

René Girard

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René Girard was born in France in 1923, having moved to the United States in the 1950's, where he lives and teaches. In that same decade, he began working in literary criticism, culminating his research in 1961 with the publishing of *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*.

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In that first work, nothing could anticipate the path Girard's research would take in the following years. He became a self-taught anthropologist and, in the pursuance of his ideas on human mimicry, he developed the crucial idea about the origins of culture and of mankind itself. Based on the study of Greek tragedy, Girard presented in *La violence et le sacré*, published in 1972, his assumption that a spontaneous mimetic mechanism led, countless times, to the death of an expiatory victim, and from the cadaver of this victim, through increasing complexity, all human institutions were born.

Girard's complete anthropological theory would only be made public with the publishing, in 1978, of *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*.

In this work, the cultural forms resulting from the emissary victim hypothesis are deduced with greater rigor and, above all, he puts forward the idea that Christianity, especially the Passion of Christ, plays a uniquely decisive role in the evolution of the human species. Jesus Christ revealed man's anthropological truth and, more particularly, he revealed that crime and deceit were the foundations of all previous societies. While the preceding societies sacrificed victims who were seen as guilty, Jesus Christ showed the inanity of all sacrifices and came to redeem all human crimes.

The role of Christianity as centre of the anthropological revelation was one of the aspects which contributed to the misunderstanding, and even hostility, by the community of anthropologists against Girard, following the publishing of *Des choses cachées*... Not even the publishing of *Le bouc émissaire* (1982), and later of *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (1999), or the many professions of faith in a strictly naturalist vision of anthropology, allowed undoing the misunderstandings. Only recently that situation began to change. Partly coinciding with the election, in 2005, of René Girard to the Académie Française, an increasing number of researchers have been following and developing his anthropological theory regarding religion. At the same time, an equally growing number of academics and public men have acknowledged René Girard as one of the most brilliant contemporary authors. A clear symptom of this acknowledgement is his highly acclaimed latest work *Achever Clauwsewitz* (2007). In this book, the anthropological perspective initiated by *La*

violence et le sacré is applied to the global evolution of mankind and the apocalyptic challenges our time announces.