</sup> Girard's preoccupation with the Bible can also be seen in the fact that he titled four of his books using biblical expressions: *Des choses cachees depuis la fondation du monde*, 1978 (based on Mt 13:35, cf. Ps 78:2), *La route antique des hommes pervers*, 1985 (based on Job 22:15), *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, 1999 (based on Lk 10:18), and *Celui par qui le scandale arrive*, 2001 (based on Mt 18:7).

ghlight the perfectly real concordances among the diverse instances where sacrifice is a problem, even though they could not always account for their own intuitions.” (Girard 2022, 62)

Girard’s basic premise is that myths are stories of persecution told from the perspective of the persecutors. Namely, these are stories (later texts) shaped by the delusional state of the crowd that assailed an innocent victim, the cathartic effects of collective violence, and, ultimately, the ignorance of the innocence of the surrogate victim (“unanimous victim,” “scapegoat”). For the sacrificial mechanism to be effective, the contagious enthusiasm and the mimetic *all against one* must be unknown to the participants. The mythic process is based on ignorance or even a persecutory unconscious that the myths never identify since it possesses them (Girard 2001, 115). The mechanism of mimetic violence simply requires a certain degree of ignorance. If the “scapegoat” mechanism must lead to social cohesion, the victim’s innocence must be concealed to allow the entire community to have a unanimous belief in the victim’s guilt. As soon as the actors in the process understand its mechanism, it falls apart and can no longer bind the community together. Communities do not invent their gods but divinize their victims. To decipher myths, one must depart from the perspective they introduce and find the “blind spots” of the text. By revealing the founding murder (the murder of the “unanimous victim”), the Bible breaks away from the type of “textuality” myths are composed of – that is, it points to its “own exegetical functioning.” Girard summarizes this with the following statement: in myths, the rules of interpretation are found outside of the text, while in the Bible, the rules of interpretation are immanent to the text. Or, put differently, the biblical text shows that it is aware of its structure. Myths are texts that are unaware of their proper structure. The climax of the deconstruction of the structure of mythical texts is found in the Gospel. Namely, unlike the surrogate victim in archaic religions, that is, myths, Christ is not a victim transformed into a god by the hallucination of a violent mob. His death, Girard emphasizes, is identical to our death. It is completely separated from the resurrection and has nothing to do with it. The death of Christ has nothing to do with the death of the phoenix, the deaths of the Aztec gods, or Dionysus. What makes Christ extraordinary is precisely his “ordinary” death on the cross. If it were not so, the Passion of Jesus would be just another example of the “eternal game of sacralization.” Therefore, in the Christ of the Gospels, Girard sees a subject who brings violence into the open, a subject who objectifies violence and thus renders it ineffective. With his death and resurrection on the third day, Christ showed that the archaic sacred is, in fact, nothing else than sacralized violence. Christ imposed a radically different kind of sacred: a non-sacrificial holiness based on love and the renunciation of violence.

What he indicated in *Esprit*, Girard deepened in his subsequent works, primarily in the already mentioned *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (although in some places in the book, there are passages identical to those from the discussion published in *Esprit*), all the way until the end of his scientific care-

er. To a significant extent, he did this through interpretations of biblical texts, which stems from his fundamental belief that biblical texts are revelatory. In *Des Choses...*, he brought a whole series of interpretations of biblical texts: from the text about Cain and Abel, the Great Flood, Joseph and his brothers, and the Songs of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah to the “non-sacrificial reading” (*la lecture non sacrificielle*) of the Gospel texts (especially the Passion) to which he juxtaposed the “sacrificial reading” (*la lecture sacrificielle*) of Stephen’s martyrdom described in the *Acts of the Apostles* and the *Letter to the Hebrews*. He devoted one book entirely to the reading of a biblical text: *La route antique des hommes pervers* (1985). It is a reading of *the Book of Job*. Girard outlined the fundamental difference between myth and the Bible by comparing Oedipus and Job. Oedipus is a successfully realized “scapegoat” because, as such, he remains hidden from himself; Job is a failed redemptive victim (because he refuses to participate in the “unanimity” that surrounds him). By defending his own position against the terrifying unanimity that looms over him, Job questions the myth text. In *Je vois Satan tomber comme l’éclair*, Girard emphasized that Jesus Christ is the ultimate negation of sacrificial practice. His resurrection is the triumph of the victim over the persecutors. Therefore, the resurrection is also the triumph of Judeo-Christian culture over mythical culture. Girard emphasizes that not only is the Bible far from relapsing into the divinization of victims and the victimization of the divine, which characterizes mythology, but the divinity of Jesus obliges us to distinguish between two “transcendences” that are externally similar but radically opposed. One is deceptive, false, and misleading. This is the one that refers to the unconscious fulfillment of the sacrificial mechanism in mythology. The other is truthful and luminous. This one destroys the illusions of the first by revealing how communities are poisoned by violent mimetism and how the “remedy” is caused by evil itself. This is the one that begins with the Old Testament and continues with the New Testament (Girard 2001, 130; 137). He also argued that in the Gospels, the sacrificial mechanism is not only clearly described but also indicates a way out of the violence that the mythical consciousness supports because it feeds on it. The way out is the cross: the negation of violence, the defense of innocence, the condemnation of totalitarianism and lynching, pity, forgiveness, and mercy.

Therefore, while archaic cultures considered the “scapegoat” responsible for the explosion of the mimetic crisis, the New Testament texts expose the mechanism of mimetic violence: the “scapegoat” is, in fact, an innocent victim, killed to restore peace to the violent community. The Bible reveals what myths conceal: human communities are based on unjust violence, and they are built on the blood of the victim who had to be convinced of their guilt. When they confessed their guilt and were sacrificed, they justified the order, restored its self-confidence, and transformed the community’s crime into a sacred crime, into a divine order (a religious epiphany). The Bible refuses to demonize/divinize the victims of bloodthirsty masses. In the Bible, the victim has the last word.

## 4. Psalm 22: A Deconstruction of the Sacrificial Mechanism

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If we return to the initial question (is the Passion narrative a prophetic or analogical fulfilment of Psalm 22), but now from the perspective of Girard's "scandalous theory" – which we believe is plausible – then we can conclude that the answer is the following: the Passion narrative is neither a prophetic nor analogical fulfilment of Psalm 22, it is about the same *logos*, the Spirit, or – more appropriate to Girard's theory – it is about the same model, or more precisely, about the same deconstruction of the sacrificial mechanism. The main points of this mechanism are: a) transfer, mostly unconscious, of collective guilt, which starts with an individual's mimetic desire, onto a "unanimous victim," that is, a "scapegoat"; b) concealment of the cause of the conflict (since mimetic rivalry based on mimetic desire remains concealed, the community believes that the "unanimous victim" or "scapegoat" is guilty); c) creation of collective unity by unanimous direction of violence towards the "unanimous victim" (thereby the destructive forces within the collective are redirected "outwardly," which leads to tranquillity and restoration of order, i.e., to the cathartic effect of restoring harmony to the collective); d) portraying a "unanimous victim" or a "scapegoat" as both the culprit and the saviour; e) ritualization of sacrifice (rituals of sacrifice become religious and cultural practices that sacralize the very mechanism of sacrifice). As we have seen, Girard points out that, in mythological narratives, the sacrificial mechanism is concealed by being presented as a necessary and divine act from the persecutor's perspective, while the Bible exposes it, thus deconstructing the dynamics of mimetic rivalry and the sacrificial mechanism.

Although Psalm 22 does not depict the phenomenon of mimetic desire (triangular desire) – namely, it is not visible who is the subject, who is the mediator, and what/who is the object – according to the depictions of the mob that attacks the sufferer (verses 7-8: "All who see me mock at me; / they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; / 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—/ let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"; verse 12: "Many bulls encircle me, / strong bulls of Bashan surround me"; verse 16: "For dogs are all around me; / a company of evildoers encircles me."), they clearly indicate that this is a "unanimous victim" or "scapegoat"). Verse 6 ("But I am a worm, and not human; / scorned by others, and despised by the people.") undoubtedly indicates that the sufferer is a social outcast, that he is demonized – which is typical for a victim of mimetic violence. However – the initial invocation ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? / Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?") places the sufferer as the subject of the statement. In fact, this is how the logic of the sacrificial mechanism is exposed. Namely, the statement is by the victim, not the persecutors. The second part of the Psalm (from verse 22, "I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; / in the midst of the congregation I will praise you") suggests that this is, in fact, not the process of sacralization of the previously demonized victim because the sufferer is innocent, but rather a

kind of rehabilitation. The cry for salvation is heard (verse 24: “For he did not despise or abhor / the affliction of the afflicted; / he did not hide his face from me, / but heard when I cried to him.”). Instead of the mob that attacks the innocent victim, here comes a collective of those who believe in Yahweh, his “poor” (עֲנָוִים - *anavim*) who respond to the messianic feast (verses 25-26: “From you comes my praise in the great congregation; / my vows I will pay before those who fear him. / The poor shall eat and be satisfied; / those who seek him shall praise the Lord. / May your hearts live forever!”). Therefore, it is precisely in the indicated deconstruction of the sacrificial mechanism and the establishment of a new community around the redeemed innocent sufferer that the “logic” and “unanimity” of Psalm 22 and the Passion narrative is found – the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

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